The Living Dead Austen: Exploring the Zombie Trope in American Culture, Film, and Literature

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The Living Dead Austen: Exploring the Zombie Trope in American Culture, Film, and Literature

By

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A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Masters of English

May 2013

College of Humanities
and Social Sciences
Department English

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May 8, 2013
(date)
This thesis explores the origin, rise, and resonance of the zombie trope in American film and literature, focusing on three cinematic stages and culminating in an analysis of Seth Grahame-Smith’s 2009 mash-up novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. While many critics have casually dismissed zombies as a trend, this thesis argues that these creatures reflect a variety of Western fears that have surpassed the obvious association with death and decay. Indeed, as this thesis argues, zombies have come to reflect a myriad of anxieties concerning the gendered and racial Others, as well as consumerism, technology, and even, as will be explored in an analysis of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, marriage.

Support for this argument consists of a number of theorists and critics. First, a historical investigation defines the term “zombie” and explores the zombie’s passage into Western culture, followed by an examination of the creatures’ connection to gothic literature. A review of zombie films beginning in the 1930s and moving into the present demonstrates the evolution of the zombie trope and its symbolic associations. This thesis culminates in an analysis of the function of zombies in a contemporary adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, which includes an inquiry into a variety of reasons for adaptation. The over-arching goal of this thesis serves to demonstrate how the zombie trope provides a commentary on societal concerns that vary with time periods, and invites audiences to consider the diverse perspectives the undead offer.
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A THESIS

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Montclair, NJ

2013
Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to thank everyone who made this thesis project possible. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis director, Dr. Lee Behlman, for his invaluable feedback, editing, time, and resources. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Naomi Liebler and Dr. Patricia Matthew, for all of their constructive criticism and aid in developing my thesis. I appreciate that you all had faith in my choice to work with such an unconventional topic.

I am also indebted to my family and friends who provided unfailing support. My deepest appreciation goes to my husband, Jon, for his loving encouragement and watching countless zombie films with me as part of my research. Thank you to my son, JJ, for providing the drive to undertake this project. Many thanks go to my mother for providing child care and a ready ear during this extensive process.

I also wish to extend a very special thank you to my dear friend, Elyse Cromwell, for her infinite patience and humor during hours of revision, zombie films, and for pressing me forward on this incredible journey.
THE LIVING DEAD AUSTEN

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Introduction

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains is in want of more brains”

-Pride and Prejudice and Zombies

It has also become a truth that audiences exposed to zombies tend to be in want of more zombies. Indeed, the zombie is fast outstripping vampires in popularity in a variety of entertainment forms.¹ The zombie, a figure that provokes primal emotions of extreme horror and panic, is currently found in popular forms as varied as film, literature, video and board games, and “Zombie Runs.”² In 2012, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention got into the action publishing a tongue-in-cheek manual on zombie preparedness. More audiences, including those in scholarly communities are taking notice of the rise of the zombies in popular culture; newspaper articles and television documentaries as well as academic publications on the subject have appeared with more frequency as viewers begin to critically question the meaning behind the monstrous creatures and their cultural significance.³ My interest in the zombie trope came about after reading Seth Grahame-Smith’s 2009 mash-up novel, Pride and Prejudice and

¹ According to Williams, over 400 zombie movies were released between 2000 and 2010. For a detailed list of zombie films from that decade see Williams, M.A. “10 Years of Zombies: Zombies Movie List 2000-2010.” Additionally, according to the documentary Zombies: A Living History (2011), more than half of all zombies films made, were released after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Cooper analyzes how the rise in zombie narratives after this event acts as a projection of American feelings of revenge.

² A “Zombie Run” is a recent phenomenon that is becoming more widespread; it consists of an obstacle course of various lengths where teams of runners attempt to complete the course while being chased and attacked by zombies. Participants can enter the course as a running team or dress up as the flesh-eating creatures. The gathering is similar to flag football in that the runners receive several flags that represent “health.” If the zombies steal all of a runner’s flags, the runner is considered “dead.” For an example of a 2013 zombie run, see: Zombierun.com.

³ See Chretien, Cooper, Posey and Spooner
Zombies. As I began to question the rising fascination with the monstrous creatures, I took note of their seemingly ubiquitous presence in popular culture from bumper stickers and accessories to young adult literature and even children’s picture books.  

Zombies are also appearing in college classrooms. Recent curricula at institutions such as the University of Baltimore, Columbia College of Chicago, and Simpson College of Iowa have included the topic in their course catalogues. Arnold Blumberg, curator of the Geppie Entertainment Museum and professor of “Zombies in Popular Media” at the University of Baltimore, justifies the inclusion of the creatures as a serious addition to cultural studies. Blumberg notes, “zombies are one of the most potent, direct reflections of what we’re thinking moment to moment in our culture” (Childs n.p.). But what are zombies, and where did they come from? Why are they becoming more prevalent in popular entertainment and what deep symbolic resonances do they have that they should no longer be casually dismissed as a mere trend? According to many critics the first “true” zombie story, is the 1932 film *White Zombie*, featuring Bela Lugosi, but the living dead monster has since evolved into a completely different creature. Before turning my attention to the significance of the zombie trope in film and literature in my first chapter, I will first discuss the origins of the term “zombie” and the historical and literary roots that have led to its prominence in popular entertainment.

The modern zombie has roots in African and Haitian religious folklore; however, the notion of the dead returning to life can be found in multiple cultural texts from Greek

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4 Examples of recent zombie-centered children’s literature include *Zombie Love* by Kelly DiPuccio, *Stink and the Midnight Zombie Walk* by Megan McDonald, and the *Zombie Chasers* series by Joseph Kloepfer.
mythology to Arabic, Chinese, Scandinavian and later Western European folklore. One of the oldest existing stories, the epic of *Gilgamesh*, makes reference to a proto-zombie-like creature when Ishtar demands the gatekeeper allow her entrance to the underworld:

If thou openest not the gate to let me enter,  
I will break the door, I will wrench the lock,  
I will smash the door-posts, I will force the doors.  
I will bring up the dead to eat the living.  
And the dead will outnumber the living. (qtd. in Jastrow 453)

Jastrow asserts that this ancient Babylonian excerpt is based on the belief in vampires and other monsters who “as spirits of the dead return to earth to destroy the living” (453). The fear of the living dead and the possibility of their rise and domination has long been part of the human fabric, which has manifested across cultures and eras. Many of these early tales focus on creatures that act out, or are created to enact revenge. As the zombie trope has evolved in modern Western culture, the function of the zombie has changed, and these changes are reflected in film and literature.

The *Oxford American Dictionary* defines the term “zombie” as “a corpse said to be revived by witchcraft, especially in certain African and Caribbean religions.” Informally, the term refers to a person who is or appears to be lifeless, apathetic, or completely unresponsive to his or her surroundings. Ackerman and Gauthier, a professor

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According to *Zombies: A Living History*, the Chinese version of the zombie is called *jiang shi*, a hungry ghost that returns to attack the living, even its own family for not being properly buried. The Arabic version is known as a *ghoul*; the creature is often a woman, and is a person who has fallen from grace, often a prostitute; Folklore dictates that she hide in the desert and call out much like a siren before attacking her victims. In Scandinavia tales were told of an undead Viking called *draugr* which is described as an unstoppable machine. The Western European zombie is known as a *revenant*, a creature that needs to feed on the living. For more information on a variety of cultural zombies, see the documentary *Zombies: A Living History*. 
in microbiology and a senior nurse, respectively, sought to present an updated review of *zombiism* in the early 1990s with a focus on terminology and pharmacology. In their investigation of zombie origins they compiled the definitions of similar terms such as *fumbi, mvumbi*, and *ndzumbi*, which originated in a variety of African cultures mostly found in the Congo area and Gabon. The meanings of these African terms translate into a variety of similar definitions depending on the specific origin such as “spirit,” “cataleptic individual,” “corpse,” “devil,” “body without a soul,” “spirit of a dead person,” and “revenant” (Ackerman and Gauthier 468). According to Ackerman’s and Gauthier’s research, “a likely area of origin [of the term] is the coastal region of West and Central Africa. From there, it was transported to the New World by slaves, apparently with little variation. Thus, the Haitian *zombi* appears to be an immigrant to the West Indies” (489).

According to Robert Voeks’ investigation of the transference of African religious beliefs and medicinal practices to the Americas,

the Roman Catholic Church maintained an implicit policy of tolerance toward pagan rituals and deities that was not shared by the Protestant sects. Converting heathens to the one true religion was best effected not by destroying their icons and suppressing their ceremonies but rather by slowly replacing them with Roman Catholic symbols and rituals. (67)

In this way, the major tenets of African religious lore, including “black magic,”*⁶* survived the trip to the New World. Voek further notes that “the success or failure of slave uprisings influenced the persistence of African magic. Early in the 1790 Haitian revolution, the high priest Boukman carried out voodoo chants and rituals, ostensibly to

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⁶ Voeks defines black magic as magical medicine practiced by African priests. Specific examples outlined by Voeks includes trances, exorcism, and secret concoctions used to control plantation masters (4).
immunize his followers against the white man’s magic. Eventual defeat of the French forces may have permanently fixed the power of Vodoun magico-medicine [and with it zombie folklore] in Haiti” (68). Additionally, it is important to consider the use of plant matter in certain African religious practices, including those said to create “zombies,” as many of the early zombie films follow the ritual formula of transformation. According to Wade Davis, an anthropologist and ethnobotanist, “of the eight species consistently employed in Haitian zombie formulas, all are of African origin, and have long been established in Africa, or have con-generic [sic] equivalents in both regions” (qtd. in Voeks 75).

The zombies were said to be created by a *bokor*, or a type of spiritual sorcerer.⁷ Within Haitian culture, the zombie had many uses; they operated as workers, servants, or helpers to their creator. Specific jobs included working the fields, acting as a messenger, or other menial tasks such as serving guests (Ackerman and Gauthier 483), which is a departure from the revenge motif found in the earlier zombie tales from other cultures. Murphy describes the zombie as “a figure of mourning that incarnates the fear experienced by plantation slaves, that is, the fear of the first modern industrial workers who were stripped of human dignity as they were turned into the instrument of a master’s whim” (48). There is a clear connection between the early Haitian zombie and African slavery. Just as slaves were often viewed as mindless workhorses, the zombie was a controlled hand used to cater to their masters’ whims.

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⁷ See Wade Davis’ work *The Serpent and the Rainbow* for a complete discussion of the biological elements of the substance said to create the Haitian zombie, which is said to include puffer fish toxin, amongst others.
Alongside the broader historical connection to slavery, there was a specific Haitian cultural background, which among other things dictated that a person might be turned into a zombie to keep him or her within socially acceptable boundaries and to protect the community. According to oral tradition, if a slave was found to be considering alerting his white master about a potential uprising, he would be transformed into a zombie by his fellow slaves and kept in a back room to prevent this information from interfering with their plan of escape or mutiny. Once transformed, this person would change drastically. The classic properties of “zombies” are outlined by Ackerman and Gauthier: the person would become emotionally and mentally dead with no will or memory and no recognition of friends or family; their eyes would appear dull, glazed and vacant, and they would speak little or not at all although they could hear; they were good workers who took their orders from their master only, and they were known to move slowly (480-1).

While there are many similarities between Ackerman’s and Gauthier’s description of the Haitian zombie and the modern version, such as the slow shuffling, limited speech and little identification with loved ones, it is also clear that the zombie carries numerous similarities to concepts found in the gothic and horror genres as well, despite having originated outside European influence. The symbolism of the zombie has several similarities to the themes found in classic neo-Gothic novels of the late nineteenth century:

*Jekyll and Hyde* is a classic treatment of the “transformation beast”... as well as a distinctly modern view of humankind’s potentially tragic dual nature. *Dorian*
Gray explores the themes of the doppelganger (the double), and Dr. Moreau is an updating of the mad-scientist theme originated in Frankenstein. (Greenhaven 21)

It seems that the modern zombie figure grew in part out of these novels. As in Jekyll and Hyde, zombies portray our dualistic nature (predatory vs. moral) and our transformation into the ‘beast.’ Zombies also reflect the concept of the double found in Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray; it is debated within numerous zombie films, such as George Romero’s zombie trilogy for example, whether zombies retain a shadow of the human they once were, or if they have become mindless killers. In this uncertainty modern zombie narratives present a moral portrait of humanity, as survivors face the decision whether to attempt to save or cure their infected loved ones or to destroy them, because once transformed they will become avid consumers. This choice to save loved ones rather than protect themselves also leads survivors to turn on each other, and in some cases make the hasty decision to eradicate any threat to continued life- including uninfected members of the group. The mad-scientist theme from Gothic literature is also found in many zombie narratives as an originating cause of the outbreak. That motif has evolved into governmental and corporate madness over time, which is found in the more recent zombie films.

Judith Halbertram discusses the Gothic genre with a focus on Frankenstein and Dracula in her work Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters, noting that

Gothic novels, in fact, thematize the monstrous aspects of both production and consumption- Frankenstein is, after all, an allegory about a production that refuses to submit to its author and Dracula is a novel about an arch-consumer, the vampire, who feeds upon middle-class women and then turns them into vampires
by forcing them to feed upon him. The Gothic, in fact, like the vampire itself, creates a public who consumes monstrosity, who revels in it, and who then surveys its individual members for signs of deviance or monstrosity, excess or violence. (12)

Halberstam's discussion leads us to question in what ways zombie narratives also thematize the monstrous aspects of production and consumption. Modern zombie narratives exploit the man-made disaster, be it war or scientific experiment (production), and the result of this calamity is a horde of flesh-eating zombies (literal consumption). Once the zombie affliction has begun, our cinematic counterparts begin watching others closely for bites, scratches, and signs of infection as they wait for their transformation from human into monster.

Halberstam further notes that the focus of the Gothic genre shifted from "the fear of corrupted aristocracy or clergy, represented by the haunted castle or abbey, to the fear embodied by monstrous bodies," (16) which fits the description of the zombie. As Miller notes, "the zombie is a virtual blank slate, a screen upon which we can project a variety of meanings" (n.p.). As the monsters of our literature and film evolve, they tend to take on symbolic references to the fears of the current time whether it is fear of racial or gendered Others, or even ourselves. Essentially, the zombie draws attention to our fear of death and decay, but as my analysis will demonstrate, these other fears are present just under the surface of such horror stories.

This relation between the Gothic creature and the modern zombie is further supported as Halberstam notes how "Gothic monsters... differ from the monsters that come before the nineteenth century in that the monsters of modernity are characterized by their proximity to humans" (23). Whether one is focusing on the Haitian zombie or the
cinematic zombie, the creatures were originally living human beings, and they continue to function within that society either as a type of slave or as a predator. Additionally, the zombie relates to the classic Gothic monsters as they all fit Halberstam’s definition of the “totalizing monster,” a creature that “threatens to never be vanquished, [who is] immune to temporary restorations of order and peace…[t]he ‘totalizing monster,’ a modern invention, threatens community from all sides and from its very core rather than from a simple outside” (29). Halberstam’s definition seems to align more closely to the modern zombie in that the creatures can infect families and communities and destroy from the inside out, whereas the Haitian zombie was a product of ritual and functioned more as a worker and less as a killer. However, as Graves notes, there are clear differences between monsters as seen in *Frankenstein* and the modern zombie.⁸

In Shelley’s story, the monster has been made by a scientist, Victor Frankenstein, who creates a being that he cannot control. This monstrous semi-human turns out to have incredible strength, and to be extremely dangerous, committing several murders. However, unlike a zombie, Frankenstein’s monster has a heart, and possibly a soul- he needs human company, in particular, he needs a female partner, and is very lonely because he is shunned by humanity and has no companion. (Graves 93)

The zombie, on the other hand, wants for nothing except flesh to consume. This terrifying image raises the question: what is so interesting about the zombie that it so persistently appears in film and literature? Rafferty states that “these alarming entities have fewer obvious attractions [than classic monsters] because, unlike vampires, werewolves, demons, witches, goblins and shape-shifters, zombies can’t plausibly be

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⁸ Frankenstein’s monster can also be interpreted as a zombie-prototype. He is a creature brought back to life from death. Like the modern zombie, he is a slow, shuffling creature, although he lacks the modern zombie’s hunger for human flesh.
endowed with rich, complex inner lives. They don’t even have personalities” (Rafferty n.p.). Moraru insists that the zombie is frightening because these monsters represent the absolutely alien ‘other.’ For Moraru,

Zombies are... our absolute opposite. Not only that, but they are keen on looking absolutely opposed to how we see ourselves as living entities in general and homo sapiens in particular. Preserving just the material veneer of humanness, the zombie is, and insists on appearing to the spectator or reader, as the human in its most de-spiritualized or a-spiritual, reified embodiment: the human as mere embodiment, the human qua body. (107-8)

While Moraru asserts that zombies function as our opposite, more convincing are scholars such as Slavoj Žižek and Halberstam, who claims that the zombie is in actuality a mirror of us, and perhaps that is what is so terrifying yet irresistible to audiences about this creature. Žižek claims that “we all are zombies who are not aware of it, who are self-deceived into perceiving [ourselves] as self-aware” (qtd. in Moraru 119). We are the zombies because our culture has made us lifeless and apathetic. We surround ourselves with technology and material possessions which hold our attention and divert us from reality. And so, it is clear that we are the zombies and the zombies are us. This notion is corroborated by Halberstam, who asserts that

We wear modern monsters like skin, they are us they are on us and in us. Monstrosity no longer coagulates into a specific body, a single face, a unique feature; it is replaced with a banality that fractures resistance because the enemy becomes harder to locate and looks more like the hero. What were monsters are now facets of identity. (163)

Halberstam’s theory is viewable in modern horror films as characters that become infected often hide their affliction, or the transformation is so gradual that it is often difficult to discern when one has crossed over from friend to predatory enemy, an enemy
that is the physical manifestation of current Western fears such as race, scientific experimentation, and consumerism. These anxieties are reflective of the mores of specific time periods and they change depending on significant social and historical events such as civil rights movements and war.

This thesis will explore the development and function of the zombie trope in film and literature. In chapter one, I will examine the evolution of the zombie in film. The reason why I begin here in film is that the idea of the modern zombie really began with film. Although zombies share similarities to the literary Gothic monsters, zombies were virtually absent from literature until the past few decades, with the exception of certain comic book series which were severely censored. I will move through three major phases in zombie film. I will begin with a focus on *White Zombie* (Halperin, 1932), *I Walked with a Zombie* (Tourneur, 1941), and *King of the Zombies* (Yarbrough 1941), and lead up to the second stage with George A. Romero’s 1968 cult classic and defining moment for the modern zombie, *Night of the Living Dead*. A brief examination of post-Romero zombie films including Dan O’Bannon’s 1985 *Return of the Living Dead*, the two versions of *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978 and Snyder, 2004), and AMC’s hit television series *The Walking Dead*, currently in its third season, will follow to address recent developments in the narrative function and symbolic resonances of the modern screen zombie.

A close analysis of these three stages of the zombie on screen will serve to demonstrate how zombie narratives evolve with the times to reflect gender roles and myriad cultural fears. I will demonstrate how as the use of zombies in film progresses,
the fears and social commentary on Western society changes focus from fear of death to concerns such as gendered and racialized Others, scientific experiments, consumerism, and technology.

In chapter two, I will explore zombies in recent literature by focusing on a key work of contemporary zombie fiction, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith (2009). Seemingly, Grahame-Smith chose to adapt a novel that was in public domain for economic reasons, but I ask what is so relevant about Austen and her work that *Pride and Prejudice* was the first choice for contemporary adaptation into this new sub-genre? I will demonstrate how Austen has become a commodity, and in fact a brand name, which has led to numerous adaptations. This is of course by no means the first adaptation of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Many adapters and audiences find the themes of love, social status, and money timeless and thus pertinent to modern readers, and the inclusion of zombies serves not only to update Austen’s romantic comedy by providing action and gore, but also to re-examine major aspects of the original such as gender roles, class distinctions, and marriage.

The exploration of adaptation will lead into a review of the reasons behind the choice of zombie integration and violence into Austen’s Regency romance. This will lead into an analysis of the function of the zombie in this novel as compared with the previously examined films. From this contrast, I explore what the inclusion of zombies does in this novel for contemporary audiences in a third section of this chapter. I investigate the ways this burgeoning sub-genre and integration of horror explains plot elements and changes characters to reflect the cultural values and gender roles on display
in Austen’s nineteenth-century novels and how they remain current in the twenty first century, as well as our current need for stylized violence. Within this section, I will establish how *PPZ*, (as the novel is often called across the internet) with its zombie component, reflects modern gender roles and is a subtle means of satirizing marriage. This adaptation serves as an intensification of Austen’s original satire of “appropriate” marriage and acceptable gender roles. Finally, I will address how the zombie is the physical manifestation of the fear and evils of marriage, a significant divergence from the creatures’ cinematic symbolism.

My exploration of this creature will advance understanding of the zombie trope, its place in popular culture, and its reflection of collective Western fears. This understanding will in due course allow readers to look beyond the mere entertainment factor of Grahame-Smith’s mash-up novel. While book lovers have certainly enjoyed previous works that appropriate characters from *Pride and Prejudice*, the adaptation, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, provokes audiences to consider how these new additions not only change perceptions of characters and add to Austen’s original satirical intentions, but also how the inclusion of zombies serve to make a social commentary not unlike the cinematic zombie narratives.
Chapter One: Zombies on Screen

That horror and film history should go hand-in-hand comes as no surprise; many of the earliest silent-era films were from the horror genre, including *Frankenstein* (1910), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), and *Nosferatu* (1922). Horror films comprise a multi-billion dollar market today, and zombie films in particular have been on the rise these past few decades, with a lifetime total gross profit of over one billion dollars since 1980 (*The Numbers*). A website that tracks gross and average film profits from 1995 to the present, ranks the horror genre at number seven out of fourteen genres (with comedy at number one).9

The zombie genre reflects certain fears, the most visible of which is that of death: as zombies return to life to plague the living, we are reminded of our own mortality. The zombie is a manifestation of the imminence of death, and its active hunt for us, not just a state that we passively enter quietly in our beds at a ripe old age. Yet at a deeper, less visible level, these films contain other more subversive terrors and anxieties that reflect major social and historical events, and therefore these concerns and apprehensions vary with time and history such as war, civil rights, and women’s liberation movements. In

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9 *The Numbers* lists the horror genre at just over $9 billion total gross profit as compared with the comedy genre at over $44 billion total gross profit. Only 329 horror films were released since 1995, as opposed to 1,751 comedy films, which I contend is one reason behind such a shockingly lower rank for this popular type of film, in spite of its growing resurgence. Additionally, horror films tend to be R-rated whereas the majority of comedies receive a PG-13 rating and are thus available to a wider audience market. Based on these two statistics, I assert that horror films would have a much higher ranking if they were considered appropriate for younger viewers and if more had been produced in comparison to other genre types. Perhaps this is the reason for the zombie/horror film to cross-over from R-rated gory mature audience films to animated family-fun movies. For example, *Hotel Transylvania*, a PG-rated computer-graphic film grossed over $346 million worldwide since its opening weekend in September 2012; *Frankenweenie*, another PG-rated computer animated film, grossed over $67 million worldwide since its opening in October 2012, and *ParaNorman* (PG) is a third example of a family-friendly zombie film that grossed over $107 million worldwide since its opening in August 2012. For more information on film profits by genre, sub-genre, and individual films see: *www.the-Numbers.com*
this way, my film analysis will connect with the function of the zombies and societal observations made by Seth Grahame-Smith in his contribution to the zombie genre through the mash-up novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

Before turning my attention to the literary zombie, I will first discuss the rise of the trope on screen. There are three major stages in the progression and development of the zombie film genre: the pre-Romero, Romero, and post-Romero phases. Even now, we are entering a post-post- Romero addition to the zombie narrative, continuing the cultural evolution of the creature. This chapter will explore the three major segments of zombie film and investigate the metaphorical function of the zombie trope and its place in the creature’s development within select films from each section. As I will demonstrate, the zombie film is not just a means for fans to feel frightened of the possibilities of death associated with these monsters, but a way for film makers to provide a social commentary of their times. Specifically I will explore how zombies are reflective of attitudes towards issues such as morality, race, gender, war, technology, consumerism, and capitalism.

~The Early Cinematic Zombie~

Most critics agree that the first real zombie story is Victor Halperin’s 1932 film, *White Zombie*. The plot revolves around Madeline, played by Madge Bellamy, who comes to Haiti to marry her fiancé, Neil, played by John Harron. There she encounters Murder Legendre, played by Bela Lugosi, described by one film critic as “a sonorously satanic zombie master who supplies labour for the local mills...where [his] zombie slaves ceaselessly labour to turn a huge wooden wheel” (Hardy 55). Per the title of this cult
classic, Madeline is also zombified by Charles Beaumont, a wealthy plantation owner, who has fallen in love with Madeline and desires to have her for his own. Beaumont enlists Legrende’s help in her transformation, and uses a powder that can either be drunk in a glass of wine, or in this case, sprinkled onto a flower and inhaled. Shortly after the wedding ceremony, Madeline dies and her body is stolen from its tomb by zombies at Legrende’s direction to be Beaumont’s plaything.

There is little distinction between Madeline and the laboring zombies in this film; here the zombies closely resemble the original from Haitian folklore: they are mindless slaves who cater only to their master, and their function resembles the African slave as they work the mill and passively follow all orders.\(^\text{10}\) Similarly, Madeline is considered an object to be controlled and is expected to obey the orders of her master. In this particular film, Madeline’s role is only to serve her master (Beaumont and later Legrendre) with quiet beauty.

Through Madeline’s transformation, she is equated with the idea of a slave. Once Beaumont has Madeline in his possession he directs her to play the piano while he sits and watches over his prize with satisfaction. He drapes a jewel-encrusted necklace around her throat, dressing her up as one would a doll, while she continues to entertain him. During a conversation between Beaumont and Legrendre about Madeline, she is referred to as a “lovely flower;” she is not portrayed as a person, but rather a delicate blossom- an object meant to be visually pleasing, which does not possess intelligence or

\(^{10}\) Phil Hardy, however, also interprets this film as a comment on “American isolationist fears during the Depression, with Lugosi as an archetypal symbol of decadent Europe determined to enslave the unwary” (55). As I noted earlier, zombies functions within their respective narratives as a tabula rasa, which allows for a variety of projections of fear and interpretations which change depending on time frame.
the ability to speak. Once Legendre has decided to take Madeline for his own, he expects her to sit in long gossamer gowns in her dressing room while maids brush her hair and continue to beautify her. The zombification of Madeline is appropriate for the times because the prevailing perception was that woman was not equipped to say anything worth the attention of the patriarchal societal system, and zombies are bereft of the ability of speech. It is not until Legendre’s death at the end of the film that the spell is broken and Madeline regains her ability to speak, although she says nothing other than the name of her fiancé. This ending firmly supports that a wife is essentially a zombie; there is little difference in Madeline when under the spell and when she resumes her position as wife. The film’s conclusion further solidifies the established notion of a woman’s role during the time period.

Two films released in 1941, *I Walked with a Zombie,* directed by Jaques Tourneur, and *King of the Zombies,* directed by Jean Yarbrough, also follow the original Haitian zombie prescription of transformation via ritual enchantment. Both films being set in the Caribbean, black slaves are not only present but well aware of the transformations that are taking place. These films also feature a sorcerer or “mad” scientist (reminiscent of the previously outlined Gothic literary tradition) who use the zombies for their own sinister aims, which is similar to the bokor creation formula stemming from Haitian beliefs, which serves to demonstrate the impact of Gothic literature and the zombie origins on these early films.

*I Walked with a Zombie* borrows certain elements from Brontë’s gothic-inflected novel *Jane Eyre.* In the film, a young nurse named Betsy is hired as a caregiver for Paul
Holland’s wife, Jessica, at their home in the West Indies. Supposedly, Jessica’s failing mental state has been caused by a rare tropical fever and she screams in the night and wanders around the compound in a white, flowing dress, much to the fright of Betsy. The audience later finds that Jessica was zombified by her mother-in-law because Jessica had fallen in love with another man. Jessica’s mother-in-law made the moral decision to transform her daughter-in-law to keep her son’s marriage intact. This reason for zombification is similar to one seen before in Haitian folklore: to keep one in line with acceptable social boundaries— in this case to keep Jessica faithful to her husband. Jessica’s transformation continues to support the attitudes governing society; namely that a woman’s place is with her husband, and that drastic measures will be taken to keep woman in her rightful submissive position. The fact that it is a woman (Jessica’s mother-in-law), and not a man who has initiated this transformation demonstrates that both sexes were shaped by this prevailing cultural attitude towards female roles. Had Jessica’s husband acted as the instigator of her transformation, viewers would be more able to express their outrage at Jessica’s suppression, but because a woman carried out the role of moral supervisor, it leads audiences to be more accepting with the actions taken to ensure Jessica’s proper fidelity as a wife to her husband.

A second film from the decade focuses less on gender and marriage issues and comments more on race and American patriotism through the inclusion of zombies. In *King of the Zombies*, three men, a pilot named Mac, his passenger, Bill, and the passenger’s African-American manservant, Jeff, crash-land on an island. They are taken
in by Doctor Sangre,\textsuperscript{11} but the manservant, an over-the-top caricature of the superstitious, comedic sidekick becomes convinced that the house is filled with zombies. Throughout the early part of their stay, the manservant rolls his eyes absurdly in his head and jumps around comically with fear of the zombies he has seen sputtering in a completely stereotypical manner, as his white companions dismiss his fear as the irrational antics of an unintelligent servant who should not be taken seriously. However, they soon learn that the doctor is really a foreign spy who is attempting to gather intelligence from a stranded United States Admiral on the island, and Jeff was right all along to be suspicious of the ominous island. During their discovery, the zombies turn on their master (the doctor) and destroy him due to the actions of Bill, who receives all the glory for the enemy’s defeat.

That the manservant’s reactions to the zombies are so comical and ignored by his white cohorts expresses white cliché attitudes towards blacks at the time. In this case blacks are portrayed through the manservant as extremely gullible and irrational, and Jeff is only given a second thought when a white character shows interest in his babbling:

JEFF. (panicked) Mr. Bill! Mr. Bill! Mr. Bill!
BILL. What’s the matter, Jeff?
JEFF. I seen ‘em! I seen ‘em!
BILL. You saw what?
JEFF. They all over the place! They everywhere!
BILL (incredulously) What’s everywhere?
MAC. What’s he talking about?

\textsuperscript{11} It is important to note the choice of Dr. Sangre’s name, which is Spanish for “blood,” and thus carries a sinister connotation.
JEFF. Why, zombies! Oh, Mr. Bill, let’s get outta here! Why this place is a walking cemetery!

BILL. Well, I’m afraid that Jeff has been seeing things.

DR. SANGRE. Shall we investigate?

BILL. Well, it sounds a little crazy, but it’s okay with me I guess.

The manservant’s stunted height in comparison to his white companions (including the doctor) further demonstrates the white conception that blacks were socially inferior to whites. Additionally, the manservant is rarely addressed but rather as “you” in the haughty and condescending manner that one would use to speak to a child. Conversely, the manservant refers to his employer as “Mr. Bill,” showing deference to his white boss and reinforcing the notion of black inferiority. When they first arrive on the island and are greeted by Dr. Sangre, Mac and Bill are immediately offered rooms, whereas Jeff is slighted.

JEFF. Excuse me Mr. Doctor, but didn’t you forget something?

DR. SANGRE. (abruptly) I think not.

JEFF. No?

DR. SANGRE. (firmly) No.

JEFF. But what about me?

DR. SANGRE. (with menace) You will be taken care of.

Later in the film, Jeff is zombified by Doctor Sangre. He shuffles into line with the other black slave-like zombies. As the camera pans down the line, they all stare blankly ahead, with their eyes wide-open and unblinking, waiting passively for their next
order. Jeff then leads them into the servants’ kitchen for dinner. Unlike the other
zombies in the doctor’s employ, Jeff is able to speak. He tells one of the doctor’s
household servants that he has become part of the “club” and “as a member of the
company I’s has special privileges,” such as being fed. Jeff then directs the other
zombies to sit and eat. This furthers the connection between the early cinematic zombie
and the African slave: if a slave works diligently, he will be rewarded. When questioned
further by the housemaid, Jeff replies, “I have seen nothing. I know nothing. I don’t
even know my name.” This dialogue furthers the notion that blacks were often viewed as
empty vessels, and thought to be incapable of advanced intelligence.

Jeff is a unique character because he is not fully a part or not allowed entrance
into the two worlds in which he exists. By that I mean that Jeff is living in the white
world, but not socially accepted as an equal, nor is he part of or familiar with his exotic
African roots. Yet, Jeff is able to lead the “lower” zombies of the household as well as
able to speak. Jeff’s status as an outsider serves to place the characters into a hierarchical
pyramid: the zombies are placed at the bottom, the next level is filled by the black slaves
and servants, and the third level and top levels are comprised of the white characters. The
“good guys,” mainly Mr. Bill and Mac, are positioned at the top of the social hierarchy
and Doctor Sangre is below them. Jeff, as an interloper in both worlds, fits below the
white characters yet above his fellow black people. He is docile and obedient to all of the
white characters throughout the film- even when he is uncomfortable with his orders.
When attempting to rescue the zombified Mac from Sangre’s evil scheme, Jeff has
reservations:
JEFF. Mr. Bill, do’s we have to do this?

BILL. (abruptly) Quiet, Jeff!

JEFF. (meekly) I ain’t said a word.

What this pyramid illustrates is that even the European enemy is considered superior to the black population and continues to support racial and social attitudes of the times.

These early zombie films of the 1930s and 1940s reflect the Western fears of adultery and the breakdown of the happy marital unit, and truly serve to reflect these many and often conflicting cultural values during the 1940s. Through the use of zombies, these three films also touch on aspects of gender, race, and characters’ moral decisions, all of which evolve in the later films. These areas, as I will later discuss, can be connected to major themes in Austen’s novel as well, which perhaps explains Grahame-Smith’s decision to incorporate the zombie trope.

~Romero’s Modern Zombie~

The defining moment in zombie filmmaking came two decades later with the release of George A. Romero’s Night of the Living Dead. Graves explores how Romero was heavily influenced by zombie literature such as H.G. Wells’ The Shape of Things to Come (1933), which inspired a film adaptation, Things to Come. In Wells’ novel, there is an outbreak called the ‘wandering sickness’ that transforms people into a zombie-like

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12 It should also be noted that King of the Zombies mirrors the American fear of European counterintelligence, a fear that is overcome through the zombie-led destruction of the doctor. In this case the zombies may be reflective of the U.S. military defeating the enemy, as the film depicts a band of zombies (including the zombified pilot) marching towards Doctor Sangre. The formation of zombies pushes back the enemy line until the doctor falls into a fire and burns to death, releasing all those under his spell. This plot reflects American sentiments towards World War II, and specifically Germany. Before the plane crashes on the island, German is heard over the radio speaker, and Dr. Sangre introduces himself as from Vienna, Austria. From this introduction is it deduced that the doctor has ties to Germany and his death is representative of American emotions towards the War.
state. The shuffling ghouls in Romero’s film play off of that image, but diverge from the Haitian zombie trope that was previously featured in cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. The factor leading to the creation of the creatures also changes; although the reason for the outbreak is never specified in the film, it is clear that it is not a product of voodoo ritual. It is suggested that a NASA satellite was leaking radiation, which caused the strange occurrence, a subtle comment on the potential evils associated with the U.S. Cold War-era harnessing of technology.

Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend* (1954) also played a major role in shaping the Romero zombie. Matheson’s story revolves around a single hero who struggles against a type of vampire creature. They are flesh-eating monsters who are extremely aggressive. This inspiration led to the major change from Haitian to modern zombie: the need to consume human flesh. In previous zombie narratives, the zombies could be violent at their master’s directive, but mostly they embodied the description provided earlier by Ackerman and Gauthier as found in the early films: they were for the most part passive workers, or spiritless women to be bent to the powerful male’s will. Romero has commented on how “my script [for Night of the Living Dead] grew out of a short story I had written, which was basically a rip-off of the Richard Matheson novel…I used zombies instead of vampires; I always thought that zombies were a sort of blue-collar, working class monster that might show up in anybody’s backyard” (qtd. in Graves 108). This notion of how the zombies might appear in our most private of spaces aligns well with Halberstam’s discussion of the Gothic monster and its ever-nearing presence.
The plot of Romero's classic film revolves around the scenario of a zombie outbreak. It is during this outbreak that a ragtag group barricade themselves in an old house in a rural Pennsylvania town. The group consists of pretty young Barbara, a white girl, who remains comatose for most of the film after her brother Johnny is killed early on by one of Romero's ghoulish creatures; Ben, a strong, young black man, who takes charge of boarding up the house; the Coopers, a white family of three; and a white teen-aged couple. As the survivors attempt to deal with this unexplainable phenomenon, they fail to work together, which perhaps brings about their doom. There are several gruesome moments in the film, such as when one of the members of the group, the Coopers' young daughter, falls victim to the outbreak and viciously and brutally murders her mother, who of course later return from the dead. Perhaps the most terrifying idea behind the film is that no one of the group survives. Most of the group is killed by the ghouls surrounding the house and at the end Ben is killed by a group of police officers who are sweeping the area to wipe out the menace.

As with the early films, Romero's Night touches on gender, race and morality. The female characters are weak and dependent on the male characters. In the beginning of the film, Barbara's brother, Johnny, is attacked and killed. The zombie chases Barbara out of the cemetery to an isolated house. During the chase scene, Barbara is the epitome of the stock female character associated with classic horror films. She keeps looking back as she runs; she falls; she throws herself against the house in despair with a wild look of terror on her face. Once Barbara has witnessed the death of her brother, she spends the majority of the film silent, unresponsive, and unhelpful- it is up to the men to secure the house and fight off the menace. These scenes of a zombie-like Barbara point
to the prevailing notion that women were feeble, dependent of males, and unable to deal with trauma events, as is also demonstrated by Mrs. Cooper.

The moral decisions in the film occur when the survivors must decide between life and their loved ones. Mrs. Cooper, as already mentioned, cannot bring herself to harm her daughter, a choice that leads to her own brutal death. Additionally, the group of police makes the decision to kill the ghouls, who look human, by viciously shooting them in the head. The end of the film features screen shots of meat hooks, suggesting further violence against what were once innocent, everyday people. Race comes into play as there is only one black character. Ben is the tragic hero of the film, who fights for survival, only to be gunned down by the very police who are supposed to be saving the survivors by eliminating the threat to a safe society.

The film is thought by many to strongly reflect cultural anxieties of the 1960s. Zachary Graves, author of a comprehensive handbook on all things zombies from voodoo origins to horror films discusses how critics noted that the ending of the film, in which the hero dies, might have been a comment on the assassination of black leaders such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, while the way in which Ben dies- tragically, and unfairly, killed by a redneck posse- mimicked the lynchings of black men that were still taking place in the South at that period. (121)

What the film seems to be saying is that Ben (representative of black culture) can overcome almost anything, even survive the zombie menace. He becomes a leader and takes action by securing the house, formulating plans, and directing other survivors in the group, but he cannot survive white racist tendencies. In the final scene of the film, Ben is the lone survivor. He hears the police approaching in the distance as they sweep the area
for any remaining threats. Ben moves slowly and quietly, hesitating to show himself to his “saviors.” The police see movement within the house and shoot Ben in the head, equating him with the ghouls. For the white police band, Ben is nothing to them; he is just one more inconvenience to be “taken care of.” In this way, Night comments on the dominant racist tendencies occurring in the United States during this time. However, another reading of Ben shows his brusque and violent nature. He is abrupt with Barbara during several scenes in the film, remaining unsympathetic to her loss. Similarly, Ben acts with violence towards Mr. Cooper over a disagreement whether to remain in the living room or retreat to the basement. In the ensuing struggle, Mr. Cooper is stabbed, and he withdraws to the cellar to die and return to life.

Keeping in mind that zombies allow for multiple interpretations, the notion that the film reflects attitudes towards the violent Vietnam War have also been entertained by critics. Eliot Stein, writing for the “Village Voice,” notes how “This was middle America at war, and the zombie carnage seemed a grotesque echo of the conflict then raging in Vietnam” (qtd. in Graves 121). Romero’s cinematographic style can also be interpreted as an evocation of the Vietnam War. Film critic Sumiko Hagashi notes how “the final sequence of the film, whose grainy black and white photography aptly recalls newsreels, begins with a shot of a helicopter, that quintessential symbol of the Vietnam War, as it descends from the sky during the concluding search and destroy mission against the ghouls” (183). While the credits of the film feature static-filled conversation as though spoken through walkie-talkies, which lends credibility to this reading of the film, the plot line and Ben’s death supports the racial commentary interpretation and is perhaps a more obvious impression that is not lost on younger audiences even thirty years
after the film’s release. For young viewers born after the Vietnam War, the exposure to warfare is presented in full color and sound found in not only news reports, but graphic video games with updated weapons, visuals, and sound that was absent from Romero’s film.

The creatures in Romero’s disturbing film differed greatly from the Haitian zombie found in films of the 1930s and '40s. The description of the zombie had evolved. First, it was almost impossible to kill; in the film, news casts warn viewers that the only surefire way to kill the creatures was to destroy the brain, an action that has remained in modern zombie film, and is often done through decapitation.13 Second, their only fear is of fire; Ben and the group set a chair alight and use it to drive away the monsters as they attempt to retrieve gas for their only vehicle. Furthermore, they were now sentient. Providing the zombies with emotions, in this case fear, was new to the description of the creature. In the previous films the zombies felt nothing as they were completely controlled by their master and existed in a trance-like state, and while the majority of modern zombie flicks feature emotionless zombies, that is also beginning to change.14

Perhaps the most frightening, and certainly the most recognized description of the modern zombies is their infectious bite and desire for consuming human flesh. Cannibalism is viewed by many cultures as the ultimate depravity;15 some cultures

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13 Defeating the enemy through means of decapitation is not a new notion. This theme of decapitation can be found in mythological tales such Perseus and Medusa, Biblical figures such as John the Baptist and several saints, and Medieval romances such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.
14 Warm Bodies (2013) features zombies who feel a variety of very positive human emotions from hope to love, which eventually leads to their cure.
15 The serial killer who inspired so much fear in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Jeffrey Dahmer, not only ate his victims, he also tried to create his own zombies by striking the skulls with a spike and pouring acid into the cranium.
believe there is no finer way to punish your enemies than by eating their heart. While many cultures feel revulsion at the thought of eating fellow human flesh, ritual cannibalism still occurs in New Guinea. It was discovered that certain tribes that practiced cannibalism developed *kuru*, a disease that came from eating brains infected with prions, a type of infection that can lead to illnesses such as Mad Cow disease. The prions leave the infected in a helpless zombie-like state with symptoms such as jerks and confusion (*Zombies: A Living History*). This data is terrifying because it leads one to wonder if something like a zombie apocalypse could indeed occur and certainly reflects our fears of death.

The symbolic resonance of the zombie also changes in Romero’s horror flick and represents different fears that reflect modern anxieties. Specifically, *Night* can be viewed as a comment on capitalistic greed. Graves asserts that

One cannot help but see the Romero zombie presented in *Night of the Living Dead* as a caricature of the greedy American capitalist, whether business man or consumer, destroying its victims across the globe, eating them up in a never-ending quest for greater consumption and eventual world domination. (125)

Romero’s zombies are indeed caricatures of capitalists represented by what were once normal people; they are men and women presented in a variety of average clothing as they attempt to break into the house and consume the survivors. Perhaps what is worrisome about this notion is that the film lacks closure. When the credits begin, the audience is left knowing that the police have not completely finished their extermination of the (capitalistic) threat- they are still searching for any stray ghouls who might return to attack and devour.
This interpretation also refers back to Halberstam’s discussion of production and consumption found in the classic novels of the Gothic genre. However, other fears may also be addressed by Romero’s film, primarily the fear of infection, seclusion, and the evil intentions of those around us. Much like a viral epidemic, the zombie outbreak affects the young and the old. What is chilling about a zombie outbreak is that anyone can become infected, and it could strike at any time, as demonstrated in a multitude of zombie narratives, including *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. In *Night of the Living Dead*, the outbreak leads to the groups’ alienation from the outside world where they must learn to work with each other or descend into chaos. Unfortunately for the survivors, unresolved tensions and arguments lead to their doom.

~In Romero’s Wake~

As other film makers were inspired by Romero’s unique take on the ghoulish creatures to create their own zombie films, plots reflected other growing fears and the zombies themselves changed to reflect everyday Western life, even within Romero’s own sequels. *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), remade by Zach Snyder in 2004, reflects our obsession with material goods as the characters barricade themselves from the zombie menace in a shopping mall. According to Amanda Fortini

it was in the late 1970s and 1980s that consumer spending began to truly surge, as lower- and middle-income Americans gained greater access to consumer credit and home equity...by the mid 2000s, the savings rate had dipped as low as 1.5

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16 While not an American filmmaker, Lucio Fulci’s *Zombi 2* is worth mentioning as the Italian director is often referred to as the Godfather of Gore, and his own violent contribution to the zombie genre is often touted as a European sequel to Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*. 
percent, and low-interest adjustable-rate mortgages persuaded people to buy McMansions [and a wealth of other goods] that they couldn’t afford. (174) Romero’s film acts as a comment on American consumerism, a still-prevalent issue reflected in Synder’s remake over two decades later, as both films present characters with access to all of the department stores without consequence. Unfortunately, the acquisition of wealth and material items is useless and meaningless during a zombie apocalypse.

Romero’s film depicts the survival of four people in the wake of a zombie outbreak. Steven, a pilot, flees the dangerous Philadelphia metropolis with his girlfriend, Fran, and two military officers, Roger and Peter. As they desperately look for fuel and supplies, they land on the roof of a shopping mall. They soon learn that the mall is overrun inexplicably with the living dead. Fran questions why the zombies would come to a shopping mall. Steven replies that is must be “some kind of instinct; memory. What they used to do. This was an important place in their lives.” The zombies are portrayed rather comically as they shuffle around the department stores. Circus-type music plays in the background as a montage shows zombies falling down elevators and wander through the stores. From these scenes it is clear that there is little difference between the mindless zombies and American shoppers, and Romero’s film comments on the absurdity of our obsession with material goods.

This theme is further explored as the four survivors clean out the mall to make a safe-haven for themselves. They use terms and phrases such as “goldmine,” “keys to the kingdom,” and “it’s Christmastime down there” when describing the mall and the allure of all the goods open to them. Only Fran is disconcerted with the males’ attitude as she
observes how “you’re all hypnotized by this place, all of you! It’s so bright and neatly wrapped for you- don’t you see that it’s a prison too?” Even so, Fran joins in with her fellow survivors in taking advantage of free clothing, sporting goods, candy and the like. Roger and Peter even raid the cash registers despite its uselessness because, as Peter says, “you never know.” As they become used to their new “home” they settle into a routine not unlike the one they may have known before: They play racquetball and go ice skating; they play videogames and give each other haircuts; they have romantic dinners and garden; they go “food shopping” in the food court and bring it back to the display rooms that they have chosen as their living quarters. They effectively turn the mall into their home, and towards the end of the film, they end up fortifying their home against other people, rather than the hungry hordes roaming the parking lots, as they attempt to protect their “stuff.”

In Snyder’s remake there is a montage of scenes depicting the survivors taking advantage of all that the mall has to offer as well. Some are enticed by the jewelry, shoes and clothing; others by fitness and sporting goods or games; they ride bikes through the empty halls, play golf, and chess, watch movies, work out, and have sex. For a while, life goes on as it ever has. One screen shot depicts Steven, one of the survivors, driving golf balls off of the roof while in the background a spray-painted in large black letters, reads “HELP! Alive inside.” Despite their perilous plight, Steven has become accustomed to the surrounding zombie horde and is oblivious to the desperate message. By surrounding themselves with material possessions and playing with all of the accessories and equipment that is suddenly available to them, it appears that they attempt to try to ignore or forget the harsh reality that they now face. Both of these films seem to be making the
statement that as long as we have our ‘stuff’ to keep us diverted, we will not be bothered by what is going on in the world— even a zombie apocalypse. These films demonstrate how the zombie trope acts as a didactic projection of concerns and anxieties our society faces at any given time.

It is also important to note the soundtrack playing during Snyder’s montage because it lends further satirical commentary. “Down with the Sickness,” originally a heavy metal piece by Disturbed, has been remixed into a cheery, jazz-infused, lounge-act version performed by Richard Cheese. The lyrics read in part:

Get up, come on get down with the sickness!
Madness is the gift that has been given to me.
I can see inside you, the sickness is rising,
It seems that all that was good has died
Oh, no. The world is a scary place
Now that you’ve woken up the demon in me.

Through the use of these lyrics, Snyder’s *Dawn of the Dead* posits that the “sickness” is not the debilitating plague that threatens our existence, but rather our “demon,” that is, our continued obsession with trivial amusements overtaking our lifestyles and becoming essential to our happiness. The positive and upbeat instrumentals that accompany this version serve to strengthen the satirical commentary made by Snyder. Ving Rhames’ character notes to a fellow survivor that “some things are worse than dying and one of them is waiting here to die.” As the survivors try to maintain a measure of their previous lives by filling the void with material objects and mindless activities, they slowly become zombie-like in their repetitious routine in both the Romero and Snyder versions. As Allan Nail, a teacher of a zombie course for high school students notes, “zombies are
people and represent the potential of zombie characteristics in everyone, which is simultaneously scary and revealing” (53). By becoming a zombie horde, this film supports Halberstam’s argument that “they are us and we are them.” In Romero’s film, Peter asserts that the zombies “are us. That’s all. There’s no more room in hell. When there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth.”

This notion of survivors ignoring reality can be seen in a variety of other zombie narratives. For example, in AMC’s *The Walking Dead*, a whole town of survivors has walled off their territory from the “walkers” and inside they feel cozy and safe enough to have outdoor picnics, resume school, and go about business as usual. In the 2011 Spanish film *Juan de los Muertos* (Juan of the Dead), directed by Alejandro Brugués, Juan, a middle aged fisherman living in Havana, literally goes about “business” as he capitalizes on the outbreak by offering to kill survivors’ loved ones- for a fee. The fee is dependent and rated on the number of zombies to be killed and the job’s level of difficulty.

This plot line connects with the consumerist commentary from *Dawn of the Dead*. As *Juan* progresses, a montage shows the phone continually ringing and the surviving group cashes in on the catastrophe: “Juan of the Dead, we kill your beloved ones. How can I help you?” Juan appears so business-like and detached from his dangerous surroundings, much like many other groups from aforementioned films. As time passes, Juan and his “employees” are shown walking down the street without fear or nervousness as they have become acclimated to their situation. Again, these films make the comment that we can get used to any disaster- as long as we can continue certain aspects of our
lives such as raking in a profit and indulging in recreation and material goods. In an interview with John Ary of Aïn’t It Cool TV, Brugués, asserts of his film, “If you love something, you have to fight for it.” The truth of Brugués’ statement is reflected in a multitude of other zombie flicks. Based on these films, what we tend to love and feel is worth fighting for appears to be a materialistic, capitalist society.

Like his predecessor Romero, Zach Snyder also further transformed the zombies in his version of Dawn; no longer were they the shuffling mindless creatures of the 1940s or even Romero’s 1960s era. Now they had speed at their disposal to chase down their victims. This evolution of the zombie has also been used in Boyle’s 28 Days Later (2002) its sequel 28 Weeks Later (2007), the Resident Evil series, and Day of the Dead (Romero, 2008), which featured zombies who could crawl across ceilings at terrifying speeds. Juan de los Muertos addresses this change by questioning why some are fast and some are slow. Unfortunately for the viewers, the survivors have no satisfactory answer to the question, but this film is the first time the question is raised for discussion. I see this change as a reflection of our current fast-paced lifestyle, and our need for speed that consumes our lives, and us, as found in the ever-rapidly increasing technology and hurried work schedule, which while embraced as necessary by many, may also cause anxiety and nostalgia for simpler times.

Additionally, in recent zombie films, the number of the enemy has grown. In Romero’s Night, the survivors only had to deal with “six or seven” of the ghouls surrounding the house. In later films, survivors must deal with hundreds, if not thousands of the “biters,” “roamers,” “walkers,” or “dissidents,” as they are referred to in various
films as the setting moves from rural country to congested city. The zombie plague changes geographic setting to affect more people, suggesting that there is no escape, and that this is not an isolated incident. In *The Walking Dead* season two, the survivors are told by a lone surviving CDC scientist that it doesn’t matter whether one dies from a bite or a scratch or natural causes because everyone is already infected, further supporting the theory that the peril is ubiquitous.

Some of the more recent zombie movies demonstrate how our fears have continued to progress into other areas aside from the Other and capitalistic society. Romero carried on with his unique filmmaking and social commentary in his 2007 *Diary of the Dead*. This film re-imagines the zombie apocalypse through the camera lens of several film students. Romero’s work serves to comment on our current obsession with technology and Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In a world where everyone can access so many brutal images and comment on them endlessly, they would not be easily disturbed by video of vividly gruesome and grisly zombie attacks. Recently, similar “found footage” films have grown in popularity. Examples of this burgeoning post-modern cinematic form include the *Paranormal Activity* series (2007-2012), *Cloverfield* (2008, Reeves), *Quarantine* (2008, Dowdle), *REC* (2007, Balaguero), and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, Myrick and Sánchez). As film presentation evolves, so too do literary forms, as illustrated by the growing popularity of the “mash-up” novel, a new subgenre spearheaded by Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Just as these “found footage” films present audiences with a new perspective via the camera’s eye which adds to the film-goers experience, the mash-up provides audiences
with a fresh perception of themes and character through the integration of the horror genre.

The Walking Dead is another example of a zombie narrative that expresses more modern fears. The show tends to focus, not so much on attacking zombies but at the breakdown of society and survival. According to Cooper, “zombies could have easily fit the revenge narrative and represent the enemy other of the us/them mentality of the War on Terror; instead the genre took a turn toward survival in the face of a world-gone-mad” (14-5). Beginning with Romero’s Night of the Living Dead, zombie narratives have become centered on the theme of apocalypse. In all of these films, whether the traditional horror genre, comedy (like Shaun of the Dead), or even the new romantic comedy (zomromcom), the plot revolves around a surviving group who must work together to survive and rebuild. As the zombie narratives evolved, this becomes more difficult to do as survivors face quicker, more numerous zombies, as well as having to accept each other. Perhaps this focus on human relationships especially in our current era of economic, environmental, and social crisis is the main draw behind the show’s popularity.

As zombie films advanced, several rules about zombies were established in the 1980s, rules that have, for the most part, remained intact in the more recent zombie films. As a rule, all zombies must die, before becoming zombies. This is a clear divergence from the Haitian zombie, who was simply enchanted through religious ritual. Another rule is that zombies must not feed on each other like cannibals, but only on human flesh. This consumption of live human flesh, as previously noted was a concept introduced by
Romero. An addition to this concept was introduced by Dan O'Bannon's 1985 *Return of the Living Dead*, in which the zombies specifically hungered for brains— a motif that has become extremely popular in more recent zombie entertainment. A third rule states that zombies are not very intelligent, which is obvious in many films when they fail to be able to open doors or climb fences. Within these rules, the modern zombie terrorizes the survivors as well as audiences by reflecting our fears and anxieties. Author Max Brooks claims that “zombies do represent our worst fears. Zombies are the end of the world and we are living in times where people are terrified about the end of the world. I think somewhere deep down in our subconscious as the dominant species on the planet we know that we’re pretenders to the throne” (The Truth Behind Zombies). As society seems to be evermore spinning out of control between economic, agricultural, political and medical issues, the idea that we may exterminate ourselves is becoming a very real possibility.

As an interesting and related side note, Margot Adler in her 2012 lecture *Why Our Society Loves Vampires*, elaborates on how the vampire trope changed in the 1960s. According to Adler, in 1968 we were able to see Earth for the first time via the famous “Blue Marble” image taken from space. This image changed our view of our roles as caretakers of our planet. We now more fully realized that we had a moral responsibility to nurture our world and a realization that we should not abuse our resources. Adler asserts that this recognition led to a change in the vampire, who is, like the zombie, a reflection of us.
The vampire is a predator, but in recent films such as *Twilight*, or even television such as the popular *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* series, vampires began to struggle with their morality.\textsuperscript{17} The question for them (and thus for us) was how to treat lower life forms—should they be treated like cattle and corralled and controlled for consumption, or should they be treated with respect? It is during this same time period of the late 1960s that the zombie trope also evolved into its more modern form of rabid monsters bent on devouring human life. Zombies came to represent consumption, obsession with material goods and technology, scientific experimentation and all the evils that these themes represent. But even that is beginning to change as well. There have been some instances of zombies that function as characters to which audiences are sympathetic. In 1993's *Hocus Pocus* there is a zombie who helped the main characters defeat resurrected Salem witches; In *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), Shaun's friend Ed is infected and transforms, but is kept alive to play video games because Shaun cannot bear to kill him; in *Day of the Dead* (2008) a zombie attacks his own kind to allow the girl he likes and her family time to escape the terrifying horde. *Warm Bodies*, which recently opened in February of 2013, focuses on a zombie who falls in love with a human girl and his attempts to protect her and her family from other zombies, which eventually allow him to become more human.

Our conception of zombies is changing, which implies that the symbolic references to the fears they embody must be changing as well. The zombie trope, as it has gained popularity, has crossed boundaries into literature. One of the most original

\textsuperscript{17} The vampire family in the *Twilight* series are 'vegetarians' out of moral respect for humans and thus only drink animal blood. In *Buffy*, two of the main vampire characters had souls and they also felt a moral aversion to killing and feeding on humans. Ann Rice's *The Interview with the Vampire* is yet a third example of this morality.
zombie novels is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, a reworking of Jane Austen’s beloved *Pride and Prejudice*. Romero and other filmmakers used these vile flesh-eating monsters not only to reflect specific fears but also to comment on aspects of gender, class and morality. Similarly, the zombie is used in this mash-up novel to make distinctions between how these themes operate in our modern world and Austen’s Regency England.
Chapter Two: The Living Dead Austen

~Using Austen~

For much of the past century, Jane Austen’s work has been continually reworked and adapted for fans hungering for more of her characters. *Pride and Prejudice* is by far the most popular of her works, and this particular story has been adapted for radio, stage, screen, and print novels most consistently since the early twentieth century. There is something about Austen’s work, and particularly *Pride and Prejudice* that leaves readers wanting more of the beloved characters and inspires authors to continue the story or present additional perspectives. In exploring Austen’s relevance to modern readers, it should be noted how Austen’s works were initially received and became widespread before discussing reasons for continued adaptation.

Claire Harman, in her investigation of Austen’s rising popularity in the early twentieth century, notes that “English was considered a ‘soft’ subject, suitable for the increasing number of women students…and Austen’s novels were some of the least inappropriate works of fiction for unmarried women to read and discuss with the older...

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18 Modern adapted print versions have taken the form of prequels, sequels, and an account of the narrative from the perspectives of male characters such as George Wickham, Austen’s villain, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, the love match of Elizabeth Bennet. More contemporary versions also include fantasy and science-fiction elements such as time travel. See Wright p440-53 for an extensive list of adaptations of Austen, which are each in turn grouped chronologically according to type of adaptation by genre, such as stage productions, musicals and radio scripts, film, and print editions up to 1975.

19 Early commentators from the *British Critic* and *Quarterly Review* of Austen’s novels asserted that her novels were “well written” and that “an intimate knowledge of life and of the female character is exemplified in the various personages and incidents introduced…” (Hogan 40). The general consensus of Austen’s Regency-era audience was that the author’s observations led to the realness of her characters; her wit and social satire were astute and entertaining. Austen’s initial public agreed with the respectable critics; in 1811, Countess Bessborough wrote to Lord Granville Gower about how ‘clever’ the writing was of the then anonymous author. In 1813, the soon-to-be Lady Byron “observed that [*Pride and Prejudice*] was ‘at present the fashionable novel’, and that it contained ‘more strength of character than other productions of this kind’” (Hogan 41).
men who taught them" (162). Although separated by a large gap of time, Austen’s works were still well-received, not only because of the realism of the characters, but also because the content was connected with acceptable gender roles of women during the 1920s. This was an era where women, although achieving higher education, were still conforming to the view that females ought to marry and maintain charge of the domestic sphere, a notion reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Harman also discusses the model of 1970s’ era romance novels, a model that closely aligns with Austen’s novels: “the heroines were always to be ‘young and virginal,’ the heroes ‘strong and assertive,’ the plots utterly predictable, and the endings happy. There was to be no violence, blood or pain; no slang language or obscenity, and no premarital sex” (201). This perspective on and expectation of female versus male social and gender roles, as well as acceptable reading content, while similar to those attitudes of the 1920s, has changed since we have entered the twenty-first century, so why do modern audiences still feel an affinity for Austen’s works?

Susan Morgan, author of “In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen’s Fiction”, observes that contemporary reception does in fact mirror that of Austen’s early readership. For Morgan, and many contemporary *Pride and Prejudice* fans,

Elizabeth, witty, self-confident, with those dancing eyes, and not quite beautiful face, depicts for all of us what is flawed and irresistible about real people… Her impertinence, of course, is why generations of readers have admired her and why we recognize that the major concern of the book is with the possibilities and responsibility of free and lively thought. (Morgan78)
And so, the early reception of *Pride and Prejudice* is reflected by contemporary audiences; we can see ourselves in Austen’s characters as did her initial Regency-era readers. If the reason for consumption of Austen hasn’t changed, that is, our love for the authenticity of her characters, are there any other factors that has provoked the continual adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, especially over the past several decades? One notion revolves around the content of the work itself; “Like Shakespeare’s works, [Austen’s] novels deal with universal themes that resonate with readers across generations and historical epochs: love, money, power and status. Her arch humor and wit, and her storybook ending give her novels both highbrow and lowbrow appeal” (Alter D2).

In his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson notes that “what has happened is aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: [it is] the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes)” (4). Austen herself has become a commodity. There are a multitude of websites that are devoted to a variety of Austen paraphernalia from Regency-era clothing, to accessories, to knick-knacks such as pillows or tableware. Grahame-Smith has boarded the commodity train by creating a pastiche of Austen’s romantic narrative and altering the work for contemporary audiences.

Jameson notes that “the omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with a certain humor, however, nor is it innocent of all passion: it is at the least compatible with
addiction” (18). Based on the previous discussion of the commodification of all things Austen, Jameson presents a valid argument that we continue to adapt authors because of our obsession with certain themes, attitudes, and time periods they represent. Jameson likens pastiche to addiction, and as a society we are certainly addicted to commercialization and name brands.

Jameson offers a further explanation as to why adaptations of any work continues today, and while his focus in on the film industry, Jameson’s additional argument is not unrelated to print texts: “the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture” (18). Pride and Prejudice and Zombies is a perfect example of this imitation, as while the majority of the book is drawn from Austen’s original, the expanded scenes integrated by Grahame-Smith imitate the period style writing. In the case of Austen specifically, Brandy Foster explains the relevance of Wolfgang Iser’s theory that “the inherent imbalance between a text and a reader illuminates the impulse reader-writers have to create new Austens or new versions of her novels…” (par. 3). Based upon these theorists, one argument for adaptation asserts that today’s authors, and in this case, Grahame-Smith attempt to create a new more balanced statement for modern readers than Austen’s original provided, one that reveals

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20 Recently, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publishing of Pride and Prejudice, The Wall Street Journal published an article that discussed a variety of Austenian adaptation and our obsession with all things Jane Austen and the constant cashing-in on the Austen name through film and novels related to the writer’s renowned works. Most notably, the article mentions “American Idol” singer, Kelly Clarkson, who paid $244,000 at an auction last year for a turquoise-and-gold ring that belonged to the famous author (Alter D2).
contemporary values and expectations. As I will explore, for Grahame-Smith, that balance necessitates clarification of Austen’s plot and an updated comment on gender roles.

While the readers of Austen’s Regency era extolled the propriety of her novel, and hailed her for writing something so appropriate, perhaps all those missing (unbalanced?) elements that they applauded is what current readers long for. Groups of readers, from teenagers to adults of both genders, want those elements that are missing from those accepted norms of Austen’s day and those of the 1970’s romance novels, and that is violence and action! Enter Grahame-Smith and his reworking of Austen, which provides his readers with blood, violence, vomit, ninjas, and of course, zombies. However, the question remains- what provoked the decision to include zombies specifically as a means of altering Austen’s masterpiece? Zombies are rather popular at this time, a valid response for Grahame-Smith’s choice.

In their own ways, each adaptation, whether film or print has something new and unique to offer its audience, or as Andrew Wright correctly observes in his in-depth investigation of a variety of genres of Austenian adaptation, “a study of the many adaptations of Jane Austen’s works lead to certain conclusions. The first is that no version escapes its time or place” (439). One example supporting Wright’s assertion is Joe Wright’s 2005 film version of *Pride & Prejudice*, featuring Keira Knightly. Susan Fraiman, a professor at the University of Virginia, notes how “Elizabeth is framed from

21 Austen’s early public and critics applauded the strength of her characters and commended the wholesomeness of the novel by observing that “it is really a very pretty thing. [There are] no dark passages; no secret chambers; no wind howlings in long galleries; no drops of blood upon a rusty dagger…” (Hogan 41). These missing elements of violence and tension, while a different genres from the comedy of manners penned by Austen, are popular in their own right by modern audiences.
start to finish as a kind of rogue figure... [and] this “updating”...comes at the expense of Austen’s own proto-feminism, which would call our attention to women’s lack of freedom in the Regency period” (n.p.). Fraiman emphasizes in this connection Wright’s choice to place Elizabeth frequently outdoors and seemingly outside of the societal concerns that Austen’s Elizabeth had to exist within. For Fraiman, “the tension Austen sets up between Elizabeth’s specialness and the norms of Regency femininity all but collapses” as she observes her world rather than participate in it. Fraiman additionally cites various shots of Elizabeth sitting unspeaking, while her family members discuss their handsome neighbor or the upcoming ball with great excitement, which further sets the stage for Elizabeth as a character free from gender constraints, much as modern women would wish to be.

And so, the truth of Wright’s statement is reflected not only in other print and film adaptations,22 but most obviously in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, as readers are immersed in a zombie-infested Regency England. This version demonstrates current culture’s obsession with action and the horror genre. The plot of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on the Bennet sisters and their quest for love and marriage. Jane, the eldest, falls in love with their new neighbor, Mr. Bingley, while Elizabeth, the second eldest, can’t stand his friend, Mr. Darcy. As Elizabeth and Darcy overcome their prejudices and pride, they come to fall in love and the tale ends with a spectacular double-wedding. Most would assert that such a picture perfect romance couldn’t

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22 Salber’s article is another example that supports Wright’s claim as she discusses cinematic adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, such as the 1995 BBC version and the 2001 adaptation, *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, and the inclusion of sexual and erotic additions to the original story present in these re-workings to reflect more current audience needs.
possibly relate to the Gothic and horror genres, and yet author Seth Grahame-Smith chose to mesh to two, and the result is skillful in its imitation of the period’s style and a reflection of both nineteenth and twentieth century values.

~Choosing Zombies~

Throughout my exploration of the zombie trope in film, I have analyzed the symbolic resonances and myriad fears associated with the creature. In investigating the use of the zombie in Grahame-Smith’s mash-up novel, I will determine possible reasons to include these creatures as opposed to other options such as vampires, which have already found a niche in contemporary entertainment. In order to establish a response, I will review several theories and examine the commentary of several critics as well as the author Grahame-Smith.

Wolfgang Iser, in his theory about the imbalance between author and reader and he asserts that, “a reader’s comprehension of a text is aided by his or her ability to negotiate the ‘blanks,’ or gaps, in a text by making connections and closing the gaps” (qtd. in Foster par. 3). In the case of Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, it is the author that has attempted to fill in the holes left by Austen by rewriting her masterpiece and utilizing zombies to balance the text for modern readers. According to Rachael E. Posey’s study on Pride and Prejudice adaptations and their divergence from the initial story, as preposterous as it seems, Pride and Prejudice and Zombies is “the novel that most closely adheres to Austen’s original, with a plot and language score of eight and an

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23 Recent successful examples of vampires in pop culture include Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight saga, Joss Whedon’s Buffy the Vampire Slayer television series, and Alan Ball’s True Blood television series.
average character difference of 2.64, [which] would seem to indicate that Austen’s plots and characters are well-suited to modern sensibilities” (35).

In his 2009 NPR radio interview with Jacki Lyden, Grahame-Smith mentioned that the existence of zombies was a perfect explanation for the presence of the militia stationed in nearby Meryton, a plot element that was a not explicitly explained in the original text. Robert Armitage, bibliographer of New York Public Library, asserts that as Austen had two brothers in the navy who often wrote to their sister, Austen was not nearly as ignorant of the Napoleonic Wars as one might suspect from its absence in her novels (Armitage). The mere presence of the militia would have been understood by Austen’s audiences, whereas current audiences clearly have a need for clarification. For Grahame-Smith, the zombie element offered that clarity and these particular creatures were a perfect fit for Austen because

Every page seemed to have something that was subconsciously put there by Jane Austen to be twisted into a gory zombie-fest. The fact that Elizabeth Bennet is such an independently-minded, well-spoken heroic figure in the book; the fact that there is an encampment in nearby Meryton of soldiers who are seemingly there for no reason- I always say, why weren’t they off fighting Napoleon in 1813? But in Jane Austen’s original book there are soldiers camped out there for no reason, so it’s not much of a leap to say, well of course they’re there digging up bodies and burning them before they have a chance to turn. (Lyden)

Grahame-Smith’s appropriateness of zombies as a choice to expand Austen’s novel has been embraced by a variety of critics and fans. Deidre Lynch, an associate professor of English at the University of Toronto, and an editor of “Janeites,” a respected publication on Austen scholarship, agrees that the zombies “give Lizzie a grander scope for her action...It goes with the muddy petticoats and the rambling across the countryside
in this unladylike way. The next step is ninja training” (Schuessler par. 7). Brad Pasaneck, a professor of 18th century literature at University of Virginia, affirms that “the characters...are so often surrounded by people who aren’t fully human, like machines that keep repeating the same things over and over again...all those characters shuffling in and out of scenes, always frustrating the protagonists. It’s a crowded but eerie landscape” (Schuessler par 9).

Michael Gamer, who teaches a course on popular culture and Austen at the University of Pennsylvania, further corroborates the notion that the creatures work well within the original. In an interview in The New Yorker, Gamer claimed that “Austen’s fiction often carries with it a sense of mystery and menace, of something extraordinary going on just out of sight” (qtd. in Halford par. 10). And so, it appears that Grahame-Smith is responding to an element of Austen’s work that was heretofore just below the surface, and he attempts to make evident through violence, areas that were previously subtle and vague descriptions provided by the authoress.

Additionally, contemporary audiences seem to have a need for clarification, whereas Austen’s intended audience found her subtleties sufficient, which says something about our culture and our need for explanation. Linda Hutcheon in her discussion of parody notes that one purpose of parodies is that they “signal less an acknowledgement of the “inadequacy of the definable forms” of their predecessors than their own desire to “refunction” those forms to their own needs (4). Grahame-Smith’s work serves to remove Austen from the genre of Regency-era romance and bring her into the twenty-first century horror-genre as he “appropriate[s] what [he] considers important from
Austen’s fiction and to weave in the ... content that [his] own readers expect” (Foster par. 14). As my analysis will demonstrate, Grahame-Smith’s version is an attempt to make explicit, through the use of zombies, what Austen more subtly satirized in her novel.

The zombie menace added by Grahame-Smith follow Romero’s cinematic zombie scenario and the unspoken rules established in the 1980s. These creatures are stupid; they often mistake cauliflower for brains. Also, the zombies only attack living humans and one can “turn” without dying first, as is illustrated by Elizabeth’s friend Charlotte. Unlike Romero’s ghouls, the zombies featured in PPZ are described and presented through illustrations in various states of decomposition, which adds an element of fear. In the early films, including Romero’s, the zombies looked very much like average humans, albeit with a shambling gait, hollow eyes, and a blue tint to the skin. Grahame-Smith describes the zombies as quite terrifying creatures:

Their movements clumsy, yet swift; their burial clothing in a range of untidiness. Some [wear] gowns so tattered as to render them scandalous; others [wear] suits so filthy that one would assume they were assembled from little more than dirt and dried blood. Their flesh [appears] in varying states of putrefaction; the freshly stricken [are] slightly green and pliant, whereas the longer dead [are] grey and brittle - their eyes and tongues long since turned to dust, and their lips pulled back into everlasting skeletal smiles. (PPZ 14)

Despite this gruesome rendering of Austen’s classic romantic comedy of manners, Grahame-Smith’s reworking is approximately 90% love story and only 10% zombie narrative, while still maintaining the comment on the attitudes towards marriage satirized by Austen herself. As AMC’s The Walking Dead tends to focus more on character interactions and relationships, so too does PPZ focus primarily on the Bennet sisters’ quest for love. The zombies act as a backdrop to the story and aid in driving the plot
while offering a more overt version of Austen’s satirical commentary on attitudes
towards marriage.

~The Living Dead Austen~

As Austen’s novel is a satirical comment on gender constraints and marriage, I
intend to explore how Grahame-Smith’s version of *Pride and Prejudice* extends the satire
through the use of zombies. While this integration serves to close some plot gaps and
appeal to contemporary interests, the mash-up more importantly makes a statement on
female gender roles that both supports and overturns notions from Austen’s original text,
it also fits the expectations of modern readers. This commentary is made through the
changes to character personalities and abilities as a result of the zombie outbreak in
Regency England.

The most obvious change to perception of female characters in *Pride and
Prejudice and Zombies* is relayed through the activities of the five Bennet sisters. They
have been trained, at the behest of their father, in Shaolin, a Chinese martial arts
technique, and are referred to as “brides of death” several times throughout the story.
The Bennet family’s new neighbors, the Bingleys, who have recently arrived, are
introduced to the Bennet family and treated first-hand to the Bennet sisters’ deadly skills
at an assembly hall when a group of ‘unmentionables’ break into the gathering. Although
the Bennet sisters quickly form the “Pentagram of Death” and swiftly dispatch the horde,
they must still work within the societal constraints placed on their sex; during the battle,
each draws a small, “ladylike” ankle dagger with which to confront the enemy, all the
while “with the other hand modestly tucked into the small of her back” (PPZ 14). It is
clear that the sisters are skilled as they valiantly vanquish the undead, but they are still expected to take on this responsibility as society dictates, that is, with feminine grace and proper conduct. At other times during the novel, it is mentioned that while Elizabeth might have felt more comfortable protecting herself with her “Brown Bess,” it is not considered appropriate for a young lady to carry a firearm, and therefore, she yields to modesty and forgoes the gun for a more ladylike dagger.

After the first battle of the novel at the dance assembly, Caroline Bingley ridicules Elizabeth to Darcy by describing a scenario in which Elizabeth and Darcy are married: “Miss Elizabeth Bennet!” repeated Miss Bingley. Defender of Longbourne? Heroine of Hertfordshire? I am all astonishment. You will be having a charming mother-in-law, indeed; and of course, the two of you would fell many an unmentionable with your combined proficiencies in the deadly arts” (PPZ 23). While Miss Bingley may be sarcastic, she mentions actions that Darcy and Elizabeth would engage in together- not Darcy as the superior man and Elizabeth as the inferior woman, but as equals. This also assumes that Elizabeth would not give up her warrior lifestyle as a married woman. The reference to equality in marriage and between the sexes is a value that is reflective of twenty-first century ideals, which serves to overthrow the principles of Austen’s nineteenth century attitudes towards a married woman’s role and supports Austen’s satirical commentary.

However, Caroline’s derision is of a sarcastic nature (and thus perhaps a more explicit satiric comment by the author on women’s unequal roles in the Regency era), and Austen’s norms are later reinforced after Jane Bennet falls ill and is tended to at the
Bingleys’ home of Netherfield for four days. Mrs. Bennet comes to ensure that her daughter is well, but mostly to guarantee that Jane will pique Mr. Bingley’s interest enough to incite a proposal of marriage: “Mrs. Bennet was perfectly satisfied, and quitted the house under the delightful persuasion that she should see her daughter settled at Netherfield, her weapons retired forever, in the course of three or four months” (PPZ 83).

For Mrs. Bennet and Austen’s society, marriage ends the necessity and respectability of training and weapons. Mrs. Bennet’s attitude serves to support the view that married women’s roles are very different from the unmarried women of Austen’s era, a notion that does not necessarily fit current times. Even though Mrs. Bennet is a character who is not to be taken seriously, a second scene confirms the role of married women when the Bennets’ cousin Mr. Collins seeks Elizabeth’s hand. Towards the end of his awkward proposal, he mentions Elizabeth’s deadly abilities: “Your own talents in slaying the stricken, I think, must be acceptable to [Lady Catherine], though naturally, I will require you to retire them as part of your marital submission” (PPZ 85). Mr. Collins is also a character type that Austen and thus Grahame-Smith mocks, but these sentiments towards a wife’s place were the norm during Austen’s day. This may be viewed as a satire of women’s roles by Grahame-Smith as well; since both of these characters are not to be taken seriously, neither are their comments about conforming to the ladylike role of wife by retiring weapons.

Although it wavers between Regency-era and contemporary attitudes, the role of married women is decided on at the end of the novel upon the marriage of Jane to Bingley and Elizabeth to Darcy: “Determined that they should keep their skills sharp,
though His Majesty no longer required them to do so, their husbands built them a sparring cottage precisely between the two estates, in which the sisters met joyously and often” (PPZ 314). While some may view this ending as a reflective of a model of productive sisterhood, it is clear that these women, who were skilled death-dealers in their own right, were prompted by marriage to submit to the role of wife, and it is only by the indulgence of their loving husbands that they are allowed to continue in their unwifely hobby. As Karen Newman notes, “marriage does after all refer to a real social institution that, in the nineteenth century particularly, robbed women of their human rights...these narrative events reflect the way a patriarchal society has manipulated biological roles for its own advantage” (694).

Indeed, the very last line of the adaptation echoes this attitude: “And the sisters Bennet- servants of His Majesty, protectors of Hertfordshire, beholders of the secrets of Shaolin, and brides of death- were now, three of them, brides of man, their swords quieted by that only force more powerful than any warrior” (PPZ 317). The use of the word “force” in this sentence is particularly interesting. Grahame-Smith seemingly implies that love compels women to submit through their acquisition of the role of wife. He appears to be mocking the social expectation that Austen’s women faced in reality and again makes the original satire more evident for modern audiences.

As Miller notes,

“zombies are the flip side of the culture’s obsession with youth, beauty and sex...vampires feed off of that obsession. Zombies undermine and subvert it. The zombie aesthetic is an anti-aesthetic, the negation of beauty and youthfulness. Zombies force us to confront the naked truth about our lives: the relentless process of aging, our slow amble toward death and decay” (no pagination).
Miller’s assertion relates to the key theme of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*: the presence of these creatures is associated with fear of marriage. Once a woman says “I do,” she is trapped ‘till death do us part, and really, marriage begins the onset of the rest of one’s life. Through his use of zombies, Grahame-Smith is commenting that marriage, especially for Regency-era women, begins the deliberate descent into the grave, and without rights, other than what their husbands are willing to grant them, they are essentially the living dead.

The role of married women is by no means the only change of perception offered by this adaptation, as the motivation in choosing and accepting a husband also comes under discussion in this version, much as in Austen’s original. Charlotte Lucas accepts Mr. Collins’ proposal after he is rebuffed by Lizzy. In Austen’s original text, Charlotte claims her decision was made based on the fact that she desires “only a comfortable home; and, considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections situation in life [is] convinced that [her] chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast upon entering the marriage state” (*Pride and Prejudice* 125). In the contemporary mash-up there is an additional plot element that adds to Charlotte’s reason for acceptance of Mr. Collins: she has been stricken by the strange plague, a secret she confides to Lizzy: “I don’t have long, Elizabeth. All I ask is that my final months be happy ones, and that I be permitted a husband who will see to my proper Christian beheading and burial” (*PPZ* 99).

Susan Morgan, in her investigation of character in Austen’s fiction asserts that “[Charlotte] is certainly right that it is socially better to be a wife than an unmarried daughter...but it is not more honorable. For Charlotte, marriage also may be the ‘pleasantest preservative from want’...but she cannot, in defending that choice, justify it by a necessity either economic or social” (93).
Marcia Lynn Whicker and Jennie Jacobs Kronenfeld discuss the components of marriage in their work, *Sex Role Changes: Technology, Politics, and Policy*, and their definition of marriage closely aligns with the prevailing view of Austen’s day: “As a legally binding commitment, marriage implies an array of financial and social commitments... traditionally, marriage was more than the linkage of two individuals. Marriage involved two sets of extended families and mutually agreeable economic exchanges” (61). This cold clinical definition of marriage is certainly reflected in Charlotte’s acceptance of Mr. Collins and one that Austen herself satirized. Grahame-Smith’s invention of Charlotte’s zombie-inflicted illness provides an additional motive that transcends the financial and social objectives for marriage, and reinforces both Austen’s and contemporary society’s viewpoint that the choice of a marriage partner should be based on mutual love and affection.

Charlotte’s deception of her new husband by her failure to tell him about her condition supports another claim of Morgan’s, that “Charlotte’s decision to marry Mr. Collins is immoral” (94), and this claim is supported in zombie version. It is immoral to subject one’s spouse to such a condition without their knowledge, even one as fat and stupid as Mr. Collins. However, unlike her friend Elizabeth, “Charlotte can imagine a future with Mr. Collins because she cannot imagine a future at all” (Morgan 95), and Morgan’s claims about Charlotte’s motives for marriage to Mr. Collins because she is certain of a life “without surprises or hope” and “no future,” are supported in Grahame-Smith’s account- only in this instance it is a *fact* that Charlotte has no future and that her life will come to an end in a very short time, which in some ways allows readers to be
more sympathetic to Charlotte and her decision and plainly demonstrates the shortage of choices Austen’s women faced.

As Morgan mentions, “the necessary wisdom for living with Mr. Collins, which Charlotte accepts, is to give up a piece of herself, suppress her shame, lose her ears, see less, diminish her life. Charlotte, the intelligent woman, must relinquish part of her mind” (95). This statement becomes literal in PPZ because as Charlotte slowly succumbs to the plague, she can no longer engage in daily activities, speak, or think. This addition to Austen’s novel clearly reinforces the position that marriage for the ‘wrong’ reasons, that is, for money, comfort, or social status instead of love is inappropriate, and the agonizing consequences for Charlotte are reflective of this position relative to both Austen’s and twenty-first century attitudes.

One other alteration that is made by Grahame-Smith is the change of appropriate hobbies for women. At Rosings, the home of Lady Catherine de Bourge, who is aunt to Darcy and patroness of Mr. Collins, the conversation from the original text about music, drawing and singing- all of which are suitable pastimes engaged in by young ladies- is replaced with one about the deadly arts. Similarly, the discussion about the use of governesses for education is replaced by ninjas. This exchange occurs again during another of Elizabeth’s visits to Rosings, where the conversation about music is repeatedly replaced by violence, and instead of singing, Elizabeth gives a demonstration of physical strength by walking across the floor on her fingertips, and later defeats three of Lady Catherine’s ninjas as a form of entertainment rather than engaging in a musical performance as in Austen’s original.
Lloyd Brown notes that writers with which Austen was familiar, such as Fordyce (whose *Sermons* are mentioned in several of Austen’s novels) would say that

"women should avoid what are defined as ‘masculine areas...accomplishments [such] as ‘ornamental acquisitions’ (dancing, French, Italian, music) are ‘designed’ to supply innocent and amusing occupations and to keep the mind in a state of placid cheerfulness.” (329)

Grahame-Smith’s intervention serves to overthrow the notion of acceptable accomplishments in his re-working of the novel to appease modern readers. As female characters engage in violence and demonstrate athletic ability, they are, and Elizabeth in particular, freed from the chains of ‘placid cheerfulness’ that Brown discusses. Indeed, it is the “free and lively thought” displayed by Elizabeth that so many readers across generations have admired. In this case then, the change in feminine accomplishment and hobbies serves to strengthen Elizabeth’s character and further endear her to modern readers.

Another example of this change concerns Darcy’s young sister, Georgiana, who in the original receives a piano as a gift from her brother. In Grahame-Smith’s alteration, she instead receives a Katana sword. While it is arguable that these details were added purely for entertainment, they also serve to reinforce the idea of female ability. Margaret Stetz, in her review of Liora Brosh’s “Screening Novel Women: From British Domestic Fiction to Film,” asserts that alterations such as these “borrow notions from pop-culture feminism to sell versions of Austen...narratives that emphasize ‘female empowerment’ [and are] the ‘go-to’ texts for [writers] who have tried to reflect and to influence contemporary gender debates while entertaining mass market audiences” (384-5).
In the zombie version, many of the female characters, both from the gentry and aristocracy, are well versed in the art of battle, an art that has been in the past mostly reserved for men. As more women join the armed forces and compete in both athletic and professional arenas that have been viewed primarily as male activities, the education of the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is reflective of the change in contemporary gender roles, this time outside of marriage and reinforces for modern readers the world within Austen’s characters existed.

This analysis has demonstrated how the inclusion of zombies serves to reinforce Austen’s satirical look at marriage. Additionally, the integration with the horror genre changes perceptions of the female characters which has also strangely enough, reflected both nineteenth and twenty-first century reader values while supporting contemporary expectations regarding those characters. The change in gender roles is perhaps the most obvious of differences in how the story is perceived; there are however, other changes, such as that of character, which serves to change how audiences understand the personalities of Elizabeth, her mother, and Mr. Bingley. Chronologically, the first change of personality in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is perceived through the actions of Mrs. Bennet. The following conversation takes place between Jane and her mother after Jane receives an invitation to lunch at Netherfield:

“Can I have the carriage?” said Jane.

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24 Based on information gathered from the Department of Defense and the US Coast Guard, in 2011, women made up at total of 14.6% of active duty participants in the Army, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard. See *Statistics on Women in the Military* for more specific break down of women’s participation in the armed forces according to state and department.
“No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then you must stay all night”. (Pride and Prejudice 31)

There is a marked difference in Mrs. Bennet’s character in the adaptation:

“Can I have the carriage?” said Jane.

“No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and they spring so easily from the wet earth. I should prefer you have speed at your disposal; besides if it rains, you must stay all night.” (PPZ 25)

Although she still fits Austen’s mold of silly and ridiculous, Mrs. Bennet, in this new version of events is depicted as equally, if not more concerned for Jane’s safety on the road, rather than solely focused on getting her married as she was in the original text.

The presence of zombies allows for yet another good reason for why Jane should go on horseback, not only as a means for preventing her homeward journey and thus keeping her at Bingley’s residence, but for safety as well. The need for Jane to go on horseback, rather than by coach is corroborated by Mr. Bennet, who claims that the horses are “wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them, and too many are slaughtered upon the road already” (PPZ 25). Mr. Bennet’s statement supports Grahame-Smith’s assertion that the inclusion of zombies serves as a further explanation of character motivations for modern audiences as this subtle change strengthens Mr. Bennet’s reasons for agreeing with his wife’s edict that Jane should travel by horseback.

A second minor character who undergoes a change of personality in Grahame-Smith’s version is Mr. Bingley. In the original he is portrayed as a cheerful and amiable man, and audiences are rooting for Jane’s marriage to him. In this adaptation, his
personality is furthered, and not for the better. Several times in the novel, his reaction to the zombie menace is less than 'manly' and desirable to audiences who look to him as a good marriage match, and he most certainly break away from that 1970's romance model. While he continues in his pleasant address to all characters, he is described by the Grahame-Smith and questioned by the two elder Bennet sisters as being weak in the face of the enemy, which, as the main characters demonstrate courage and cunning when dealing with the unmentionable hordes shows a deficiency in his character for both the Bennet sisters as well as audiences.

When several of the "dreadfuls" break into Bingley’s home and consume his serving staff, Elizabeth notices his "white face and troubled countenance" (PPZ 81), and as Darcy “[makes] quick work of beheading the slaughtered staff… Mr. Bingley politely vomited into his hands” (PPZ 82). Later, when Elizabeth and Jane are discussing Bingley’s absence, they ponder whether, “the sight of his bloodied staff was too much for his delicate character” (PPZ 94). Mr. Bingley is painted as less than heroic; in fact he is portrayed as a wimp, and perhaps this serves to place Darcy on a higher pedestal for Elizabeth and Grahame-Smith’s readers. However, the change diminishes audience approval of the character as a hero, but also perhaps serves to make him all the more real with his masculine flaws, and realistic writing is what both Austen’s initial and current audience have applauded.

Elizabeth, however, is the most affected by the integration of zombies into her world. While audiences have praised her energetic and brazen manner, there are several times throughout the adaptation where her personality is very much changed. During a
walk from their estate of Longbourne to Meryton, the group of sisters and Mr. Collins are set upon by a herd of the ‘manky dreadfuls’. The other characters stay true to their original personalities: Lydia, the youngest and a flirt, is afraid to dirty her dress and appear unkempt in front of the officers; Jane by far the sweetest of the five girls, is still portrayed as caring for all- even the zombies whom she wants to shoot and put the out of their misery; Mr. Collins places high regard on his pipe, a gift from his ladyship Lady Catherine, and strenuously objects when Elizabeth uses it to light the horde on fire; but Elizabeth is different from her original self. She is sinister and as she sets the blaze says, “let them burn...let them have a taste of eternity” (PPZ 58). This change is reinforced by Mr. Collins who “saw in Elizabeth’s eyes a kind of darkness; a kind of absence- as if her soul had taken leave, so that compassion and warmth could not interfere” (PPZ 58).

This change in Elizabeth is continued later in the novel when she learns Charlotte’s dark secret:

As for Elizabeth, she could hardly think on the matter without coming to tears, for she alone knew the sorrowful truth. She thought often of striking Charlotte down- of donning her Tabbi boots and slipping into her bedchamber under cover of darkness, where she would mercifully end her friend’s misery with the Panther’s Kiss. But she had given her word, and her word was sacred. She would not interfere with Charlotte’s transformation. (PPZ 101)

While Elizabeth is still appropriately concerned with honor and demonstrates affection for her friend, she has been transformed by Grahame-Smith into a killer. It is debatable whether this is merely a gimmick with the purpose of entertainment, and if these changes detract from Austen’s intentions. In the original, as proved from audience reviews, readers appreciate Elizabeth’s liveliness, and as much as we may wish it to
continue here, her character has been altered to paint her as more menacing, which perhaps is fitting considering Elizabeth's personality and inclination towards more outlandish behavior as opposed to other characters in Austen's novel.

These radical changes in character may not allow PPZ to be received with the same gusto as the original, but the addition of the creatures serves to further plot gaps for modern audiences that the original was lacking. The explanation for the militia in Meryton has already been addressed, but there are other examples as well. One is George Wickham's failure to attend the Netherfield ball. The original explanation is that he had business to attend, which leaves very much room for doubt in the audience (and indeed should have warned Elizabeth as well) as to his true reasons for declining to appear. The new version presents a more plausible excuse, relayed to Elizabeth by Denny, one of the soldiers of the militia, who enlightens Elizabeth:

Wickham had been obliged to go to town on business the day before, to attend a demonstration of a new carriage that boasted of being impervious to attacks by the manky dreadfuls. This assured Elizabeth that Darcy was not answerable for Wickham's absence, and her feelings of displeasure against the former was sharpened by immediate disappointment. (PPZ 72-3).

This addition serves to delay the audience's and Elizabeth's suspicions of Wickham's character, whereas the original is perhaps too predictable. One can more easily excuse Elizabeth and her failure to understand Wickham for what he is because this report of his whereabouts is more credible and detailed than what Austen provides.

A second major modification, which really serves to change how audiences perceive the characters and events, is Darcy's reason for separating Jane and Bingley. Austen's original motivation as relayed by Darcy in his letter to Elizabeth is that he found
Jane to be “indifferent” to Bingley’s attentions, and thus, he concealed from Bingley the news of Jane’s three month visit to London. Grahame-Smith’s edition has an entirely different motivation: the possible presence of plague. In his letter to Elizabeth, while he does mention the possibility of Jane’s lack of interest in his friend, Darcy has an additional motive. He writes,

But it was not until she took ill and remained at Netherfield that I had any apprehension, for knowing of her occupation as a slayer of the undead, I was certain that she had been stricken with the strange plague...upon her recovery, which I expected to be temporary, I perceived that [Bingley’s] partiality for Miss Bennet was beyond what I had ever witnessed in him. You sister I also watched. Her look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but I remained convinced that she would soon begin the cheerless descent into Satan’s service. As the weeks turned to months, I began to question my observations. Why had she not yet turned? Could I have been so wrong as to mistake a simple fever for the strange plague? By the time I realized my error, it was too late to affect any undoing of the scheme. Mr. Bingley had been quite separated from Miss Bennet, both in distance and affection...My opinion of Miss Bennet being stricken was confirmed by her failure to join us in the investigation of the unfortunate kitchen incident, and my will strengthened to preserve my friend from what I esteemed to be a most unhappy connection. (PPZ 156-7)

Darcy’s major motive for separating the two lovers is more detailed and acceptable to modern audiences in the contemporary version, and is also supported by Elizabeth, who “could not deny the justice of his wariness; for Jane’s cold had been severe indeed, and even [she] had once or twice suspected the same” (PPZ 165). Based on Lizzy’s reinforcement of the probability of Jane’s illness, Darcy’s motive for the separation can be more easily forgiven in this version, whereas the original reasons were based solely on Jane’s perceived indifference and low family connections. The change in Darcy’s letter allows readers to continue to cheer for Darcy, and urge Elizabeth to absolve him of the
blame for his actions, more so than in the original story. As explored throughout my
discussion, the changes that are made allow for varying perceptions of character and plot,
and while they change significantly from the original, the main themes of pride,
prejudice, love, and social status remain untouched and as appealing as ever to readers.

~Concluding Thoughts~

Jameson notes that "one way of reconstructing the initial situation to which the
work is somehow a response is by stressing the raw materials, the initial content, which it
confronts and reworks, transforms and appropriates" (7). In *Pride and Prejudice and
Zombies*, Grahame-Smith stresses and reinforces the nineteenth century attitude that
marriage is the only appropriate position for a young lady to attain in life as presented in
the happy double marriage at the end. However, by introducing violence and altering the
female characters in terms of ability in battle as a result of the zombie outbreak, he
confronts other cultural attitudes of Austen’s era and turns them in favor of contemporary
views on the roles of women and the acceptance of violence.

The over-arching question of this thesis is why zombies? What is it about this
creature that has worked so well in both film and literature to convey our fears as
opposed to more popular tropes such as the vampire or other monsters? Vampires are
more equated with sex and desire, and the blood associated with this creature is
representative of life. Therefore, the vampire would undermine the notion that these
fears were truly terrifying and all-encompassing. Zombies represent the ultimate
inescapable fear of death and the metaphorical function of the creature referenced
throughout the provided tour of films and literature also connotes pervading concerns of the times.

The zombie opens for discussion social issues such as exploitation of laborers as found in the early zombie films of the 1930s and 40s; gender and race discrimination can be considered when viewing Ben’s and Barbara’s roles in *Night of the Living Dead*; consumerism and materialism are prevalent themes in *Dawn of the Dead*, and a variety of other issues from the evils of capitalism, scientific experimentation and our growing obsession and reliance on technology are explored in other zombie narratives. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* integrates zombies to make Austen’s satire of her Regency-era world more explicit while also commenting on contemporary attitudes towards gender roles. The slow shuffling of the hunters aligns well with the idea of particular fears creeping ever closer without emotion, rationality, or the spark of humanity once present in the now empty shells called zombies.

My analysis of selected zombie narratives has sought to examine how this trope has evolved and to demonstrate how that evolution reflects changing Western anxieties and perspectives. As Nail notes, “the symbolic nature of zombies is a potent example of how the absurd can be instructive when approached as if it were a legitimate societal concern” (54), a notion that leads readers and audiences of zombie narratives to consider what important lessons and different perspectives the undead can provide for us.
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