

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS, MORALITY, AND IDEOLOGY PERSPECTIVES IN EDGAR WRIGHT'S FILM *SHAUN OF THE DEAD* (2004)

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Abstract

This research analyzes Edgar Howard Wright's 2004 film, *Shaun of the Dead*, using psychoanalysis, morality, and ideology. In addition to presenting a parody of zombie horror, the film also depicts the moral and psychological journey of the main character, Shaun. Shaun transforms from a passive individual into a mature leader. Through qualitative method, the analysis combines Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the id, ego, and superego with Aristotle's moral theory of virtue and responsibility, as well as Marxian ideological critiques of apathy and social conformity. The results show that Edgar Wright uses zombies as a symbol to reveal the existential crisis of modern humanity. In conclusion, the film emphasizes that self-change, social awareness, and humanitarian values are at the heart of humanity's struggle against indifference.

Keywords: Ideology; Morality; Psychoanalysis; *Shaun of the Dead*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis film Edgar Howard Wright tahun 2004, *Shaun of the Dead*, menggunakan psikoanalisis, moralitas, dan ideologi. Selain menyajikan parodi horor zombie, film ini juga menggambarkan perjalanan moral dan psikologis tokoh utamanya, Shaun. Shaun bertransformasi dari individu pasif menjadi pemimpin yang dewasa. Melalui metode kualitatif, analisis ini menggabungkan teori psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud tentang id, ego, dan superego dengan teori moral Aristoteles tentang kebajikan dan tanggung jawab, serta kritik ideologis Marxis terhadap apati dan konformitas sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Edgar Wright menggunakan zombie sebagai simbol untuk mengungkapkan krisis eksistensial umat manusia modern. Kesimpulannya, film ini menekankan bahwa perubahan diri, kesadaran sosial, dan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan berada di jantung perjuangan umat manusia melawan ketidakpedulian.

Kata kunci: Ideologi; Moralitas; Psikoanalisis; *Shaun of the Dead*

INTRODUCTION

Edgar Wright is known as a British director with a fast-paced, dynamic, and satirical directing style. *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) is one of his most famous works, a horror-comedy that uses zombies as a symbol of the social realities of urban British society. Beyond entertainment, the film also serves as a reflection on modern life trapped in routine, apathy, and an identity crisis (Hyejun, 2022; Rautanen, 2022; Wright, 2004). The story highlights the life of Shaun, an ordinary man living with boredom, inner conflict, and an inability to take responsibility. When a zombie outbreak erupts, Shaun is forced to act, think quickly, and save his loved ones, ultimately discovering a more mature identity. Thus, the film presents a journey of psychological transformation paralleled by moral and social change.

This study employs three complementary analytical approaches to provide a deeper and more comprehensive interpretation of the film. By combining psychological, ethical, and ideological perspectives, the analysis examines the film beyond its humor to understand its deeper message. First, psychoanalysis is used to examine Shaun's inner conflicts and psychological development, drawing primarily on Sigmund Freud's theory of the human psyche. Through this lens, Shaun's behaviors, anxieties, and decision-making processes are analyzed to reveal how unconscious desires, repression, and personal insecurity shape his actions throughout the narrative (Baillon & Labarre, 2015; Decker, 2016; Pasopati et al., 2025; Saputro et al., 2024).

Second, the moral approach focuses on the protagonist's ethical journey, particularly his growth and transformation when confronted with a sudden crisis. This perspective highlights how Shaun evolves from a passive

and irresponsible individual into someone capable of making moral choices, taking responsibility, and demonstrating courage and empathy toward others (Baillon & Labarre, 2015; Decker, 2016; Pasopati et al., 2025; Saputro et al., 2024).

Third, an ideological approach is applied to uncover the film's broader social critique, especially its commentary on consumer culture and the repetitive, mechanical routines of modern life. The film's exaggerated situations and satirical elements expose how individuals become trapped in monotonous patterns that resemble the very "zombie-like" existence being parodied. The zombie outbreak symbolizes how people lose individuality in modern capitalist society. By integrating these three analytical frameworks, this research seeks to reveal the deeper meanings beneath the film's humor and satire, showing how comedy serves as a powerful vehicle for psychological insight, moral reflection, and social criticism.

METHOD

This research uses an exploratory qualitative approach with content analysis techniques. Data were obtained from dialogue, scenes, and visual elements of the film *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). Data were collected through documentation, specifically by watching the film and identifying relevant dialogues. Content analysis was employed as the analytical technique to focus on the film's narratives.

Data analysis focused on three main domains: psychological (psychoanalysis), morality, and ideology. The research steps are as follows: (1) Data Identification, by collecting scenes and dialogue that demonstrate inner conflict, moral dilemmas, and social criticism; (2) Aspect Classification, by grouping

data based on psychoanalytic categories (repression, id-ego-superego), morality (responsibility, sacrifice, humanity), and ideology (apathy, conformity, consumerism); (3) Theoretical Analysis, by using Freudian, Aristotelian, and Althusserian/Marxian theories to interpret the symbolic and social meaning of each aspect; and (4) Synthesis, which connects the results of the analysis of the three aspects to highlight the film's main message as a critique of the existential stagnation of modern humanity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Intertwinements of Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Morality

Psychoanalysis, ideology, and morality are deeply intertwined domains that shape how individuals understand themselves and their social world. Psychoanalysis, from Freud onward, emphasizes the role of unconscious desires, repression, and internal conflict in human behavior (Kuchenhoff, 2023; Malle, 2021; Rodowick, 2023; VanHook, 2024). Ideology and morality, while often presented as rational or universal systems, are deeply implicated in these psychic processes, functioning not only as social structures but also as internalized forces that organize desire, guilt, and identity.

Ideology operates by providing narratives through which subjects interpret reality and their place within it. Psychoanalysis reveals that these narratives are not neutral: they resonate with unconscious fantasies and anxieties. Ideological beliefs often gain their power not through logical persuasion alone, but through affective investment (Kuchenhoff, 2023; Malle, 2021; Rodowick, 2023; VanHook, 2024). Subjects become attached to ideologies because they offer symbolic solutions to unconscious conflicts, promising coherence,

belonging, or moral certainty. In this sense, ideology does not merely shape thought from the outside; it is sustained by psychic mechanisms such as identification, projection, and repression.

Morality, similarly, cannot be separated from psychoanalytic insight. Freud's concept of the superego illustrates how moral norms are internalized, transforming external authority into an inner voice of judgment and prohibition (Ervin, 2022; Morley et al., 2021; Sandbæk, 2023). Moral ideals thus become sources of both ethical orientation and psychic suffering, generating guilt and anxiety when unconscious desires conflict with accepted norms (see Puspitasari et al., 2021; Hidayati et al., 2022; Kotimah & Suprpto, 2024). What appears as moral conviction may mask unresolved conflicts between instinctual drives and social expectations.

The close relationship between these three domains becomes especially visible when morality is mobilized ideologically. Moral discourse can legitimize power structures by framing them as natural or righteous, while psychoanalysis helps uncover the unconscious investments that sustain such legitimacy (Ervin, 2022; Morley et al., 2021; Sandbæk, 2023). By exposing the psychic underpinnings of ideology and morality, psychoanalysis offers a critical tool: it destabilizes claims of moral purity and ideological neutrality, revealing them as historically and psychologically contingent. In doing so, it opens space for ethical reflection that is less dogmatic and more attuned to human ambivalence and desire.

Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Morality in *Shaun of the Dead*

In *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), directed by Edgar Wright, psychoanalysis can be used to interpret the characters, relationships, and

themes, particularly Shaun's personal growth and his relationships with others (Hyejun, 2022; Rautanen, 2022; Wright, 2004). The film's comedic horror narrative provides an ideal ground for exploring psychoanalytic concepts such as repression, id/ego/superego, and the resolution of internal conflicts.

The first aspect is how Shaun experiences repression and routine. Shaun's life is marked by a stagnant routine, symbolizing repression. He is stuck in a dead-end job, in a strained relationship with Liz, and lives with his immature friend Ed. Shaun represses his potential for change, using excuses and distractions (like the pub) to avoid confronting his issues (Baillon & Labarre, 2015; Decker, 2016; Pasopati et al., 2025; Saputro et al., 2024). His world becomes a literal representation of his internal struggle when the zombie apocalypse hits, forcing him to confront the "undead" parts of his life, including his unaddressed problems and failures.

Early in the film, Shaun's repeated trips to the Winchester pub highlight his inability to change. A notable dialogue occurs when Liz expresses her frustration, "*Liz: 'If I don't do something, I'm going to end up in that pub every night for the rest of my life like them!'*" (Wright, 2004). Liz critiques Shaun's stagnant life and warns of the dangers of remaining in his comfort zone, which he has repressed the desire to leave. Freud's concept of repression involves pushing uncomfortable feelings, desires, or memories into the unconscious mind (Baillon & Labarre, 2015; Decker, 2016; Pasopati et al., 2025; Saputro et al., 2024). Shaun's life at the start of the film reflects deep repression. He has repressed his ambition, relationships, and potential for change, instead choosing the comfort of routine and avoidance.

Moreover, Shaun's morning routine also contains monotonous repression of time and space. Early in the film, Shaun walks to the shop, oblivious to signs of the apocalypse. The mundane actions (getting a drink, forgetting change) show how deeply entrenched he is in routine, so much so that he doesn't notice the chaos around him. This routine represents how Shaun suppresses awareness of the need for change, mirroring his repressed potential (Kuchenhoff, 2023; Malle, 2021; Rodowick, 2023; VanHook, 2024). Liz explicitly points out Shaun's inability to move forward in life, "*Liz: 'You've got to take charge of your life, Shaun. You can't just live like this.'*" (Wright, 2004). Her words highlight his unconscious avoidance of responsibility and his refusal to address his stagnation.

The film is also situated within Freudian perspectives of id, ego, and superego. The characters in *Shaun of the Dead* can be viewed as manifestations of these elements, with Shaun's struggle representing the tension between them. The Id is represented by Ed, Shaun's best friend who acts on impulse and pleasure. Ed indulges in gaming, crude jokes, and a carefree lifestyle, embodying Shaun's unconscious desire to avoid responsibility.

Ed embodies Shaun's id, the part of the psyche driven by pleasure, impulses, and immediate gratification. Ed encourages Shaun to avoid responsibility and indulge in childish habits, such as drinking at the pub or playing video games. In the quotation of "*Ed: 'You don't need Liz. All you need is a couple of pints and a good night out.'*" (Wright, 2004), this statement reflects the id's influence, urging Shaun to prioritize pleasure over personal growth.

As the superego, Liz as Shaun's girlfriend embodies the voice of morality, responsibility, and social expectation in Shaun's life. She consistently desires structure, growth, and

emotional maturity, pushing Shaun to move beyond his stagnant lifestyle. Liz represents the moral conscience that urges Shaun to aspire toward a better, more responsible version of himself, even when he resists change (Wright, 2004). Her frustration stems not from a lack of care, but from her awareness that Shaun has potential he refuses to realize. By confronting him about his habits, priorities, and avoidance of adulthood, Liz functions as an external force of conscience, challenging his comfort-driven behavior.

This role is clearly illustrated in the quotation, "If we can't sort this out, we're not going to last. You can't keep putting it off." Through this statement, Liz demands accountability and emphasizes the consequences of Shaun's inaction. She does not allow him to escape responsibility through procrastination or humor, which he often uses as defense mechanisms (Wright, 2004). Instead, Liz insists on emotional honesty and commitment, hallmarks of the superego's influence. Although her pressure makes Shaun uncomfortable, it is necessary for his growth. Ultimately, Liz's role as the superego forces Shaun to confront his immaturity and recognize that meaningful relationships and personal development require effort, sacrifice, and responsibility.

As the ego, Shaun represents the part of the psyche responsible for mediating between the conflicting demands of the id and the superego. He is constantly torn between Ed's influence, which symbolizes his desire for comfort, escapism, and a carefree lifestyle, and Liz's expectations, which reflect responsibility, maturity, and personal growth (Eitzen, 2012; Napitupulu et al., 2025; Riza et al., 2025). Shaun's role as the ego places him in the difficult position of trying to satisfy both impulses without fully committing to either, leading to indecision and stagnation. Rather

than confronting his problems directly, he often avoids conflict, hoping circumstances will resolve themselves.

Shaun's character arc centers on his struggle to find balance between these opposing forces. At the beginning of the film, he fails to effectively mediate, allowing Ed's influence to dominate his life while neglecting Liz's reasonable demands. This imbalance causes strain in his relationships and prevents him from progressing into adulthood (Eitzen, 2012; Napitupulu et al., 2025; Riza et al., 2025). However, as the narrative unfolds, Shaun is forced to confront the consequences of his passivity. By the end of the film, he successfully integrates both aspects of his psyche. He learns to accept responsibility, take initiative, and grow emotionally, while still preserving elements of enjoyment and leisure. This balance reflects the ego functioning properly, enabling Shaun to develop into a more complete and self-aware individual.

The zombies are also a metaphor for repression. Zombies symbolize Shaun's unchanging, unthinking routine and the broader societal complacency. The apocalypse forces Shaun to act decisively and grow emotionally, breaking free from his "undead" habits. The zombies in the film symbolize repression and the "undead" parts of Shaun's life, involving his unaddressed issues, suppressed potential, and the monotony of his routine (Eitzen, 2012; Napitupulu et al., 2025; Riza et al., 2025). Much like the zombies, these unresolved problems lurk in the background, growing more dangerous as they are ignored. The zombie apocalypse forces Shaun to confront these repressed aspects of his life head-on. When the zombies first appear, Ed makes light of the situation, "Ed: *"Look at the state of it!"*" (Wright, 2004). His humor reflects the id's desire to trivialize serious problems.

Shaun initially adopts this mindset, ignoring the gravity of his situation.

As the film progresses, Shaun begins taking control, reflecting his willingness to face repressed issues. His pivotal moment of growth occurs when he makes a plan to save Liz and his family; "*Shaun: "Take car. Go to Mum's. Kill Phil. Grab Liz. Go to the Winchester. Have a nice cold pint and wait for all this to blow over."* (Wright, 2004). This humorous line shows Shaun starting to act decisively, though he still clings to his comfort zone (the Winchester pub).

The plan also reveals that Shaun has not fully escaped his reliance on familiarity and comfort. His decision to retreat to the Winchester pub symbolizes his lingering attachment to his old habits and safe spaces. Even as he steps into a leadership role, he still seeks refuge in what he knows best (Bishop, 2025; Decker, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2025; Wright, 2004). This blend of action and hesitation highlights Shaun's transitional state; he is evolving, but not yet fully transformed. The moment effectively illustrates Shaun's ego beginning to function more effectively, balancing responsibility with comfort as he moves toward personal growth.

Regarding ideology, *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) is often interpreted as a satire on contemporary societal norms and behaviors. It blends comedy and zombie horror while exploring themes of apathy, conformity, and the monotonous routines of modern life. It is indeed a satire of social apathy and routine. The film portrays Shaun's existence as a mirror of social stagnation. Prior to the zombie apocalypse, he and those around him are stuck in monotonous, unsatisfying routines (Bishop, 2025; Decker, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2025; Wright, 2004). This is represented by Shaun's ordinary job, his troubled relationships, and his frequent visits to the Winchester pub.

When the apocalypse starts, Shaun first fails to distinguish between the zombies and regular individuals. For example, his walk to the shop is nearly identical before and after the outbreak, showing society's lack of awareness and engagement with its surroundings. In a dialogue of "*You've got red on you.*" (Wright, 2004), it symbolizes Shaun's passive ignorance and inability to recognize growing problems in his life, encompassing both personal and societal matters.

The film is also reflection of social conformity and criticism to consumer culture. The zombies in *Shaun of the Dead* symbolize mindless conformity. They wander aimlessly, reflecting the mindless, repetitive actions of contemporary consumerist existence (Bishop, 2025; Decker, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2025; Wright, 2004). Shaun himself starts as a metaphorical zombie, stuck in a loop. Liz complains about their stagnant relationship; "*If I don't do something, I'm going to end up in that pub every night for the rest of my life like those other sad old men.*" (Wright, 2004). This critique reflects the fear of becoming trapped in a monotonous, zombie-like existence.

Then, Shaun decides to leave such conformity behind, driven by newfound bravery. The film implies that forming meaningful connections with others and pursuing individual development are essential to overcoming indifference. Shaun's quest to protect his loved ones is simultaneously his path toward emotional growth and accountability. As the crisis intensifies, Shaun takes charge, finally stepping beyond his passive role in life: "*If you get cornered... bash 'em in the head. That seems to work.*" (Wright, 2004). Shaun transforms from a passive observer to an active participant, symbolizing the need for action to overcome both personal and societal decay.

In terms of morality, *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) focuses on Shaun's evolution from a directionless, immature individual into a considerate and selfless leader (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Newland, 2017; Rautanen, 2022). Throughout the film, it raises questions about loyalty, sacrifice, relationships, and humanity during crises, skillfully weaving moral challenges into both its comedic and dramatic scenes.

At the beginning of the film, Shaun is depicted as a man caught in a monotonous routine. He holds a pointless job, has difficult relationships with his girlfriend Liz and his stepfather Philip, and spends the majority of his time drinking at the Winchester pub with his close friend Ed. This lack of direction signifies a reluctance to take ownership of his life, which represents the main moral journey of the film; Shaun must mature and manage his situation (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Newland, 2017; Rautanen, 2022). When the zombie apocalypse begins, Shaun's first response is one of disbelief and disorientation, reflecting his previous evasion of real-life problems. Nonetheless, the crisis compels him to take action, and he starts making choices to safeguard those he loves. His commitment to Liz that "things will change" is challenged as he assumes a leadership position, coordinating their survival strategy; "*Shaun: "Okay. I'll get Mum. You get Liz. Then we'll head to the Winchester."*" (Wright, 2004). This line illustrates his first real attempt at leadership, even if the plan itself reflects his immature attachment to the pub as a solution. Over time, however, his plans grow more selfless and practical, showing his moral growth.

Moreover, loyalty serves as a persistent moral theme in the movie, especially within the bond between Shaun and Ed. In spite of Ed's reckless actions and regular blunders,

Shaun continues to be extremely devoted to his closest friend. This commitment is challenged when the group's existence is at risk, and Ed's ineptitude turns into a disadvantage (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Newland, 2017; Rautanen, 2022). Shaun will not give up on him, even when it would be more secure to let go. The theme of sacrifice becomes particularly touching in the third act, as Ed, bitten by a zombie, decides to remain behind and protect Shaun and Liz's getaway. This unselfish deed emphasizes Ed's personal growth, prioritizing his friendship with Shaun over his own safety; "*Shaun: "You're the best friend I've ever had." Ed: "And I've had a few."*" (Wright, 2004). This bittersweet exchange demonstrates their bond and reinforces the theme of loyalty in the face of danger. Ed's sacrifice is a testament to the value of friendship, even in extreme circumstances.

Then, the zombie apocalypse represents a symbol of humanity's decline, not just in a literal way (humans becoming zombies) but also in how individuals act when faced with pressure. The movie delves into how people make ethical choices when their survival is at stake. A central moral dilemma in the film is how to handle zombified family members. Shaun grapples with the notion of killing his infected stepfather, mother, and eventually, Ed, highlighting his wish to hold onto their humanity despite their transformation from the individuals he once knew (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Newland, 2017; Rautanen, 2022). His decision to prevent David from shooting his mother after her transformation into a zombie underscores the emotional and ethical intricacies of the scenario; "*Shaun: "Don't point that gun at my mum!"*" (Wright, 2004).

This moment illustrates Shaun's protective instincts and moral outrage, even when logic dictates that she is no longer his mother. The scene underscores the

emotional weight of maintaining humanity and compassion in a dehumanizing crisis (Wright, 2004). The film contrasts Shaun's approach with the selfishness of characters like David, who is willing to make ruthless decisions for his own survival. This difference highlights the moral spectrum of humanity under pressure.

By the end of the film, Shaun has developed greatly as an individual. He makes amends with Liz, demonstrating his dedication to change, and he also achieves closure with his stepfather Philip and his mother Barbara before their deaths. These moments emphasize the significance of addressing personal disputes and cherishing relationships before it is too late (Bishop, 2025; Decker, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2025; Wright, 2004). Shaun's reconciliation with Philip is especially important. After years of bitterness, Shaun comes to understand that Philip truly cared for him and did his utmost as a father figure. This understanding enriches the emotional complexity of Shaun's journey; "*Philip (dying): 'I always loved you, Shaun.'*" (Wright, 2004). This confession underscores the importance of forgiveness and understanding in strained relationships, even in the face of death.

CONCLUSION

Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* expertly combines psychoanalysis, ethics, and ideology to create a story that functions on several layers. By intertwining these perspectives, the film invites audiences to engage with the narrative both emotionally and intellectually. Although it initially seems like a lighthearted zombie comedy, the film explores deep themes of human connections, moral challenges, and social commentary. The film depicts Shaun's transformation from a passive,

aimless individual into a mature, selfless leader, illustrating the essence of personal development in extraordinary circumstances. It emphasizes how crises can act as triggers for change, compelling people to face their weaknesses, make tough decisions, and focus on what genuinely counts.

Shaun of the Dead demonstrates how crises profoundly influence psychological, moral, and social change. Edgar Wright blends humor and tragedy to highlight the importance of self-awareness and human responsibility in the face of unpredictable realities. The film reminds us that mere survival is insufficient; genuine reflection on the chaos of modern life is what distinguishes meaningful existence. It encourages audiences to consider how awareness, choice, and accountability define meaningful existence. From an ethical standpoint, the movie highlights concepts of responsibility, fidelity, and selflessness. Shaun's development as a character is highlighted by his readiness to take responsibility for both himself and his loved ones, even when confronted with daunting challenges. His steadfast loyalty to Ed, despite his friend's shortcomings, illustrates the lasting significance of friendship, while Ed's final sacrifice highlights the necessity of selflessness in relationships. The ethical conflicts shown, like deciding to kill zombie-turned relatives—introduce emotional intricacy, urging viewers to reflect on their own ability for empathy and humanity in dire circumstances.

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