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Zombies in Film, Video Games and Literature”

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1. Introduction

Zombies once represented everything that is considered frightening: they not only are dead and still walking; they may be our unrecognizing loved ones, yearning for nothing but brains. The character of a zombie has been constructed over the years to terrify those encountering it either through word of mouth, on pages or on the screen.

However, the popular representation of zombies has undergone a change. Zombies are no longer tools of terror; there is an increasing amount of fiction portraying them as rather amusing or even cute. How can such a drastic change happen to an established character of horror fiction?

The first argument which comes to mind deals primarily with their human aspects; they used to be people, and in a sense, they are slowly becoming people again: going through the motions of integration within fiction. Furthermore, in several films, zombies resemble pets rather than monsters (*Fido*, *Shaun of the Dead*); retaining the characteristics of a dog for instance - fun to play with, with an underlying quality of violence which can and should be easily managed.

It is true that there are several monsters in horror fiction resembling humans, somewhat deluding this point. However, the vast majority of these are undergoing the same change in representation. Readers have sympathized with vampires in an ambiguous way since the publication of *Interview with a Vampire*; the character has been further altered compared to its origins by the novel series *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* and *Twilight*. Ogres largely are not perceived as scary since the premiere of the first *Shrek* movie. The shift is present regarding various humanoid monsters. In this paper, I will focus on zombies as one of the most established and popular characters of horror fiction in film, video games and literature alike. In addition, the zombie is a beloved character in its own right, as evidenced by the numerous depictions in popular culture which do not reference any work of fiction (see chapter 10).

Due to the fact that other humanoid monsters have all been subjected to this change in representation to various degrees, it can be argued that this process is a special form of anthropomorphism: turning humanoid monsters into domestic variations; integrating them into society either as representatives of an alien culture or as pets. The initial issue with this process is the search for a term with which to describe it. Humanoid

monsters are not inanimate creatures; consequently, using the term “anthropomorphism” would be inaccurate. I will refer to this development as cutefication, meaning the process which alters the popular perception of a humanoid monster (in this case, zombies) from threatening to beloved. I intend to examine this shift of representation through studying the most renowned zombie depictions in film, video games and literature and identify the various means through which cutefication is implemented, as well as illustrate the possible reasons for this phenomenon.

The frequent differentiation between zombies includes Haitian zombies and modern or Hollywood zombies (see Christie 3, Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 3). I will use the term “modern”, because the characters it refers to are not strictly confined to Hollywood productions. The United States can be considered the home of modern zombie fiction, and as such, the works frequently reflect national issues (as discussed in chapter 6). However, the films discussed in chapter 7 were produced in New Zealand (*Braindead*), Great Britain (*Shaun of the Dead*), Canada (*Fido*), with an independent production from the U.S. (*Riga Mortis*); the video game *Minecraft* discussed in chapter 8.3 is by a Swedish developer. Thus, the term “Hollywood zombie” is not appropriate any longer.

I propose a third category for the character of the zombie: the post-modern zombie. I will use this expression to refer to the undead characters which have undergone cutefication. Correspondingly, the expression “post-modern zombie fiction” will be used to refer to works of fiction which employ techniques of cutefication. It should be noted that the characters of zombies in post-modern fiction are not necessarily post-modern, as means of cutefication may only affect the representation of humans, or merely include the utilizing of zombies as a tool to achieve popularity, as these techniques all contribute to changing the character’s status to beloved. I will explore some examples in chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10.

2. Origins

2.1 Haiti

Zombies are a relatively recent phenomenon, even though there are speculations about what we understand as Haitian zombies having existed as early as 1200 AD (see Keegan). The concept of zombies is closely connected to the practice of vodoun, or the popularized version of the word, Voodoo.

It is important to note that popular culture generally depicts the Haitian religion as dark and evil in film, video games and literature. For instance *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, which is a novel that has been adapted to film, primarily focuses on the dark side of the religion. More recent examples include the TV series *True Blood*, based on the series of novels *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, where voodoo is shown as sinister and quite possibly fake. In the popular online role playing game, *World of Warcraft*, there are witch doctors practicing Voodoo and the players can acquire voodoo dolls.

In spite of the representation of the religion as wicked throughout the Western world, “[m]ost vodoun has little to do with sorcery and black magic” (Keegan). As posted on the website of the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum, “the combination of prejudging Voodoo by western standards with the dramatic licenses exploited in the movie industry, have given a false impression. Voodoo, in fact, is a very positive, benign and healing spirituality”. It should be noted that Haitians do not refer to their religion as vodoun; the expression is used solely for a “dance ritual during which the spirits arrive to mount and possess the believer” (Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* 12). It is easy to see how other cultures interpreted this supernatural practice as evil, and equated it with the entire set of Haitian beliefs. Thus, in popular culture Voodoo came to mean the power to rule over someone’s spirit (e.g. voodoo doll).

The word zombi or zombie in modern accounts is derived from the word “nzambi”. According to the Oxford Dictionary of World Mythology, the word refers to the God of the Bakongo people (Cotterell). Christie states that “[the] Nzambi is a religious figure, a spiritual entity with superhuman abilities, and an object of religious faith” (51). Davis agrees with the root of the word; however, he describes the meaning of “nzambi” as “spirit of a dead person” (*The Serpent and the Rainbow* 12). Christie describes the evolution of the word as follows:

When tribal members settled in the Caribbean, [...] the word “zombi” still referred to a spirit [...]. But during the nineteenth century, as African religious beliefs collided with Western influences and zombie mythology underwent the vicissitudes of cultural migration, the term came to represent a spirit that can occupy people (still an external). Eventually, in Haiti, the external disappeared and the term came to refer to a person for whom internal consciousness and volition were absent - a “zombie drone” [...]. (53)

Even though modern and post-modern zombies do not have a lot in common with the Haitian ones, the departing of consciousness is attributed to death in every case - zombies are people who died and returned from the grave. Seabrook describes the Haitian zombies in *The Magic Island* as “[...] a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life - it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive” (93).

The motivations for the revival of the dead seem to differ: in Keegan’s definition, “[a zombie is] someone who has annoyed his or her family and community to the degree that they can no longer stand to live with this person. They respond by hiring a Bokor, a vodoun priest who practices black magic and sorcery, to turn them into a zombi”. According to a West African Vodun tradition, the sorcerer extracts the zombi astral to enhance his power, or to sell it to clients for luck (see Audley 1). Davis describes the sorcerer’s motive to be financial as well: “[they] have the power to raise innocent individuals from their graves to sell them as slaves” (*The Serpent and the Rainbow* 26). We find a corresponding representation in the film *White Zombie*: “Zombies. The living dead. Corpses, taken from their grave and made to work at the sugar mill.”

Another significant difference between the accounts is the level of power the Bokor gains: in Keegan’s description, the revived person remains under the spell until the sorcerer dies. In the West African folklore, “[it] is believed that after a time God will take the soul back and so the zombi is a temporary spiritual entity” (Audley 1). As we will see later on, all of these spiritual aspects have been removed from the tradition of modern zombies.

2.2 20th century accounts

Before taking a closer look at fictional accounts, a short introduction of non-fiction zombie literature is necessary, as zombies became initially popular through these works. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the true accounts of zombie rituals are

still not fully explained. In relation to modern zombies, this means that assuming they infer any kind of disturbing atmosphere relating to their Haitian origins, it is most likely to be closely connected to the partly unsolved mystery of their creation; consequently, the available accounts may be seen as partly responsible for the popularity of zombie fiction in general.

There are several accounts from researchers in the twentieth century, who set out to explore the zombie phenomenon. This can be attributed to the rise of technology, as uncontrollable fear from the paranormal started to decline. Consequently, people from the Western civilization set out to discover the science behind the supernatural in many cases.

“Early Caribbean travel literature occasionally mentioned voodoo rites and transmitted snippets of zombie lore, but even as late as 1928 folklorist Elsie Parsons mentioned that the “zombi” was virtually unknown outside of Haiti” (Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 2). This was true until William Seabrook’s novel *The Magic Island* was published in 1929. Even though Seabrook claimed in a later novel, *Asylum*, that his works are not “fiction or embroidery,” the entire truth of what has actually happened and what he added to enhance the experience are unclear. In Rhodes words, “Seabrook was more of an adventurer and raconteur than a historian or journalist” and “the book reads less like a standard travelogue of Haiti than an incredibly descriptive piece of fiction” (78-79). Consequently, his contribution should be associated more with the popularization of the zombie than with ethnographical research. However, he is notable in this context due to the fact that “it was Seabrook who confronted zombies for the first time in an overt way in an English-language text” (Rhodes 30).

According to twentieth century accounts about the Vodoun culture, it was found in every instance that in order to raise someone from the dead, a poison had to be administered. Zora Neale Hurston traveled to Haiti to explore folklore in 1937. In her opinion, “if science ever gets to the bottom of Voodoo in Haiti and Africa, it will be found that some important medical secrets, still unknown to medical science, give it its power, rather than gestures of ceremony” (67). Wade Davis started to carry out research related specifically to the nature of these poisons in 1982. He wrote a book about his experiences in Haiti with the title *Passage of Darkness: the Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*. As opposed to his previous novel, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, this work dedicates some

attention to the medical side of the issue as Davis attempted to study the “zombie poison” from a scientific perspective as well. Keegan writes about a “substantial number of pufferfish and porcupinefish that [they] recover from archaeological sites” in the West Indies. He proceeds to introduce a theory stating that the natives “used the tetrodotoxins in these fishes as a means to communicate with the spirits, and to heighten the authority of the *behique* who could seemingly die and then days later appear to rise from the dead”.

However, neither Davis’s nor Keegan’s accounts are supported by facts and are based on the idea of TTX as a reanimating drug, which is subject to debate: for instance, Davis’ accounts are highly criticized in the scientific community, the main argument being that TTX poisoning does not cause a death-like trance and should be dismissed as a cause for such a state (see Hines, 115-116). Yet it should be noted that Davis never identified this substance as the sole cause of “zombification”: he names the “set” and “setting” as necessary ingredients as well. He describes the former as “the individual's expectation of what the drug will do to him or her”; the latter as “the environment - both physical and, in this case, social - in which the drug is taken” (*Passage of Darkness* 108).

As the above accounts show, a definite conclusion as to the means of creating zombies has not been reached. The researchers do not share the same experiences, even though they were studying the same culture. The only aspect which seems to be present in every case is the existence of people who for whatever reason became dependent and impressionable.

Further evidence supporting the existence of zombies in some form or other is their utilization to threaten the Haitian people. The seriousness of Vodoun beliefs can be illustrated through the regime of Papa Doc Duvalier, which started in 1957. “[It is] is widely seen as one of the most corrupt and repressive in modern history. He exploited Haiti's traditional belief in voodoo to establish a personal militia, the feared and hated Tonton Macoutes, said to be zombies that he had raised from the dead” (Henley). The fact that an entire country could be terrorized with the concept makes it hard to dismiss it as entirely fictional.

3. Early development of the modern zombie

The undead have been a part of popular culture almost through the entire 20th century. Before that, it is difficult to pin down which stories should be considered connected to zombies in the Haitian or the modern sense. Not being able to apply either the modern definition or the one connected to voodoo (due to neither of them having been able to influence the works), the following older examples are up to interpretation regarding their relevance.

The issue inspired some notable works of fiction theorizing the presence of zombies in literature as far back as the Bible. In the movie *King of the Zombies*, one of the undead is called Lazarus. A more direct interpretation is the short story *Lazarus* by John Connolly, where the reader is introduced to the protagonist's point of view after the rebirth: "Something terrible has happened. Some great wrong has been committed in the name of pity and love. [...] What have you done? He tries to say. What have you taken from me, and from what have you taken me?" (Connolly 2).

Due to examples throughout literary history which may be argued to feature zombies, the true origin of the zombie as a fictional character is hard to determine. Even though Frankenstein's monster is not considered a zombie (most likely due to the fact that he was not one person but created out of several), he was certainly humanoid and revived; and as such can be argued to have influenced the evolution of the modern zombie. H. P. Lovecraft's series *Herbert West-Reanimator* (1922) shows obvious parallels with Shelley's novel; which support this theory.

"It was not long after the faculty had interdicted his work that West confided to me his resolution to get fresh human bodies in some manner, and continue in secret the experiments he could no longer perform openly. " (Lovecraft, Part I)

"I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation." (Shelley, 23)

Lovecraft does not use the term "zombie" in any of these short stories; however, avoiding the term remains a trope in modern and post-modern zombie fiction as well (e. g. Romero movies, *Shaun of the Dead*). Furthermore, the nature of these revived creatures is

remarkably similar to that of a modern zombie to such an extent, that we may consider his representation of an undead the first modern example.

Looming hideously against the spectral moon was a gigantic misshapen thing not to be imagined save in nightmares—a glassy-eyed, ink-black apparition nearly on all fours, covered with bits of mould, leaves, and vines, foul with caked blood, and having between its glistening teeth a snow-white, terrible, cylindrical object terminating in a tiny hand. (Part III)

As for the term “zombie” gaining popularity, the novel *The Magic Island* contributed to it being introduced to everyday language. Seabrook’s “sensational writing style” (Rhodes 79) made the novel a bestseller. Seabrook describes a zombie as follows.

The eyes were the worst. It was not my imagination. They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring unfocused, unseeing. The whole face, for that matter, was bad enough. It was vacant, as if there were nothing behind it. It seemed not only expressionless, but also incapable of expression. (101)

The *Time Magazine* wrote in 1940 the following about the novel: “The Magic Island credulously expounded Haitian voodoo, introduced ‘zombi’ into U. S. speech.” The “allegedly non-fiction” (Rhodes 78) book was published in 1929, and even though Seabrook only devoted one chapter to zombies, he certainly popularized the expression. The combination of Lovecraft’s representation of the undead and the phrase becoming commonly used marks the 1920’s as the birth of the modern zombie as a fictional character.

Haitian culture featuring resurrected bodies has been depicted on screen, plays and literature numerous times during the twentieth century. Some examples are the short film *Unconquered* (1917), the play *Zombi* by Nathalie Vivien Scott (1929) and the novel *A Maroon: A Tale of Voodoo in Obeah*, which includes a chapter titled *The Resurrection* written by Captain Mayne Reid as early as 1883. At first glance, *White Zombie* (1932) may not seem highly relevant to the discussion of modern zombies besides the fact that it is widely regarded as the first feature length zombie movie (see Rhodes 13); *Magic Island* is frequently identified as the source for the film (see Rhodes 93, Philips 27-40, Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 2) and correspondingly it does not feature any modern undead creatures. The setting is Haiti; the zombies are resurrected by Murder Legendre (played by Bela Lugosi) and act as slaves, following orders, which is a typical Haitian approach to the topic.

Yet the movie is notable for one important detail: the orders given to the creatures involve violence in the film. Thus, even though they are being controlled and do not follow their own nature (which seems to be non-existent in the film anyway), they pave the way for the modern zombies: a circle of them slowly advancing on the protagonist, indifferent to bullets, seemingly unstoppable. This element is well-known in popular culture and is mirrored by numerous zombie movies (e.g. *Dawn of the Dead*, *Shaun of the Dead*). Furthermore, *White Zombie* is a precursor of later zombie movies in the sense that it mirrors the social anxieties of America of the time it was released. This phenomenon will be discussed in detail later on.

4. What is a modern zombie?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “zombie” as an “animated corpse brought back to life by mystical means such as witchcraft.” However, with the rise of the modern zombie in literature, film and popular culture, this description is neither complete nor accurate - it seems to refer exclusively to the undead associated with the Vodoun culture discussed above. Over the past decades many changes affected and continue to influence the character of a zombie. In order to achieve a better grasp of the transformation which has taken place and is still continuously present, it is important to differentiate between the definition of the word “zombie” as it stems from Haitian culture and the phenomenon which started in 1968, with the premiere of the *Night of the Living Dead*.

In the process of constructing a more timely definition, it is helpful to look at the traits all modern zombie characters seem to share. Contrary to the Haitian reanimated corpses, these revived bodies are never in a suspended state due to an administered poison, they are dead - at least at one point. This distinction helps to eliminate some elements of popular culture which might be incorrectly considered as zombie fiction. Furthermore, the means of coming back to life are no longer solely mystical: the replacing of the supernatural with the scientific is a frequent motif. This aspect mirrors the mission which was never completed by the researchers of the “zombie poison”; on one level, modern zombie fiction is filling the gap which is still present in non-fiction Haitian zombie accounts.

4.1 Revival

There are several ways introduced in fiction to become a zombie. One of the most common causes is a scientific disaster, which can mean for instance radiation poisoning. A viral infection as a reason for an outbreak is common; however, these works cannot be considered zombie fiction in this context and will be discussed separately. The supernatural as a reason is more frequent in literature and films before the 21st century. Additionally, the most popular way of becoming a zombie (based on the number of victims in general) is directly from a zombie. I will discuss all of these causes in detail, and differentiate between the characters of the infected and those I am referring to as modern zombies.

4.1.1 First generation zombies

Some zombies come back to life as a result of human error. In the 2008 film *Dance of the Dead*, the dead emerging from their graves is a side effect of a nearby power plant. In *Dust*, the reason is scientific experimentation, which contaminates the earth. Even though the revival stems from technical mishaps, as is the case with viruses, the disparity is apparent as in the scenarios at hand only the already deceased are directly affected by the catastrophe.

The supernatural may no longer dominate the process of becoming a zombie, yet it is still a possibility which is present in literature and film as well. In *The Evil Dead*, forces are awakened through incantation and take over dead bodies. In *Pet Sematary*, reanimation is achieved when the body is put to rest at an Indian burial ground. A few works do not offer any explanation as to the presence of the undead; such as *Almost the Last Story* by *Almost the Last Man* or *Shaun of the Dead*. Some horror-comedies offer completely different explanations for the reanimation as those above, which may be considered traditional. In *My Boyfriend's Back*, the reason ties in with the romantic sentiment of the film. As Dendle puts it, “we learn that Johnny was allowed to return as a zombie because someone messed up in the heavenly bureaucracy, and in such cases the victim of the blunder is allowed a second chance at life, as a zombie.” (Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 114) In *Idle Hands*, the reason for re-animation is because after the characters died, “the light [they saw] was really far”; and they chose to return as zombies instead.

In some representations, the reanimation occurs due to a virus created by humans, such as *28 days Later* or *Resident Evil* (the Rage Virus and the T-Virus respectively). The characters in these examples cannot be viewed strictly as zombies. In both cases, people turn into flesh-eating creatures due to a laboratory accident. Consequently, instead of re-animated corpses, they are the victims of a special sickness that leads to zombie-like behavior.

As Boyle, the director of *28 days Later* stated, “[they] liked the idea that the virus simply amplifies something already in each and every man and woman, rather than turning them into something entirely Other, as is the traditional route in zombie movies” (Boyle). Furthermore, in an interview he specifically stated that “It’s not a zombie movie, everyone. It’s not a zombie movie. [...] They’re infected. They’re not zombies” (Shawn). This underlines the fact that regardless of the deceptively similar outcome to actual zombie scenarios, it is important to stress the ultimate difference between the undead and the infected. The former die for whatever reason, then rise again; the latter contract a virus, then exhibit zombie-like symptoms.

One could argue that the crucial distinction should be the presence or lack of death; however, it is challenging to determine whether a character has actually died, as evidenced by *Return of the Living Dead* in modern fiction, or by Davis’s description in non-fiction.

“You can’t always tell. Breathing can occur with such gentle movements of the diaphragm as to be imperceptible. Besides, the absence of respiration may represent a suspension, not a cessation. As for body temperature, people are pulled out of frozen lakes and snowfields all the time.”

“The eyes of the dead tell you nothing,” added Lehmann. “The muscles of the iris continue to contract hours after death. Skin color can be useful...”

“Hardly in this case [...]” (26)

In some cases, the indication of demise is not represented at all: in *28 Days Later* for instance, death is not a stage between human and infected, and those affected do not need to be terminated by destroying the brain. Max Brooks discusses the issue during a Q&A published on the website of The Washington Post.

The zombies in ‘28 Days later’ weren’t really zombies (in that they weren’t technically dead). I think the scientific term for them is ‘crazies’. The good think [sic] about crazies that they die just like normal humans. Shoot them in the chest, stab them in heart, run them over with the car. As in the movie, even starving them seems like a pretty good solution.

Thus, the victims of such an illness resemble the Vodoun zombies more than the modern representations. Therefore, a clear distinction is necessary: the works dealing with infection can be categorized as biohorror. Several popular films belong to this category, such as *Resident Evil*, *The Crazies* and *Zombieland*, and as such, the characters featured in these films are not part of the focus of this paper. The plots of these works of fiction are remarkably similar to that of traditional zombie films; however, this is relevant to the social aspects and implications of these works and will be discussed later on.

4.1.2 Second generation zombies

In almost every work of zombie related fiction, zombies are infectious. It is beyond doubt that this element results in a more terrifying plot, as even a little bite can turn the main character or their loved ones into the enemy. Yet the issue seems similar to the debate about victims being zombies or infected: if the state of being undead can be transferred through a bite, is it not just a form of virus?

The difference between the second generation undead and infected can be theorized as such: an undead will never be alive again. On the other hand, a virus may be lethal, yet there may be a cure discovered even for the worst diseases - a hope, which might prove to be false; resulting in a different kind of dread and desperation. In literature, *I Am Legend* is an example of a quest for this antidote. The viral nature of zombies and its implications are discussed in detail in chapter 5.3.1.

4.2 Attributes

Modern zombies are not controlled by their creators - we cannot even speak of a creator as such. They are not lone servants; they exist in packs and their only motivation is hunger. "It wasn't that he needed that flesh to live. Its presence in his leaky stomach was never what powered him. The strength of his desire was unrelated to any practical end. He hungered, and so he needed to hunt. That was what he did. That was what he was" (Edelman 175).

The conventions about portraying the modern zombies are relevant to the effects of dread (or amusement) they invoke in the audience. Furthermore, they need to be taken into account while analyzing the works, as these features determine the way humans deal with zombies. It is impossible to make universal statements about this issue as the

representations are highly diverse; yet it is important to understand the main characteristics. Consequently, I will now offer an overview of the most prominent examples, and more detailed descriptions when analyzing specific works of fiction in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

4.2.1 Physical abilities

The movements of the undead are usually represented as sluggish and often jerky, since the body retains the damages done to it and their brain functions are highly limited. Max Brooks writes: “Even without injuries or advanced decomposition, their lack of coordination makes for an unsteady stride” (13). Their bodies are traditionally depicted as decomposing, regardless of the fact that they are still using them. The life span of a walking body varies greatly depending on the source; Brooks for instance estimates it at three to five years (10). Injuries affect them only in a strictly functional sense as they cannot feel pain: “My arm fell off today. Lucky for me, I’m left-handed.” (Turner 1)

In some recent works of fiction (e.g. *Dawn of the Dead*, 2004; *Zombieland*), zombies are capable of fast movement, even running. It should be noted that there are very few actual zombie movies which feature the character as quick; most of these belong to the biohorror category. This fact has been overlooked by many who are involved in creating zombie fiction, resulting in a heated debate on the subject, eliciting some passionate comments by those portraying zombies in their works.

“ZOMBIES DON’T RUN! [...] You cannot kill a vampire with an MDF stake; werewolves can't fly; zombies do not run. It's a misconception, a bastardisation that diminishes a classic movie monster. [...] Death is a disability, not a superpower. It's hard to run with a cold, let alone the most debilitating malady of them all.” (Pegg, *The Guardian*)

It can be argued that fast zombies allow for a more dynamic advancing of the plot, due to the fact that the slow undead may seem easily avoided: “They're so slow. We could just walk right past them. I wouldn't even have to run” (*Night of the Living Dead*). However, years of zombie fiction evolution have shown that slow revived corpses can be just as –if not more – terrifying as fast ones. The horror of a zombie does not solely lie in the threat of being caught by it, as it will be discussed later on. Furthermore, given the very nature of these creatures, it seems logically more acceptable to portray them as sluggish. A human

character in *Night of the Living Dead* asks, “Are they slow-moving, chief?” To which the sheriff replies, “Yeah, they're dead. They're all messed up.”

The disclaimer quoted above by Boyle, referring to his film as “not a zombie movie” was uttered in a situation where he was confronted about the creatures’ speed. This and Pegg’s emotional article above are merely a sample as to the level of which artists involved with zombie fiction are affected about the topic. The fact that not only fans, but writers squabble over this issue on countless forums can be argued to mark the characteristic as a tradition (see *Fast vs Slow Zombies*). The established nature of slow zombies is further supported by the fact that some films exploit the convention for the purpose of humor. In *Return of the Living Dead*, upon discovering that the creatures indeed run and cannot be killed by destroying the brain, Freddy says: “You mean that movie lied?!” – referring to *Night of the Living Dead*.

The opinions regarding the strength of the undead vary to the same extent as for their speed; even though this issue does not appear to be discussed in such an expressive manner. Several examples can be found portraying zombies with extraordinary strength (e.g. *Dawn of the Dead*, 2004); yet the arguments above remain relevant to this issue as well as all other superhuman features which may be attributed to them: their only improvement (if it can be referred to as such) after revival is the lack of physical pain and the ability to carry on without rest or food: “Chances are that pain and exhaustion will dictate your limits. These factors do not apply to the dead” (Brooks 13). There have been exceptions to this portrayal recently; for instance, in the video game *Minecraft* and Edelman’s short story *The Man he had been Before*, the undead are only active at night.

4.2.2 Termination

There are several theories as to what will kill a zombie, varying from film to novel to game. What most of the works seem to have in common is the fact that you need to destroy the brain. In Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* the scientist shares the information on TV: “Kill the brain, and you kill the ghoul.” This element is mirrored in *Shaun of the Dead*, when the anchorman says “It's just not something you ever expect to have to say on air: ‘removing the head or destroying the brain’. Extraordinary.” According to Brooks, “[t]he brain must be obliterated, by any means possible” (19).

Interestingly, the link between zombies wanting to eat brains and their own brains as their weak spot has not always been linked. In *Night of the Living Dead* for instance, zombies wanted to eat people but were not shown to be partial to the brain. This tradition only started in 1985, after *Return of the Living Dead* premiered. In some works, severing a head or any other body parts will only result in those becoming independently animated (*Dance of the Dead*). In horror-comedies, this is a frequently used source for humor (*Return of the Living Dead*).

5. The terror of the undead

The character of the zombie has undoubtedly become one of the most frequent tools of terror in popular culture. There are several points which can explain this phenomenon.

As mentioned in section 4.2.1, the undead are generally represented as slow-moving and simple-minded. The feeling of fear is evoked not by a sudden, unexpected source of danger. After the initial discovery, the characters are aware of the presence of zombies; and if they stay alert, never cease to pay attention and do not let their personal feelings get the better of them, they might just survive. As Waller puts it when discussing *Dawn of the Dead*, “[t]he living must always remain cautious of the threat posed by the undead, no matter how ludicrous the zombies look or how easily they are outmaneuvered. And if the living dead cannot be eluded, they must be killed [...]” (307). Fear is evoked through the zombies’ portrayal as relentless. Pegg says, “[i]t’s the difference between someone shouting ‘Boo!’ and hearing the sound of the floorboards creaking in an upstairs room: a quick thrill at the expense of a more profound sense of dread” (*The Guardian*).

5.1 A personal threat

Perhaps the most obvious reason zombies evoke fear is the notion of demise. “[With zombies] we see the process of decay as it happens right before our eyes[...]. They are this kind of perverse manifestation of humans’ desire for immortality gone horribly awry” (qtd. in Gross). This point is explored in the short story *Life Sentence* - an influential man viewing mortality as “simply the latest challenge” (Armstrong 105). As humans are doomed to fail in their simultaneous quest for happiness and immortality, the result will invariably be the lack of one or both.

The undead thus relate to the audience on a deeper level: it is easier to perceive a character as a monster in case it is not humanoid, such as the boogeyman. Zombies, however, used to be human; then proceeded to shed their human qualities to become nothing but a vicious threat to the existence of the living. The most elementary threat in zombie fiction is universal: anyone can become one of them. As Paffenroth points out, “[zombies] are the only humanoid threat that will bring about the end of civilization by turning all of us into them” (18).

This factor coupled with their traditional depiction as slow but eventually unavoidable menace shows a parallel with the notion of death. Consequently, the character of a zombie may be seen as one’s personal demise.

Drink less, cut out red meat, exercise, practice safe sex; these are our shotguns, our cricket bats, our farmhouses, our shopping malls. However, none of these things fully insulates us from the creeping dread that something so witless, so elemental may yet catch us unawares - the drunk driver, the cancer sleeping in the double helix, the legless ghoul dragging itself through the darkness towards our ankles. (Pegg)

Zombies are also unique in the sense that they are capable of invoking the age-old horror of the departed who were relatives. Masters reports about a primitive ritual describing the actions which had to be taken after someone’s death. “[It] was absolutely essential to speed the spirit on its way once death had taken place. At all cost the late departed must join the family’s ancestors without delay. Should there be a delay the spirit would take offence, would hover malignantly around [...]. Precautions for the spirit’s escape include the opening of windows and doors [...]” (qtd in Dillard, 15). As Dillard points out in reference to *Night of the Living Dead*, the film can be seen as the reverse of this ritual, shutting the doors and the windows to keep out the spirits which already departed but did not make it to the other side completely (16). The same theory applies to numerous works modern zombie fiction, where the objective of the characters includes defending a safe haven (*Dawn of the Dead*, *Return of the Living Dead*).

5.2 A threat to loved ones

The arguments above lead to the next point of the undead being terrifying on another level: they are a threat not only to oneself, but to the loved ones as well. The well-known stories of love overcoming obstacles are contradicted in a most violent way; the protagonist has to

deal with the loss and immediately make the decision of murdering the loved one if they turn. Waller writes, “[...] one of the most disturbing requirements in the struggle for survival is that a human being can and will be called upon to kill an undead creature who in life was his closest friend, his fiancée, or his lover” (313).

According to Freudian theory, ambivalence occurs when “children feel both love and murderous hate towards the same object, sometimes simultaneously” (Sadock 255). This state can be used to describe the character’s position as well, when faced with an undead loved one. In some post-modern works, the issue is represented as a mere inconveniency (*What Maisie Knew*, *Fido*). Another relevant Freudian theory is the death drive opposing Eros; parallel to the ambivalence in children’s behavior, since “[for] the opposition of the two types of drives, we may adduce the polarity of love and hate” (Freud, 109). Eros is not simply the opposite of the death drive, “[it] comprises [...] the actual uninhibited sex drive and the goal-inhibited and sublimated drive impulses derived from it” (107). In this context, the bathroom scene in *Dance of the Dead* is a unique physical manifestation of the constant inner struggle, where the sex drive finally aligns with the death drive and consequently results in death.

The terror is heightened by the frustration of helplessness induced by the fact that the human characters are perceived as better than their enemies in every aspect but one: they are human. They get tired, they need their sleep as well as food: the implication on the personal level is that when it all comes down to such a situation, education, talent, empathy and everything else that really mattered before is completely useless (if not counter-productive), and the ones to survive will be those capable of mindless violence. Crane discusses this phenomenon while analyzing *Night of the Living Dead*.

Altruism of any sort is no longer rewarded in the horror film. Most slasher and gore films kill off even the most self-sacrificing protagonists. If a monster should be bested, then, at the moment of apparent triumph, the protagonist must, to survive, become more violent, more savage, than the ostensible monster. (12)

5.3 A threat to society

The contagious nature of the undead coupled with their power to eliminate human values make them a threat not only to the self and the loved ones, but on a larger scale to society as well. The possibility of failure of containment is present in every work of zombie

fiction. The fascination with such a situation presented (or suggested) in literature, film and video games may be explained on two levels.

5.3.1 Zombies are the next plague

The popular scenario of a zombie apocalypse can be attributed to an elementary fear of any epidemic - the most devastating of which may be the plague, the most recent of which is probably swine flu. The parallel between the plague and a zombie outbreak has been pointed out in several works: in *Zombieland*, Columbus states that zombies are “the plague of the 21st century”; in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* the phenomenon of the dead coming back to life is referred to as “the strange plague” (26).

In Barney’s words, “[...] the Western cultural imagination, the term *plague* inevitably conjures up the horrors of the so-called Black Death of the fourteenth century, perhaps the most spectacular biological disaster in human history” (6). Contemporary audiences, however, may have a hard time relating to this epidemic. Yet we are all aware of certain disasters and scares, such as the H1N1 virus. Boluk and Wylie argue that “the viral zombie does not replace the older style of zombies as much as find a way to reconfigure it in the light of emerging scientific discourses that tap into deeply felt post-AIDS, SARS, bird flu and H1N1 anxieties” (6). I would like to argue that this attribute is not restricted to the infected or crazies (which she refers to as the viral zombie), but is inherent to all zombie characters which are contagious.

The H1N1 scare of 2009 may be used to illustrate how humans are threatened by the idea of something uncontainable, even though with proper precautions it may prove harmless. As Greenspan writes when discussing the alternate reality games *ZombieTruth* and *Lost Zombies*, “[by] exploiting the official channels of state-sanctioned biopolitical protocols, they call into question whether a full-blown SARS or H1N1 pandemic is any more realistic than the outbreak of zombies” (213). Equating a possible zombie outbreak with viruses which are known to the public heightens the sense of reality and thus the sense of terror generated by the character of the zombie in general.

Furthermore, these viruses are explained today: we know what caused the bird flu, SARS, AIDS (see Boluk 6). For the zombie virus as a whole, there is no explanation: we may know the origin, but there is usually no name for it and as such, it evokes fear - corresponding with the Romero-inspired tradition of the characters avoiding the uttering of

the term “zombie”. According to Dendle, “[t]his pestilence anxiety is almost always non-specific, because ultimately [it’s] death itself that is the disease” (*The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 12). A notable exception here is *The Zombie Survival Guide*, where the fictional virus is named and discussed in detail; yet also characterized as “not fully understood”. This view is supported by the fact that there is absolutely no chance of a cure for those already infected (in zombie fiction) or the cure is more of a rumor which is bound to be popular, yet most likely does not exist (in biohorror). As Boluk and Wylie write, “the zombie appears now to occupy the position of uncontrollable threat that was previously associated with the plague” (6).

Biohorror fiction exploits these feelings of dread. One of the characters in *28 Days Later* gets infected through a drop of blood falling in his eye. This element appeals to the paranoid in every viewer: the smallest mishap may lead to a person’s demise. In addition, it is a further proof of the fact that in this type of horror, the threat is primarily a virus and not someone infected.

Zombie fiction employs vessels for the disease. Becoming a zombie is generally depicted as a direct result of being bitten - humans may walk around smeared with zombie blood (*Braindead*, *Shaun of the Dead*) and they will be fine - sometimes even when their blood mixes (as in *Dawn of the Dead* in the fountain scene, 2004). This seemingly contradicting statement however makes for prolonged and gory fighting scenes between humans and zombies; and more importantly, marks the undead as manifestations of the threat.

5.3.2 Social uprising

As mentioned above, all zombie fiction can be considered to depict a form of apocalypse. (It is not a coincidence that the term “zombie apocalypse” has become increasingly popular, referring to any and/or every scenario of a zombie outbreak.) Wood’s discussion of apocalyptic American horror films is thus relevant to zombie fiction in general.

The [apocalyptic horror film] expresses, obviously, despair and negativity, yet its very negation can be claimed as progressive: the ‘apocalypse’, even when presented in metaphysical terms (the end of the world), is generally reinterpretable in social/political ones [...]. [These films] are progressive in so far as their negativity is not recuperable into the dominant ideology, but constitutes (on the contrary) the recognition of that ideology’s

disintegration, its untenability, as all it has repressed explodes and blows it apart. (215)

The fear of society falling apart is probably as old as the existence of constructed societies. However, the interpretation of an apocalypse as a form of plague leads to a biological (or, in this case, sometimes mystical) explanation, which is not a direct result of social dysfunction. Consequently it must be noted that the outbreaks themselves can be categorized in this respect in two ways: a result of human error originating from an effort to achieve a certain social status (power, money etc.), or mystical means unrelated to social tension. The works of fiction belonging to the former kind (*Dance of the Dead*, *Life Sentence*) correspond to Wood's description; those belonging to the latter group (*Dawn of the Dead*, *Almost the Last Story by Almost the Last Man*) may be compared to the concept of the plague. Yet the results in both cases are strikingly similar; the obliteration of the existing social construct on either a small or a larger scale – both of which suggest the possibility of a global apocalypse. Considering these prospects together with the loss of values on a personal level mentioned above, the real terror of a zombie apocalypse is the prospect of losing everything that humans believe to be important and having to conform to those norms which were condemned by society before.

On the other hand, many characters seem to find their true calling only when the outbreak begins. This motif can be observed for example in *Shaun of the Dead*, where the previously aimless protagonist discovers a purpose in life after the zombies appear: he needs to save his mother and his ex-girlfriend, and he assumes the leadership of an entire group. In *Zombieland*, Columbus says "My mother always told me someday you'll be good at somethin'. I don't think she could have guessed that somethin' would be zombie killing". In the series *The Walking Dead*, Glen comes up with an elaborate plan to avoid the zombies, and when someone asks him with admiration what he did before all this, he answers "Delivered pizzas... why?" Furthermore, the figure of authority is frequently shown to be disregarded, as in *Dawn of the Dead*, 2004: "He's a cop, C.J." "So what?"

In some zombie fiction, humans prove to be just as dangerous as zombies: in the original *Dawn of the Dead* for instance, a policeman is seen killing people. An even broader sense of human to human danger is an important element in the first two of Romero's series: the television broadcasting false information. This recurring motif

reinforces the feeling of society's complete lack of ability to deal with such a situation effectively; the people participating in the newscast would rather send innocent viewers to their deaths (in this case, by suggesting rally points that are known to have been overtaken by zombies) than accept the changed circumstances and admit their incompetence. One might also consider the parallel between deadly consumerism and blind trust in what the television says, which also proves fatal. Romero thus brands two of modern society's favorite past time activities as lethal - reinforcing the notion of an upside down social system.

The pressure of never-ending danger and the possibility of contagion keep the characters (and the audience) on edge. Some of the human characters who threaten other survivors redeem themselves and thus reinforce faith in humanity; as C.J., who sacrifices himself to help the remaining members of the group escape; or Wichita and Little Rock in *Zombieland*, who scam survivors over and over again but finally, join forces with the male protagonists. Some characters, however, do not evolve; in which case they either perish (as Harry in *Night of the Living Dead*) or in the truly terrifying cases, continue to thrive (for example, Merle Dixon in *The Walking Dead*).

These examples all reinforce the notion of a complete meltdown of a social structure as we know it; as there is no training for this kind of situation, anyone can assume leadership based on their character (and in many cases, possession of a weapon) alone. The close proximity of social issues arising at a time of an apocalypse and the plague can be traced back to the simple reason of contagion. In both cases, isolation means safety. The problem is the same in both cases as well: are the ones around infected? Is anybody hiding a bite mark, as in *Dawn of the Dead*, *Dance of the Dead* and *Shaun of the Dead*? There is no certain way to tell, furthermore, personal relations may override sensible reasoning, resulting in irrational mercy and more deaths (*Dawn of the Dead*, 2004). As Boluk and Wylie write, "a zombie outbreak, much like a plague epidemic, is an event in which the anxieties associated with social connectivity come to the fore [...]" (7). Identities are wiped away - you are either one of them, or one of us.

5.4 Zombies as the Other

The undead can be seen as representing a form of Otherness - one might even say, the ultimate form. Applying the notion of the Other to zombies gives Hegel's view a literal

meaning: "Each consciousness pursues the death of the other" (qtd. in Beauvoir 173). This view also resonates with Dendle's opinion, who writes that "[t]he essence of the 'zombie' at the most abstract level is supplanted, effaced or stolen consciousness; it casts allegorically the appropriation of one person's will by that of another" (*The Zombie As a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety* 48).

In contrast, Wood defines the Other in this respect as "that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with [...] in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it [...]" (199). This view can be applied to the evolution of the zombie fiction: the only possible solution to deal with zombies used to be termination. It can be argued that the continuous failure to completely achieve this goal in fiction led to the evolving of the techniques we can observe in later works (to be discussed in detail later on), such as *Shaun of the Dead* or *Fido*: instead of annihilation, they are forcefully integrated. It does not quite work, but the façade is sufficient to keep up the appearance of a working society.

6. Zombies - a mirror of society?

As mentioned above, the notion of a zombie apocalypse can be directly linked to the anxiety of a possible social disturbance. However, there are more levels on which the character of zombies can be viewed as reflecting social issues. The shifting representations in zombie fiction throughout the years can be interpreted as parallel to some of the main changing issues in society.

The character of the zombie may seem one-dimensional at first glance, and it is a fact that in some cases they are depicted as nothing more than monsters. However, as illustrated in chapter 4, they show a level of variety; furthermore, the human characters and the overall setting of the films discussed below go beyond inducing nightmares about fictional scenarios. The subtle modifications of the undead and those fighting them can be employed to represent some of the main concerns of society over time.

In this chapter, I will introduce some of the most influential works of zombie fictions in film and offer two frames of interpretation each which reflect some of society's major concerns at the time of their release respectively. I will then analyze the characters (with a focus on zombies) within those frameworks. This process is significant because in

case zombie fiction as a genre can be demonstrated to reflect the audience's ever-changing anxieties, this quality is highly relevant regarding the progression of cuturefication. These movies are all modern works of zombie fiction, and as is the case with most of such films they were produced in the United States. Thus, the analyses presented are concerned with the American social stance.

6.1 The Great Depression and race anxiety: *White Zombie*

The film *White Zombie* received numerous positive reviews upon its release. *The Film Daily* wrote in 1932 that “[i]t rates with the best of this type of film [...]” (qtd. in Rhodes 266), while *Variety* reported that “the macabre atmosphere is evenly maintained and heightened by the action and the setting” (qtd. in Rhodes 267). As for the box office results, “*White Zombie* had been a tremendous financial success” (233), which was “[...] much talked about but rarely pinpointed in precise dollar amounts” (161). The positive reception is interesting in retrospect, as this was the first feature-length zombie movie (see Rhodes 13). In this section, I will offer several possible reasons which could explain the American audience's readiness to embrace zombie fiction, in line with the social anxieties of the time.

The two issues this chapter focuses on may seem controversial as far as exploiting the fear of the audience is concerned. I would like to show that not only are both views valid, but they make for a complex web of fears which appealed to most of the viewers at the time, whether they were suffering from the consequences of the Depression era or had racial anxieties. While these two may not seem interconnected, Fay states that “with or without zombies, ‘U.S. policy resurrected a colonial/slave economy’ and the zombie is a metaphor for exploited and conscripted labor” (see Phillips 32). Thus, the dread of zombies as a representation of slaves is valid on both levels.

6.1.1 The Depression era

As discussed above, the original zombies were used as mindless slaves; this is how they entered popular culture. In the context of social anxiety, the American audience's instant enthusiasm may be explained through the working conditions during the Depression era.

Since its earliest periods, America had forged individual and social values around a perpetual shortage of available labour and the valorization of hard work, initiative, and industry; now for the first time it was faced with a catastrophic surplus of labour, of hands without work to do. The burned-out souls standing in lines at soup

kitchens or fruitlessly waiting in employment lines are zombies of a sort, shells of human beings. (Dendle, *The Zombie As a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety* 46)

The description in the above quote can be viewed as one of the explanations for the positive reception of the undead fiction; the true horror of the creatures lay beyond the initial representation and mirrored the audience's elementary fear for their existence at the time. As Rhodes writes, "citizens clung to films as an important luxury, a necessary form of entertainment. [...] The popularity of the horror film cycle during the early years of the Great Depression [can be explained with] catharsis, the desire of Depression-era filmgoers to find an outlet for their worries." (120). *White Zombie* elevated these worries to a fictional level, thus making it possible to recoil at the horror the people were experiencing during the Depression through the depictions of monsters. Even though the everyday problems were real, it can be argued that transforming them to elements in a clearly fictional setting enabled viewers to temporarily experience their issues as fictional.

Another argument which may explain the popularity of the film is the notion of emotional connection to the topic and the new perspective provided by the film. Simply put, the common sufferings are transformed into something monstrous in the form of zombies; consequently, the film may have induced in the viewers a feeling of "being better off" in comparison.

6.1.2 Race anxiety

As the zombies in this film are Haitian and part of a Creole culture, the implications of race issues cannot be ignored. Even the title points to the apparent oxymoron, as perceived by the contemporary audience: the true horror does not lie in the existence of zombies, but in the fact that even a white person can become one of them.

The threat of the lack of boundaries between native Haitian and American culture is further elaborated, when the villain taints Madeline with magic and turns her into a zombie. Prior to that, her character has not been particularly opinionated and afterwards she just follows orders as well; essentially retaining the same attitude but answering to a different master. Consequently, it can be argued that the horror as experienced by the American audience is having a white woman turned into a slave through non-white means; the depiction of Haitian magic versus socially accepted repression. Philips states that "[...]

the zombification of the white woman, Madeline, is a threat to white supremacy in the social and economic power structure, and it also represents a threat to racial purity” (28).

At the end of the film, the villain is stopped by Beaumont, who is at the time in mid-transition between being zombie and human. This may be viewed as the depiction of a white person who refuses to yield to submission, which the creoles and even a white woman have done. The in-between status allows for a demonstration of power no one else but a white male could offer in this particular reading; thus allowing the viewers to associate not with a person (as Beaumont is certainly not a heroic one), but with an ideal.

6.1.3 Character analysis

The zombie characters in the film are not undead in the strict sense, even though they have been buried; they change back to humans when Legendre’s power over them ceases to exist (corresponding to Haitian tradition – see Keegan). Thus, they are helpless victims while remaining humans on some level - forced into submission, stripped from their personalities and free will, mercilessly exploited to work at a factory to no end.

Their human qualities are eliminated completely, as demonstrated by the fact that when one of the workers falls into the mill, the others do not show any reaction and grind him up. This element –keeping in mind Legendre’s role as a factory boss - points to the importance of labor over human existence as perceived by employers. During the Depression, this portrayal was possibly scarier due to the potential level of truth than the monsters featured.

The zombies return to their human state when Legendre dies, as it happens to Madeleine. This makes them not simply resurrected monsters in the eyes of the viewers; they were embodying their worst dread: sacrificing their humanity to work in a factory without any substantial benefits. On the other hand, the American characters in the film are clearly afraid of the zombies and do not view them as victims. They are not aware of the fact that the creatures are not really undead and view them as “taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life” (Seabrook 93). They simply accept the fact that things work this way in Haiti; and the true horror only starts when Beaumont decides to ask Legendre for help, thus getting involved with the local culture.

In contrast, Madeline retains her beauty even as a zombie and is never rendered to physical labor. As a white woman, “[she] is zombified to become, implicitly at least, a sex

slave” (Phillips 28). As mentioned above, the horror does not lie within the fact that she is being controlled; rather that she is being controlled by magical means as opposed to the familiar patriarchal oppression. This is further stressed by the fact that she seems to resist the magic imposed on her within her soul, although not physically: she is seen brooding on the balcony, with one of the maids commenting that “perhaps she remembers something”. Thus, magic is represented as weaker than social pressure, or in a more romantic approach, love; offering the audience a level of relief.

The evil mastermind of the film, Murder Legendre, is not simply a witch doctor with powers which allow him to resurrect the dead: he is a factory owner, thus may be viewed as representing the Industry. His racial status is unclear; as Phillips writes, “he is repeatedly and contradictorily associated with both sides of Haitian history, European and African” (29). This allows the audience to experience both sources of fear outlined above at once. If the viewer perceives him as white (as the lack of black makeup suggests), he may be seen as the representative of the industry;



Fig. 1: Murder Legendre With a Zombie

exploiting helpless workers. He mockingly states about the zombies that “they do not worry about long hours”. If he is perceived as black, he may represent the “[...] fear, for whites, the loss of sovereign physical and mental autonomy and/or fear of ‘unnatural’ servitude” (Phillips, 28). Legendre’s aim seems to be to make as much money as possible; and at the same time, his character seems to thrive on the power he exercises over others - especially the white characters.

The rest of the characters are fairly simply constructed, which underlines the fact that as whites in a Creole setting, they are unable to exercise their powers which they might do in a more familiar setting. Neil for instance is merely a passive bystander for most of the film; he does not protect his bride, nor initiates her rescue. Madeline is “virtually character-free, and so serves in a mostly symbolic function as innocent White Womanhood” (Phillips 36). Dr. Bruner merely represents the positive counterpoint to

Legendre's character. He is a missionary and thus represents Christianity as opposed to the villain's witch doctor status; yet he does nothing to greatly influence the plot besides offering guidance.

6.2 Invasion of the home and country: *Night of the Living Dead*

Even though the origin of the modern zombie's character can be traced back to the 1920s (as mentioned in chapter 3), true commercial success and critical acclaim in cinematic works started with *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968. At the time of the release, many critics dismissed the film as nothing more than an "unrelieved orgy of sadism" (qtd. in Higashi 184). However, audience and critics alike discovered that "Romero is the Shakespeare of zombie film, and this is his Hamlet" (Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 121).

Regarding the central theme, it is defending the self and the home. Romero explores the ideas and beliefs which occupied Americans in the 1960s and he has them torn apart by modern zombies - replacing those qualms with allegorical representations of the viewers' imminent fears. Waller writes that "*Night of the Living Dead* offers a thoroughgoing critique of American institutions and values" (4). As far as social implications of the time are concerned, the most prominent ones are arguably the Vietnam War and the concerns of defending the home. In this chapter, I will offer a brief analysis of both readings, hoping to illustrate that as the first film featuring clearly modern zombies has secured the way for others to follow and tackle issues on a more complex level; thus proving that their success is due to more than the prominent display of gore.

6.2.1 Vietnam War

Grant points out the film's allegorical message regarding the Vietnam War: "George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* constitutes the Vietnamisation of the horror film, a self-conscious, politically and socially charged work [...]" (197). One of the most shocking motifs of the film may be considered as an allegory for the same prominent issue at the time; namely, as Wood puts it, "[...] cannibalism, and on the specific notion of present and future (the younger generation) being devoured by the past" (213). On this level, literally being eaten may be viewed as a metaphor for being forced to go to war. Stein remarks that "this wasn't Transylvania, but Pennsylvania - this was Middle America at war, and the zombie carnage seemed a grotesque echo of the war raging in Vietnam".

The realistic feeling of the film is achieved not simply through visual effects, the “grainy black and white which gave [Romero’s] gorefest the look and feel of a doc,” (Stein), but the incorporation of everyday elements familiar to the viewers. The TV and the radio were also present in most people’s home at the time, with footage and information about the war frequently broadcast. In this sense, the reports shown in the film about the catastrophe were possibly experienced by the audience as parallel to those in reality.

Taking all of these interpretations into account, the film may be seen as an allegory for the Vietnam War as experienced by Americans. Romero achieved this by taking all the horrors of this physically remote war and placing it into an all-too familiar setting, forcing the characters and consequently the audience to face the terror which was known to be at a safe distance as an imminent threat.

6.2.2 Invasion of the home

The notion of the perfect home during the late 1950s and early 1960s within television and cinema was most prominent in middle-class families and closely associated with a patriarchal hierarchy within the home. “The dutiful homemakers were always perfectly groomed, wearing perfectly ironed aprons, showing no signs of stress and no aspirations to escape life in the kitchen” (Pieraccini 543).

In *Night of the Living Dead* however, the farmhouse as a wholesome place of existence is torn apart as zombies relentlessly attempt to break in, disheveling the ideal of a safe haven. Wetmore describes the scenario as “[...] Ben, Barbara and company defend the family home against hordes of intruders [...]” (164). Furthermore, the presence of zombies has the effect of unsettling the traditional power relations regarding both race and gender: the most competent of the characters trapped inside is Ben, a black man, the only one who has something resembling a sensible plan. The constant power struggle between him and Harry puts all those around them in danger as well, yet they are so consumed with the quarrel that they fail to acknowledge this fact. Ben only shoots Harry when he jeopardizes his safety; not realizing the effects their disagreement had on others long before that. The women are all put aside, contrary to their traditional status within the home. Thus, the house itself is turned into the outside world, where women are weak and confused, only capable on focusing on the well-being of their family, and incompetent white men think they have superiority over capable black males simply because of race relations.

The film explores the danger of “normalcy” on several levels. At the very beginning of the film, spirituality is disparaged by Johnny, the first victim in the movie: “There’s not much sense in me going to church”. He clearly prefers the practical approaches to life; making fun of his sister for registering the sinister atmosphere of their surroundings. His mocking is cut short when a zombie, which Johnny assumes to be human, attacks and murders him, conveying the message of danger in overt realism. Another way of representing the treacherous nature of normalcy is incorporating accidents in the middle of the mayhem as a cause of death. Judy and Tom die as the truck explodes; they are not devoured by the ghouls surrounding them but perish because of a basic and predictable chemical reaction. A further everyday danger is depicted through the blind trust in media, when Tom insists on staying inside: “Well... the television said that’s the right thing to do”.

6.2.3 Character analysis

As mentioned above, this film is considered as featuring the first revolutionary representation of modern zombies in film; namely as jerkily moving cannibals. Most of the zombies are wearing suits, which can be viewed as an allusion to middle-class Americans - or simply as a result of being freshly dead and buried in their best clothes (as the audience is informed: only the recently dead seem to rise).

On the level of Vietnam narrative, it can be argued that the zombies represent the soldiers who disappeared during the war: they can be described as “living dead”, just like the monsters. They are in a realm which cannot be physically specified, and as far as the world is concerned, they are representing a status between life and death until declared otherwise. The zombies thus can be viewed as the manifestations of those who disappeared at war and could be categorized as neither alive, nor dead - resulting in lack of closure on behalf of their families. The fact that only the recently dead rise ties in with this theory, as the families of disappeared soldiers give up hope after some time and accept their loved one as dead. (see Randell 69-70)

The creatures are referred to as “ghouls,” the term “zombie” is never used. Later on, this became a recurring motif and was exploited in other works of zombie fiction (e.g. *Shaun of the Dead*), constituting a form of homage to the original modern zombie production.

The first representation of modern zombies in film portrays them as relentless and relatively smart: they are capable of using tools (such as a rock to smash a window or using a cement trowel as a weapon). They are capable of running to an extent (as we see the first ghoul in pursuit of Barbara), yet they are considerably slower and less coordinated than humans. They hunger primarily after human flesh; however, it is suggested that this is merely a preference as one of the creatures eats a live bug off a tree. This way of depiction marks them as human to some extent; validating the interpretation of both middle-class Americans and missing soldiers.

The former reading may be further elaborated by taking into account their relentless nature in the quest for food, using everything at their disposal to get what they want in a mechanical manner. This may be viewed as parallel to the way Americans in the 1960s persistently pursued the American Dream, going through the motions of often mindless labor (at this time typically associated with office work rather than physical effort as it was shown in the case of *White Zombie*) in order to gain something. The notion of the American Dream in the 1960s is closely associated with the ownership of a house (see Leigh 33); which reinforces the argument about the level of importance the home represented at the time.

The reason for the dead coming back to life is supposedly radioactive contamination originating from a space probe, yet the theory seems to divide opinions and the audience is not provided with a final answer, thus leaving a lot of room for metaphorical interpretation. However, the fact that the explanation is not supernatural points to some important implications. First, the de-mystifying of the undead has the immediate effect of inviting the audience to relate to the danger on a more personal level. Monsters and witches are scary, yet decidedly fictional; however, at the time of the nuclear happenings, a scientific mission gone wrong was perfectly viable. Second, the lack of magic surrounding the undead makes them more ordinary as opposed to supernatural; thus, more similar to the living characters than the zombies featured in earlier films.

The female are all decidedly passive. They are not included in the decision making process and several times seem only to make the men's job harder. For instance, when Judy decides she wants to stay in the farmhouse and Tom brings forth all the rational arguments against this move, she just says "I know" repeatedly. Tom even recalls a time

when there was a flood and Judy had the same idea; using this example for deeming her incapable of making rational decisions on her own. His attitude towards Judy is more that towards a child than a partner; gently pointing out previous mistakes and thus devaluating her opinions. This portrayal is relevant to both interpretations offered: as a Vietnam narrative, the women are merely there in spirit, motivating the males internally (through evoking protective instincts in them), but from a purely technical perspective they are only in the way. In the context of the loss of home and the values associated with it, the women are incapable of asserting themselves in a way it was expected of them within the domestic sphere, marking them as practically useless in a scenario when the inside of a house no longer represents safety.

Helen is portrayed as the strongest female character in the film; yet this is only conveyed through her bluntness in words (talking back to her husband). As for her actions, they are solely maternal and do not extend to the managing of the overall crisis, only to tending to her daughter - who rises later on and murders both of her parents. Based on these facts it can be said that the female characters only achieve any form of real substance when they are relieved from their womanhood and are transformed into engendered ghouls. Amongst the resurrected, there is no marked distinction between male and female beside what remains from their previous lives (such as clothing).

6.3 Consumer society and dwindling resources: *Dawn of the Dead*

The second part of Romero's series, *Dawn of the Dead* premiered in 1978 as was met with instant enthusiasm from audience and critics alike. Ebert wrote in the Chicago Sun Times that "Dawn of the Dead is one of the best horror films ever made [...]". It is currently ranked as number 27 of "The Top 50 Cult Films" (Top 50 Cult Movies by Entertainment Weekly). Its popularity was maintained years after its release even in box office terms, bringing in 55,000,000 dollars world-wide (Box Office/Business for Dawn of the Dead), which is unusual for a horror film. As Modleski writes, the recurring midnight showings of the film at shopping malls all over the United States can be explained with the viewers "revelling [sic] in the demise of the very culture they appear most enthusiastically to support" (290).

6.3.1 Consumer society

In this film, the zombies target a larger sanctuary than in its predecessor: the object under constant attempts of invasion is a shopping mall. Thus, the movie may be interpreted as a social commentary on consumer society; as pointed out by numerous critics (Laudermilk, Ebert, Paffenroth et al.). The representation of the mall as a safe haven and a trap at the same time can be compared to the attitude of the average American consumer - they are drawn to the location in hopes of supplies in both the movie and real life, only to find that they are unable to leave.

The protagonists choose to take advantage of their location and attempt to stage real-life scenarios with the help of the seemingly endless props available at the mall - yet the activity never transcends exactly that: empty pretend-gestures in light of a society which held these values important but is no longer present, since in the film “society is in the process of total collapse” (Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 42). The parallel is even more obvious in light of the quote uttered by Fran addressing Peter, who seems to be mesmerized with the mall: “You’re hypnotized by this place; it’s so bright and neatly wrapped. You don’t see that it’s a prison too.”

The motif of the mindless undead milling around in the shopping mall has been compared to consumer society by many critics (see Waller 307). Some quotes strongly support this argument: Fran asks Peter, “Who the hell are they?” He answers, “They are us, that’s all” - and as for their attraction to the mall, “Some kind of instinct, memory of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives”.

To understand the roots of this comparison in context with the 1970s, it is helpful to study Morris’s description about the opening of a shopping mall named Green Hill. “The basic Green Hill complex [...] was opened in February 1972. The ceremony included ritual displays of crowd hysteria, with frenzied women fainting [...]. This time, women came wearing signs of Green Hill identity [...]” (405) The choice of locals to express their belonging to a specific location of consumer culture signals their emotional ties. In a way, giving up their individuality on the level of clothing for the sake of belonging to a mass associated with shopping (and a dinner coupon) marks them as zombies as far as the lack of distinction between individuals is concerned.

6.3.2 Dwindling resources

Another aspect is only briefly mentioned in the film but significant both regarding the plot and mirroring anxieties of the society at the time - the fact that when the living escape on the helicopter, they are low on fuel. Thus, it is implied that after overcoming flesh-eating monsters, this detail may lead to their demise in the end; if not, they certainly will not come too far. This element can be interpreted as a reflection of a widespread “concerns over fuel availability and the increasingly evident trap of dependence on a non-renewable resource” (Dendle, *The Zombie As a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety* 51), resulting from the energy crisis of 1970 and the oil crisis of 1973. Being aware of the audience’s attitude towards the topic allows for an environment-conscious interpretation of Romero’s familiar plot, where survivors hole up in a place which was supposed to be safe (the home or the mall), only to find out that the idea of safety associated with these locations is nothing more than a society-constructed illusion. Consequently, they are forced to continue their never-ending mission to find yet another safe place - a quest which is doomed to fail, parallel to the superficial solution of providing reserves which are not sustainable instead of focusing research on a renewable resource. This theory is further supported by the publishing of *The Limits of Growth* in 1972, a scientific book reporting on a study with the conclusion that “continued growth in the global economy would lead to planetary limits being exceeded sometime in the 21st Century, most likely resulting in the collapse of population and economic system” (Turner 1-2). In this context, the researchers at MIT foretold the coming of an apocalypse; Romero added the zombies to it.

The final getaway attempt can be viewed as the impossible mission to get away from the temples of consumer society as well as the doomed attempt to get far on fuel (literally and metaphorically) - the protagonists can try as they might, but to no avail. The illusion of escape is the only temporary solution offered to the audience. Both of these issues are still strikingly relevant today.

6.3.3 Character analysis

Regarding their physical attributes, the zombies are similar to those in *Night of the Living Dead*. However, the important factor of them being drawn to an important place in their lives is a motif which inspired numerous works of zombie fiction later on (e.g. *Shaun of the Dead*). The representation of zombies in this film is also notable because “[t]he popular

perception of mindless consumer as zombie is owed strictly to *Dawn of the Dead* “(Laudermilk 83). The zombies in this sense do nothing less than what they did while they were alive - they shamble along the aisles of the mall, looking at things they have absolutely no use for. Williams writes that “zombies remain the ultimate consumers who follow their instincts to the logical conclusion by killing at eating humans [...]” (Williams 93).

In the frame of environmental anxiety, zombies may be seen as representing the ideal human: no need for fuel, water or oxygen. Contrary to the popular depiction of complete destruction during an apocalypse (most strikingly represented perhaps in *Fido* with the two sides of the fence; the safe side neat and orderly with plants, and the wild zone grey without any trace of life), from an environmental view the undead would be the perfect creatures to occupy Earth. Lauro defines the “eco-zombie” as a subset of the category of the Natural zombie which draws particular attention to the current state of the planet or makes overt reference to environmental themes” (57). Even though the major topic of this film is consumer society, in my opinion the zombies in this film are the first to represent the “eco-zombie” in the sense described above and as such have influenced more overt examples later on (*Plants vs Zombies*).

6.4 Aging society and warfare - Return of the Living Dead

This film was an intentional spoof of *Night of the Living Dead*, yet it still incorporated some important elements of social anxiety; which can be argued to point towards zombies’ established role in fiction as a mirror of society. It premiered in 1985 and even though it can be considered a financial success (grossing over \$14,000,000 with an estimated budget of 4,000,000 - Box Office/Business for *Return of the Living Dead*), it received mixed reviews from critics. It was nominated for four Saturn awards, yet the *Chicago Sun Times* called it a “kind of a sensation-machine, made out of the usual ingredients” (Ebert 1985).

6.4.1 Aging society

The film is widely considered a cult classic today (Lott), however, the reasons for its success at the time may go beyond the simple mixing of gore with comical elements. One of these reasons is possibly the representation of something that was considered truly unsettling at the time: the increasingly unclear line between life and death.

By the 80s, it was becoming clear that medical advances were creating new challenges for society: such technologies as prosthetic limbs, artificial hearts and organ transplants were increasingly raising questions of what it was to be human. The fear of being kept artificially alive beyond health, happiness or social utility became more and more vivid in a population with a stable retirement age but ever-increasing life expectancy. (Dendle, *The Zombie As a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety* 52)

In light of this, it is not hard to picture the zombies as people who should not be alive; yet they walk, talk and literally feast on the capable humans.

The blurring line between life and death is further represented through the locations the living are hiding in: they are all places of death, such as the mortuary or the warehouse which specializes in storing cadavers. In this sense, the humans are surrounded by death even before the zombies strike; they just fail to comprehend their position until it is too late. The elusive nature of death is also portrayed when Freddy and Frank get sick and the paramedics determine that they are technically already dead, yet somehow still conscious.

Beyond the anxieties about artificially expanded life expectancy, the 1980s were a time promoting individualism and effectiveness. The true terror in this sense is not death; it is a death-like state which the younger generation perceives as being old and incapable of contributing to society. Decaying appearance and mental capacity was frequently seen as worse than death at the time - as mirrored by the popular phrase of the 1980s "Live fast, die young, leave a beautiful corpse" (see Dendle, *The Zombie As a Barometer of Cultural Anxiety* 53). This attitude coupled with the above mentioned medical advances may have resulted in some resentment towards the older generation. Thus, the portrayal of zombies eating brains - which became the norm ever since - can be argued to represent the older generation's unwanted neediness which exasperates and exhausts young people and consequently compromises their lifestyles - making them unattractive and tired, resembling their elders.

The lack of a happy ending suggests the hopelessness of the situation and the growing number of zombies may be viewed as the aging population which is predestined to wipe out the younger generation eventually. As the target audience of the film is arguably young people, the means of this annihilation can be seen as deeply disturbing. The zombies will consume their youthful identities in order to fulfill their own needs and make them undead in the process; dooming them to exist as something they detest.

6.4.2 Warfare

At the time of the film production, the Reagan administration was increasing military spending which peaked in 1986 (Carliner 6). This was cause for concern amongst Americans, as evidenced by Karaagat's description: "many voters [...] registered anxieties about Reagan's foreign policy stance - one that seemed overly confrontational" (50).

In *Return of the Living Dead*, these fears are exploited to the extreme. The US Military is frequently portrayed as inadequate (designing faulty tanks to contain the undead) and making bad decisions (eliminating the entire zombie-infested area, resulting in a much bigger infestation). The social anxiety about the military situation at the time is represented rather directly. The viewer's trust in the government is challenged, as the survivors are being assured that the situation is being taken care of while soldiers aim a missile at them.

6.4.3 Character analysis

The film is notable for the first use of the now famous zombie line, "Braaaains". The reason for zombification is a science experiment gone wrong; however, this situation was contained (events, which according to the film *Night of the Living Dead* was based on). In this specific case, the zombies were dormant and got released by accident; the tank created by the U.S. Army they were stored in was faulty, which combined with the human stupidity of poking it resulted in a small-scale zombie invasion.

The undead are more intelligent than in all of the other films discussed. They can talk, they get organized and most importantly, they have feelings. As one of the zombies explains, they want brains because it relieves "the pain of being dead". Yet they are still modern zombies: no significant level of sympathy is evoked through their representation as creatures capable of feeling; it is merely a comical element which serves to counterpoint the excessive gore associated with them. The zombie who shares the information is basically half a skeleton with her spine wagging like a tail; the characters around are clearly disgusted and afraid rather than touched.

As mentioned above, the zombies may be seen as representing the elderly in an increasingly old population. In this sense, the zombies' pain of being dead and their need to eat the brains of the living may be interpreted as the older generation's necessity to utilize the resources of more capable people, thus annihilating their chances of expanding

their own lives. Their capability of feeling is also relevant because it demonstrates the parallel between the undead and the old. The zombies' unattractiveness and demanding nature overshadows the fact that they feel pain - which may be seen as mirroring the young peoples' attitude towards the elderly at the time.

7. The evolution of the post-modern zombie in film

Movies featuring zombies enjoyed a new surge of popularity from the 1990's on, and have been gaining fans ever since. In this section, I will discuss the phenomenon which may be considered as the evolution of what I refer to as post-modern zombie fiction. This relatively new approach stems from horror-comedies; and as such, may be easily dismissed as light entertainment. However, these films are perhaps the first few of a kind starting a new trend, which became the beginning of a shift in zombie fiction in every genre: the process of cutefication.

It is important to note that this transformation is not necessarily restricted to the zombie characters. As we have seen earlier, there has never been a unified representation of zombies; consequently, the changes in the ways they are portrayed make up for only part of the shift in question. I have identified the theme of humans attempting to care for zombies as an important element of this shift. The zombies' characters remained modern in numerous cases; yet the human attitude towards them turned from hostile to accepting. In some of the post-modern works the representation of zombies started to change as well, depicting them as dangerous yet lovable.

I will illustrate the development of this new attitude in detail first in films, as the change is most apparent in this field. An overview of video games and literature separately will be offered as well, as the shift has not taken place simultaneously, yet it is present in all three fields. Naturally, there is no straight line to be drawn from violent horror zombie fiction to emotionally involved ones; the overall trend can be observed nevertheless. To summarize, zombies are being turned into humanized pets through various means; I will refer to this process as the cutefication of zombies, try to identify the means through which it is implicated and search for possible reasons by analyzing some of the most popular examples in each field. In this section, I will offer a brief analysis of each movie with varying foci, as there is no set grid which can be employed to demonstrate the shifting of

the representations. I will discuss the zombie and human characters separately, in order to identify the different aspects of possible cutefication.

Horror comedies featuring zombies have been gaining recognition since the 1983 production of the music video *Thriller*, which made popular awareness of zombies widespread enough for the genre to be considered in style (see Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 8). Yet most of these productions only made use of portraying the zombies' character as funny (e.g.: eating themselves as in *Bloodsuckers from Outer Space*), or the humorous yet simply hostile ways the humans deal with them (e.g. severing limbs in numerous creative ways, or interrogating a half corpse, as in *Return of the Living Dead*).

The genre is generally perceived as pure entertainment and easily dismissed. Critics often write off such productions, labeling them as “[not] especially scary or repulsive [nor is it] very funny” (Holden about *Braindead*); “a major buzzkill” (Eng about *Idle Hands*), and to have “no aim other than to give you a giggle and a shriek” (Burr about *Fido*). Koehler wrote in 1999 that “overall theatrical and ancillary returns will be dampened by the harsh fact that the horror-comedy genre is in rather gory decay”. The disappointing reviews coupled with such predictions proved to be not enough to discourage filmmakers: these films continue to become more popular - *Zombieland* for example created an income of \$75,590,286 in America alone, making a comedy the top-grossing zombie fiction until today (imdb.com). This particular movie classifies as biohorror, for this reason I will not offer a detailed analysis here; yet it illustrates the growing popularity of the genre.

It can be argued based on this and the number of films released, that zombie comedies are just as (if not more) popular than true zombie horror ever was, as demonstrated by Table 1. In this case the classification of amazon.com was referenced; however, it should be mentioned that there are numerous movies which cannot be clearly defined as horror or horror-comedy; especially due to the advanced special effects of today, which make even the films which were originally not intended to have a humorous aspect look funny to today's audience. Yet the films which have a lasting legacy and legitimate merit are still not considered comic despite the primitive makeup and special effects, for instance, *Night of the Living Dead*.

Years	Zombie horror	Zombie horror-comedy
2000-2009	516	547
1990-1999	63	106
1980-1989	119	48
1970-1979	54	5

Table 1: Number of films released, based on the database of Amazon

7.1. Braindead

The film I will introduce first to illustrate the beginning of these changes in the field is *Braindead* (also known as *Dead Alive*). It premiered in 1992 and it may be considered as the first truly successful romantic zombie comedy. Several films were produced previously, however, without critical and financial acclaim (see Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 10). It is set in 1957 in New Zealand, and features an insecure protagonist, who attempts to keep his girlfriend and his mother happy in an escalating situation involving zombies. Roberts writes that “*Braindead* is said to be the bloodiest film of all time, measured by the amount of fake blood used during filming. Try 700 liters in the last scene alone.” Combining this level of gore with romantic overtones was certainly a pioneering idea, which contributed to the film being widely considered a cult classic today (see Smith).

7.1.1 The zombies

The representation of flesh-eating creatures is different in several ways than what we have seen earlier. They have emotions beyond mindless hunger; they have other needs than eating human flesh and some level of control over their behavior (for example attempting to eat with a spoon). Furthermore, the zombies are capable of producing offspring: the zombies in this film are displaying post-modern characteristics.

When Vera Cosgrove turns into a zombie, her character is uniquely reflected in the transformation: she does not simply become undead, as the others in the movie do and is customary in the tradition of modern zombie fiction; she changes into a huge monster. Her size may be viewed as parallel to the protagonist’s need and difficulty to triumph over her. She also retains her entire personality, referring to herself as his mother.

7.1.2 The humans

Lionel is a clumsy and insecure young man, living with his mother in an unhealthy relationship based on guilt. His character has been so crippled by the years of emotional blackmail that he has lost all sense of responsibility towards himself - he became selfless to an alarming extent. This is best illustrated by the fact that he would rather give up his budding romance than abandon the zombies he decided to care for; and due to the fact that he is not capable of juggling the two realities suddenly surrounding him, he tries to sever contact with Paquita.

The film follows his struggles and culminates in his character becoming independent from his mother. She finally (following years of doing it metaphorically) physically devours him - thus offering him the chance to win his freedom on both a physical and mental level, as he escapes from her womb. He is an example for what has been mentioned in chapter 5.3.2: a lovable loser, who only emerges as a hero when faced with the extreme situation of zombies surrounding him.

Vera Cosgrove is a tyrant, dominating his son's life as she does not want to be left alone. She murdered her husband and his lover years ago; her character is powerful and evil in a cunning way, manipulating Lionel into feeling guilty every chance she gets.

Paquita represents the stance between the modern and the mysterious: while she has a job and goes after what she wants, she is also deeply connected to the mystical. Her grandmother tells her fortune and she accepts it without any negotiations. It is because of this bond that Lionel manages to escape his mother at the end of the movie - both physically and spiritually - with the help of the medallion; an object representing the supernatural.

There is a parallel between Vera's and Paquita's character, which is overshadowed by their portrayal as pure evil and good respectively. They are both strong women, who exercise their will on the same weaker man. They both employ clever strategies to get what they want, such as guilt. After being bitten by the rat monkey and squashing its head to a pulp, demonstrating that she is capable of taking care of herself, Vera tells Lionel in a weak tone to take her home, thus forcing him to end his date. Paquita returns to Lionel's house, and when she is told he cannot see her anymore, she protests "But we are

romantically entangled!” She miserably hands Lionel his coat and a rose, which leads to him breaking down and sleeping with her.

7.1.3 Social commentary

Levy describes the film as a “gory, macabre satire of 1950s New Zealand society”. The film features several references to the location. Even though the plot is not tied to the country, there are details which serve as a reminder to the audience as to the setting. The most prominent cultural reference in the film is at the beginning: the audience sees images of Queen Elisabeth II, the Kiwi flag while the national anthem is playing in the background, thus elevating Lionel from a clumsy protagonist trying to clean up his own mess to a national hero. Interestingly, this sequence was left out of the American version; arguably to make identifying with the protagonists easier for the American audience.

On one level, the film is a cautionary tale with the moral “do not disrespect cultures you do not understand”. However, it is also an example of civilized people (in this case, Lionel) clinging desperately to norms which no longer apply. The virus causing people to turn into zombies stems from a Sumatran Rat-Monkey. The monkey is captured in order to be displayed at a zoo in New Zealand, against violent protests from the natives. The explorer collecting the monkey waves a permit in front of the savage locals; a humorous comment on the rigid way representatives of the Western world cling to their norms and rules even in an environment where these are perfectly meaningless; similar to the way members of society act when encountering zombies in many works of zombie fiction. Furthermore, the stubbornness and the refusal to take the natives protests for what it probably is (a warning) leads to the ensuing chaos; thus portraying the civilized world’s perceived superiority not only wrong but dangerous.

This illustration of the refusal to adapt is frequent in post-modern zombie fiction later on. As we have seen, in earlier examples such behavior led to the inevitable conclusion of death. Here however, the protagonist manages to play pretend for a while with the creatures without any serious ramifications (besides a few casualties).

On another level, the film can be analyzed as the tragedies which can stem from taking a little too much care about what the neighbors might think. Lionel’s reaction of embarrassment rather than terror at the sight of zombies seems like an unnatural response; it can be attributed to either his mother’s constant emotional blackmails, as discussed

above, or the adapted social norms. In the latter case, the confrontation of something unnatural results in embarrassment and agile efforts to hide it, whatever it takes. It can also be argued these two theories tie together, as evidenced by the fact that Vera murdered her husband and his lover to avoid the shame of being abandoned. Thus, society's merciless attitude towards anything that deviates from the norm caused Vera to become a murderer, and consequently the same attitude led to Lionel's damaged personality, with his mother being a victim and in a way a projector of shame, rather than the villain. Society's unforgiving stance is further elaborated when members of the congregation discuss his actions during the funeral. "Poor Lionel. He was always so attached to his mother" to which the priest replies, "Well, I've seen some displays of grief in my day, but nothing quite like this."

Initially, the representation of gender roles may make it seem like the oppression of women is not present in the film: Lionel's mother is clearly a stronger character than his son, up until the very end, and Paquita is clever enough to extort a date from Lionel. In contrast, however, Paquita is only content with a man on her side, even if he is utterly boring. She is very confident in the way of getting what she wants, yet what she seems to desire is a man, and if Lionel is not willing to participate, any man will do. In this sense, she is conforming to society's expectations to the same extent as Vera is, for instance while trying desperately to make a good impression on the president of the Wellington Ladies Welfare League.

Furthermore, the gender roles during the final scenes reinforce stereotypes to a comic extent: Lionel fights off the zombies with a lawnmower, a clearly masculine tool, while Paquita is rendered to stay in the kitchen and use a food processor as weapon. Paquita even ends up as the stereotypical damsel in distress, when she is about to fall off the roof and it is up to Lionel to save her.

7.1.4 Cutfication

An important characteristic of the zombies in this film is perhaps one of the initial examples of the trend of cutfication: they have emotions, not only needs. (The zombies in *Return of the Living Dead* claimed to want brains because they felt pain, which is not an emotion.) This may be the

first instance of zombies displaying affection for one another. Even though it is in the form of sex (which is portrayed as humorous, partly due to the fact that one of the participants used to be a priest, already suggesting that they retain memories of their previous lives; him trying to live out in death what he could not while alive),



Fig. 2: Zombie Attraction in *Braindead*

there is a high level of passion displayed between two zombies (Fig. 2).

Furthermore, the fact that zombies are capable of having children on one hand serves as a source of humor as Lionel cannot suppress his paternal instincts and attempts to treat the undead baby as others treat their children (copying what a mother does on the playground). On the other hand, this is a perfect example of humanizing zombies; even though they have no concern for their own offspring, the fact that they are fertile might encourage the audience to see them as less monstrous.

A significant difference regarding the depiction of Western and the native reaction is their respective handling of the infected. The representation of these two radically different approaches is closely connected to the idea of cutefication, marking it as sort of a Western nonsense. As soon as the explorer is bitten by the monkey, the local guides sever the affected parts (including his head). Later on, it is confirmed that this form of containment is indeed the right one and in sharp contrast with the approach the protagonist takes: attempted domestication.

It is important to note the difference between the notions of domestication and what we have seen in the case of Haitian zombies and may describe as complete control. In this new approach, the protagonist attempts to treat them just like people - much like a parent may treat a violent and disturbed child: feeding them, taking care of them, allowing them a certain level of social contact (e.g. taking the baby out for a walk).

Eventually, things get out of control and Lionel has to abandon all forms of pretence, concluding in perhaps one of the goriest zombie killing scenes of all time (see Roberts). As Dendle writes, “[the film is notable for] its creative exploration of ways to messily maim and dismember [zombies]” (*The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* 49). Yet the attempts to treat the creatures as pets or human became a trend in zombie fiction.

7.2 Shaun of the Dead

The movie was called the first Rom-Zom-Com (Romantic Zombie Comedy; see Smith) - incorrectly, as *Braindead* already incorporated all the romantic elements found in *Shaun of the Dead* and even more (such as romantic relationship between zombies). Yet the movie was a success on both a critical and commercial level. The setting is Britain, where Shaun is struggling and failing to keep his girlfriend, his colleagues, his roommate and his family happy. Suddenly the focus of importance shifts, as the entire country is overrun by zombies and Shaun attempts to save his loved ones together with his couch-potato friend, Ed.

7.2.1 The zombies

The enemies the protagonists are facing display well-known characteristics from the Romero movies: they growl but do not speak, will devour the entire body and congregate. Furthermore, as we see in Phil's case and at the end of the movie, they retain memories from their lives (just like it was suggested in *Dawn of the Dead*). Their way of movements serves as a source of humor, when Dianne decides to coach the others on how to act like a zombie - thus disproving the innate message of traditional zombie fiction regarding soft versus survival skills.

The origin of the virus remains unclear - however, there are several references to other horror movies: at one point, the newscast on the radio talks about a space probe breaking up over England, a reference to *Night of the Living Dead*, and on TV a confirmation is broadcast that the cause is not infected monkeys, as opposed to in *28 Days Later*. During the scene when Shaun is channel surfing on TV, the audience hears snippets of information.

TV REPORTER. Six months on and, to many, the events of Z-Day must seem like a bad dream.

TV REPORTER. As we now know, the phenomenon resulted from the use of...

NEWSCASTER. ... not something I ever expected as a newscaster to have to say on air. "Removing the head or destroying the brain." Incredible.

7.2.2 The humans

The characters are fairly two-dimensional: the protagonist, Shaun is a salesman without any real prospects, living with two roommates, one of them being his slacker friend, Ed.

Shaun does not conform to the character of a hero as the audience knows it; he is neither ambitious, nor very smart, as demonstrated by one of the taglines of the movie: “In a time of crisis, a hero must arise... from his sofa.” Yet not only does he survive, he thrives during the crisis as well as in the post-zombie world. The latter can perhaps be explained with the presence of zombies: clearly, in comparison he is a very accomplished person, and apparently in the modified social structure less is expected of him - as Liz’s description of their day at the very end shows, she has given up on motivating Shaun, and made her peace with their routine:

SHAUN. What’s the plan, then?

LIZ. Right, a cup of tea...then we get the Sundays. Head down the Phoenix for a roast, veg out in the pub for a bit then wander home, watch a bit of telly, go to bed.

Ed’s character is simple and straightforward: he crashed on Shaun’s couch five years ago, where he remained until the outbreak, playing video games and getting by dealing marijuana. He might be best described through his unchanged lifestyle as a zombie; he keeps sitting around, playing the whole day. During the crisis, Ed can be seen both as a dead weight and a great help. He has excellent ideas, such as using the shotgun, and bad ones, such as playing with the fruit machine. Yet his attitude is priceless; even though he keeps making mistakes, sometimes on purpose (e.g. wrecking a car so he can ride in a Jaguar), his disposition might be considered the reason the others are allowed to function on a high level and stay sane in the face of an apocalypse.

7. 2.3 Intertextual references

The title already hints at the nature of the film, which is more differentiated than the simple pun would suggest. The intertextual references included make it a must-see for anyone interested in the genre. For example, Ed’s line “We’re coming to get you, Barbara!” is a joke quoting verbatim the famous line from *Night of the Living Dead*.

The film features a running gag: the characters are trying to avoid the word “zombie”. As mentioned above, this is a reference to the Romero movies, where the expression is rarely or never used: a news reporter for example refers to them as “assailants”.

ED. Any zombies out there?
 SHAUN. Don't say that!
 ED. What?
 SHAUN. That!
 ED. What?
 SHAUN. That!! The "z" word. Don't say it!
 ED. Why not?
 SHAUN. Because it's ridiculous!
 ED. Alright... are there any, though?

Ed does not seem to share Shaun's aversion to call the creatures what they are; this can be attributed to his lack of social awareness. Shaun's effort to deny the obvious is an attempt to stick to the reality he knows and is comfortable with: to not name the threat means it does not exist as such; it helps maintaining the chance that the creatures might be something different and rationally explainable. This behavior ties in with the post-zombie world management of the issue within the film.

7.2.4 Social commentary

One of the social commentaries in the film is the depiction of the entire society as zombies in the opening scenes and mirrored by one of the promotional posters (Fig. 3). This metaphor is elaborated later on when Shaun meets several of them during his trip to the shop without even noticing their changed condition - what is



Fig. 3: Promotional Poster for *Shaun of the Dead*

more, he looks like he is one of them. On one hand, this may be seen as the visual representation of Shaun's entire lifestyle in one long cut: shambling along, barely aware of his surroundings, making a minimum effort. The same scene can also be viewed as a deliberate exaggeration of the message in *Dawn of the Dead*, with the apparent link between zombies and consumer society. The parallel between the two films is further

detailed by the fact that in *Shaun of the Dead*, the humans seek refuge in a pub, where later all the zombies congregate as well; suggesting that this place represents a location of high importance for the British as does the mall for Americans.

Another way of looking at the zombies and the terror they represent ties in with the fear of giving up one's lifestyle (as discussed in chapter 6.4.1). The idea in this context is reversed; in a sense, young members of modern society are already zombies as opposed to a productive older generation. What is depicted here is the dread which goes unnoticed in many cases: a lifestyle which includes spending too much time in front of the television, playing video games, simply getting by instead of getting ahead; or, to use a more appropriate set of expression, surviving instead of living.

7.2.5 Cultural references

There are several instances where the audience is offered various examples of British culture and behavior; the most prominent of which may be Shaun's parents, who keep maintaining their strict norms even when the world as they know it has clearly come to an end. Phil, while dying, shares a wonderful monologue with Shaun, full of emotions, which obviously does not tie in with his everyday character. This display of feeling and understanding towards his stepson is naturally in stark contrast with the zombie he becomes a few moments later; yet interestingly, as Shaun tries to convince Barbara "[t]hat's not even your husband in there! Ok? I know it looks like him, but there is nothing of the man you loved in that car, nothing!" Phil rejects Shaun's music, proving him wrong and asserting his values even from beyond death.

When Shaun and Ed are faced with the zombie in their back yard, they assume she is drunk: it can be argued that in an American production this would not be the first theory to occur, given the fact that it is early in the morning and the zombie is female. Furthermore, Dianne is describing a zombie as follows: "Vacant, with a hint of sadness. Like a drunk who's lost a bet." Another culture-specific element is the source of humor in several cases: the creative termination of zombies with objects such as LP discs or cricket bats. The only firearm used is the Winchester at the end of the film, the authenticity of which was in doubt earlier on.

7. 2.6 Cutefication

There are several examples of everyday behavior being incorporated with the apocalypse; serving as both a source of humor and as demonstration of the frequent motif in zombie fiction: sticking to norms which no longer apply. These elements are highly prominent, demonstrated by the fact that they are incorporated in several of the movie's taglines, for instance "Buy milk. Call mum. Dodge zombies."

The film is notable for being perhaps the first example of an entire nation (and possibly the world) forcefully trying to integrate the creatures into society. This fact is relayed through various TV shows, which tell the audience that there are organizations to help the undead: "... to have a top band with us, talking about their work for the charity Zombaid..." There are also reality shows featuring zombies and they are used as cheap labor: "The fact that the mobile deceased retained their primal instincts make [sic] them ideal recruitment for the service industry, as well as other roles [...]."

Furthermore, there are humans who treat their zombie relatives as if nothing had happened:

TALK SHOW GUEST. I don't see nothing wrong with it but I know that some people would. But he's my husband, you know. I still love him and I got the ring, Trisha.
 HOSTESS. You go to bed with it?
 GUEST. 'Course I do.'

It is notable that the hostess in this case refers to them as "it", marking them more as a pet than human. The same point is supported by the fact that Pete tells Ed: "[y]ou wanna live like an animal, go live in the shed, you thick fuck," which is exactly what happens after Ed turns into a zombie.

In this particular case, the cutefication can be viewed as a conscious choice of humanity to avoid resembling anything that may be described as a holocaust. People choose to stay with their loved ones, as Shaun does, because after the army destroyed a number of the creatures, the danger is perceived to have been averted (which show a parallel with the view that one zombie is not necessarily a threat, the terror lies in the large number of them). Wood's concept of the Other (see chapter 5.4) may be implemented on this strange post-war setting: after the war, the losing side must be integrated or annihilated - the film illustrates an example of the former option.

7.3 Fido

This horror-comedy from New Zealand was released in 2006. The approach to zombies is best described as satirical - the entire concept being that even though they do in fact want to eat people, this is just them being silly and deep down they are lovable creatures. Yet as was the case in the films discussed earlier, the focus is on the humans. The setting is America in the 1950s; however, a different version than as we know it. The audience is introduced to what led to this state of the world through a humorous educational video at the very beginning, which already sets the tone as to what can be expected throughout the film. The dead are coming back to life as zombies, which will also happen to those who get bitten. So far, the film is following modern zombie fiction traditions closely. We learn about “Zombie Wars”, which humans have won. The theory about integration discussed in connection with the other post-modern films is also staged in this film. The unique twist is the invention of a controlling collar, which decided the outcome of the war and the government later apparently monopolized to “tame” the zombies.

Essentially, it is post-war America: wives wait for their husbands impeccably dressed, with a hot meal and a drink, men work at the company and try to come to terms with their war experiences either by bragging or by suppressing them, children are expected to contribute to the picture of a perfect family by being social (“Don’t play baseball by yourself, it makes you look lonely”). The only difference is that the war was against zombies.

7.3.1 The zombies

Reanimation is triggered by a cloud of radiation from space; this is not specified any further other than scientists identifying this as the cause. The creatures show Romero-inspired physical qualities, yet regarding their mental abilities, they resemble the Haitian zombies to some extent. They are used as slaves, and even though they do not share a single master, they all answer to their owners individually.

On this level, it is interesting to note the parallel between the institutions of Zomcon and the *bokor* in vodoun culture. They both have the power to control the undead, the former by scientific, the latter by magical means. The ultimate difference is how they handle this power: Zomcon shares it with the community, allowing everyone who can afford it to own one or more zombies at a time. This is the kind of attitude that society

would applaud; not keeping such a great gift but sharing it and capitalizing on it to a reasonable extent - as evidenced by the fact that even middle-class families can easily afford one undead each. However, we are talking about the walking dead. Thus, the film poses and leaves the question open: is it better to have one person control an army of zombies, such as Legendre in *White Zombie*, or to have an entire society exercise power over many individual creatures?

Zombies retain certain memories from their lives, for instance we know that “old habits die hard,” as Fido happily smokes a cigarette. This is also true in *Dawn of the Dead*, in which case the audience is not invited to sympathize with them at any point; yet in *Fido*, the focus on the individual has this effect. Fido’s personality is present as well, or at least we can ascertain that he is capable of establishing connections: among other things, he is protective of Timmy and he has feelings for Helen (in fact, a remarkable range of emotions to express without any words). He slowly takes over the part of Bill in Helen and Timmy’s life, being a defending entity, as a father should be; and entertaining company, as a husband should be. He even manages to make Helen blush, which her husband obviously has not done for a while. At the end, Fido fulfills the roles of a pet and a family member at the same time.

As for the nature of other zombies, it cannot be conclusively determined whether they are prone to overcoming their hunger for human flesh without the help of the collar. One interpretation can be that the substitution of respect and care will make the collar unnecessary, and if zombies are treated right they will behave right, just like dogs do. Since we only know about Fido, this is merely speculation. Mr. Theopolis also realizes his zombie to be more than just an exchangeable item: “There’s only one Tammy in the world”; however, she is not featured without her collar after this shift of attitude.

7.3.2 The humans

The only true character development in the film is that of Helen. At the beginning, she is the perfect wife, proper, effective and beautiful. She does everything in her power to maintain appearances.

HELEN. What on earth, Timmy? This is a new shirt!

TIMMY. It was those bullies I told you about. They pushed me down, and Stan pointed his gun at me!

HELEN. What? Did people see you like this?! [...] Just go and clean up, put on a new shirt, and we won't even have to talk about those bullies.

She also accepts her husband's neurotic behavior and fear of zombies, which in this society is perceived as ridiculous - until the new neighbors move in, who own six zombies. Helen cannot bear the humiliation of them thinking they are poor or socially awkward, so she goes against Bill and purchases a zombie. "When his wife asked me how many we had, I didn't know what to say. So I told her we had one. [...] What was I supposed to do? Tell her that my husband is afraid of zombies?!"

However, various circumstances lead to her getting slowly fed up with her life and stand up for herself. Bill's obsession with going to funerals and getting a head coffin prompts her to take Timmy's side openly for the first time and tell her husband they are "going zombie". She makes various attempts to have fun with Bill, but his constant refusal leads to her defiance and having fun in inappropriate ways: she has a water fight with Timmy and Fido on the street (which is the first instance of her recognizing a zombie as more than a slave by offering him a drink) and dances with Fido, after Bill refuses to engage in such frivolities. At the very end, she is depicted as a widow and a single mother of two, looking like she has never been happier. Ultimately, Bill's death was necessary to achieve her complete emancipation.

Timmy is a smart, but unpopular boy. He thinks differently than others, which in this society is not appreciated.

TIMMY. I was just thinking about the zombies, who are buried too deep to get out. [...] I mean, people who dies before the space dust. Couldn't some of them still be in the graveyard right now, trying to claw their way out?

CLASS. *silence*

TEACHER. Well, children... It's time for outdoor education!

7.3.3 Social commentary

At first glance, we are introduced to a society which has successfully integrated zombies and clearly defined their place within the system. It can be argued that this film continues where *Shaun of the Dead* left off. Zombies are servants; any other type of relationship with them is frowned upon, just like Mr. Theopolis' implied sexual behavior is cause for

general scandal in the neighborhood. A type of connection like this is evidently not only disliked by society, it constitutes a taboo, as the audience learns that Mr. Theopolis was fired from his job as the security chief at Zomcon for this reason. This issue was mentioned earlier in connection with *Shaun of the Dead* as well; a woman causing moderate outrage in a talk show for keeping her husband as a zombie.

Children are taught how to shoot from an early age at school, even though there is a regulation which states that no one under the age of 12 may own a handgun - this may be a commentary on the liberal handling of firearms in the US. In this world, the ceasing of pulse means becoming an object which may or may not be used. This is why the most coveted burial is with two separate coffins; one for the body, one for the head, to prevent reanimation. The underlying contradiction of using dead people as objects and investing an entire life's savings ("Those funerals are expensive!") to avoid becoming such an object already hint at the fact that the humans are aware of some trace of a personality still being present. There is no shortage of zombies; in fact, the "wild zone" is completely overrun with untamed ones. Fences protect the communities, thus making them sheltered on more than one level.

The entire move has a *Stepford Wives*-like atmosphere, which renders the humans just as creepy as the zombies. The description of the perfect homemaker quoted in chapter 6.2 applies to the lifestyle depicted in this film as well. People rigidly stick to what they perceive as ideal, the audience relates to the different characters through their behavior which implies their desire to break through these social bonds. For instance, Cindy is supposed to go to her ballet class, and she seemingly happily obliges - only to pause and whisper to Timmy, "I hate ballet." Another example is Helen's reaction to the request of the men for a new beer, which was originally directed at her friend, Dee Dee: "You are not actually going to go get them another beer, are you? Get your own beer, Bill!" which confuses the men to the extent that they giggle and go in the house - in a way, assuming the female role as they do not know how to react. They immediately compensate by discussing their war experiences, in an attempt to regain their compromised masculinity. One can see the joy of disrespecting the patriarchal system on Dee Dee's face, while Helen looks confident in her new-found role. To re-establish power relations, Mr. Bottoms labels Helen as "a live wire," indicating to Bill that he should keep her under control. These

examples also demonstrate that metaphorically, women and children are kept in a collar to control them as well, just like the zombies; if they disobey, they might just be thrown into the wild zone, as it happens to Timmy.

Interestingly, some zombie-human relations are frowned upon even after the “liberation” of the creatures (which may in fact only affected the neighborhood, as the rest of the community is not portrayed afterwards). Timmy himself obviously thinks it is weird for Cindy to keep her resurrected father on a leash and call him Daddy - yet the important point is that he does not say anything about it. Consequently, judgment and prejudice is still present; however, there is a genuine attempt on the humans’ part to be more accepting of unusual situations.

Overall, the social commentary of this film is powerful because it is plausible. From having inappropriate zombie-human relationships to teaching children nursery rhymes such as “In the brain and not the chest, headshots are the very best,” once the viewer accepts the basic setting, the reactions and scenarios portrayed are not too far-fetched.

7.3.4 Cutfication

There are numerous examples of cutfication in this film on both the human and the zombie side. Perhaps the most prominent one is the “taming” of zombies with force (the domestication collar): “With the collar in place, a red light comes on, telling us that the zombie’s desire for human flesh have been contained; making the zombie as gentle as a household pet.”

The film explores the zombie-pet parallel on various levels; it is even depicted on the movie’s promotional poster (Fig. 4). The name Fido already points at the zombie’s intended role and as such it is immediately disliked by Bill: “Fido... What kind of a stupid name is Fido? Who names a zombie anyway?!” His aversion to name

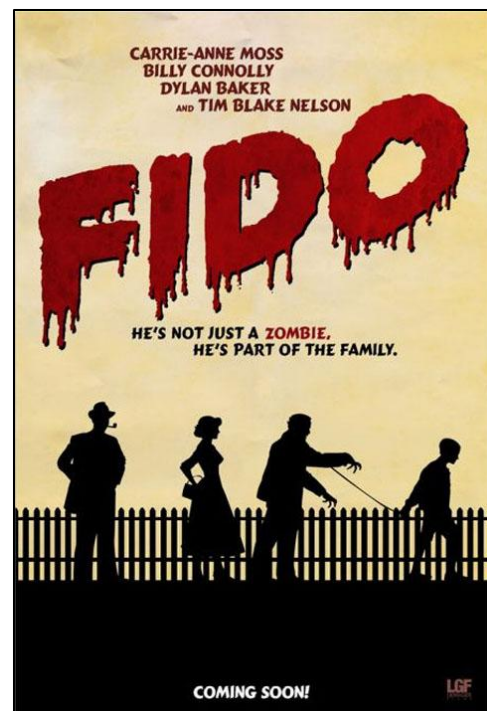


Fig. 4: Promotional Poster for *Fido*

the creature points to his desire to view him as an object, as the act of naming itself elevates anything to a personal level. Furthermore, there are multiple intertextual references to the TV series *Lassie*: the protagonists share the same name, Timmy; and the famous scene of *Lassie* getting help is recreated when the zombie hurries to fetch Helen.

HELEN. What is it? Where's Timmy?

FIDO. [growls]

HELEN. Is something wrong? Is Timmy in trouble?

FIDO. [howls]

Even though the audience is aware that the community is dealing with creatures that would attempt to kill them without the collar, by depicting them as wild captured animals the viewer is invited to feel empathy towards the undead.

7.4 Rigamortis

This short film is different than those previously discussed in several ways. Firstly, it is an independent effort:

Rigamortis is a 36-minute zombie musical designed for digital distribution, but it's so much more than that. It's an attempt to make a meaningful, high quality film outside the classic system of studios, distributors, and inflated budgets. It's an attempt to prove that [...] we live in a world in which anyone with a good idea and enough passion can create something that is not only critically successful, but commercially viable as well. It's an attempt to show that a handful of individuals [...] can create something with the same level of quality and production value as anything that comes out of the classic studio system. (rigamortismovie.com)

This testimony points out the lack of special effects necessary to create a zombie film, therefore as available for a broader audience not only to enjoy, but to produce. Furthermore, while it is an American production, it is intended for digital distribution and thus may be considered as "viral" - another trait, which testifies for the possibility of making such a film for almost anyone with a camera. Consequently, the film is another example which demonstrates that zombies no longer belong to Hollywood.

The film starts after the war against zombies is won, much like in *Fido* - in this world, however, the aim of the living is to completely annihilate them. The protagonists are the last two zombies, hunted by the blood-thirsty Brock. Even though they attempt to coexist with the humans, they are ruthlessly hunted down and killed by an angry mob.

7.4.1 Social commentary

While the viral nature of the film may be argued to render the nationality of the production irrelevant to some extent, this is not the case. There are several cultural references, which serve as comic elements, elaborating the shallow nature of the human protagonist: “Every muscle oozes thick, with pure American pride / A Bald Eagle is my house and the American Flag my bride!” Viewers from all over the world will recognize the exaggerated patriotism (which may be argued to be frequent in American culture), and interpret it as humorous regardless of their nationality. As for the rest of the film, it takes place at what may be called as a stereotypical American town: there are plenty of green areas, small streets with shops, and a bar where apparently the majority of the townspeople spend their evenings.

The film has a very unusual take on the zombie apocalypse: it is not determined whether the undead started to devour brains as soon as they appeared; however, it is safe to assume it was so (since Parker is more than happy to attempt eating humans, referring to one of them as “a snack”). Yet at the point of the story where only two zombies are left, they are depicted as unjustly discriminated against – thus, it is impossible to specify who started the war. What is more relevant in this context is that this is perhaps the first example where the viewers do not naturally assume it was the zombies.

At one point the zombie chorus laments, “What kind of monster hides and runs? / What kind of victim kills for fun?” These questions are directed at Brock; thus turning zombie conventions upside down and marking the undead as vulnerable as opposed to humans. The scene further elaborates on the zombies’ wish to create a better world:

If you can visualize a world that’s free from fear and hatred
Then you’ve just visualized a fantasy that I’ve created.
A world where we don’t have to hide
where we are free to live our lives
It seems so perfect in my mind [...]

The two surviving zombies may be viewed as representatives of a minority, rejected and hunted by society. They wish to be left alone, even though Parker feels Brock should “pay for his crimes” and wants to turn him, he shows mercy in the end; showing more compassion than the living ever did for him or his family.

7. 4.2 The zombies

As the film begins, zombies no longer represent a direct threat to people, nor do they serve as a tool to illustrate human behavior in an ultimate apocalyptic scenario. The zombies are their own complete characters, depicted as the victims in several cases - simply trying to survive. They are capable of emotions, and communicate with each other perfectly well; the communication is “translated” in the film, as the undead are physically unable to keep up with their apparent desire to sing and dance like humans do. Thus, they are portrayed as misunderstood by the living: individuals, who do not have the means to correspond with their enemies, rendering them unable to make amends.

Zoey is a naïve optimist, which are interesting characteristic traits for a zombie. Even though the humans terminated all other zombies, she stays positive and believes that there is a chance for them to coexist with the living, against all evidence.

PARKER. I’m sick and tired of running, being hunted.

Chased by angry mobs with object blunted.

Just look at all that the world has done to you.

Your skin’s rotting away

ZOEY. But I look thinner

PARKER. A victim of decay

ZOEY. No need for dinner

Her sunny disposition is so defining that she manages to convince Parker not to eat humans. This lets the audience know that they can survive without killing people, which coupled with Zoey’s attitude evokes sympathy and understanding. In this sense, the zombies are represented as a minority with a bad reputation, having to deal with prejudice which does not apply to all of them.

Parker is a young zombie, who - based on his clothing - used to be a shop assistant. Due to the fact that he turned, the reference to his former life may be viewed as a sort of inverse hero story: what can be observed multiple times in zombie fiction happening to humans (a motif present in this film as well), takes place backwards. The mindless chores of a shop worker marking a character as no more than a person getting by are traditionally replaced with successful zombie slaying (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Braindead*). Here, the same character turns into a zombie and only then does his nature evolve: he falls in love and attempts to be a bigger person than humans - for instance, not killing Brock when he has

the chance. “My life never began until I stopped living / My heart never beat until it was still / I had to die to feel more alive.”

7.4.3 The humans

Brock is the only human protagonist of the film - he is yet again a character who only found his true calling during the zombie apocalypse.

It's hard to think that a few weeks ago,
I was just your average joe.
I wore a tie to work, what a jerk,
But that's when everything changed.

However, a prominent difference compared to the depiction of traditional heroes is introduced in the first few minutes of the film: Brock enjoys zombie killing a little too much, and his hero status is not acquired by saving people. This to him seems to be an inadvertent side effect; his glory derives directly from the high number of zombies he has terminated.

I can't deny that the violence was quite satisfying.
Every thunderous blast added mass to my self-esteem.
There ain't no thrill like a kill that sends a head a flying.
If this zombie event never ends that'd be alright with me.

His disturbing attitude originates from losing his girlfriend, Zoey, and not being able to change his own attitude towards her after she turns into a zombie:

Why must I have the hots for a stiff? [...]
But for my task to be complete I must kill every last zombie,
who knew the very last would be the one whose very passing
sent me on my quest?

Later on, the intense chase after the last two zombies is clearly not initiated because of the possible danger they pose to humanity; it is fueled by Brock's jealousy, with the townspeople blindly following him. Their idolizing attitude towards him may be interpreted as gratitude; however, their mindless rants about Brock's greatness lead the viewer to believe otherwise. Keeping in mind that the film takes place after the war against zombies is mostly won, it is safe to assume that the townspeople abandoned God and turned to someone who may be viewed as a new savior, as suggested by Brock's claim to

having turned water into wine. He sums up his deeds and the rewards he expects as follows:

It's about time you hailed someone and that someone should be me
 If I hadn't saved the day just think where you'd all be.
 Holes in your heads, or just plain dead, or perhaps a fate far darker.
 Oh my god! I saved your lives! Now pay me back with lager!

Thus, spirituality is completely abandoned and the value of people's lives is equated with beer - which they seem perfectly content with in exchange for an idol.

While most elements are highly comical, such as Brock shooting a child's zombie mother ("Sorry kid, even mombies have to die"), there is an underlying notion which may be viewed as parallel to that in *Fido*: beyond the absurdity of it all, this might be seen as a plausible way people would react in such a situation. Thus, due to the lack of a happy ending, people are represented in two ways: either as disturbed and addicted to power and fame, or mindless followers who will do anything to keep their icon happy. Any other form of character representation is that of zombies - who, ironically, view the living as inhuman.

7. 4.4 Cutfication

The film employs different methods of cutfication than previously demonstrated: instead of attempted domestication, as in the films discussed above, the notion of desired termination is prominent. However, the audience is allowed an insight the human characters cannot or refuse to see: the zombies are sensitive, reasonable creatures. They sing and dance; or, as far as the living are concerned, attempt to. Their minds still work, even though their rotting bodies and vocal chords cannot keep up. The living upon discovering this, still choose to persecute them, thus portraying the humans cruel and bloodthirsty in comparison to the undead, as evidenced by Brock's thoughts after having been shown mercy by Zoey and Parker.

Was I just attacked by monsters
 or could it be that I was saved
 Pardoned by my baby, fresh out of the grave?
 But their skin is flaking off of their face
 and they limp along at a grandpa's pace
 Their diet consists of human brains.
 They're soulless, inhuman.

While the idea of humans being more dangerous than zombies is present in many previous works (e.g. *Dawn of the Dead*), the depiction of survivors' aggression prior to this film was always towards other humans: modern zombie fiction never depicts violence against the undead as something to condemn. This film clearly sides with the zombies, representing them as unjustly discriminated against and hunted. The viewers are expected to sympathize with them, as they are not only persecuted, but understanding about it. Zoey explains the situation to Parker:

Remember it wasn't always brains that we longed to eat
We didn't walk around in bodies made of rotting meat.
Just as we have changed, Brock's heart has grown dark
but he is still a person and, like anyone, he's flawed.

Furthermore, they have visions for a better world. While the townspeople sit at the bar and drink, Parker has a utopia in mind.

There will be a renaissance like the world has never seen
When all the brilliant thinkers from throughout time convene.
We'll learn from history's greatest minds
Like Socrates, he's back alive!
And Mark Twain will be on at five

These remarks represent zombies as not only individuals, but characters who wish to evolve and crave precisely the values which are traditionally depicted as useless in modern zombie fiction.

It can be argued that the very fact that the creators selected zombies to feature in their film project is part of the cutefication process: they could be substituted with any endangered people/species, yet zombies were chosen, obviously in the hopes of creating a bigger hype and achieving a high level of popularity. While this film is essentially a romantic musical, it is rendered "cool" because zombies feature in it. Furthermore, I would like to argue that in this case, post-modern zombies have the effect of annihilating traditionally viewed gender-related genre preferences, and their presence in the film make it more accessible to viewers: a clash between the romantic and the undead, resulting in a feature which pleases (or attempts to please) everyone. Thus, zombies are employed as a tool to mediate between romance and horror; a method which can be seen as a method of cutefication, because it makes use of and contributes to the character's popularity at the

same time, allowing zombies to be an element associated with positive notions rather than terror.

8. In video games

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that video games featuring zombies are not exclusively settings of blood-baths. Since the 1990s, some games started taking a humorous approach towards the characters of the undead - which, similar to the process in film, started the development of cutefication. I will introduce three games which are of different types and can be referred to as pioneering in their own genre, offer a brief summary and analysis of gameplay, followed by the analysis of the relevant characters.

I am not trying to argue that zombie games rated 18 are less popular with the appearance of games which display signs of cutefication. An ego-shooter perspective exterminating the undead is still in demand, for instance *Left 4 Dead* (2008), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) and *Dead Island* (2011). Pinchbeck discusses the representation of modern zombies in the video game *Doom 3*.

When we see a zombie in *Doom 3*, our cultural knowledge about zombies kicks straight in, defining a template of expectations about its action, and our responses. This is reinforced by the representational level, the engagement of our natural reaction to a pallid, shuffling, moaning humanoid dragging its entails along behind it. (85)

This view is challenged by the appearance of post-modern zombies. As we will see, some games depict zombies as rather sweet as opposed to disgusting. Thus, a player's reaction (based on the argument by Pinchbeck) cannot be that of immediate violence. The mediation of this discrepancy in *Plants vs. Zombies* for instance is resolved by the utilization of plants as an attacking force; the player merely strategically places them and never attacks zombies directly.

The transition from modern to post-modern zombie representation is not smooth: gamers who particularly enjoy the gory details of murdering zombies are less likely to adapt their habits and start playing comical games. However, to approach the issue from another perspective, the appearance of post-modern zombie games has already resulted in the involvement of a lot of players, who would never play a gory and violent game; may that be for reasons of age or preference. Consequently, post-modern zombies in games are

gaining popularity and in a way educating those who are not closely familiar with gory zombie games - thus, still impressionable about the character of the undead and open to new interpretations. This aspect of the cutefication process in this case leads to the social acceptance of zombies as a comic figure, as witnessed by the age restrictions being defined lower than in the case of modern zombie games (*Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, *Plants vs. Zombies*). The publishing of a game called “Pet Zombies” supports this argument. It was released at the end of 2011 and has not received any extreme reactions, positive or negative - which points to the above mentioned social acceptance, underlined by the fact that this is a game rated T for teens, despite its featuring of “cool, eye-popping, gory effects” and “torturing [zombies] with pokes, throwing toys at their bodies and even lighting them on fire”.

8.1 *Zombies Ate my Neighbors*

The game was released in 1993, it is a run and gun adventure which is considered a cult classic today (see Lucas); it currently holds a rating of 85,63% on *gamerankings.com*. Its popularity is further illustrated by the fact that the protagonists’ appearance inspired several costumes amongst fans (Fig. 5). What makes it highly relevant to the topic of cutefication is that it only became a cult classic as attitudes towards zombies have started to shift. When released, the ESRB rating system was not in effect, which led to some censorship. Blood was replaced with purple goo and enemies



Fig. 5: Zeke and Julie in Real Life

with chainsaw were replaced with lumberjacks. Yet after the ESRB rating system took effect in 1994, the uncensored version of the game was labeled as appropriate for ages of 10 and above despite the presence of monsters and the player’s aim of murdering them.

A film version was announced to be in production in 2011, at present not a lot of information is available on the topic (see: Williams). However, the very fact that a non-horror zombie game is planned to be adapted to screen shows the growing popularity of post-modern zombies as opposed to modern ones.

8.1.1 Gameplay

When launching the game, the player sees a poison green swirl whirling back and forth, until the title is revealed. In the background, red circles keep going around, which has the effect of reminding one of hypnosis. The music is what might be referred to as a typical 8-bit sound; additionally, it is dark and menacing. Yet all the allusions to horror films are dispelled when the player reads the comical title, *Zombies Ate my Neighbors*. The sense of comic relief is deepened by the now familiar outcome of the scenario; there is no intention of keeping the player in suspense as far as the plot is concerned.

The player has the option to choose between a male and a female character. During the actual game, the player is provided with a bird's eye-view; thus, the sense of violence is further diminished as a typical "ego-shooter" experience is not offered. The player has to save the neighbors from zombies by collecting them and killing the undead. The weapons used to this end are of escalating size and creativity; on the first level, there is only a gun at the player's disposal (which might even be mistaken for a water gun), on later levels other weapons can be acquired, such as a bazooka or a weed whacker.

Some of the levels have titles with intertextual references to classic zombie films, such as *Evening of the Undead* (*Night of the Living Dead*) or *Terror on Aisle 5* (*Dawn of the Dead*). The former example is a level where the setting is a garden and a house; parallel to the film it references in the title. Correspondingly, the latter takes place at a shopping center. It is interesting to note that as opposed to many popular run and gun adventures, the setting is not in the least exotic but clearly suburban. The contrast of zombies and the neighbors commencing their everyday activities (cooking, swimming) is comical, in a way similar to what has been discussed in connection with *Shaun of the Dead*.

8.1.2 The humans

The male protagonist, Zeke, is a young guy with a trendy haircut, wearing jeans and a shirt with a skull on it. He is sporting the well-known red and blue 3D glasses of the time, which marks him as a movie fan (Fig. 6). It can be argued that this implies his expertise in zombie matters, as film is the main medium of zombie fiction. The fact that he keeps his glasses on the whole time he is fighting the monsters may indicate that he deliberately chooses to view them as if they were in a movie. Thus, he can be viewed as a character like Lionel (*Braindead*), Shaun (*Shaun of the Dead*) and many others: finding his true calling

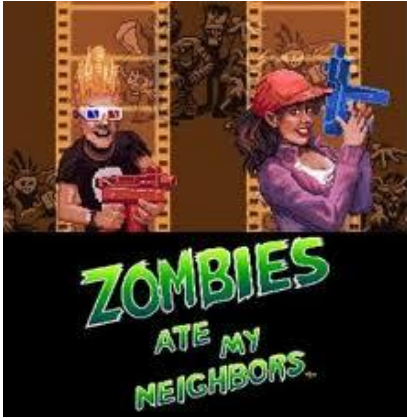


Fig. 6: The Protagonists of *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*

during a zombie apocalypse and saving the very people who probably labeled him as slacker before.

Julie is the female protagonist, she is wearing sporty clothes, yet sexy at the same time: a tight tank top, shorts, a jacket and a baseball cap (Fig. 6). The outfit is functional and somewhat revealing; evoking images of females who are apt at zombie killing while retaining their feminine attributes (Fran from *Dawn of the Dead*, Liz from *Shaun of the Dead*). Her femininity is further displayed by her default pose: hands on her hips, leaning to one side, a typical physical depiction of a sassy attitude. In both characters' cases the player can only assume their personality traits based on their appearance, as they do not talk.

The other human characters all have to be saved by the player; they are overt stereotypes and the same on every level. The blonde cheerleaders, the drunken person grilling, the obese man tanning in the pool and the crying baby are all typical components of a suburban lifestyle. They represent normalcy; and even though the protagonists may not have a good relationship with some of them (for instance, the strict teacher constantly waving a paper graded F); they need to be saved in order to return to the lifestyle which is assumed to have existed before the zombies came along.

8.1.3 The zombies

The reason of reanimation is suggested by the barrels lying around everywhere; marked as poison and biohazard, leaking green fluids. The zombies have risen from their graves, which are shown as gaping empty. The undead are identical: tall green males, wearing tattered suits. When killed, another one comes to fill their place; consequently, they cannot be eliminated, only temporarily escaped by reaching the next level (as is the case in many films, *Dawn of the Dead* 2004 for instance). Upon spotting the player's character, they will rapidly approach, only to falter and wander off when the character is out of sight, signaling their limited brain functions. Thus, the representation of the undead in this case corresponds with the tradition of modern zombie fiction. Yet the physical appearance of the creatures is not frightening; rather overly stereotypical and consequently humorous.

The zombies' greenish skin color is in sharp contrast with Zeke and Julie's white complexion. It is interesting to note that in a sense, this is the only thing differentiating them: their aim is to collect the neighbors, and the player's character has three lives, giving them the ability to return from the dead. When they do, they will have the same abilities and mission as before, which is signaled by their unaltered appearance.

8.1.4 Cutfication

This is perhaps the first video game with a lighthearted attitude towards zombies - the killing is present, yet the ridiculous title together with the sweet animation marks it as more of a comic game than horror. The low age limit on the game is most likely due to these factors; however, the contrast between the censorship in 1993 and the 10+ rating in 2007 shows that the audience grew unafraid of zombies, perceiving the characters in the game as funny rather than scary.

This game is also an early example of using zombies to make the product more popular. As the game progresses, a variety of monsters is introduced, such as aliens, mummies, vampires and Frankenstein's monster. Except for the aliens, they are all undead; yet the zombies were chosen to feature in the title, proving the growing popularity of the character. This utilization of the zombie is arguably an important method of cutfication, as it promotes the character's status as renown and familiarizes different audiences with the concept of zombies on another level than gory enemies of humanity – thus contributing to the character being generally associated with positive notions.

8.2 Plants vs. Zombies

Plants vs. Zombies is a tower defense game, where the player has to protect his or her home by placing various plants in the front yard, which will protect the home from the approaching zombies. The game was released in 2009 and was positively reviewed by game critics. *Gamerankings.com* logs it with a score of 88.32%, naming it as the 9th most popular PC



Fig. 7: *Plants vs. Zombies* Toys

game in 2009. Tae describes it in PC Advisor as follows: “Plants vs Zombies offers up a great sense of depth and complexity. It's ridiculously charming to boot, with a cute visual

style and a quirky sense of humour.” It was nominated for the Game Developers Choice Awards for “Innovation”, “Best Download Game” and “Best Game Design” (see: 10th Annual Game Developers Choice Awards). It served as inspiration for a board game with the same title and several types of toys (Fig. 7). The ESRB rating is 10+, while in Germany, the game was found to be appropriate for ages of 6 and above.

8.2.1 Gameplay

Upon launching the game, the initial picture already sums up the situation the player is going to deal with (Fig. 8): on the left side, adorable anthropomorphized plants are featured while on the right side cute zombies are climbing through a graveyard fence. The picture is very colorful, with bright tones and overly sweet animation. The bar



Fig. 8: *Plants vs. Zombies* Start Screen

which shows the loading progress is depicted as fresh grass being laid over a grave; when the game has loaded a zombie’s head bursts through the lawn. Groans of zombies can be heard over the music, which is an interesting combination of what might be best describes as happy elevator tunes with a few somber tones; already foreshadowing the nature of the game. In the main menu the player sees a cracked tombstone with a few grayish flowers; the game options are “engraved” in the stone. In sharp contrast, there is a well-lit yellow house in the background: a scene of life versus death, signaling the upcoming clash between the representatives of the two realms.

There are several options of game modes, the most elaborate and descriptive of which is the adventure mode. When choosing this option, the player meets Crazy Dave, who is a neighbor - he summarizes the situation as “Man, those zombies just keep a’coming.” He only mumbles; the message is translated in a speech bubble, which makes him parallel to the zombies insofar that he has clearly limited brain activity and is not capable of coherent speech. Yet the player sides with him as the situation marks even the most disliked neighbor as a comrade (as in *Zombies ate my Neighbors*). He provides help

occasionally throughout the game in the forms of advice and selling things from the back of his truck.

After reading Dave's introduction, the player can pick out the plants which are to defend the home. There are two currencies in the game: money, which can only be used to purchase goods from Dave. This is optional, as opposed to collecting the other currency, sunshine. In case the player does not gather the sunshine produced by the sunflowers, the plants cannot be placed on the lawn and the zombies will breach the barriers; thus sunshine - which arguably stands for natural energy in this case - is rendered more important than money.

The setting of the game is the house, which is depicted as a cliché suburban home complete with a white picket fence, a welcome mat, a tricycle and the entrance, perfectly manicured green grass in the front yard and a pool in the back yard. As the game progresses, the scenes of the attacks vary from the pool to the roof of the house, yet they always remain domestic. As we have seen earlier, the home is a frequent setting in zombie fiction to convey the horror of the mere illusion of safety; in this case, this horror is not present at all due to the animation and the very nature of the game, namely, if the player loses they can simply try again, thus overwriting previous mistakes to create a better outcome.

The player is never depicted in the game, allowing every individual to retain their identity to some extent when playing. This notion is supported by the stereotypical suburban surroundings evoking the feeling that it could be anyone's home. The only reference to the character's identity is the scream when the player loses, which is distinctively male. While this is a small detail, it implies the presence of the patriarchal concept of a male defending the home. Yet this aspect is mediated by the game's central theme of gardening as a form of defense, which is traditionally an activity associated with the domestic sphere.

8.2.2 The plants

The plants are excessively anthropomorphized; not only do they have facial features, their expressions hint at their personalities. The Sunflower, which in the game can only be used to provide energy but is ineffective as a point of defense, smiles constantly and sways back and forth, implying an aptly sunny attitude and benign nature. The defending plants are

represented as determined, their expressions corresponding with their respective techniques: the strategically offensive Pea-Shooter for instance resembles a resolute soldier, the Spikeweed, which functions as a trap looks sneaky and the Tall-Nut, which functions as a wall, stares heroically ahead as zombies munch on it; only to shed a tear as it is growing smaller from the attack.

Every plant has its own biography, with a tagline which describes their personalities further. The Cattail's message for instance is as follows: "Woof! Woof woof woof! Does this confuse you? Do you expect me to say 'Meow' like a cat because the word 'cat' is in my name and I also look like a cat? That's not how things work around here. I refuse to be pigeonholed." It is easy to see how a player is invited to create a personal connection to each plant. Even though some plants look evil, they are in constant flowing motion, as opposed to the jerky movements of the zombies - thus signaling their status as belonging to the good side.

8.2.3 The zombies

Initially, the zombies encountered are identical: grey-skinned, wearing suits, with bulging eyes and yet portrayed as endearing. As the levels progress, a variety of zombies are introduced, including pole-vaulter and football player zombies, suggesting that they retained a level of self-awareness. However, this is not highly relevant in this framework as their attack techniques correspond with their personalities; consequently it is a detail which primarily serves the gameplay.

The reason for zombification is suggested by the green glow coming from the sewers, pointing to an environmental mishap. The entire concept of the game supports this: the zombies in this context are products of an ecological disaster, which transformed them into not only brain-eating monsters, but destroyers of every form of life - as portrayed by the plants, which the zombies devour in order to get to the house. This is in sharp contrast with the "eco-zombie" as discussed in chapter 6.3.3; yet they still fit Lauro's definition (quoted in the same chapter). Thus, in this game the zombies are a tool to raise environmental awareness through representing the negative side. The player cannot survive without placing plants as a defense line - which in this sense can be interpreted as a metaphor for the importance of preserving nature and surviving with the help of natural

resources instead of promoting non-sustainable resources, which are predestined to lead to a disaster for humanity.

The player is warned before a particularly large number of zombies are about to attack, with the words “A huge wave of zombies is approaching!” In these cases, one of the zombies is always carrying a flag with a picture of a brain on it, signaling their intention to eat the character’s brain as well as signifying their wish for total dominance on the level of spatial occupation. In this sense, they are representing a complete zombie apocalypse - which can never happen within modern zombie fiction, as there would be no one to report on it. This topic is explored in detail in the short story *Almost the Last Story by Almost the Last Man*. In case of post-modern zombies however, it is a possibility as the zombies’ perceived individuality by humans could lead to a zombie-narrated apocalypse, as it is implied in the novel *Dust*.

8.2.4 Cutefication

Besides the obvious visual choices which make the zombies more adorable than scary, there are several other tools of cutefication at work here which make the players forget that zombies used to be a tool of terror. The game is littered with cultural references, which will make those who take the time to read them (they are everywhere) sure to smile. For instance, some of the levels reference elements from popular culture; such as Scary Potter and Dead Zeppelin. As in the case of *Zombies Ate my Neighbors*, it is a comic element which serves to set the light-hearted tone of the game despite the presence of zombies.

There used to be an undead Michael Jackson amongst the various zombie types (unfortunately it had to be removed due to legal reasons). When a player in effect killed Michael, it was not the celebrity whose death they caused within the game; it was a zombie. Yet the personal touch has the effect of cutefication through assigning an abstract identity and mixing the two realities - Michael Jackson as a zombie in the music video *Thriller* and the Michael zombie within the game. Further zombie characters include Zomboni, a stereotypical Canadian zombie riding an ice-cleaning truck and

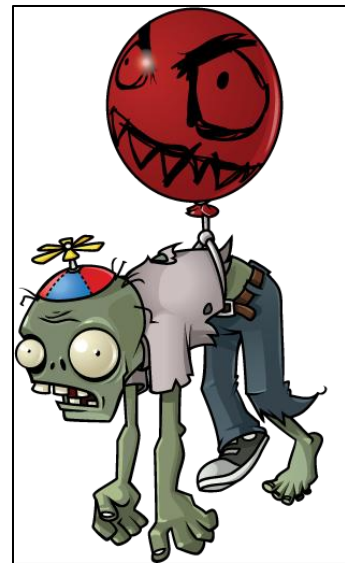


Fig. 9: Flying Zombie in *Plants vs. Zombies*

zombies riding balloons or dolphins, combining the traditionally cheerful and happy notions with flesh eating monsters (Fig. 9).

There are also various messages which can be regarded as examples of cutefication. The Hypno-Shroom's tagline for instance is "*Zombies are our friends. They're badly misunderstood creatures who play a valuable role in our ecology. We can and should do more to bring them round to our way of thinking*" - thus implying that they are more of a mixture of vermin and pet, and they should not be exterminated. This particular plant has the effect of making a zombie fight on the player's side, insinuating that they are not inherently evil creatures, merely misguided. The player's sympathy is also evoked by the simple tricks the zombies employ in an attempt to "trick" the player. This is represented in the form of messages, which do not have any effect on the game progress, thus serving simply as a source of humor and helping to establish a perhaps patronizing attitude towards the undead: "Hello, this iz your mother. Please come over to my house for 'meatloaf' Leave your front door open and your lawn unguarded. Sincerely, Mom (not the zombies)". When a player finishes the game, a song can be heard and a party involving every character of the game is featured. The soundtrack is sung by the Sunflower, and the lyrics include her singing "I know your type: tall, dark, and dead, you want to bite all the petals off of my head". She is speaking directly to the zombies, making them more than animated objects, which serves as a method of cutefication. To support my argument further, I would like to refer to a video (*Plants vs Zombies Reviewed by a 1.5 Year Old!*). A toddler is mesmerized by the closing song and video of the game, which comes on before the end credits. He repeatedly demands "ombies," dances (just like the Sunflower) and sings together with the song. It is clear that he has no concept of undead monsters; yet the happiness and enthusiasm a child of that age shows that there is nothing horrifying in this video even for a toddler.

Pitts wrote about the game in *The Escapist* in the framework of gaming techniques, yet his description may also be applied to the process of cutefication in video games.

How do you pair the walking undead - bane of gun-wielding hardcore game protagonists - with a casual game? The very notion seems impossible. Zombies are dangerous, mindless enemies to be destroyed at all costs. Their eradication requires tact, aggression and - most importantly - firepower. They are not what one clicks, matches or clears. Zombies are not casual.

He then goes on to say that the game indeed manages to pair hardcore gaming techniques with the expectations towards a casual game. If one was to replace the word “casual” with “cute”, the quote aptly describes the process that I believe is in progress in the field of zombie fiction.

8.3 Minecraft

The game was released in 2011, and was met with instant enthusiasm from critics and gamers alike. It was awarded “Game of the Year” by *PC Gamer UK*; at the Game Developer’s Choice Awards it won “Best debut game”, “Best downloadable game” and “Most innovative game”. The players’ enthusiasm may best be described with the fact that there are about 3,650,000 videos on YouTube associated with the game; some of which is players changing the setting of the game to real life and combining the features with traditional elements of zombie fiction, such as breaking out of a surrounded place of haven (*Minecraft: The Last Minecraft*).

8.3.1 Gameplay

This is a sandbox game, meaning that there is no set goal or a predetermined adventure the player has to complete in order to finish the game. In fact, it has an optional ending - the player may leave the universe through a portal and defeat a dragon. However, since the player can build his or her own universe, and may continue to develop it to increasingly complex levels, “The End” does not really mean the game is finished, rather stopped - as signaled by the player’s character reappearing in their own universe after slaying the dragon. The game allows for a lot of personal involvement and creativity. The monsters of the game are not exclusively zombies; there are spiders and creatures called creepers, which all represent a threat.

The building of various constructions can be a complex task, and as it is not highly relevant, will not be described in detail. The simplified concept is the player collecting items by cutting or killing them - the slaying of a pig will result in pork chops for instance, which the player needs to survive. For construction projects, the player needs to collect the material necessary to complete a given formula; for instance, with the combination of two sticks and three cobblestones a stone axe can be crafted.

8.3.2 The zombies

The zombies have the same measures as the player's character; they are wearing clothes but are shades of green, with empty eye sockets (Fig. 10). When they see the player's character, they will slowly approach it with groans (not intelligible, yet the loading bar features "braaaains" among other funny lines - thus implying it). Zombies usually appear in groups, which points towards their nature to congregate. They are relatively easy to destroy, unless they attack in hordes or the player is cornered. They can be killed by splashing healing potion on them - which makes this game perhaps the only realized scenario involving the elements of biohorror logic implemented

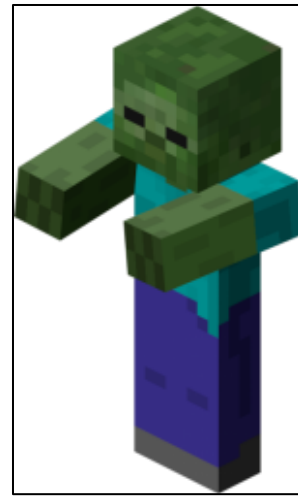


Fig. 10: A Zombie in *Minecraft*

on zombie fiction. Within this game, zombies typically appear at dark location, as the sunlight burns them - in this sense, they exhibit a mixture of vampire and zombie characteristics. When killed, they will drop rotten flesh, which can be consumed by the player in case of an emergency but most of the time will cause food poisoning.

8.3.3 Cutefication

Besides some details, the undead in the game display all the characteristics of modern zombies - yet I would like to argue that this game employs a form of indirect cutefication. It is important to note that the zombies here are a minor component of the game; they cannot even be considered the main hostile elements (which are decidedly the creepers). Yet they were chosen to feature instead of countless other monsters; implying their status as more popular in comparison to different enemies. This method of cutefication may be seen as a subtle version of what has been described in chapter 8.1.4 in connection with *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*: in this case, the character of the zombie is not utilized to make the game more popular, rather marked as a character which is almost a necessary component of a good game.

This game advances the process of cutefication through its popularity as well. On the 5th of March, *Minecraft* had 23,514,649 registered users, and the number continues to grow daily (see *Minecraft* statistics). Through representing zombies as an "easy enemy", all the users of the game (and since it has not received an age rating yet and it is available

for free online, it is safe to assume that many children included) are being influenced in a way to not perceive the undead as a serious threat.

9. In literature

Unlike most imaginary creatures, the modern zombie does not have a long history of literary tradition. In fact, the emergence of written modern zombie fiction as a genre only dates back to 1989, when *Book of the Dead* was published (see Audley 8). Even though there are earlier accounts of works involving undead creatures which we can regard as modern zombies (such as *Herbert West, Re-Animator* by Lovecraft discussed in chapter 3), this collection of short stories started the trend of narratives focusing entirely on scenarios revolving around zombies; and as such, the start of what we may refer to as modern zombie literature today.

The reason for the lack of literary tradition is most likely to be found in the very nature of modern zombies: they lack the power of calculation, and as such, cannot provide an intricate plot. They have no personalities; consequently they cannot be portrayed as complex, evolving characters. Interestingly, the start of modern zombie literature can be placed around the same time as the shift in representation began to unfold in movies. Thus, as undoubtedly the main territory of zombies is film, we may theorize that their primary evolution to post-modern enabled the character to be portrayed in a literary setting as well.

This does not mean that all zombie literature is post-modern; quite to the contrary. Most undead creatures are portrayed as modern zombies (see chapter 4). Yet the shift is perceptible in this field as well, even though it is more challenging to pinpoint than in the case of films or video games. This may be due to the fact that it is taking place presently; therefore, there are fewer examples available to support the theory. However, I will attempt to introduce some works, which may be considered as already foreshadowing the same shift which has already happened in movies.

9.1 Short stories

As mentioned above, the first book to be published which may be regarded as the start of modern zombie fiction is a collection of short stories. This type of fiction can be predominantly associated with the genre until today. There are a large number of collections compared to the amount of novels dealing with the same topic: *Book of the*

Dead (1989), *Still Dead: Book of the Dead 2* (1992), *The Mammoth Book of Zombies* (1993), *Wormwood* (1995), *The Book of All Flesh* (2001), *The Book of More Flesh* (2002), *The Book of Final Flesh* (2003), *The Undead* (2005), *The Living Dead* (2008), *Zombies* (2009), *The Living Dead 2* (2010), *The New Dead* (2010), *Undead Tales* (2011) etc.

There are an incredible amount of short stories featuring zombies and the number continues to grow. Besides the staggering total of anthologies being published since the 1990s, the amount of novels started to increase as well. To illustrate this, I have compiled the approximate number of novels, “non-fiction” survival guides and anthologies published since 2005.

Year	App. number of novels	App. Number of survival guides	App. number of anthologies
2011	298	12	44
2010	185	13	36
2009	78	4	20
2008	43	3	11
2007	35	1	9
2006	18	0	3
2005	6	0	2

Table 2: Number of Books Published, Based on the Database of Amazon.com

The point may be further illustrated by the fact that specialized publishing companies were founded like Books of the Dead Press and Library of the Living Dead Press, the latter of which is solely concerned with zombie and apocalyptic fiction.

It is a difficult task to point out the shift in the representation of zombies in anthologies, as one book usually contains a wide spectrum of stories, featuring modern and post-modern stories and characters as well. Therefore, I would like to argue based on the above mentioned facts regarding the number of short stories as opposed to novels that within literature, short stories remain the primary field for zombie fiction. With the start of cutefication, short stories have multiplied. These stories do not necessarily employ cutefication (even though many of them do; such as *What Maisie Knew* or *Copper*); however, due to the high numbers it is impossible to present every single story as individually employing cutefication or not. Thus, my argument at this point is that the

process of cutefication in film resulted in a broader target audience of zombie fiction, which allowed for any form of zombie fiction to be popular in the field of short stories.

9.2 The Zombie Survival Guide

This is not a traditional story: as the title suggests, it is a survival guide, and as such it cannot be analyzed as other works of fiction. The book is highly successful, it was featured on the *New York Times* bestseller list 44 times as of the 4th of March (see Bestsellers, Paperback Nonfiction). A film version is scheduled to be released in 2014 (*The Zombie Survival Guide*).

The book is written in the traditional style of guides, it includes tips and instructions about what to do in case of different scenarios. It is never acknowledged within the book that it is a work of fiction - in fact, the reader is instructed in the introduction to “not discount any section of this book as hypothetical drama.” (xiv) According to the author, Max Brooks, “its longevity is due largely to its realistic tone” (qtd. in Richards).

This realistic tone is achieved through the straightforward presentation of facts, including examples about what could go wrong and deducing the safest option for each scenario. For instance, in the section *Weapons and Combat Techniques* the reader learns about the possibility of setting the zombies on fire: “In actual combat, fire can be as deadly a threat as it is a protector. [...] In the minutes or hours before a blazing zombie succumbs, it will become a walking - or to be perfectly accurate, a shambling - torch” (52). The reader is bound to think about this for a second and agree. Knowing the general characteristics of zombies, this truly would prove to be a dangerous move. Thus, the reader is forced into a position where contemplating actual zombie attack scenarios becomes normal. After agreeing with the author’s logic, the next sentence completes the sense of reality with introducing specific examples: “Several cases have been recorded in which burning ghouls have done more damages, even caused more deaths, than they would have with only their fingernails and teeth” (52). The statements are often supported by statistics: “When compared to other motorists attempting to escape a zombie outbreak, dirt-bike riders have a 23-to-1 survival rate. Sadly, 31 percent of motorcycle fatalities come from ordinary accidents” (107). The sense of non-fiction is further heightened by the illustrations. They

are black and white, minimalistic and without any gore. There is no blood depicted even on figures which illustrate for instance the spearfishing of a zombie (149, Fig. 11).

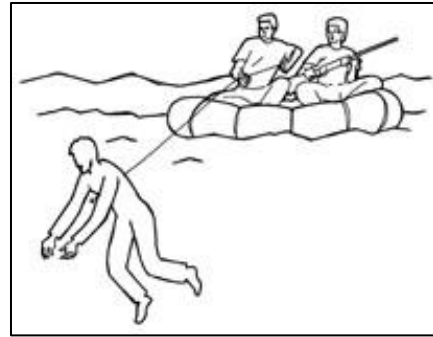


Fig. 11: The Spearfishing of a Zombie in *The Zombie Survival Guide*

The book has seven main chapters, the first of which is *The Undead: Myths and Realities*. The characteristics of the zombies are described in detail, and a clear distinction is made between the Voodoo and Hollywood versions, most of which corresponds with the research presented in this thesis. In this book, a third kind of zombie is clearly distinguished: the type which is labeled as “real” and is discussed throughout the guide as such.

Further chapters provide information about weapons, what to do on the defense, on the run and on the attack, how to live in an undead world and finally the list of recorded attacks. The structure is helpful and reader friendly, the subchapters make it easy to quickly access whatever information is needed. In the appendix an outbreak journal is provided for readers to record “suspicious events that could indicate a possible outbreak”.

This book is generally categorized under humor (for instance, on the homepage amazon.com). While reading this book, the realistic tone coupled with the fictional characters of zombies results in a humorous experience for the readers; however, the guide itself contains no comical elements, which might accounts for the book’s categorization as “non-fiction” in the *New York Times* bestseller list. The overall reactions on forums generally maintain the illusion of reality regarding the topic: numerous discussion forums and Q&A-s include practical debates and inquiries about zombies, keeping the matter-of-fact tone of the novel.

Why does the Washington Post insist on burying all zombie attack reports on page A17 (if mentioned *at all*), when clearly the need to be prepared is so obvious? In whose interest is it to keep us in the dark about Zombies?

Max Brooks: I've always said, the first duty of any government is the preservation of Law and Order. Imagine what our government would have to deal with if they admitted there were zombies out there. I certainly don't want to have to tie up our government with that political football, and I certainly don't want to pay a

"Zombie" tax to keep me safe when we, as private citizens can do it on our own. (qtd. in VanderMolen)

Thus, with the cooperation of the readers, the *Zombie Survival Guide* was allowed to transcend its own limits within the pages and become more than just a funny book. In fact, it can be argued that the appeal of this work lies largely in the conspiracy-sense it provides the readers with outside the realm of the book (see the excerpt from the *Washington Post* above). The fans of the novel maintain the realistic sense even though the ridiculousness of the topic is what makes the guide a comic work in the first place. Interestingly, the reader collaboration in such a way seems to increase the popularity and invite more fans rather than destroy the humorous aspect. The phenomenon of consistently pretending that zombies are real can be frequently observed.

In Brooks' guide, the character of the zombie is not subject to cutefication. The description provided in the section *Zombie Attributes* resembles an account about an animal - every detail presented with precision, some myths introduced and discounted along with an explanation.

Imagine the human body as a tool kit. The somnambulist brain has those tools, and only those tools, at its disposal. It cannot create new ones out of thin air. But it can, as you will see, use these tools in unconventional combinations, or push their durability beyond normal human limits. (6)

A detailed physical description follows complete with illustrations, discussing the zombies' abilities; portraying them as decomposing (10), limping (13), referring to their brain as "[a]n instinct-driven, unitask machine that is impervious to tampering and can only be destroyed" (15).

However, the lack of cutefication within the book does not mean it is completely absent. As discussed earlier, the label "humor" associated with the novel only applies from an outside perspective: within the book, there are no comical elements. Yet the very fact that zombies were chosen points to the popularity of the character - a theory, which is further supported by the success of the book: a way of cutefication discussed in connection with *Rigamortis* (chapter 7.4.4) and *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* (chapter 8.1.4). Furthermore, the author stating "Take out the zombies and it is still a general disaster survival guide" (qtd. in Richards) suggests that zombies are merely an ingredient in the recipe of success.

The same can be said about the highly successful novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which is the original Austen work with additional zombies by Seth Grahame-Smith. I will not offer a detailed analysis here, as it would have to include the analysis of the original book as well as a comparison with the mash-up version and spatial limitations do not allow for such a comprehensive approach. However, the very existence of a classic being “enhanced” by zombies supports the point of cutefication through popularity.

As demonstrated in chapters 7.4.4 and 8.1.4, there are examples of films and video games utilizing zombies as a tool to increase popularity and thus the process can be viewed as a method of cutefication. Consequently, it can be stated that the evolution which took place in those fields has started in literature as well.

9.3 Dust

This novel was featured as a top pick on the *RT Book Review* website (RT Book Reviews). While this honor is arguably less remarkable than the *New York Times* bestseller status, it indicates the popularity of the novel. Yet the reason this book is highly relevant to the discussion is the review by Douglas Preston, featured on the back of the novel: “Joan Frances Turner has done for zombies what Anne Rice did for vampires.” Even though spatial limitations do not allow for an extensive comparison, the implication of such an influence on the way a character is generally viewed should not be dismissed. Therefore, I will focus on the innovative ways this novel deals with zombies.

The most important factor is that the narrator of the novel is a zombie, which results in the distinctive representation of the undead in several ways. The story takes place in an alternate reality very similar to ours, in Indiana - there is a map provided within the book. In this reality, however, some of the dead are coming back to life. It is hinted that the reason is scientific experiments gone wrong, yet never explicitly explained; as is frequently the case with modern and post-modern zombie fiction.

The novel also offers a new approach regarding the differences between zombies and humans. It is clearly stated that the two groups hate each other, with a few exceptions. There is no constant violent war raging, they more or less leave each other alone; existing in the same reality but completely separated. When this barrier is breached by humans, it is either to set zombies on fire; when it is done by zombies, it is to hunt humans for food. So far, this is almost the traditional setting (except for zombies willingly separating from

humans to live in a constructed society of their own). The innovative element is humans approaching zombies with an intention to communicate and warn them while being fully aware of their cannibalistic nature. In this context, this is an example of the motif attempted care for a zombie - which is frequently found in post-modern zombie fiction in film - being adapted to literature.

9.3.1 Social commentary

Humans and zombies coexisting is not an optimal scenario for either party - in this case, the reader is introduced to the zombies' perspective as the hunted. People generally treat the undead as taboos: children are educated to stay away from the dangerous areas designated for zombies; the dead still get buried instead of burned because there is a chance they will not return. Overall, an understanding of keeping distance has formed between the two groups, until the living decided to eliminate the undead completely. The main plot twist of the novel is the appearance of a virus, which was constructed by the living and meant to destroy the zombies.

The lab got ideas, started tinkering. If they could mutate [the virus] more, make it an active contagion, wreak havoc with your digestive tracts, maybe they could somehow starve you out. Just seed your habitats with it, watch you wither and drop- nothing else had worked, nothing. Tried everything. They even had smallpox samples, Jessie, what the hell, it worked on the Indians, right? (234 235)

The reference to the Native Americans places the zombies as the innocent victims of a crime of humanity, even though some of them eat humans. In this sense, zombies are portrayed as persecuted and thus implied that cannibalism is merely their nature which humans are unable to accept.

The scientists' intentions are sabotaged by Jesse's brother, who unknowingly constructs a virus which turns humans into something resembling zombies, and makes zombies grow new flesh. In this sense, the traditional monsters are equated with the implied ones; the humans. "Hoos eating their pets, their children, forming hunting gangs, devouring anything they can find" (237). The zombies on the other hand never exhibit such a lack of self-control; none of them consider killing a living member of their family for food.

9.3.2 The zombies

In the novel the narrator shares “insider information” to the extent that is not present in other works. The reader is informed about the zombies’ feelings, needs and abilities in a detailed manner. The novel is also singular on the level of physical descriptions: for instance, the stages of decomposition in zombies are clearly identified and named (rotter, bloater, feeder, dusty). While there are other works which include detailed descriptions of zombies (e.g. *The Zombie Survival Guide*), they lack the emotional angle this novel offers. This perspective is provided by a first person narrator, and even though most of the physical description is figural and implicit, the occasional auto-characterization evokes a feeling of empathy.

“So how long before I turn into a giant pile of rot like all the rest of you? Or a skeleton, so this can all just be over?”

Okay, don’t be too fucking rude or anything. My fingers twitched wanting to rip up violets by the roots but I’d done that once before when I was angry, killed a tree by kicking it, and I felt so bad about it afterward my stomach hurt. I pressed my palm flat against the ground, to ward off temptation instead.

“You’re a rotter already” I told her. (76)

The first person narrator evokes sympathy in the reader, which is highly conflicting with some of the gory descriptions. “There’s nothing in this world, nothing, that’s as honest or as beautiful as meat and blood, beautiful as this bone gnawed white and stripped clean, this shredded hide, those hanks of flesh and tooth scrapings of veined yellow fat [...]” (9). Nevertheless, the protagonist Jessie is a lovable character - partly because she refuses to eat humans. “‘I’ve never eaten [a human],’ I said. ‘Not worth the trouble’” (77). This is an example of her behavior corresponding to those while she was alive: “I was a vegetarian [...]” (9). It is thus conveyed that the zombies not only passively remember what their lives were like before they were reborn, but that they may also retain certain characteristics which they perceived as defining to their personalities. This is an advanced version of the behavior the zombies in *Dawn of the Dead* exhibit when being drawn to the mall, as it represented “an important place in their lives”. The fact that the undead keep their names after they are reborn supports this notion.

The zombies are highly evolved creatures in this novel. They communicate with each other what might be best described as telepathy; this unusual approach is explained with the fact that their lips and tongues have rotted away. In this respect, they are superior

to humans. They also respond to each other's personalities, which are described as ever-present music different in every zombie, on a level which is highly emotional: they have dances.

Piano, banjo, cello, violin, harpsichord, trumpet, sax, electric guitar, all those clashing and chaotic brain radios melting together into something that flowed lightning-fast from Sam, to Mags, to Teresa, to her, to me, round and round the circle. It gathered strength and energy as it traveled, electricity singeing flesh, and together just by standing there we fashioned a tune from our collective head never heard before by anything, living or reborn, one that never, no matter how much we wished it, would ever be heard again. [...] We weren't just choosing to play together; something else was playing us. (95-96)

These sessions may be likened to religious experiences; they cannot be controlled and invoke a feeling of elementary togetherness within those involved. Thus, the zombies are capable of experiencing emotions connected with the supernatural, mediating their monstrous representation and marking their existence as more meaningful than a threat to humans.

Their society resembles tribes; there are groups, such as the protagonist's (Fly-By-Nights) with leaders and a strict hierarchy based on physical abilities. "I'd never forgotten what Teresa did to Lilian, how she made Joe and me finish her off, but then it'd been Lilian who jumped her first and if you finished off the gang leader all by yourself like that, no help, you'd more than earned the right to boss all the rest of us" (83). Even though the main focus of every zombie is survival, Jesse shows compassion towards some in his group, while not others. "[...] I couldn't hate or fight Annie, I still just liked her too much. She was one of those kinds. Teresa, though. Yeah" (89). The characters the reader bonds with are zombies; they are far from mere cannibals and resemble humans in many ways, while retaining certain inhuman attributes. Just like amongst the living, there are evil, insecure, cheerful or rebellious zombies. However, these stock characters are modified to fit the nature of the undead.

The living are portrayed as more than just food, which is what the perspective of the novel would suggest. They are not sympathetic characters; they are fallible and selfish, as demonstrated by Jessie's sister's repulsion upon seeing her after she returns from the grave. Normally, this would be perceived as the reaction to be expected upon encountering a zombie; yet the narrative techniques employed shift the reader's perspective to perceive

what would in most works of zombie fiction be a natural reaction as prejudiced and weak. Relatives are not important to the undead and are mostly represented as unpleasant reminders of a past life: “[They] didn’t matter; we always pretended we’d never had any other family” (54).

9.3.3 Cutfication

Having a zombie narrate the story from a first-person perspective is an evident example of cutfication: a level of sympathy is instantly evoked in the reader. This sense is deepened due to the fact that the novel might be classified as a bildungsroman. The protagonist is merely a teenager when she has to face a completely new form of existence: being a zombie. The reader is introduced to her struggles and failure to separate herself from her previous life. The other zombie characters are all part of her evolution, representing a difficult “can’t live with you, can’t live without you” romantic involvement (Joe), the father figure whom she has to say goodbye to (Florian), and a tyrannical unjust leader whom she finally stands up to, reasserting her own values as opposed to adopting others’ (Teresa). Consequently, the reader develops a level of personal involvement with the characters of the undead.

Another form of cutfication is the unusual approach of depicting a zombie as a better person than a human. Jim attacks Jesse and attempts to kill her simply because of his uncontained hate. “You don’t get to survive. It’s not fair. You’re coming with me-“ (350). When she finally overpowers him, not only does she show mercy but does so with an effort: “*Break his back, a little voice inside me whispered. His spine. Take his eyes. Do it. You know you wanna*” (352). This internal struggle marks her as morally responsible and for lack of a better expression, human.

10. Zombies in real life - current influences on popular culture

Zombies can be noticed more and more frequently within our everyday lives: from massive zombie walks, through different games to appearing on general clothing. These phenomena point to the fact that anything featuring zombies is considered popular nowadays. The zombie as a character or even simply as a notion is employed as an enhancement in order to attract more people.

10.1 Zombie walks

These events usually take place in big cities, and feature any number of participants in zombie costumes shambling along the streets - sometimes as part of a promotion, sometimes as a protest, for charity or simply for fun.

The first zombie walk on record took place in Sacramento, with the site newsreview.com referring to it as “unexpected entertainment, [...] popular parade of zombies”. It is now an annual event, retaining its original goal of promoting the film festival Trash Film Orgy. On their website, last year’s walk was scheduled as such:

Saturday, July 9 at 9pm Sub-Q to the Crest

6-8pm-the DEAD Face Off!

9pm-the DEAD Horde Gathers!

10pm-The DEAD Walk!

11pm-The DEAD Party!

The Original Sacramento ZOMBIE WALK is back and bigger and better than ever!

There are walks which do not have a promotional aim, the first of which was held in 2003 in Toronto. The number of participants continues to grow; in 2010 six thousand zombies (as the site consistently refers to those who take part) walked the streets. It remains a non-profit event; those who wish to donate can do so through the website (see torontozombiewalk.ca).



Fig. 12: Zombie Walk in Pittsburgh, 2008

An example for a charity walk is Zombie-O-Rama; they collect food for those in need. According to their website, 2,000 pounds of food were donated only last year. Since 2008 the World Zombie Day is annually organized in numerous cities, raising awareness about world hunger. “World Zombie Day, a day when all fans of zombie culture can join together in an international effort to alleviate world hunger. At all World Zombie Day zombie walks, participating living dead are encouraged to bring a non-perishable food item donations [sic] for local food banks” (*World Zombie Day*). The innate controversy of the

undead helping others is not a concern of either the organizers or the participants; and in the case of food rallies, the irony of zombies collecting food makes these events even more enjoyable for those involved.

The very fact that these gatherings are not confined to movie theaters illustrates that the popularity of zombies has gone beyond the realm of fiction and has achieved a unique status in society. The character of zombies is employed to call attention to issues that otherwise might go unnoticed but are generally considered important. In this sense, these walks might be likened to the famous demonstrations against fur, involving naked participants - marking the character of the zombie as a remarkable tool capable of promoting a cause, in a sense similar to nudity. While this parallel may seem far-fetched, it illustrates the same change I have demonstrated in film, video games and literature: namely, that the character of the zombie is becoming an independent component in the quest for popularity, in this case in real life.

The nature of such an organized “apocalypse” is far from the mayhem one might imagine at first. There are strict rules, to which the zombies are expected to adhere. While these are slightly different depending on the organizers, it is interesting to take a look at some traits they all have in common. Participants are encouraged to stay in character, which as far as most organizers are concerned, includes “communicat[ing] only in a manner consistent with zombies (such as grunts, groans and slurred moans calling for ‘brains’)” (*Zombie Walk Handbook*), and “lurch shamle and drag barely hinged limbs down the street” (Rathorne). This shows that those involved are attempting to stick to the traditions of the modern zombie character. However, the fact that these are organized gatherings often with a purpose beyond recreation marks these events as connected to post-modern zombies. The sense of “togetherness” which the participants feel coupled together with the visual experience make the events extraordinary to those involved. A user on yelp.ca describes her experience about the Vancouver walk as such: “[...] you're STILL going to look awesome and not at all like you half assed it because you are IN A SEA OF FREAKING ZOMBIES. Strength in numbers, yo. [...]If we got this serious about political protests or environmental issues we could change the world”.



Fig. 13: A Family
Participating in the 2011
Birmingham Zombie Walk

Another element reinforces the post-modern nature of the walks: children are welcome to participate (Fig. 13). The site of the Sacramento walk claims that “The Zombie Walk is free to participate and open to all ages,” the Vancouver walk is “fun for the whole undead family!” This fact alone shows clearly that zombies are no longer something society labels as scary, as children are not shielded from these rallies but encouraged to participate.

10.2 Zombie fashion

The popularity of a special type of clothing continues to gain popularity in the Western world; something that is usually referred to as “geek chic”. Generally speaking, this type of style is not represented through colors or cuts; these items are usual clothes or accessories with prints or motifs referencing anything that might be considered “geeky”: video games, mathematical equations, sci-fi shows etc.

While the expression geek chic is generally used to refer to everyday clothing, it should be noted that there are many items not meant for everyday use. I will not discuss these extremities because I consider them costumes rather than fashion. This chapter is concerned with clothes and accessories which can be found on websites and in shops for everyday wear, not those specializing in Halloween gear. While the growing popularity of zombies in costume situations is relevant to some extent here, it has already been mentioned in the context of popularity (in chapter 8.1 and 10.1). I will now focus on clothing which brings zombies into our everyday lives, marking them an important cultural figure rather than scary monsters.

Zombies in fashion are closely associated with the above mentioned “geek chic”. There are a seemingly infinite number of T-shirts available online with funny lines printed on them, such as “Got Brains?” or “Only zombies love you for your brains”. While the very use of the character (or reference to it) on a T-shirt is a form of cutefication, it is made even more obvious through the sweet or humorous texts associated with them.



Fig. 14: Zombified Animal as a T-shirt Pattern

Furthermore, it is easy to come across blood-splattered designs as well as ones featuring drawn brains or silhouettes of zombies, yet there are very few which might be described as gory. The notion of zombies in the fashion world is frequently coupled with something considered adorable, such as a baby animals or children (Fig. 14). This might be explained with the fact that people generally avoid wearing offensive clothing; however, bearing that in mind, it can be stated that zombies no longer represent something offensive to the public.

It can be argued that basically any topic or character can be found on the internet printed on a T-shirt; which is no wonder, since many companies offer their users free designing opportunities, and only expect payment if the design is produced, such as zazzle.com. However, some quick browsing will already prove the popularity of zombies: there are over 17.000 designs available on this website alone - interestingly, over 4,000 of these available for children and toddlers (Fig. 15). This illustrates on one hand the popularity of zombies in fashion, and on the other hand the fact that it is now socially acceptable to dress up a child as a zombie not only for Halloween or a zombie walk, which may be considered extraordinary situations. It is also suitable to provide them with an everyday wardrobe featuring the undead.

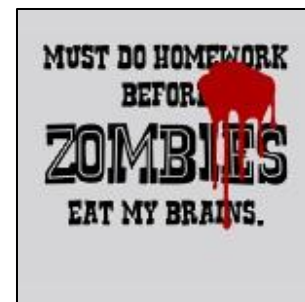


Fig. 15: Zombie T-shirt Pattern for Young Teenagers

While T-shirts seem to be evidently the most popular surfaces for zombie fashion (arguably due to the accessible design options), there are other objects available to make a fashion statement featuring them. For instance, a pair of shoes (Fig. 16) from Iron Fist are part of a line named “Zombie Stomper”. They feature a rotting zombie’s face illustrated with typical comicbook style, the gore is countered with a cute bow at the back of the shoe.



Fig. 16: Zombie Pumps

The line includes rainboots, flats and flip-flops, with several different designs yet employing the same idea - gore with a bow.

Zombies have been incorporated not only into the objects of fashion, but the process of selling these objects as well. The March of the Zombies was first organized in 2009, and has since become an annual event. This is a fashion show, where several

local designers can showcase their talent and present their clothes

modeled by zombies (Fig. 17). Jes d'Arbonne described last year's event as a "combination of high fashion and the grotesque," with models who "let their inner zombies show, snarling at the audience and stalking down the runway" (examiner.com). Interestingly, the clothes are generally not connected to zombies; thus, this is yet another example of zombies being used as a boost to make something interesting and popular. As Fig. 17 shows, there are people wearing zombie makeup in the audience as well. This underlines the viral nature of



Fig. 17: A Model at the March of the Zombies Fashion Show

zombies, which is an innate characteristic in fiction and has crossed over to real life.

To illustrate that zombies featuring in fashion is not an American phenomenon, I would like to introduce some buttons from the set which was designed for the Fantasy Game Convention in Vienna. It is obvious that the undead are deliberately pictured as individual cute characters, with funny captions. One of the characters used to be Mozart, the caption reads "Vienna's zombies are classic" (Fig. 18). No gore is present on this particular design; the Mozart zombie has smooth green skin and bright blue eyes, perhaps more reminiscent of an alien. He's holding what appears to be a can of soda with his picture on it - basically, the only reason it can be deduced that he is in fact a zombie is the caption.



Fig. 18: Mozart Zombie



Fig. 19: Lonely Zombie

In contrast, many of the other buttons feature extensive gore; however, it is always mediated by either the caption or the representation of the featured zombie. For instance, one button reads: “Wanna be my friend?,” and shows a rotting little boy crying, with no arms, with the words “Hug me” on his shirt (Fig. 19). The undead in this case is shown as the victim; a lonely child who has trouble fitting in. If there was an actual human child on the button, the image would be considered disturbing and outrageous. However, the fact that it is a drawn zombie elicits the well-known “awww” sound from those looking at it - the ultimate sign of labeling something as cute.

The general popularity of zombies and the desire to display one’s fondness of them goes beyond fashion and involves everyday objects as well. For instance, on the popular website *Think Geek* the selection includes a zombie head cookie jar, a zombie juice water bottle and a glow-in-the-dark zombie mug. Food items, such as zombie sauce or zombie jerky are available as well. Furthermore, several toys are featured, for example the “Dismember-me” plush zombie or the zombie board game *Last Night on Earth*.

What is particularly notable about all the items above, clothes and other objects alike is that they do not reference a specific work of fiction. Thus, the zombie has become a figure in its own right as an object, rather than a fictional character confined to a plot. This form of physical manifestation free of specific textual reference can be employed to make something more appealing to a large audience outside the realm of fiction, just as we have seen in the case of the zombie walks.

11. Why are zombies being subjected to cutefication?

11.1 “They’re us; that’s all.”

As we have seen in several examples, the line between human and zombie is not always clear. The monstrosity of the creatures has been and continues to be compromised, turning them more into humans or pets than beasts. One of the possible explanations for this phenomenon might stem from the similarities found between humans and zombies - at least on the level of appearance. There are several examples of living people being

misidentified as zombies (*Night of the Living Dead*) as well as the other way around (*Shaun of the Dead*). The scene involving Shaun's failure to recognize the changed world around him while taking a walk surrounded by zombies reinforces this view.

As discussed in chapter 7.2.4, *Shaun of the Dead* may be argued to invoke a certain level of dread through depicting some of the living characters as similar to zombies. If the notion of the modern lifestyle is applied to a certain segment of the Western society, the process of cutefication may be viewed as reflecting the process of modernization to some extent – which poses the question whether it is the zombies in fiction that are becoming human, or are humans becoming more like zombies? Thus, it can be argued that cutefication is the result of the unease in the audience evoked by the qualities modern zombies and modern humans share.

11.2 Changing preferences of dread

As illustrated above, the remorseless nature of zombies within horror fiction has proven to be outdated for the audience of today. The “love triumphs over all” principle can be frequently observed in post-modern zombie fiction despite lacking as a main element in modern zombie works (*Fido*, *Shaun of the Dead*). This may be connected to social anxieties.

As discussed in chapter 3, zombies have a long-standing tradition of mirroring the social issues of their time. In this context, cutefication may be viewed as a process reflecting the changing preferences of dread stemming from social anxieties. However, while some of these works retain elements of horror, their primary goal in general is entertainment, as opposed to invoking terror.

11.2.1 Monsters are our friends

It may be argued that zombie fiction indirectly reflects the fear of people rather than monsters. In contemporary horror films without comic aspects, the protagonists frequently are human and it is hard to find recently released successful movies which feature monsters in the classic sense.

Current horror movies tend to focus on the inherent evil qualities of people when confronted with other cultures or ways of life (*Straw Dogs*, *The Woman*). Other popular threats depicted in fiction are related to ecological issues; for instance, Nature (*The Happening*), and various forms of biohorror (*The Crazies*, *Contagion*). These are just some

examples to illustrate a point; spatial restrictions do not allow for further elaborations. However, the tendency is clear: viewers choose to be afraid of realistic scenarios and villains. Phillips explains this trend as follows: “[by] the 90s, reality seemed to be slipping the form of mediated fiction. Reality, in other words, just wasn’t what it used to be, and so, the American horror film was reconfigured to address the broader anxieties of a culture that found it increasingly difficult to differentiate realistic cinema from cinematic reality” (164).

On one hand, this points to the role of post-modern zombies reflecting the general social anxiety of being frightened by other people as opposed to fictional creatures. Even though humans as villains have been featured in horror movies since the birth of cinema, as evidenced by the horror film *The Story of the Kelly Gang* - “considered the first full-length feature film ever made” (imdb.com); monsters have been neglected in the 21st century and their place in horror fiction was overtaken by realistic notions and characters.

11.2.2 Globalization

Even though zombies are no longer a tool of terror, their representation can be assumed to continue reflecting social issues. Thus, the question is raised: which issue is mirrored in post-modern zombie fiction? I would like to argue that it is globalization. Within fiction, zombies are being integrated into society and trained to disregard their own nature in order to blend in (*Fido*, *Shaun of the Dead*). In addition, the process has started the other way around as well, helping humans integrate into a fictional zombie society; for instance, the book “*How to Speak Zombie: A Guide for the Living* demonstrates how to blend in and avoid being eaten while carrying on with everyday activities like ordering a latte from a zombarista and shopping at a zombie-infested mall. This essential guide features an electronic sound module that demonstrates proper zombie pronunciation” (Mockus).

In this sense, the fact that post-modern zombie fiction is predominantly comical reflects a general lack of threat in society’s perceptions. Globalization is a central issue today; yet the nature of this concern is not like those presented earlier, such as war – it does not evoke fear for one’s life. These qualities are imitated in zombie fiction through portraying the integration of zombies as a process which is sometimes difficult, often involves humorous elements and overall as a more civilized choice than annihilation or segregation.

On the other hand, zombie fiction may also be seen as representing globalization sarcastically: it shows the desperate need of society to integrate anyone and anything within its own system of values in order to avoid having to deal with diversity on a deeper level. This interpretation is supported by the lack of equality between zombies and humans even within post-modern works, as well as the fact that in most cases the integration process cannot be complete due to the innate nature of the undead.

12. Conclusion

Zombie fiction is undergoing changes in film, video games and literature as well. I will summarize the characteristics of modern and post-modern zombie fiction derived from these changes respectively. The definitions offered here are by no means universally true; they are primarily based on the works discussed and serve as an illustration of the components involved in the process of cutefication.

Modern zombie fiction retains the traditional element of zombies attacking humans as a central theme. The norms and values of society are generally represented as useless or counter-productive. Hierarchy within the social system is commonly shown to collapse and authority shifts from those who held it before the apocalypse to those who are depicted as pitiless and strong. The audience is never invited to build a personal connection with the undead characters. The termination of zombies is not condemned, except by humans who are unable to accept a loved one's changed status. However, in these cases it is the murder of a human which is opposed, and it stems from the failure to recognize the character as a zombie. The protagonists in modern zombie fiction are often violent and ruthless. The human characters either adapt to the changed situation, or they inevitably die: as quoted earlier, "altruism of any kind is no longer rewarded in horror-fiction" (Crane 12). While this is not the case in horror-comedies, it holds true for the modern works. In film and literature, the ending is generally depicting or foreshadowing a tragic conclusion. These works belong to the horror genre and while some of them have comic elements, they are predominantly scary and not fit for a young audience.

Post-modern zombie fiction may contain examples of compassion towards the undead, exhibited either by the protagonists or by society in general. While in modern works this attitude results in death, here it often serves as a source of humor and does not

always have dire consequences. Even though some works retain the traditional theme of zombies being hunted, in these cases the undead are given a voice (sometimes only figuratively) and the audience may see their side of the story. Due to these factors, the termination of zombies is frequently portrayed as a tragic event in film and literature. In video games, the annihilation of zombies is still a main component, yet the enemies depicted are not characters of horror. The traditional norms of society are not abandoned, rather enforced on the undead or protected against them. Happy endings are frequent, the works are rather humorous than terrifying.

Post-modern zombie characters often have feelings and desires beyond craving human flesh. They are frequently depicted as a misunderstood minority repressed by humans or as pets. Their appearance does not necessarily evoke terror, and if it does, the dread is mediated by the portrayal of their personalities, allowing the audience to create a personal connection to them.

In the course of the 20th century, Haitian zombies gave way to modern zombies, which corresponded to the changing anxieties of the target audience. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the contemporary changes can be explained with the same concept. Consequently, the process of cutefication may be seen as a response to the target audience's changing preferences which stem from their fears and worries. It is important to note that the presence of one or more methods of cutefication does not necessarily mark a work as post-modern; for instance, *Return of the Living Dead* is a modern work of zombie fiction featuring post-modern zombie characters. However, every work employing at least one method promotes the perception of zombies as a popular character. Contributing to the growing fame of zombies and their depiction as lovable cannot always be found within the same work of fiction, yet it is these two factors combined which led to the unique status the character enjoys today. Thus, we can differentiate between methods of cutefication pertaining to the physical and mental attributes of zombies portrayed directly or indirectly, and methods which promote the character's status in fiction as well as real life.

The direct methods include portraying a zombie as cute through animation, reduced or eliminated gore, and the representation of their thoughts, feelings or wishes. The indirect methods refer to the humans' attitude towards the zombie characters, such as attempted domestication or integration. The methods promoting their status are for

instance featuring zombies predominantly amongst other monsters, or using the character as an ingredient within a work otherwise unrelated to zombie fiction. The latter case is a unique example, insofar that the works feature zombies to achieve popularity, thus promoting the character's popularity further and possibly inspiring more works employing the same method.

After modern zombie fiction post-modern works appeared; scary zombies are being replaced by adorable ones. While within fiction the shift arguable mirrors society's changing preferences of dread as deriving from their fears, in fashion, the presence of zombies signals the awareness of the loss of identity in this increasingly impersonal world. Those wearing zombie fashion are using the very symbol of the absence of individuality to assert it. Watching a zombie movie no longer equals seeing a horror film and playing a video game featuring the undead is not only for adults anymore - the target group is larger than ever. Many authors and dedicated fans support the sluggish advancement of zombies within fiction; yet the character proves to be as dynamic as the ever-changing audience. They're us; that's all.

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14. Appendix

14.1 Summary

This diploma paper explores the shifting representations of the character of the zombie within fiction. I intend to show that zombies are no longer a tool of terror and find out the possible reasons for this alteration. The main focus of this thesis is the shift from modern to post-modern zombies and works of fiction. There are examples analyzed from the fields of film, video games and literature in order to illustrate the development which led to the zombies' current status. I will refer to this change as "cutefication", and explore the methods employed within this process.

The first part introduces the origins of zombies in Haiti and the most influential non-fiction accounts on the subject during the early twentieth century. This is followed by an overview of the development of the modern zombie. Subsequently a description of the character is offered as it appears in modern fiction, complete with a discussion of different types of modern zombies as well as the differing and universal attributes based on a selection of sources. I then explore the reasons why modern zombies evoke terror in the audience on different levels.

The changes implemented on the character of the zombie and on works of zombie fiction can be shown to correspond to the social anxieties of the audience. To support this theory, I am introducing four prominent films from different eras and analyze them in the light of the troubling issues of their times respectively.

An analysis of post-modern works employing some form of cutefication follows. The first field to be examined is films, as this is arguably the most popular medium of zombie fiction. Four films from different countries are presented and analyzed, thus illustrating the independence of post-modern works from Hollywood. I then introduce examples from the fields of video games and literature, tracing the shift of representation chronologically in all fields. I also examine the role of zombies outside of fiction through the relevant trends of popular culture, such as zombie walks and fashion. Finally, I present several possible explanations for the process of cutefication and pinpoint the different methods employed which contribute to today's status of zombies as beloved.

14.2 Zusammenfassung

In dieser Diplomarbeit wird die Umwandlung der Charakterdarstellung von Zombies in der Literatur behandelt. Ich beabsichtige zu zeigen, dass Zombies kein Werkzeug des Schreckens mehr sind und suche nach den möglichen Ursachen für diese Verwandlung. Der Fokus liegt im Wechsel vom modernen zum post-modernen Zombie und ebenso dieser Wechsel in der Literatur. Weiters bringe ich Beispiele aus den Bereichen Film, Videospiele und Literatur, um die Entwicklung, die zum heutigen Status von Zombies führte, zu verdeutlichen. Die Veränderung bezeichne ich als „Verniedlichung“ und ich erkunde die Methoden, die in diesem Prozess vorzufinden sind.

Der erste Teil leitet mit der Herkunft von Zombies in Haiti und den grundlegenden Tatsachenberichten zu diesem Thema während des frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts ein. Darauf folgt ein Überblick über die Entwicklung des modernen Zombies. Ich biete eine Charakterbeschreibung von Zombies in der modernen Literatur an; ebenso eine Diskussion über die verschiedenen Arten von modernen Zombies und auch eine Aufstellung über die Gemeinsamkeiten, aber auch Unterschiede, je nach Quelle. Weiters betrachte ich, warum moderne Zombies Angst und Schrecken in den verschiedensten Stadien beim Publikum auslösen.

Ich zeige, dass die Veränderungen, die der Charakter eines Zombies erfahren hat und die in der Zombie-Literatur vorkommen, mit den sozialen Ängsten des Publikums korrelieren. Als Unterstützung dieser These analysiere ich vier Filme aus verschiedenen Epochen und die Probleme, die die Gesellschaft zu jeweiligen Zeitpunkt hatte.

Darauf folgt eine Analyse von post-modernen Werken betreffend der Überlegung der Verniedlichung. Als ersten Punkt betrachte ich Filme genauer, da es sich hier um das populärste Medium von Zombie-Fiktion handelt. Ich behandle vier Filme aus verschiedenen Ländern, um die Unabhängigkeit der post-modernen Werke von Hollywood zu illustrieren. Darauf folgend analysiere ich beispielhaft Videospiele und Literatur, wobei ich jeweils den Ablauf der Veränderung des Charakters chronologisch zeige. Daraufhin betrachte ich auch die Rolle von Zombies außerhalb der Fiktion im Umfeld von Trends in der Populärkultur, wie z. B. Zombie-Walks und Mode.

14.3 Curriculum Vitae

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