

Menippean Satire and The Body Genre

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Menippean satire is an old but complex literary genre with many different facets that make it unique. The facets in question are important to note as there are around nine different major recurring themes that define the genre throughout almost every film you may see, without outright defining it as a major genre itself. Throughout a class discussion, it was noted that the nine themes presented were the carnivalesque or comic-like nature of the film, plot freedom and fantasy, truth-testing, slum naturalism, three-planed construction, experimental fantasticality, abnormal psychic states, inserted genres and dialogism, and finally, scandals that involve characters breaking etiquette. After analyzing the features of the genre on its own, it is important to understand how this genre can be compatible with others as it is not usually recognized as such on its own.

A genre that Menippean satire can be tied to the most is that of the body genre. The body genre is another lesser-known or thought-of genre that, according to the class lectures, is made to affect the viewer's body to create a sensational and sometimes visceral experience. To think about what may or may not be a body genre film, all the viewer must do is analyze how that film made them feel. If they were having any experience of goose-bumps, shudders, tears, dizziness, or laughter, then they were most likely watching a body genre film. Knowing the elements of the body genre film is important to know as it is also a genre that is less common and hidden in its definition.

Now that the two genres of Menippean satire and the body genre have been laid out and explained separately, it is important to note how the two can relate to one another and, more importantly, how the Menippean satire can be described as a form of body genre itself. In an article selected for a class reading by Mikhail Bakhtin titled "Characteristics of Genre and Plot

Composition in Dostoevsky's Works," Mikhail states this in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Menippean satire, "the most important characteristic of the Menippean as a genre is the fact that its bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure is internally motivated, justified by and devoted to a purely ideational and philosophical end: the creation of extraordinary situations" (Bakhtin 1984, 442). The biggest takeaway from this quote is the use of the terms "internally motivated," and "extraordinary situations." These terms can be directly applied to what we know about the body genre's way of invoking particularly strong feelings in the audience.

The body genre notoriously takes extravagant and experimental ideas and pushes them to the limit to engross the viewer in the film they are watching by tapping into their internal systems and ways of thinking. Many examples of this can be a horror film like *Carrie* (1976), a thriller like *Fall* (2022), or even a romance such as *The Way He Looks* (2014). In an article by Bori Máté titled "The Sensuality of Presence in "Body Horrors": Rethinking Body Genres in Documentary and Experimental Film," Máté states his idea about the body genre and how people can be affected by it. "Meaning is generated by the entire body, not just by conscious thought. The images the observer makes mirror his or her body's activities: its physical movements, shifts of attention, contradictory impulses toward order and disorder" (Máté 2022, 39:7). Through analyzing this interpretation, it can be said that viewers have the tendency to connect with what they see on screen and become attached to the characters represented, in doing so they feel how the characters do personally within themselves.

It is important to note this when looking up body genre-type films. However, they will never be stated as a genre themselves but listened under another more well-known category, just like the Menippean satire. A perfect example of this would be the film, *Everything Everywhere*

All at Once (2022). This film has many different features and genres littered throughout the entire piece but is not listed as a body genre or a Menippean satire, even though it can be arguably considered as using features from them both. The film follows the main character Evelyn, a struggling mother, daughter, wife, and business owner who must use her newly discovered powers of multiversal travel in order to save all of reality. The concept is a mouthful and extremely difficult to understand even after viewing it multiple times, and that's the exact point that the director Daniel Kwan is trying to get across (EEAaO, 2022).

So how can the two genres in question be analyzed within this confusing and complex film in order to show the way that the Menippean satire and the body genre are possibly considered one and the same in some context? To start, it is already aforementioned that the film is an extremely mind-bending piece, something very common within the Menippean satire genre. The film itself is meant to open up the audience's mind and make them think about their place in the universe, or in Menippean terms, the film is meant to “test the truth.” Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022) does so by using such Menippean traits as plot freedom and fantasy, abnormal psychic states, and experimental fantasticality while traveling between the multiple universes. This can be shown in the scenes where Evelyn’s realities first clash with one another, where the screen breaks out into multiple cracked pieces or in her fighting stance when the google eye is stuck to her forehead like in the pictures below (EEAaO, 2022).



While those scenes can definitely be linked to body genres as the action and thrilling intensity of them can cause the audience to be on the edge of their seats while watching due to the fact that they are unaware of what is going to happen next, the more influential body genre type themes of Menippean satire that are present in the film are those of comedy and scandals or characters breaking etiquette. These themes are shown frequently throughout the film to bring a lighthearted context to the message that is being spread while also making people think about what is abnormal compared to our societal standards. This causes the audience to burst out in laughter while also becoming confused, contemplative, sick and even sometimes infuriated at what they see on screen. The images below show two more notable body genre scenes with the wackiness of hotdog fingers and the uncomfortable paper cut scene (EEAaO, 2022).



In conclusion, the Menippean satire and the body genre are very similar when compared to one another, even though they are labeled differently in the grand scheme of a genre as a whole. While the genres may not be widely recognized by the public, they both make a great impact on the films they occupy and can even be said to be in more films than one may originally think. It is important to note the differences and similarities between these two genres to be able to fully understand and interpret the type of film that is being watched at a deeper and more intellectual level while also enjoying all the entertainment these genres have to offer.

Annotated Bibliography:

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