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Shaun of the Dead and the Parody of Reverence

The Schatz Formula

The art of parody has been a long form subgenre of mainstream film comedy at least since Mack Sennett produced the slapstick comedy *Teddy at the Throttle* (1917) as a means to respond to and spoof the melodramatic storytelling tendencies his mentor D.W. Griffith explored in *Birth of a Nation* (1915). The purpose of film parody is simple: response. Parody is both a response to growing and resonant formal trends in popular film genres, such as characterization, archetypes, plot beats, genre aesthetic and settings. Parody can also collect and reference trends in popular culture at the time the film was made, such as music, celebrities, or the current political climate, thus creating a time capsule made from a mold of pastiche and humor. Parody has had a history through both pop culture and analytical readings as a “counter” to what the subject is spoofing. Dan Harries refers to Parody in his book Film Parody as a “counter song” to text, and has been “viewed as a mode that essentially ridicules another text by mimicking and mocking it.” (Harries. Pg 5) Film Scholar Thomas Schatz claims that “Parodies of established genres are a good indication of how we become familiar with the genre’s conventions and appreciate seeing these conventions subverted.” (Schatz. pg 39) Harries’ and Schatz’s quotes may be true for most popular forms of parody, but could it be possible that another form of parody can exist? A form that celebrates and admires the medium it is spoofing, with little shred of irony, thus potentially reinventing the genre, not just the genre the parody film is spoofing, but

a reinvention of parody itself? The very best example of this is found in British filmmaker Edgar Wright's feature film debut, *Shaun of the Dead*.

The term "parody" stems from the greek term *parodia*, which was a narrative poem that imitated the style of ancient greek poems.(Harries. pg 5) The poems also mocked the ideas found in said poems and made light of greek heroics. Parody is often defined as when an artist imitates another particular artist or genre, and exaggerates certain features that are known to be familiar with said artist or genre for the sake of humor.. Parody is found in all types of art, including painting, like Dadaist era artist Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919) which was a direct parody of The Mona Lisa, giving her a Dali-esque mustache and giving the painting the name of an anagram of an obscene french turn of phrase. Music is a prime art form for parody, especially in the 20th and 21st century. Famed accordion player and songwriter "Weird" Al Yankovic has built a career since the early 1980s by changing the instruments and lyrics of Grammy Award winning and Platinum Record selling songs from a variety of genres into comedic farces. A notable example is Weird Al turning the Coolio song *Gangsta's Paradise* (1995), a song about the anxieties of living a potentially short lifespan in the world of a gangster, into *Amish Paradise* (1996), a song about what it is like to be Amish.

Most of the humor, specifically the writing and visual humor, found in parody films are built around a frame of reference to another work, and take familiar traditions found in genre filmmaking and turn them around into a joke at the expense of the genre. Parody is used as a means to both criticize and make humor out of a genre's faults. such as Mel Brooks satirizing the racist undertones of the Western genre with *Blazing Saddles* (1974), or satirizing the capitalistic empire of the Star Wars franchise with *Spaceballs* (1986). A more recent example is Drew

Goddard's *Cabin in the Woods* (2012), turning the expected tropes found in modern horror into a machination of corporate mundanity, as if the genre is going through the same motions of a stale corporate career. Parody films can be argued that they look down upon the genres they are spoofing, exposing the apparent flaws of a genre in hopes of both creating laughter, and highlighting the gaps of said genres so future filmmakers can learn to digress from those ideas and create something new.

Film parody has existed about as long as art of film itself has, but has increased popularity over the last 40 years thanks to filmmakers such as Mel Brooks, The Zucker Brothers, and the Monty Python team creating a surplus of popular parody films from the 1970s to the present day. They have been quoted to serve as “cogent markers of a culture steeped in an ever-increasing level of irony; an era where postmodern activity has become the norm than any sort of alternative practice.” (Harries. pg 3) One may consider the mockumentaries of Christopher Guest like *Best in Show* (2000) or *Waiting for Guffman* (1996) to be parody films, but they fall more in the category of straight satire. The major difference between a satire film and a parody film is the parody takes the form of an original texts and copies it for humorous intent or critical analysis, while satire is more of an original work that has elements of commentary and humor, but not every satire is inherently comedic.

In order for a parody film to work, it has to work inside an established genre, one that a large audience can firmly understand, and a genre that has a long history. Very few would get the jokes of a parody film if the genre has yet to establish itself. So how does a genre establish itself?

Thomas Schatz has theory that film genres exist within a cycle of themselves, and I will use the subgenre that *Shaun of the Dead* parodies as an example to explain his theory, The

Zombie Horror genre. Schatz describes the first stage of a genre as an “experimental” stage. This is usually the birth of the genre, where a filmmaker or a group of filmmakers experiment with new ideas and concepts that reflect “society speaking to itself” (Schatz. pg 38). In the case of the zombie film, George Romero sought to reflect cultural (or in this case, counter cultural) ideas of the late 60s, police brutality, civil rights, and the brutality of the Vietnam War, and reflect them back into audiences, capturing a realistic sense of fear through a fictionalized enemy, the zombie. *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) was the film that established the modern Zombie and what it could represent. There have been interpretations of the zombie in previous decades, most notably in the Pre-Code horror film *White Zombie* (1932), but *Night* is the seminal film that establishes the rules of the genre that most zombie fiction still follows until present day. The zombie is an undead human, raised from the dead by some kind of vague disease caused by a bite. They eat flesh, they travel in packs, they groan, and they are always on the move. The only way to kill a zombie is a lethal blow to the head. The characters featured in the film are an ensemble of strangers brought together by the unusual and tragic circumstances, and they are all locked up in a confined space, causing tension and claustrophobia. Romero established these rules in 1968, and these have been the rules that more or less have stuck since. The multimedia franchise *The Walking Dead* loyally follows Romero’s zombie rule set throughout both its long running comic book series and television series.

This brings us to the next stage of Schatz’s genre evolution, He describes this stage as when “both the narrative formula and the film medium work together to transmit and reinforce that genre’s social message-its ideology or problem-solving strategy-as directly as possible to the audience.” (Schatz. pg 38) This classical era of the Zombie film was again started by George A.

Romero, only this time it was a decade later, with *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), a direct followup to *Night*. The film exudes a greater confidence and understanding of the genre, broadening the scope of the material from a small farmhouse in late 1960s Pittsburgh, to a giant late 1970s mega mall. The budget was greater (1.5 million for *Dawn* as opposed to *Night*'s \$114,000), so the scale, urgency, and brutality of the threat is portrayed far greater. The Production Code was but a distant memory, so George Romero and his special effects team created new and innovative techniques of displaying bodies being torn to shreds in realistic detail. Romero also updated the themes of the film. Instead of tackling the subjects of racism and civil injustice in *Night*, the film tackles themes of exuberant capitalism, using the zombies as a metaphor for Americans mindlessly engaging in capitalistic desires, as though their desires to buy consumer goods matches the zombie's desire to eat human flesh. *Dawn* exemplified the potentials of the zombie genre, and set the level of chaotic violence to another gold standard for the genre which lead to several filmmakers of the late 1970s and early 1980s to take George Romero's formula and push it to a further level of extreme viscera, most notably found in Lucio Fulci's *Zombie* (1979) and Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981).

Schatz' believed that the end of this genre's "classic" stage "can be viewed as that point at which the genre's straightforward message has saturated the audience. With its growing awareness of the formal and thematic structures, the genre evolves into the age of refinement." (Schatz. pg 38) Audiences had become aware of what the zombie sub genre had to offer, and so filmmakers, including George A. Romero, had to evolve the genre and become self reflexive about what the zombie represents in popular culture and relinking the line between human behavior and zombie behavior. This is explored in Romero's third film in the *Dead* series, *Day*

of the Dead (1985), which bridges the gap between the “classical” era of the zombie, and a new “age of refinement.” The character Dr. Logan (Richard Liberty) runs experiments on a zombie named Bub (Sherman Howard), attempting to find a docile and conditioned behavior within the creature, and potentially link it back to its former self as a human. It seems as if Romero himself is trying to find the human element of the genre that may have been lost amongst all the gore. Other filmmakers during this period sought to take the zombie genre and push the special effects of gore to the point of absurdity, reveling in the pure physical destruction of the human body. For example, Stuart Gordon’s *Re-Animator* (1985) shares similar story beats to Dr. Logan’s arc in *Day of the Dead*, but is far more comedic in tone, playing the awkward state between life and death as a zombie for laughs. This is exemplified by former Romero collaborator Dan O’Bannon’s own entry into the genre, *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead 2* (1986), and Peter Jackson’s *Dead Alive* (1992). While these films are inherently comedic in nature, they are not parodic. They do not comment on nor necessarily make fun of genre tropes found in the classical era of the zombie, the jokes are more general and “gross out”, like using zombies as a means of sexual gratification in *Re-Animator*. However, these films are the stepping stones that lead the zombie genre further down the realm of parody.

The final stage of Schatz’s theory of genre cycles is what he would describe as the “Baroque Period” of genre. When referring to musicals, Schatz describes this era of a genre’s life cycle as “the generic conventions, which earlier were components of the genre’s unspoken ideology, have now become the central thematic elements of the narrative. No longer does the genre simply celebrate the values of music, theater, dance, and popular entertainment, it actually critiques and deconstructs them in the process.” (Schatz. pg 40) The genre becomes far more self

reflexive, and is far more aware of what the audience is expecting. This is when both reinventions of the genre as well as parody come to surface. According to Schatz, this “baroque” period of the genre can signal the end of its cycle. He applied the theory to Westerns, as once they reached their parodic cycle with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and *Blazing Saddles*, the popularity of the Western had significantly subsided. (Schatz. pg 40) Audiences have evolved to expect film experiences that go against tradition, they want their content dipped in irony so they can take what they know as familiar and laugh at it. Take the Zucker Brothers and Jim Abrahams landmark parody film *Airplane* (1980), for example. The film is a farce of 1970s disaster films, most notably the *Airport* franchise. The fourth and final film in the *Airport* franchise, *The Concorde...Airport '79* (1979), was a box office failure, only grossing 13 million dollars worldwide with an estimated budget of 14 million dollars. However, *Airplane!* Grossed 84 million dollars worldwide with a budget of 3.5 million.

There is a use of complete mise-en-scene that has become heavily associated with parody film as prolific comedy filmmakers such as Mel Brooks, and the Zucker Brothers, which involves using the full range of cinematic language to convey a joke. The Zucker Brothers, in particular, have a relentless style in conveying jokes. Almost every shot in *Airplane!* contains a visual gag, and the film bends and breaks any form of logic or realism in order to tell a joke. Telling a coherent story is not the filmmakers’ goal. Instead they seek solely to make the audience laugh at the expense of the genre. This is based on an idea of expectations of the genre. Audiences who consume Film Parody are, for the most part, familiar with that certain genre’s tropes, so when absurdity and the unexpected plays out, it gets a laugh. The Autopilot of the airplane is a literal “Otto” blow up doll. A line of passengers forms on the airplane, taking turns

to slap a man out of hysteria. An old woman speaks jive. These jokes occur minutes apart from each other, giving the audience more opportunities to laugh than to breathe.

The concept of film parody exists as a mode within Schatz' theory of genre, but does not apply to the entire theory as a genre, because, to clarify, parody is not a genre. It is a response to genre. It is a mode of reflecting on genre in a comedic way. Parody is, therefore, seen as static. It has always existed since genres were forming in the early age of filmmaking and will continue to exist as long as film genres exist. Film parody is about having a playful conversation about genre, but it is not a genre by itself.

How does all this apply to the zombie genre? For most of the 1990s, especially after the release of *Dead Alive* (1992), the genre was dormant. The rate of zombie films being made and released from 1993 until 2001 were quite limited, besides the odd hit like *Army of Darkness* (1993) and *Cemetery Man* (1994). Traditional zombie films were not in favor, and prominent zombie film Auteurs like Romero and Lucio Fulci were disinterested in making more zombie films. Audiences were more interested, at the time, in the satirical deconstruction of another subgenre of horror, the Slasher film, with films like *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997). In the early 2000s, the zombie genre was reinvented in a new and different direction with Danny Boyle and Alex Garland's film *28 Days Later* (2002) recontextualizing and remixing the behavior of the undead. They were faster, more aggressive as they ran full speed at their prey. The slow moving existential dread of the classic Romero style zombie had become replaced by a more visceral and animalistic threat, reflecting on modern cultural anxieties like the advent of modern diseases such as rabies, bird flu, and SARS. That being said, there was still room to cinematically explore the classic zombie, but the delivery method had to change.

Audiences were too familiar with the classic zombie to be afraid of it, so the traditional zombie came back in a far more parodic context thanks to a young filmmaking duo from London, fully introducing the zombie genre into the Baroque period.

The Wright Lesson

British filmmaker Edgar Wright, known at the time for his highly revered but short lived television sitcom *Spaced* (1999), directed and co-wrote his first feature length film in 2004, a celebratory spoof of the zombie horror films of George A. Romero, *Shaun of the Dead*.

Collaborating with his frequent co-writer and star, Simon Pegg, the duo sought out to explore the genre and use certain thematic and visual cues that Romero developed. The main difference, and this is what separates *Shaun* from Romero's work as a traditional zombie film and puts it more in line with a work of parody, is tone. The title is, of course, a play on Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, but besides the name and the primary antagonists, the films share very little in common narratively. Many parody films are a direct mirror to the films they are spoofing, such as Mel Brooks' *High Anxiety* (1977) being a parodic mirror to the plots of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960), *Shaun of the Dead*, however, is its own story.

So what does *Shaun* have to offer both as a parody of Romero's iconic zombie trilogy, and can it even qualify in the parody film canon? Its original advertising campaign did not necessarily label it as a parody, not in the sense that it fell in line with popular film parody at the time, such as the *Scary Movie* franchise, but instead it was advertised with the tagline "a romantic comedy...but with zombies". *Shaun of the Dead* both exists within the canon of film parody, as well as exist as an outlier of film parody, because Edgar Wright's unique approach to directing and writing and a more earnest and idealized application to zombie genre

storytelling both making light of the subject matter, and yet celebrating it at the same time almost creates what I would like to call a “Parody of Reverence”, as opposed to a “Parody of Irony” that most parody films fall into.

Shaun of the Dead uses visual humor similar to the Zucker Brothers and Mel Brooks films in order to tell a joke, meaning the film uses visual pastiche that has been well established within the genre, and turns it around into a joke. That means that the comedy does not just come solely from writing and dialogue, but from every aspect of the mise-en-scene of a film can a joke be extracted. The film opens with an ominous synthetic hum over the *Universal Studios* logo, which was taken directly from the original *Dawn*. The electronic store Shaun works in is named “Foree Electronics”, a reference to one of *Dawn*’s co-stars, Ken Foree. Shaun attempts to reserve a table at a seafood restaurant named “Fulci’s”, a reference to Lucio Fulci. In a shot early in the film, there is a close up shot, low to the ground, as the camera stays on a shot of feet clumsily shambling towards the camera. Off screen, a sound of a faint moaning is heard, like the sound of someone struggling to catch their breath. As established by Romero’s films, this is the classic behavior of a Romero style *Zombie* approaching the camera. If this was your typical *Zombie* thriller, we would assume this is, indeed, a zombie. Instead, what happens, is the camera tilts upwards and it is revealed that it is not a zombie, but our main protagonist, Shaun, waking up from a nap, thus creating a simple but effective joke as well as a reference to *Day of the Dead*, where there is a shot very similar, a low angle close up of shuffling feet, as a zombie shuffles towards Captain Rhodes (Joe Pilato). Not only does he make visual references to Romero, he also makes references to other horror directors. There’s a shot 25 minutes into the movie where Shaun is stumbling through his kitchen at night listening to an answering machine, and the way it

is shot, according to Wright himself, is a reference to John Carpenter. The slow dolly in a space ripe with shadows echoes shots found very similarly in *Halloween* (1978). Wright even makes subtle references to his own work, as Pete (Pete Serafanowicz) answers his cell phone with a “Dom, hi” the exact same way he answers his phone in Wright’s sitcom series, *Spaced*. Wright is humorously referencing the films and filmmakers that inspire him, but at the same time, maintaining respect for them. He never presents his films as above his influences, like making fun of them

One of the most notable references is a subtle one toward the middle of the film. Shaun’s mother is named Barbara (Penelope Winton), and as described in the previous paragraph, she is in need of rescuing. While Shaun is on the phone with Barbara, she insists that she does not want to cause a fuss, but Ed butts into the conversation and yells into the phone, “We’re coming to get you, Barbara!” This line is both a reference and a recontextualization of a quote. The original quote is from *Night of the Living Dead*. In the beginning of the film, a woman, also named Barbara (Judith O’Dea) and her brother Johnny (Russell Streiner) are visiting a graveyard. Barbara is unnerved by the atmosphere of the place, and Johnny taunts her with one of the most famous lines from the film, “They’re coming to GET you, Barbara”. The line is repurposed as a reference, a plot point, and a showing of affection through character all at the same time. It is such a subtle reference, according to Wright, George A. Romero himself did not initially get the joke.

Examining and analyzing the protagonist and namesake of the film, Shaun, it is realized that his characterization is another aspect that makes the film work as a parody yet does not step into the realm of irony or mockery. The film takes place in a world where the danger of the

zombie is just as real and is just as palpable as Romero's films, but since our hero is the schlubby and lazy Shaun. *Dawn* already has a flawed, slightly incapable, and only pseudo heroic protagonist in "Flyboy" (David Emge) and yet by comparison, Shaun makes Flyboy look like a fully confident hero. Shaun is a character who is deeply unaware of his surroundings for the first half of the film. So who is Shaun? He is likeable enough, but he is unmotivated and lazy, coasting through his life as a late 20s electronics salesman, with no aspirations. He finds joy in spending time with his roommate, Ed, but Ed is even more unmotivated than Shaun. His girlfriend, Liz (Kate Ashfield) leaves him as she wants to move on to better things, as this puts Shaun into a depressed funk.

Where does this play into the use of parody? Consider a scene from one another zombie film *28 Days Later* (2002), released just two years prior to *Shaun*. One of the earliest scenes in the film is the protagonist Jim (Cillian Murphy) wakes up from a coma to discover that the zombie apocalypse has struck London while he was sleeping. The mood of the scene is ominous and frightening, with multiple wide shots of Jim wandering through empty London streets as shops are abandoned and vehicles are turned over, with no life in sight. Jim appears confused and aching, and as the sequence progresses, his confusion turns into sheer terror. The Godspeed You! Black Emperor song featured in the scene drones further emphasizes the mood, giving the audience an ever heightening sense of dread and fear, the very same fear that possesses Jim.

Shaun of the Dead has a scene very similar to *28 Days Later* in its setup, in its context, and even taking place in the same city. However, instead of a coma, Shaun wakes up from a hangover the morning the zombie apocalypse begins to happen, but Shaun does not notice. Bodies on the ground, people running, smoke in the background, broken glass, the world gone

awry. Does Shaun care? Not immediately. There is a two minute and 15 second unbroken Steadicam shot of Shaun, again hungover, wandering through his street getting a drink and ice cream from his local convenience shop. His head is down, zombies are wandering around in the background, car windows are broken and sirens are going off. He walks into the shop, and opens a refrigerator door, completely oblivious to a massive bloody handprint on the door. He mildly slips on blood on the ground, but is unphased. He yells out the store clerk's name, but is unanswered. He walks back to his home, as the destruction around him continues to get worse, but he still does not notice it. A zombie of a homeless man attempts to grab Shaun, but Shaun shrugs him off and says "no I don't have any change." While he is in his home, Shaun is flipping through channels on the television, the TV is directly telling him what is happening on the outside "Religious groups are calling it Judgment days as there's-Panic on the streets of London-as an increasing number of reports of-serious attacks-on people who are literally being-eaten alive." This scene adds to the characterization of Shaun, as his arc throughout the film is him learning to take responsibility for himself and his loved ones, but it is presented through the use of audience familiarity and pastiche to both tell a joke and further the story. We, as an audience, are already familiar with what the zombie is through their presence in 30+ years of pop culture. We know what they are capable of, and how dangerous they can be, but Shaun is oblivious and shrugs off the danger like it is a normal Sunday morning shop run. This familiarity adds to the humor and reference of the scene, as well as establishing the tension and danger throughout the movie. It also adds to Shaun's character and continues his character arc, where he, throughout the film, has to learn to not be oblivious of himself, his surroundings, and his loved ones, and learn to take responsibility for his actions.

The film also pokes light fun at the behavior of the zombie. Towards the middle of the second act, the group has to navigate a massive horde of zombies in order to get to their supposed safe haven, The Winchester. In order to do so, they have to mimic zombies in order to pass through unnoticed. They have to stiff their backs, they have to have a vacant look on their faces, and they have to mindlessly groan. Shaun asks Diane, (Lucy Davis) described earlier in the film as a “failed actress” to briefly motivate and teach the group to act like a group of shambling corpses. In the background, there is a male zombie impaled to a tree, and Diane describes it to the group so they can mimic it. She says “look at the face, it’s vacant, with a hint of sadness. Drunk, or he’s lost a bet.” This feels like Edgar Wright’s viewpoint of the zombies. Despite these being flesh eating and dangerous husks of walking meat, Edgar Wright gives little moments to the zombies that flash back to their previous existence as humans, portraying them not as monsters, but as misunderstood and primitive animals desperately searching for their humanity back, a theme that was once explored in a much less comedic and much more somber tone in Romero’s *Day of the Dead*. (1985)

Edgar Wright has a very kinetic pace to his editing that he attributes to one of his horror filmmaking inspirations, Sam Raimi. Wright turns mundane activities, such as getting ready for work, picking up flowers for mother, and using the bathroom and shoots and edits them with what are called “crash” and they look as though they are a high octane action sequence, with dramatic zoom ins and quick cuts. This type of editing and use of crash zooms is familiar to Sam Raimi’s previously mentioned *Evil Dead* franchise, but they are used in that film to emphasize something dramatic. In *Shaun of the Dead*’s case, the juxtaposition of mundanity with fast paced editing creates a joke. This form of editing is taken to an extreme level at a midpoint through the

film. After protagonist Shaun (Simon Pegg) and deuteragonist Ed (Nick Frost) have their first real encounter with a zombie, they begin planning their rescue attempts of Shaun's mother, Barbara, and his ex girlfriend Liz. Shaun makes a list of everything that needs to be done such as "Take Pete's car, go round mums, deal with Phillip, go round to Liz's, have a cup of tea, and wait for the whole thing to blow over". As Shaun is listing these plans, the film shows these events in a pseudo fantasy flash forward sequence as the events transpire with quick cuts, zoom ins, and exaggerated facial expressions as the events happen as he describes them. Ed objects to Shaun's plans, exclaiming he wants to be somewhere safe, familiar, and a place where he can smoke. Shaun continues to list new plans, eventually settling on going to their local pub, The Winchester. These new plans are displayed with far more rapid editing, and as the montage plays out, the characters inside the montage seem to grow more exasperated, as though they are playing through the events over and over in real time. For example, when they "deal with Phillip" in the montage, Shaun says a dramatic goodbye to Phillip before hitting him over the head "I'm so sorry Phillip." By the third montage, he just says an apathetic "Sorry!". This use of montage, sound effects, performance, and direction both tells an effective joke, and at the same time, moves the narrative forward in a brisk but understandable way. This became a staple in Wright's filmography, as *Hot Fuzz* (2007), *Scott Pilgrim vs the World* (2010). What was once a form of editing borrowed from one of his filmmaking inspirations becomes a far more unique form exclusive to Wright, comedically emphasizing the mundane stakes of a scene through visuals and editing.

One notable feature that *Shaun of the Dead* presents that is not common amongst other parody films is its strong use of drama. Parody films of the past like *Blazing Saddles* or *Airplane!*

were too focused on the jokes and making fun of the pastiche of genre to incorporate any actual drama and emotion into their films, but *Shaun of the Dead* both accomplishes emotional drama and does it without it feeling forced, while building on the characters and the arcs they go through. The most notable example of this is found near the end of the film, where Shaun realizes his mother had been previously bitten by a zombie, and is slowly passing away on the ground. Shaun is emotionally distraught, as one of the group members, David (Dylan Moran), is pressuring Shaun to put a bullet into his mother's head before she turns into a zombie, before she endangers the rest of the group. Shaun is unable to handle to pressure, as he lashes out at David, threatening him with a broken bottle. The tension rises as more of the group get involved, guns are pointed at each other, secrets are revealed, David questions Shaun's viability as a leader, then Liz breaks the tension and calms everyone down. Then, Barbara rises from the ground, out of focus in the background, only to come into focus when Shaun realizes what he has to do. David hands Shaun the gun, and Shaun quickly ends Barbara's existence as a zombie. The amount of buildup, tension, release, grief, and pathos found in this scene is not only admirable as a scene itself, but works as an effective piece of drama that is rare to find in a genre that is more interested in gore and broad social commentary. I feel as though a scene like this is hardly found even in Romero's work. *Shaun of the Dead* accomplishes so much as a form of parody, as character work, as a horror film in the zombie canon, and at times as a drama, that has it ascended as just another form of parody? Even as a parody of reverence?

In what ways does it ascend above other works of parody? As exemplified earlier, *Shaun of the Dead* takes greater consideration into its story, characters, and themes than most other parody films do. The characters in films like *Blazing Saddles*, *Spaceballs* (1987), *Airplane!*, or

The Naked Gun (1988) are not meant to be explored as nuanced characters with arcs and distinct motivations. The characters in those films are used as vessels to deliver jokes. These jokes are meant to belittle the genres they are imitating, and to make light of the common clichés and problematic tropes found in said genres. It is as though the films and the filmmakers feel like they are above the genres they are making fun of, with a mission statement “how can you take this genre seriously anymore? Look at how played out and trite it has become!” This causes a cold separation from the films to the audience, as well as giving these films a feeling of a linear experience. Giving credit where credit is due, these jokes can be funny, and are and these films are rightfully considered classics by critics and audiences for their sharp and witty comedic writing. The nihilistic disregard for any logical sense or reality in Zucker Brothers films is admirable, and creates a buffet of constantly unexpected sight gags, but as well as these films accomplish this goal, it is all they accomplish. It is easy to remember the dozens of memorable sight gags and references found in *Airplane!*, but it is rather difficult to recollect the plot or how the characters change in the film. These kinds of parody films, while funny, feel static. There is very little attempt at drama as well, so it is hard to stay invested in what little plot these films offer.

Shaun of the Dead finds success as both a parody of the zombie genre and as a film altogether because it does *not* treat itself as above the genre it is spoofing. It treats itself as equal to the decades of genre history it has built upon, as Edgar Wright pays tribute to the films and filmmakers that he grew up with, creating a new feeling of appreciating genre. The film laughs *with* genre, not at it. It gives an equal amount of respect to the text as Romero did. The zombies are not the butt of the jokes. They are treated just as dangerous and as violent as they are in

Romero's *Dead* trilogy. The film also treats its characters with respect, giving them proper arcs, motivations, personalities, and goals to achieve. They are not just vessels to deliver jokes, but are nuanced characters that live in the world of the film. Their unique and quirky personalities, as well as their offbeat decision making juxtaposed with the violent and dangerous world they inhabit finds a way to insert humor into a genre without diminishing the stakes, like Ed (Nick Frost) answering a drug deal call while a massive horde of zombies are about to rain down on them, or having the three leads beat down on a zombie with pool sticks to the rhythm of Queen's *Don't Stop Me Now*. The layered characterization and development of the film's cast makes the audience grow closer to them, so when something funny happens to them, the humor hits harder and when something dramatic occurs, the drama hits even harder, delivering a much richer and more satisfying cinematic experience.

Shaun of the Dead proves that parody film can achieve greater pastures than being a vessel for jokes and genre belittlement, so has the parody film learned this lesson from Wright? Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case. Edgar Wright himself has furthered this idea of the Parody of Reverence with his follow ups to *Shaun of the Dead* what he labels the "Three Flavors Cornetto Trilogy", that being *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz* (2007) and *The World's End* (2013), expanding the formula to other genres he greatly admires, that being the cop action film with *Hot Fuzz*, and the alien invasion/body snatcher genre with *The World's End*. However, outside of Wright, The Parody of Reverence hardly exists, if at all. The closest film that comes to mind is Mel Brook's *High Anxiety* (1977), where Mel Brooks shows some admiration for Alfred Hitchcock's filmography, but still humorously criticizes the common tropes and cliches found in said films. That film, however, predates *Shaun of the Dead* by 27 years. In the 15 years since

Shaun of the Dead's release, parody film has not evolved past that point. In fact, it has actually regressed. There has been the occasional bright spots in parody filmmaking like Jake Kasdan's *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story* (2007) parodying the tired trends in musical biopics, The Lonely Island's *Popstar: Never Stop Never Stopping* (2016) parodying the concert documentary and the state of the modern music industry, and perhaps the best modern example, Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012), deconstructing the modern state of horror films. These films are not Parodies of Reverence, they are just modern examples of the kinds of parody films The Zucker Brothers and Mel Brook's used to produce. Other than that, the parody film is in a sad state of affairs, ranging from box office failures (although critically successful, all the films listed previously were not successful at the box office,) to complete disasters. For example, there was a trend in the early to mid 2000s where Hollywood amalgamated whatever was popular in pop culture at the time and churned them into a barrage of references into what is known as the "Blank Movie" franchise. There was potential for promise in this franchise, as the Wayans Family and the Zucker Brothers were involved in the early *Scary Movie* (2000-2008) films, delivering what they were best known for into these films, but from *Date Movie* (2006) to *Vampires Suck* (2010), hack writer/director duo Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer ran the entire concept into the ground by making all of their references feel endless and meaningless. It now seems as though the parody film has fallen out of favor entirely in modern cinema, but if more comedic filmmakers could learn the right lessons from what Edgar Wright created with his trilogy of the Parody of reverence, then there is endless possibility for the parody genre to evolve and become popular again.

Where does *Shaun of the Dead* fit in Schatz' theory of the genre cycle? It is definitely qualified to fit into the "Baroque" period of a genre. However, Schatz claims that Baroque period is usually the point at where the genre reaches its popular end, (Schatz. pg 40) as is what happened to the Westerns and the Hollywood Musicals, where the Western has been in a state of constant re-examination with films like *Unforgiven* (1992) and *No Country for Old Men* (2007) or have died out completely like the Hollywood Musical, but did this happen with *Shaun* and the zombie genre? Absolutely not. As a matter of fact, the genre has grown considerably in the last 15 years since the film's release, and the film's use of the Parody of Reverence shows there is still life in the genre. One of the highest viewed TV shows of the last 10 years has been AMC's *The Walking Dead*, another story that explores the ideas George Romero left behind. Film franchises like *Zombieland* (2009) and *World War Z* (2013) have collectively grossed over a billion dollars, and zombies themselves have been a consistent part of the public consciousness since. There are now more zombie films produced in modern cinema than there were in the Schatz classical era. Even George Romero himself came back and directed three more films for the *Dead* series, with Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg appearing as cameos in the final film of the original *Dead* series, *Land of the Dead* (2005). I'd say that even though *Shaun of the Dead* is a work of parody, instead of directly putting it in the Baroque period, I would say it ushered in a new era of classical zombie fiction. There should be a new step to Schatz' theory of genre, as *Shaun of the Dead* proves that a genre does not have to remain at a static place in the baroque period, but instead can branch off and evolve into a new era, in what can be considered the Neo-Classical Era of the zombie genre.

Filmography

Teddy at the Throttle (1917)
Directed by Clarence C. Badger
Triangle Film Corporation

White Zombie (1932)
Directed by Victor Halperin
United Artists

Night of the Living Dead (1968)
Directed by George A. Romero
Continental Distributing

Blazing Saddles (1974)
Directed by Mel Brooks
Warner Brothers Pictures

High Anxiety (1977)
Directed by Mel Brooks
20th Century Fox

Dawn of the Dead (1978)
Directed by George A. Romero
United Film Distribution Company

Halloween (1978)
Directed by John Carpenter
Compass International Pictures

Zombi 2 (Zombie) (1979)
Directed by Lucio Fulci
Variety Film

Airplane! (1980)
Directed by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, Jerry Zucker
Paramount Pictures

The Evil Dead (1981)
Directed by Sam Raimi
New Line Cinema

Day of the Dead (1985)
Directed by George A. Romero
United Film Distribution Company

Re-Animator (1986)
Directed by Stuart Gordon
Empire International Pictures

Evil Dead 2 (1987)
Directed by Sam Raimi
De Laurentiis Entertainment Group

Spaceballs (1987)
Directed by Mel Brooks
Metro Goldwyn Mayer

The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad! (1988)
Directed by David Zucker
Paramount Pictures

Dead Alive (Braindead) (1992)
Directed by Peter Jackson
Trimark Pictures

Unforgiven (1992)
Directed by Clint Eastwood
Warner Brothers

Army of Darkness (1993)
Directed by Sam Raimi
Universal Pictures

Cemetery Man (Dellamorte Dellamore) (1994)
Directed by Michele Soavi
DARC

28 Days Later (2002)
Directed by Danny Boyle
Fox Searchlight Pictures

Shaun of the Dead (2004)
Directed by Edgar Wright
Universal Pictures

Date Movie (2006)

Directed by Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer
20th Century Fox

Hot Fuzz (2007)

Directed by Edgar Wright
Universal Pictures and Rogue Pictures

Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story (2007)

Directed by Jake Kasdan
Columbia Pictures

No Country for Old Men (2007)

Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen
Miramax

Zombieland (2009)

Directed by Ruben Fleischer
Sony Pictures Releasing

Vampires Suck (2010)

Directed by Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer
20th Century Fox

The Walking Dead (2010-Present)

Produced by Robert Kirkman
AMC Networks

The Cabin in the Woods (2012)

Directed by Drew Goddard
Lionsgate

The World's End (2013)

Directed by Edgar Wright
Universal Pictures

World War Z (2013)

Directed by Marc Forster
Paramount Pictures

Popstar: Never Stop Never Stopping (2016)

Directed by The Lonely Island
Universal Pictures

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