Introduction

Race, Colonialism, and the Evolution of the "Zombie"

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Jamie Russell (2005) might have been correct when he stated that zombies had been ignored by critics of horror (p. 7), but that does not mean that zombies have been universally ignored by the academy, as a recent article by Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry makes clear: "The ubiquity of the metaphor suggests the zombie's current cultural currency" (Lauro and Embry, 2008, p. 86). Zombies are now receiving a great deal of attention because they are both symbolically prolific and textually ubiquitous:

> Because the zombie travels so widely, and across so many fields, it has become a very familiar character, one that participates in narratives of the body, of life and death, of good and evil; one that gestures to alterity, racism, species-ism, the inescapable, the immutable. Thus it takes us to "the other side"—alienation, death, and what is worse than death: the state of being undead [Webb and Byrnand, 2008, p. 83].

Still, at least prior to our current moment, the academic zombie, when it has come to the attention of scholars, has lurched down some very narrow (but nonetheless suggestive and fruitful) paths. The academic world knows five things about the zombie trope, and these things have come to be taken as truisms. One, that the zombie began as something associated with Haiti, and further with a religion the West once called Voodoo and now, in an age of greater cultural tolerance, calls Vodou. Two, that as a result of this, the zombie is best understood in the postcolonial mode, and says as much about "Western" fears as it does about any Haitian reality. Three, that George Romero redirected zombies in a fundamental way in 1968, when he reimagined them in *Night of the Living Dead* as cannibalistic ghouls who replicate themselves through infection, and that Romero's casting a black actor as his hero was ground-breaking in some way that critics still fail to agree upon (in part because Romero himself has sent mixed messages concerning whether that casting was a political statement or not). Four, that Romero's 1978 follow-up film, *Dawn of the Dead*, again re-cast the zombie, now as a symbol for mindless consumerism, thereby establishing zombie narratives as a potential location for critiques of late capitalism. Finally, the modern academic probably knows that Deleuze and Guattari proclaimed the zombie to be the "only modern myth" in *Anti-Oedipus*, lending the motif a certain cultural cachet.

The present volume is largely concerned with the Caribbean or Haitian zombie, a creature that comes from the African roots of Caribbean religion; a forthcoming companion volume, *Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*, will explore the many cultural uses of the zombie in the years following the release of George Romero's first two films. Whatever the truth which lies behind the legend of the Caribbean zombie, it is worth remembering that this legend has been reimagined in the West at least twice: once in the early twentieth century, where films like *White Zombie* summoned the zombie in the service of various Caucasian fears and racisms, and a second time when the resulting North American construction was further modified by George Romero in the classic *Night of the Living Dead* and its first sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*. The "real" Haitian zombie is not only revenant but phantom, the subject of competing ethnographic and historical claims, seemingly eclipsed by a scarier, more ghoulish Hollywood descendent. This introduction will argue that the Haitian zombie has not disappeared as fully as it might seem — the Caribbean roots of "the only modern myth" remain the first and perhaps best way to explain and explore all modern manifestations of zombieness.

The Caribbean Origins

Though the official state religion of Haiti is Catholicism, the vast majority of Haitians practice the religious syncretism that is Vodou, a tradition that is often misunderstood at best, and vilified at worst. The term "Voodoo" is now differentiated from Vodou, as it has come to encompass every ignorance of the true religion. Voodoo, as distinct from Vodou, should be used to signify the racist image of a devil-worshipping, black-magic wielding, and uncivilized tradition imagined by Western popular culture. Vodouisants (practitioners of Vodou) in New Orleans often refer to their spirituality as Voodoo, differentiating the "darker" elements as Hoodoo. The choice of terminology here includes an element of sensationalism, as "Voodoo" has become a huge tourist attraction in the Big Easy, but the distinction between a legitimate religious tradition and some form of dark art is maintained. The spiritual tradition more properly called Vodou is a loosely affiliated, syncretistic religion originating primarily in Haiti (though aspects of it can be found throughout the West Indies, and similarities exist with traditions such as Santeria and Candomblé), that combines elements of a variety of African spiritualities, most prominently from the West African kingdom of Dahomey (modern-day Benin), with Roman Catholicism and "New World" native spirituality. The religion began when slaves of wide-ranging African backgrounds were brought together in what became the hub of the slave-trade — Haiti. Huge numbers of Africans from varied tribal affiliations and cultures were forced to find common ground as they were gathered to the island of Hispaniola. This common ground included collective spirituality as these diverse peoples were systematically "converted" to the Catholic Church. Vodou resulted from an amalgam of beliefs and traditions of a people who were at once forced to accept, and yet collectively rejected, a colonial religion of oppression while they struggled to retain some sense of African identity and culture. Voodoo, which we might take as a term of derision, ought to be taken not to refer to the Haitian religion but rather only applies to negative and racist constructions. Far from being the object of Hollywood horror, this perversion of Haitian religion, long proffered by fearful American slave-holders and Christian clergy alike, still appears today: evangelist Pat Robertson explained, in response to the massive earthquake that hit Haiti in January, 2010, that the island nation's independ-

ence, and subsequent misery and poverty, were set in motion when the Haitian people "swore a pact to the Devil" during their successful revolution of 1791–1804. The distinction between Voodoo and Vodou will be maintained throughout the chapters in this volume, with Vodou being the preferred spelling of the religious tradition, and Voodoo reserved for sensationalistic, horrific, or racist depictions of it.

Zombies, for their part, represent in the African tradition not simply the walking corpses of the Western imagination but are synonymous with a wide range of monsters. Bratty children are sometimes themselves called zombies, or frightened into behaving by the threat of zombies under the bed. Spirits of the dead, people transformed into animals, and tiny fairy folk can all be designated zombies (see Ackermann and Gauthier, 1991; Niehaus, 2005). Aside from being scary monsters, what all of these ideas share in common is an idea of subjugated agency. Karen McCarthy Brown defines the zombie as "either the disembodied soul of a dead person whose powers are captured and used for magical purposes, or a soulless body that has been raised from the grave to do drone labor in the fields" (Brown, 2005, p. 9638). The former suggestion of the zombie as disembodied spirit is more often referred to as the *zombi astral* and has not translated into the Western imagination. The latter concept of the revenant corpse remains what most of us would now recognize as a zombie proper. Aside from the varied suggestions as to what zombies may signify, there is also some degree of uncertainty as to where the term originates. It has been suggested that the term derives from West African words for "fetish" (*zumbi*) or "spirit/god" (*nzambi*); certainly, both of these might more easily be associated with the *zombi astral*, which can be bought and kept as charms for luck and health. Another relation is to the Louisiana Creole *jumbie* (thought to itself derive from the Spanish, *sombra*, being a ghostly shade or perhaps the French, *les ombres*, shadows) which can signify either an evil curse or a ghost. It may just as easily be a French patois derivation, a favorite of one of the authors (Moreman), of the words *sans vie*, a possibility particularly fitting considering the relationship between the zombie and the slave in Haiti (cf. Kordas, this volume). Whatever its etymology, it seems clear that the zombie as walking corpse is particularly attached to Haiti, while the *zombie astral* as captured soul (often held in a jar for future and nefarious use) is more popular in Africa. The Haitian derivative is suggestive of the unique conditions of slavery and Catholic doctrine. Catholicism was known and had been successfully amalgamated into some African spiritualities, but in Haiti it was rejected as the religion of the "white man's God."

The zombie in Haitian folklore is believed to be the product of evil magics employed by a dark priest known as a *bokor*, or sorcerer, to be distinguished from the benign priest and priestess, the *houngan* and *mambo*. According to Wade Davis' controversial ethnography, the production of a zombie serves a social corrective function as only deviants are made into zombies (Davis, 1985; Davis, 1988a). Whether or not this is the case, Haitians hold the possibility of one's being transformed into a zombie — a mindless slave risen from the dead by evil magic — as very real, even enacting laws prohibiting zombification.

As with Vodou/Voodoo, the wildly disparate forms taken by the zombie in the western imaginary can be problematic. Lauro and Embry suggest a triple nomenclature:

> Given the fact that there are multiple valences in play, it seems best to designate the distinction typographically: there is the Haitian *zombi*, a body raised from the dead to labor in the fields, but with a deep association of having played a role in the Haitian revolution (thus, simultaneously resonant with the categories of slave and slave rebellion); and there is also the *zombie*, the American importation of the monster, which in its cinematic incarnation has morphed into a convenient boogeyman representing various social concerns. The *zombie* can also be a metaphoric state claimed

> for oneself or imposed on someone else. This zombie has been made to stand for capitalist drone (*Dawn of the Dead*) and Communist sympathizer (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*), and, increasingly, viral contamination (*28 Days Later*). In its passage from zombi to zombie, this figuration that was at first just a somnambulistic slave raised from the dead became evil, contagious, and plural. Our manifesto proclaims the future possibility of the *zombii*, a consciousless being that is a swarm organism, and the only imaginable specter that could really be posthuman [Lauro and Embry, pp. 87–8].

No lesser a light than Slavoj Žižek disagrees, drawing on Lacan and arguing that the undead of *Night* "are not portrayed as embodiments of pure evil, of a simple drive to kill or revenge, but as sufferers, pursuing their victims with an awkward persistence, colored by a kind of sadness ... *because they were not properly buried*," like Antigone's family and Hamlet's father (Žižek, 1992, pp. 22–3). This sadness would seem to be rooted firmly in the Haitian zombi, rather than the initial walking corpses of Romero's film, which appear first in a graveyard (the very definition, one would think, of being properly buried).

Lauro and Embry's third version, the zombii, is a riposte to Haraway's idea of the cyborg, the posthuman who has evolved through a mingling of self and machine, and does not necessarily directly concern us here: except that the academic zombie, as a nearly-empty signifier carrying a few key-but-infinitely-interpretable features (strength through swarming, lack of individuality or identity), does seem to embody a kind of consciouslessness. The zombie comes to represent whatever we fear most from Others, not just in individual texts, but in the criticism itself. To borrow Lauro and Embry's terminology, by recasting the zombi as zombie, Romero created something which could legitimately be both Other and our own spectral, feared future at the same time.

The threat is that of assimilation to an inexorable collective, and is the same fear we see at work in *Star Trek*'s Borg: the absolute loss of identity in the service of an unknown and unknowable, in fact unachievable because non-existent, goal. The Haitian zombie could be called the living dead in a metaphorical sense, especially after Davis: the Marxist *homo laborans* in the service of a master, with an emphasis on being either dead and acting alive, or alive and acting in an unconscious way that is like death in its lack of individual consciousness. Romero's "living dead" were another matter entirely: "...the zombie, by its very definition, is anticatharsis, antiresolution: it proposes no third term reconciling the subject/object split, the lacuna between life and death. The zombie is opposition held irrevocably in tension" (Lauro and Embry, p. 94). For Lauro and Embry only the post-human zombii suggests the "possibility of a negation of the subject/object divide ... a paradox that disrupts the entire system" (Lauro and Embry, p. 94). Only by metaphorically escaping its Caribbean roots could the zombie become a signifier which points beyond the system itself: George Romero effected that escape, albeit partially by accident.

Zombie Swerve: "...to all the undead around the world..."

With this immortal line, a newly-zombified DJ in Santa Monica sends a record out to the growing zombie hordes in 1988's *Zombi 3* (dir. Lucio Fulci). The zombie apocalypse, in this film, is the result of American military experiments with a chemical compound called "Death One," experiments which take place not in the United States, but suggestively in its former colony, the Philippines. Lucio Fulci's unofficial sequel/prequel to Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, known most often as *Zombi 2*, locates the birth of the zombie in the Caribbean, from which it spreads to New York and the rest of the world; by 1988, the unofficial sequel

to that unofficial sequel took its cue once again from broader trends, including the chemical-origin stories found in John A. Russo's also-unofficial sequel series starting with *Return of the Living Dead* (1985), where zombie outbreaks occur as a result of exposure to 245-Trioxin (itself based on "Trixie," the chemical compound which causes insanity in Romero's 1973 *The Crazies*, remade in 2010). The chemical or viral cause has since become the most common in-text explanation for zombie outbreaks (although less common than aporia, the lack of explanation, or sometimes an ambiguous cacophony of competing explanations).

In many respects it looks as though the Haitian zombie is a thing of the past, permanently eclipsed by the success of Romero's cannibals. Romero's own use of the "Voodoo" explanation was brief: a single line in which *Dawn*'s Peter recalls that his grandfather, a Trinidadian priest, used to say that when hell was full, the dead would walk the earth. But for Romero, this is merely one of a host of explanations provided within his films, a plethora which makes it impossible to pinpoint a particular cause (and which, in turn, was deftly satirized in *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), when the protagonist flips through a host of television channels all offering different explanations). Still, the viral/chemical explanation is everywhere: *28 Days Later* and its sequels on film and in graphic novels, the *Resident Evil* franchise, Max Brooks' novel *World War Z*, etc.). The Vodou zombie is, by contrast, relatively hard to find: there is the film adaptation of Davis's *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, and hints in such low-budget films as *Enter Zombie King* or Godsmack's 1998 heroin anthem, "Voodoo." In Andy Duncan's short story "Zora and the Zombie," Zora Neale Hurston, a central figure in American reception of the Haitian zombie, is depicted experiencing odd events and meeting Felicia Felix-Mentor, the "zombie" photographed for her 1937 book *Tell My Horse* (see Rita Keresztesi, this volume). Duncan notes that Hurston is almost unknown in horror circles today: "I marvel that many readers, judging from their comments, never heard of Hurston. Had I realized beforehand that this story would be many readers' introduction to her I wouldn't have dared write it." Romero's reinvention seems to hold the field.

If the Haitian zombie is not completely gone from western pop culture, its presence is often muted at best, indeed often roped to the later Romeran or viral form of the zombie. There have been some attempts to combine the two species of zombie into a single narrative, with limited success. The 2005 Irish comedy *Boy Eats Girl* is one of a handful of texts which attempt to combine the two traditions: the zombie crisis is caused by a voodoo ritual, but the zombies are cannibalistic because a key page of the manuscript was missing when the ritual was performed (for more, see Rushton, this volume). Similarly, *Zombiez* (also 2005), often described as a hip-hop zombie film and with an all African American cast, uses Romeran cannibal zombies but prefaces itself with a screenshot explaining that the living dead could be created through pharmaceuticals, specifically the "pufferfish"—the overt reference to a 1982 study by an unnamed pharmacologist is certainly intended to imply Wade Davis (*The Serpent and the Rainbow* came out in 1985, but Davis' article in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* appeared in 1983). This admittedly oblique return to the Haitian zombie reflects the film's desire to be an African American zombie film, however unsuccessfully.

Max Brooks' popular parody *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) invokes the Haitian zombie as one of many metatextual jokes. After much discussion concerning zombie traits, Brooks' narrator turns to the "voodoo zombie" in order to distinguish the two species:

> It is true that the word "zombie" originally comes from the Kimbundu word "nzúmbe," a term describing a dead person's soul, and yes, zombies and zombification are integral parts of the Afro-Caribbean religion known as voodoo. However, the origin of their name is the only similarity between the voodoo zombie and the viral zombie [Brooks, 2003, p. 20].

Brooks does not privilege one or the other in diegetic terms: the *Survival Guide* posits that both kinds of zombie are real and might be encountered. The narrator, however, is manifestly less concerned with the voodoo than the viral. When his discussion turns to the possibility of controlling the viral zombie, the narrator's mildly sardonic voice comes to the fore: "Several times headstrong humans have insisted they could simply command their living dead attackers to stop. As cold, rotting hands grabbed their limbs and dirty, worn teeth bit into their flesh, these people discovered, too late, what they were dealing with" (p. 22). It is a theme Brooks comes back to in his novel, *World War Z* (2006), when a communications expert who ran Radio Free Earth during the conflict discusses various misconceptions the global communications network was designed to address; in doing so, she rehearses a list of zombie qualities derived from various Romeran texts:

> There were so many misconceptions: zombies were somehow intelligent; they could feel and adapt, use tools and even some human weapons; they carried memories of their former existence; or they could be communicated with and trained like some kind of pet. It was heartbreaking, having to debunk one misguided myth after another. The civilian survival guide helped, but it was still severely limited [Brooks, 2006, pp. 196–97].

Besides the sly reference to his own earlier *Zombie Survival Guide*, Brooks has taken deliberate aim at several previous zombie narratives, including some by Romero himself: intelligent zombies (*Land*); zombies who remember (the original *Dawn* and *Day*); zombies as pets or companions (*Day of the Dead, Shaun of the Dead,* and *Fido*). Brooks even has an in-text explanation for some of these "misconceptions": the "quisling"—humans driven mad by the disaster, and have come to believe that they are themselves zombies (Brooks, 2003, pp. 157–59). All proof of in-fighting among zombies, and by extension all that Brooks declares non-zombie behavior, can be attributed to these quislings.

More often, however, the Haitian zombie is eclipsed altogether. Perhaps no greater example can be found than that of Simon Garth, a 1973 Marvel Comics attempt to cash in on the sudden popularity of zombies following *Night*. In the short-lived *Tales of the Zombie*, Steve Gerber and others tell the story of Garth, a businessman who is sacrificed one night to the spirits of the *loa* only to arise as an undead creature controlled by whoever holds the key to an amulet around his neck. The priestess who is initially supposed to kill him reveals herself to be his "trusted Creole secretary" Layla; the ritual is inadvertently completed only when another of Garth's employees stabs him with the ritual knife while he is fleeing the voodoo practitioners. *Tales of the Zombie* is an anthology series, full of voodoo stories in the old EC Comics horror mode, and long prose attempts to "explain" Voodoo/Vodou to comic book fans or to review zombie-themed films like *Night*, the 1974 blaxploitation zombie movie *Sugar Hill* (later edited for television as *The Zombies of Sugar Hill* and not to be confused with the 1994 Wesley Snipes gangster film), and the James Bond vehicle *Live and Let Die*. Despite the heavily traditional zombie stories in this series, when Marvel published a re-imagining of Simon Garth's story for its adult MAX imprint in 2006, Garth became a bank teller with Layla as his co-worker; the zombie threat in this new version is not Voodoo, nor is it individual. Instead, the plot is highly derivative of the *Resident Evil* series: the army has been experimenting with a virus, and Garth is only involved because he and Layla have been taken hostage by thieves who then drive into the contaminated zone. The final symbolic rejection of the text's Haitian-tinged origin comes when the re-imagined Layla is quickly dispatched by a random zombie: even in a heavily ameliorated form, most modern zombie narratives have no place for a priestess of the *loa*.

Consumption: Not Just for Tuberculosis Anymore

Despite the proliferation of potential meanings, the zombie is associated with capitalism above all else: "Capitalism, we suggest, works as an analogue of zombiedom because it too is predicated on insatiable appetite, and the drive to consume," write Webb and Byrnand; later in the same article, they argue that Romero's films "are particularly good examples of zombie films that lay down the terms by which the zombie trope 'reads' capitalism" (p. 90–1). The argument is the wrong way around: Romero's films do indeed "lay down the terms" precisely by not being "good examples" — they are the progenitors of the trope itself, particularly *Dawn*, which takes much of its lasting power from its at-the-time unique setting in a shopping mall. If *Night* reimagined the raised dead as cannibalistic, infectious ghoul rather than victimized laborer, *Dawn* further reimagines that ghoul's cannibalism as symbolic of endless (indeed pointless) consumption. In a fundamental sense, the Haitian zombi — a symbol of the *bokor* or master's appetite, for wealth, sugar, white women, what-have-you — is not gone, but has rather been invested with that very appetite in its own right; in the absence of consciousness, that appetite is both undefined (in the sense that the zombie wants only to ingest the humanity it once shared) and all-encompassing (to eat or turn all human life is to destroy all value, as civilization collapses with the disappearance of its human inventors and inhabitants). In fact, the viral zombie is not only the consumer or the market, but is capital itself: "Capitalism has the same heartless all-consuming character, particularly in its pure form in which the 'invisible hand' of the market is supposed to bring about a dynamic equilibrium between supply and demand.... The problem is that capital doesn't care, and doesn't weigh human costs. It is simply zombie — hungry, and hence focused on feeding and expanding regardless of the consequences" (Webb and Byrnand, p. 93; but explored more thoroughly in Chris Harman, 2009; and Datta and MacDonald, this volume). As Stinson argues, in this volume, the zombie-as-capital trope has been adopted in Africa, the ultimate (linguistic) homeland of the zombie; Jean and John Comaroff (1999) have also noted this trend in South Africa. Steve Shaviro argues that this adoption of the Romeran zombie, which "originally came into American culture from distorted accounts of Haitian vodoun," are now coming back full circle: "...the periphery indulges in a sort of reverse exoticism, as it appropriates the mythology of the imperial center," no longer "workers and producers, but figures of nonproductive expenditure" (Shaviro, 2002, p. 289). Third World discourse now consumes the American zombie in turn, putting it to work in opposition to the domination of First World economic models. The Caribbean zombi, it could be argued, has not been replaced at all, only reinscribed, and thereby made more powerful.

Even otherwise exclusively diegetic matters could be explained through the lingering influence of the zombi in its American descendent. The fast/slow debate — which concerns the definition of the "realistic" speeds at which an undead corpse could reasonably be expected to move — makes little sense without the Haitian zombi, the catatonic victim of poisons or spells whose mobility is limited by a lack of consciousness or agency. Arguments mounted in the defense of the Romeran zombie's slow movement range from the likelihood of broken bones which cannot subsequently heal (which seems unreasonable when we are talking about living corpses in the first place) to their narrative nature as a group monster: "Zombies have no individual identity, but rather get their power from membership in a group: It's easy to kill one, but 1,000 indomitable flesh eaters may just overwhelm you" (Levin, 2004). The Vodou zombie is still here, in the central lack of agency and individual will which it bequeaths to Romero's otherwise-distinct creatures. The Romeran zombie's

ability to infect the living and create more unthinking members for the group is a more perverted inheritance: instead of a bokor laboriously raising undead servants, the creatures raise themselves. In effect, zombies are now self-colonizing, following patterns set up long before the living victim was ever born. The master-figure is eliminated, particularly in texts which do not seek to locate the origins of the zombie outbreak anywhere in particular, leaving the zombie open to a greater range of symbolic possibilities: shopper-as-zombie, stripper-as-zombie, Walmart-employee-as-zombie.

A true "'zombie manifesto' is one that cannot call for positive change, it calls only for the destruction of the reigning model" (Lauro and Embry, p. 91), a "monstrous future," a phrase they borrow from Franco Moretti (2005, p. 95, n. 26): "...the monster expresses the anxiety that the future will be monstrous" (Moretti, p. 84). The zombie calls for revolution without goals. But Moretti is worth quoting at greater length here, as his observation comes from a discussion of Dracula and Frankenstein's monster, creatures very different from the zombie/zombi in their resolute individuality, even if they flirt with the same ideological preoccupation with capitalism, a society split between the capitalist and the worker, bourgeois and proletariat:

> The literature of terror is born precisely *out of the terror of a split society*, and out of the desire to heal it. It is for just this reason that Dracula and Frankenstein, with rare exceptions, do not appear together. The threat would be too great: and this literature, having produced terror, must also erase it and restore peace. It must restore the broken equilibrium, giving the illusion of being able to stop history: because the monster expresses the anxiety that the future will be monstrous. His antagonist — the enemy of the monster — will always be, by contrast, a representative of the present, a distillation of complacent nineteenth-century mediocrity: nationalistic, stupid, superstitious, philistine, impotent, self-satisfied. But this does not show through. Fascinated by the horror of the monster, the public accepts the vices of its destroyer without a murmur.... The monster, then, serves to displace the antagonisms and horrors evidenced *within* society *outside* society itself [Moretti, pp. 83–4].

The zombi and its master, whether the Béla Lugosi of *White Zombie* or the *bokor* of Davis's study, can with some effort be fit to this model: Lugosi's Legendre and his ally, the plantation owner Charles Beaumont, will both fall to their deaths, freeing at least their white female victim Madeleine, and thus erasing terror and restoring peace. (Simon Garth, in his earlier version, plays out something of this tension: he has two named employees, the loyal Layla and his traitorous gardener Gyps, both of whom play different roles in reducing the capitalist himself to commodity). The viral zombie does not fit this pattern in quite the same way: in the classic Romeran film and its successors, the zombie outbreak is often not contained — the stopping of history is not illusory at all, the destruction of the reigning model is complete. In Romero's films and other texts like *The Walking Dead*, Moretti's model is reversed. The reigning model is recalled over and over again only to be destroyed almost as many times as it is invoked: in Kaufman's Fiddler's Green (*Land of the Dead*, 2005), the unnamed village in the woods in Carrie Ryan's novel *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (2009), or the quasi-utopian prison setting of Image Comics series *The Walking Dead*'s third and fourth volumes. Further, while the protagonists of the viral zombie narrative are as flawed as those in Moretti's texts, those flaws condemn these various protagonists in a way that is meant to be noticed: Kim Paffenroth's Christian reading of Romero's films is correct that the human characters have a better chance of survival when they avoid self-centered and stupid behaviors (Paffenroth, 2006). Webb and Byrnand observe: "In story after story, there seems to be no limit to the survivors' rage, or their incapacity to empathize with one another" (p. 86). Even when survivors do show empathy or tolerance, their actions

have less effect in the world than the more routine dark actions. In *Land of the Dead*, the heroes flee their city, eschewing the opportunity to attack and possibly destroy the zombie horde; in doing so, they circumvent the class struggle at the heart of Romero's films. Crucially, they do not solve that problem, the central political or social dilemmas of class conflict and human alienation bequeathed to the viral zombie by its Haitian zombi forebear.

Not all zombie aficionados are enamored of the signifying undead. Mark Kidwell's comic book series *'68* was originally envisioned as a series which would come between story arcs for a series focused on a reimagined Barbara (from *Night*) but set in Vietnam (a one-shot was released in 2007, a mini-series began in 2010, both from Image Comics). Kidwell describes the genesis of the series: "Basically, I started thinking about the year in which the original Romero film was shot (1968) and started wondering what was going on in the rest of the world at the time"—thus *Night* meets the 'Nam comic, not surprising given that much of the critical response to *Night* considered the Vietnam War an important context for the film (Hervey, 2008, pp. 95–8). Originally planned as a tie-in, Kidwell remarks that "Upon later reflection the property was judged strong enough to stand on it's [sic] own and is no longer part of the NOTLD series. It stands on it's own as an original property." Asked about the zombie genre's tendency towards socio-political relevance, Kidwell makes a case for kind of apolitical generic purity:

> I gotta tell ya, I'm not a fan of mixing political commentary with horror. I know, I know ... a lotta folks will grind on and on about the "consumerism" subtext of Romero's *Dawn* and the underlying "Dangers of Nuclear Testing" themes of films like *The Hills Have Eyes*. I'm here to assure you that more people (like me) came out of *Dawn of the Dead* after their initial viewing saying, "Man, did you see that fuckin' guy's head explode?" or "I lost it when that dude bit a chunk outta that lady's arm!" As far as my intent goes, the only statement being made with *68* is about sticking by the people you care about, until the end (or after) in the face of something horrible [Bough, *Revenant* online, 2006].

Earlier, Kidwell had belied his own avowed distaste for themes on exactly the latter issue, the "brotherhood felt among the troops and the willingness of fellow soldiers to walk through fire to save their brothers in arms." In that, Kidwell is expanding on one of Romero's key tropes—the coming-together of a group of survivors in the face of horrific calamity—and simultaneously rewriting Romero's third film, *Day of the Dead*, with its portrait of disaffected and cruel soldiers who share a vague sense of fellowship with each other in opposition to the scientists and civilians with whom they are saddled. To take 1968 and reinvent it as a glorification of military idealism is itself "mixing political commentary with horror."

But for Kidwell, as for others, it is mostly about the gore. The recent Dynamite series *Raise the Dead* (2007) has been specifically marketed as a counter-text to *The Walking Dead*, widely seen as an intelligent but slow series about the psychological damage caused by a society-wide catastrophe. As the reviewer for *Ain't It Cool News* puts it: "*The Walking Dead* is still a quality read about the emotional toll a zombie apocalypse has on the human spirit, but this is a zombie book that doesn't forget to put the bite into its story." Shades of Anton Chekhov: if there's a zombie in the room in Act 1, it had better eat someone's entrails in Act 3. The issue is a deeper one than it may first appear, having led to a continuing division in the zombie genre: social relevance versus the splatter films early critics saw even in *Night* and its successors. *Night*'s co-writer, John Russo, has argued that the social relevance of Romero's own films has been overstated:

> A lot of the critics have jumped off the deep end in likening the ghouls to the silent majority and finding all sorts of implications that none of us ever intended. I think George wants to encourage

> that kind of thinking on the part of some critics. But I'd rather tell them they're full of shit [Russo in Hervey, p. 24].

Even as the cinematic zombie comedies (*Shaun of the Dead*, *Fido*) invest their stories with heady doses of social and political commentary, B-movies and graphic novels reiterate the buckets of blood approach, tragedy divested of all meaning: the best example is Peter Jackson's aptly titled 1992 film *Braindead* (released in North America as *Dead Alive*).

The Question of Ben

To be fair to Russo, his skepticism may be partially rooted in precisely the factor that caused critics to take *Night* seriously in the first place: the gore was, for the time, excessive, but the casting of a black actor as the film's protagonist — and then having a posse (which has seemed obviously modeled on a lynch mob to many viewers and critics) execute that protagonist at the end of the film — virtually by itself created an intense critical interest. The casting of Duane Jones as Ben has been dismissed by Romero himself as "an accident. The whole movie was an accident" (Romero in Hervey, p. 24). As Hervey puts it, the crew's on-site discussions of the film's themes, the collapse of the traditional family and the possibility of revolution, never overwhelms the finished product: "...*Night*'s implications hit audiences more powerfully for not being laboured over: they're genuine subtexts" (Hervey, p. 26). Even Ben's death is the result of several "accidents": Jones has said he suggested Ben's death as the only ending that wouldn't "read wrong racially"; the final cut of the film omits a line in which the Sheriff regrets the mistaken shot which brings Ben down (Hervey, pp. 113–5).

Jones' observation was confirmed when producer Russell Streiner (who also appears in the film) observed that the audience at the film's opening night, largely African American, responded by stating that the film could only end with "Whitey" destroying the character, eliminating the specter of an able black leader (Hervey, p. 115). Max Brooks, in the section of his *Survival Guide* dedicated to "historically recorded attacks," tells the fictional story of a 1762 zombie outbreak occurring in Castries, St. Lucia. Both reinscription of the Caribbean zombie as viral and allusion to *Night*'s ending, Brooks' short narrative twice states that Africans are particularly capable of combating zombies. The first is during the initial outbreak:

> An outbreak of indeterminate source began in the poor white area of the small, overcrowded city.... Several free black and mulatto residents realized the source of the "illness" and attempted to warn the authorities. They were ignored. The outbreak was diagnosed as a form of rabies [Brooks, 2003, p. 201].

Once civil authority has completely broken down and the island's white population takes refuge in two fortresses, the slave and free black populations join forces and in "a slow, deliberate wave, they cleared St. Lucia in seven days" (202). Once British and French reinforcements arrive, the slaves are re-enslaved and the island's free blacks are executed, and the incident is officially remembered as a slave uprising. Just as Ben "must" be killed by a fearful white power at the end of his narrative, so does the black population of St. Lucia.

The Only Modern Myth

It is tempting to think that Deleuze and Guattari's observation, that the zombie is the only modern myth, is routinely cited not because it is a particularly interesting or even

accurate observation, but because Deleuze and Guattari are in that rare category of academic superstar. The full quote is this: "The only modern myth is the myth of zombies — mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 335). For Lauro and Embry, the viral zombie posits the end of revolution itself, in a flattening of all expectation, all personal or class ambition. "When we become zombiis, when we lose our subjectivity and the ability to rationalize, there will be no difference between the two. Therefore, when we truly become posthuman, we won't even *know* it" (Lauro and Embry, p. 108). In Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, Peter guesses that the dead are flocking to the mall because "this place was important to them" in life; the analogue character in the 2004 remake, Kenneth, says the same thing, but only in a deleted scene. We won't know it when it happens, indeed.

The cultural currency of the zombie, rooted in a fluidity which allows the trope to be used in a variety of academic disciplines and cultural contexts, the very openness of the metaphor — paradoxically now moves hand-in-hand with the waning of the genre itself. Although many critics, including some in this volume, note the increasing popularity of the zombie towards the end of the twentieth century, there are signs that the nearly-unstoppable zombie hordes have finally met their match: over-saturation.

Contributors to the Present Volume

Ann Kordas traces the origins of the zombie in the American imagination, providing an overview of the evolution of the monster from its Haitian origins as it slowly spread to North America. Rita Keresztesi focuses on *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, published in 1938, the product of an ethnographic study conducted by novelist and folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston has been lauded as a great African-America writer, but her work on Vodou remains controversial — likely the result of lasting biases against the subject matter as much as criticisms of the book's form or scholarship. At least as, if not more, controversial than Hurston in the field of zombies is Wade Davis. Sociologist David Inglis unpacks the lasting prejudices attached to Vodou and the zombie, and their study, through a detailed discussion of the controversy surrounding Davis's ethnobotanical work, much of which has been accepted by the popular imagination despite heavy criticism from within certain segments of the academy. Barbara S. Bruce continues the discussion of the racial elements of the zombie in discussing the role of Duane Jones, the black star of George Romero's low budget horror *Night of the Living Dead*, in contrast to the mainstream celebration of "the first black superstar" (Bruce, this volume), Sydney Poitier. Though both Poitier and Hurston are celebrated as African Americans, the zombie as racialized symbol remains an object of derision. Ronjon Paul Datta and Laura MacDonald change course in moving from racial aspects of the zombie to interpreting the creature from a Marxist perspective. The notion that the zombie might represent a criticism of capitalism has been prevalent since Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, but the Haitian background to the zombie also forces us to consider economic issues in relation to the zombie. Elizabeth A. Stinson brings the racial, economic, and neocolonial discussion of "zombified capital" into focus with a close reading of Congolese dramatist Sony Labou Tansi's play *Parentheses of Blood*. Eric Hamako further shows how the zombie symbolizes the racial and socioeconomic "Other," imbued with Orientalist qualities such as an insatiable yet asexual hunger for the flesh, unintelligibility, implacability, and a horde-like social-structure that threatens to pollute

heteronormative white family structures and racial purity. Becki A. Graham brings the logical conclusions of the preceding chapters into the modern day as she relates depictions of the modern zombie to the threat, real or imagined, of terrorism. Here, the racist fears of American slave-holders experienced with the successive/ful revolution(s) in Haiti are recognized in modern fears of the Other assaulting America. As far as monsters imbued with meaning go, Cynthia J. Miller exposes the heights to which the zombie has been vilified as she notes the correspondence between them and that greatest villain of the Western imagination — Nazis. Miller examines the relationship between these two monsters as she explores the sub–sub-genre, whose comedy value often outweighs the severity of its subject matter, of zombie–Nazi films that have appeared since World War II. Exploring yet another cultural milieu for zombie meanings, Cory James Rushton examines the Irish film *Boy Eats Girl*, which sees zombies embodying cultural paralysis and presents an argument for a religio-nationalist resurrection for Ireland and its identity. If zombies are so often seen as a "destabilizing force that shatters [everyday life]" (Braun, this volume), Michele Braun offers the recent film *Fido* as a corrective in its portrayal of a post-zombie-apocalyptic world in which the zombie cannot necessarily be controlled, but might at least be understood and incorporated into the world. Edward Dutton and Dave Beisecker both wonder at the myriad possibilities of interpretation opened up by the "post-modern" zombie. Beisecker offers a philosophical analysis of what it means to be a zombie, engaging with the ongoing debates of consciousness studies and the ramifications that zombies, philosophical and otherwise, might have for materialism. Dutton then engages in a rebuke of Ulrich Beck's notion of "zombie categories" — categories that are maintained and yet have become empty of meaning in a post-modern word — arguing instead for a rationalist perspective on metaphors.