

Chapter 3

The ‘Next People’: And the Zombies Shall Inherit the Earth

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Introduction

On Halloween night 2014 I stood with thousands of others along the side of a large boulevard in Amsterdam. There was an excited buzz rippling through the crowd and young children zipped in and out, threading their way around their parents and friends, vying for the best viewing locations. Their cries and laughter filled the air alongside the adult conversation and the sound of phones ringing as people attempted to find each other in the crowd. We were all waiting with mounting excitement for the annual Halloween Parade. It was running late. Heads turned down the street, cameras and phones at the ready, watching for any sign that the parade was arriving. Expectation hung in the air. Finally ... music. And then a truck disguised as a giant metal dragon belching smoke and music lurched into view, followed by a slow moving phalanx of participants, all in Halloween costumes. Some of the walkers were waving at the crowd, others were ignoring us, while still others lunged at unsuspecting individuals with threatening roars and grimaces. An armada of decorated vehicles, flanked by phalanxes of monsters and ghouls moved slowly along the street. Loud music blared out from each of the decorated trucks and cars interspersed amongst the walkers; some walkers carried their own drums and many blew on whistles. The result was a cacophony of noise and a visual smorgasbord of horror. There were the usual Friday the 13th outfits, a few Freddy Kruegers, too many creepy clowns, vampish nurses and devil costumes, but what stood out were the zombies. There were baby zombies, school-aged zombies, decaying zombies, sexy zombies, zombie families, zombies young and zombies old. We clapped and screamed our appreciation at all of them. Some zombie costumes were highly professional with exposed teeth, ghoulish eyes and rotting bloody flesh while others

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amounted to a bit of green and white face paint and blackened eyes. Nevertheless, the zombies were everywhere, taking over the streets of Amsterdam on that night. This seems only appropriate, as zombies *are* everywhere.

Global crisis and fear has been good for zombies: by the end of 2011, zombies were worth almost US\$6 billion to the US economy alone (Ogg 2011). In 2008, 21 news headlines across the US and the UK used the word ‘zombie’; by mid-2013, the term ‘zombie’ had already been used 100 times in that one year. In the last ten years, we have found ourselves in the grip of a profound economic crisis alongside natural disasters, wars, and a number of global pandemics including HIV, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the avian influenza H5N1. Levina and Bui (2013, p. 1) suggest that the surge in monstrous narratives, zombies amongst them, “have allowed us to deal with the profound acceleration in changing symbolic, economic and technical systems” offering a “space where society can safely represent and address anxieties of its time”. Our time is one of global interconnection and uncertainty and it seems that the monster we have chosen to represent our resulting anxieties is the zombie.

This positioning of zombies as contemporary monsters seems apt. Auerbach (1995) observes that each era or generation embraces the monsters it needs. We, apparently, need zombies. According to Bishop (2008, p. 145) the zombie “was a new monster for a New World”. Unlike other monsters well known to us – Dracula, Frankenstein, werewolves – zombies do not originate in European literature and folklore. They are, instead, creatures of the modern era and the New World. This genealogy seems to have uniquely positioned zombies as a mirror to contemporary cultural landscapes and social tensions. The film critic Robert Eiberg considered that the Fritz Lang masterpiece *Metropolis* (1927) created “a time, place and characters so striking that they become part of our arsenal of images for imagining the world” (http://www.ebertfest.com/four/metropolis_silent_rev.htm). Just as the images from *Metropolis* provided a social metaphor around inequality and exploitation, the figure of the zombie has become part of the way that we imagine and interpret the contemporary world. Appropriately, this contemporary monster has been brought to life in film and the increasing reach of mass popular culture since the mid twentieth century. The emergence of the zombie as a modern monster and metaphor is significant. The history of the zombie in popular culture mirrors a range of social and economic issues as well as the evolution of media since the early twentieth century. This chapter briefly explores the characteristics and uses of the zombie before turning to a consideration of the issues that zombies raise for thinking about young people and education.

The Zombie Shuffles into Popular Culture

First seen briefly in William Seabrook’s anthropological novel *The Magic Island* (1929), the idea – and terror – of the zombie crossed quickly into our imaginations, buoyed on the first wave of popular cinema in the 1930s. Seabrook painted an image of male and female bodies enslaved and possessed by zombification and sent to

labour in the foreign-owned sugar cane fields. Echoes of the history of slavery and racial tension in the United States run through these early voodoo zombie depictions as zombies shuffled through the night, mindlessly slaving on plantations for exploitative landowners occupying an abject liminal zone between life and death. This theme was the base for the films *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) both of which were set against the evocative backdrop of tropical cane fields, racialized sexual desire, exploitation and the beating drums of voodoo. Bishop (2008, p. 31) notes that *White Zombie*, “presents audiences with the exoticism of the Caribbean, the fear of domination and subversion, and the perpetuation of the imperialist model of cultural and racial hegemony”. These comments are just as relevant for *I Walked with a Zombie*. Set against a legacy of the US occupation (1915–1934) and colonial control of Haiti, these early films portray Haiti as both savage and regressive, caught up in the fallout of colonialism and subaltern politics. At the same time, the films reflect issues of slavery, disposable and exploitable bodies, abuse of labour in the early twentieth century, and of course, deeply entrenched racism. The *New York Times* review of the movie published during its opening week in 1943 called zombies a “dull, disgusting exaggeration of an unhealthy, abnormal concept of life” and sought to safeguard the minds of the youth of the country from the ideas and images associated with the film. However, the real terror of the film and others like it for audiences in the West, beyond the titillation of monsters and women in distress, was the suggestion that white people might also be turned into zombies, subjugated and ‘colonized’ (Bishop 2008). Bishop goes on to suggest these movies “not only exploit the exotic black native but also take advantage of the popular tendency to romanticize ancient lands, imposing castles, and mysterious figures” (p. 144). These themes and the new figure of the zombie worked to generate an ‘Other’ against which a surgent America could measure itself.

In the late 1960s, George A Romero shifted this early voodoo infused zombie trope with the release of his independent film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). The low-budget movie was filmed in black and white and as LeJacq (2007) notes, “the almost news-reel black and white footage gives it an eerie homespun quality that parallels simultaneous footage from the civil rights movement and Vietnam, and makes us question our own pleasure in watching it”. The film begins with a brother and sister visiting their father’s grave and the now famous line of dialogue, “They’re coming to get you, Barbra”. As it turned out, they were in fact, coming to get them both. The film was shocking, and a terrifying new monster uniquely equipped to reflect the concerns of the modern era shuffled into our collective psyche. This movie and the Romero films that followed established what became the classic zombie lore, moving zombies from soulless slaves controlled by a colonial master to the risen dead, driven by a hunger for living human flesh, and relentlessly slow moving. While the 1930s and 1940s zombie films spoke to issues of labour exploitation and racism, Romero and his zombies constructed a biting critique of post-war American consumerism, setting up zombies as a vehicle for criticism of social issues. Like the earlier film zombies, the Romero zombies had lost their humanity as well as their identity. As the zombies relentlessly attack, the social breakdown

that follows lays bare existing tensions around gender, race and class as survivors turn on each other.

While the shambling zombies of earlier movies were slaves to mass production, Romero's zombies became slaves to mass consumption (Botting 2011), often depicted wandering empty shopping malls in their role as the ultimate undying and mindless consumers. In their unreasoning consumption of the living zombies demonstrate the "ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human relations under capitalism" (Wood 1986, p. 213). This drive to eat flesh is refined by a focus on eating brains in *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) creating a zombie world strong enough to support four sequels. In *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) writers Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright updated Romero's social critique with their own, focussing on what Stokes (2010, p. 68) describes as the "apathy and identity crisis evident in postmodernity". Once again, the zombie film was used shine a harsh light on social issues. Romero's zombies were coming to get you. Stokes notes that, "while Romero criticized social injustices and rampant consumerism, Pegg and Wright focus on the toll postmodernity takes on the individual and on the community" (2010, p. 68). It takes a zombie apocalypse to wake the main characters from their own lifeless state as postmodern zombies, staggering through the motions of mind-numbing daily lives with no sense of identity or purpose. In an ironic twist, one of the lead characters ends the film as a zombie, but rather than being destroyed, his lifelong friend keeps him chained in the garden shed where he spends his time playing video games, exactly as he had done in life.

While the earlier Romero films were set in more local locations – small town USA, shopping malls, cities – newer depictions of zombies reflect the more globalized world in which we find ourselves. Instead of local infestations, we are provided with sweeping vision of total apocalypse with entire nations falling within days to the zombie onslaught. Our fears and tensions have become global and as a result, so have the zombies we produce. The film *World War Z* (2013) presents the deeply unsettling vision of hordes of zombies – created as part of a global pandemic – surging up and over each other to breach high barrier wall, a locust plague of flesh-eating zombies. These massive barrier walls and what they represent are themselves no stranger to the viewer of contemporary zombie films: the US fears invasion across its southern borders and has spent years and many millions building and maintaining the Mexico-United States barrier; Israel continues to build fortified barriers in its ongoing conflict with Palestinians. In this era of film, disease spreads so quickly that entire cities are overrun, governments collapse and survivors have to band together to survive (the zombies and each other).

While their original contagion was reliant on film, zombies have continued to spread. Following the pathways of popular culture, zombies quickly invaded the video game industry. *ZombieZombie* (Quicksilver 1984) is credited as the first zombie video game. In this very basic arcade style game, players find themselves in the middle of a city overrun by zombies and must use bursts of air from a rifle to knock down the zombies in order to survive. By the 1990s, game graphics had improved significantly, encouraging an increasing gore factor in games such as the LucasArts cult classic *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* (1993). A key point in the zombie game

universe was reached with the release of *Resident Evil* (1996). Establishing the new zombie genesis as viral, the backstory for the franchise is the secret development and illegal experimentation with the T-virus that, when released, turns animals and humans into ravenous flesh eating zombies. The virus, once released, is spread by bite. Very quickly, former colleagues and friends become rabid zombies who must be destroyed before they can infect you, the player. This game established the now sprawling Resident Evil media franchise and influenced game development from that point, selling more than 50 million games by 2012. Since that initial game, the franchise has grown to almost 20 video games, a highly successful film series, novels, comics and a large range of merchandising and action figures. Of course, the game with possibly the most general appeal has been the tower defence game *Plants vs Zombies* (PopCap Games 2009) which requires you, a home owner, to use a variety of plants to fend off an army of cartoonish zombies attempting to cross your lawn and enter your house. Like most contemporary zombies, they want to eat your brains. When it was released on iOS for iPhone via the Apple AppStore, it sold more than 300,000 copies in the first 9 min.

Paralleling the resurgence of zombie movies and the growth of entire virtual game worlds populated with zombies, the phenomenon of zombie walks in urban sites emerged. These participatory street events brought together hundreds, sometimes thousands of shambling people dressed as zombies, each with the desire to demonstrate publicly or to just participate in a large-scale event. These walks were often linked to the sense of dispossession felt by citizens as world economies collapsed and neoliberal governments did little to support them. Accusations of soulless governments neglecting powerless citizens, loss of traditional identity pathways – these were all themes associated with the walks. They were, and remain, as much a political statement as they were a fun participatory mass event. As in the movies, and as Sarah Juliet Lauro notes in the Preface, there has been a recent shift towards fast moving zombies in film and this has spread to the non-film world with the appearance and spread of Zombie Runs. In these events, the zombies are no longer shambling. Reflecting the speed and rapid spreading of the disasters and threats – viral and environmental – that seemingly surrounded us, zombies began to run. Fast and increasingly, in packs.

Zombies have proved to be adept at boundary crossings and as such, have been co-opted as metaphors across a range of social theory. In the field of international relations, Drezner (2011) has used scenarios based around a zombie apocalypse to test the readiness and scope of national and international responses to large-scale humanitarian crises and violence. Giroux (2010) has argued loudly that zombies are the perfect metaphor to describe the dead but still twitching ideas and behaviours of neoliberal capitalism. Ulrich Beck has drawn on the notion of 'zombie categories' to describe 'living dead' sociological categories which remain in use even while they are unable to effectively describe contemporary social and cultural conditions (Slater and Ritzer 2001).

The power of the zombie to reach into the far – and sometimes unexpected – corners of our culture is reflected in the latest iteration of the classic comic book character *Archie*. American high school student, Archie Andrews first appeared in Pep

Comics No. 22 in 1941 hoping to attract fans of the Andy Hardy movies (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer 1937–1946) starring Mickey Rooney. Since then, Archie and his friends Jughead Jones, Betty Cooper, Veronica Lodge and Reggie Mantle have lived together in the seemingly ageless small town of Riverdale, attending Riverdale High School and hanging out at the local milkshake shop. Their exploits have been depicted across a number of comic series including *Archie Comics Digest* (January 1982–present), *Betty and Veronica Vol. 2* (June 1987–present), *Archie* (Winter 1942–present) and *Life with Archie* (1958–1991) and *Life with Archie: The Married Life* (2010–present) that explores the two parallel lives that characters would have if Archie married either Betty or Veronica. This series comes to an end with the death of Archie – in both possible universes – as attempts to save a friend from being shot. The death of the lead character of a successful comic book franchise that has endured since the early 1940s is not, however, as terminal as might be expected. Archie’s character pops up in a new comic series, *Afterlife with Archie* (October 2013–present), a story arc begins with the death and botched resurrection of Jughead’s pet dog – Hotdog – and Jughead’s own subsequent death and zombification. Before long, the town of Riverdale and its inhabitants are forced to face a zombie apocalypse with well-known and beloved characters from the Archie universe appearing in the series as zombies. Like the *Walking Dead* comic book and television series the story arc embraces horror and pathos as characters fight for survival against the backdrop tagline, “This is how the end of the world begins”. Each issue of the series has rapidly sold out. The entwining of a much loved and iconic character such as Archie who has always represented youthful innocence and optimism, with the darker trope of the zombie evidences the power of this metaphor for addressing a range of social issues.

As zombies have moved into the popular consciousness and escaped the limits of film to cross into video games, television, comics, toys and social theory they have also evolved to match the issues of a new cultural and economic landscape. In many contemporary depictions they are no longer the inexplicably risen dead or the victims of a bewitching, but the result of infection, rapidly spread along the pathways of globalization. The challenges of surviving in a zombie-infested world reflect the challenges to our own humanity and moral compass in the face of terrorism, war and economic unrest. Zombies have continued to evolve as a mirror for the concerns of each generation, providing a vehicle to articulate and challenge social norms and current.

What Is It About Zombies?

Derkson and Hudson Hick (2011) suggest that the power of the zombie is linked to its uncanniness – its ability to be simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. This ambiguity results in acute discomfort in those who experience it. The zombie is apparently living – it moves, looks human (particularly in the early stage of

zombification), demonstrates desire and purpose – but it is also patently without life. It is both living and dead, familiar and unfamiliar. This sense of uncanniness, of something simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, is enhanced when the zombie is someone we once knew as a living person – a colleague, neighbour, husband or parent. The familiar-become-strange challenges the boundaries of obligation and the social contracts established between parent-child, neighbours, employer-employee, citizen-government, particularly when the former family member attacks. Viewed from another perspective, the zombie refuses to stop existing, but the death of the self that formerly inhabited that particular body crosses a boundary line away from subject-citizen (Vint 2013). Zombies exist but no longer have the protections afforded by the notions of subject and/or citizen that sit at the core of our cultural, social and political structures. Even as they attempt to consume the living, they are themselves without any of the protections afforded the citizens of a fully operational state. The non-living, but undeniably existing zombie, poses a direct challenge to many of these fundamental structures and the relationships premised upon them.

The living-but-not-living zombie also challenges the immutable boundary between life and death. Modern western culture has become disconnected from death. The process of dying has become pathologized and medicalized. Few of us ever see a dead body. If we do, it is usually in the sterilized wards of a hospital or alternatively, at a funeral home where the body is arranged to look as if peacefully sleeping – death as slumber. Zombies challenge this efficient and hygienic process by refusing a quiet death and by forcing the living to confront the non-living in a battle for survival that must ultimately end in violence. Zombie bodies challenge our death-as-sleep image by confronting us with physical trauma and decay. Portrayals of zombies “take the hidden bodies and place them directly in front of the audience, bridging the disconnect between daily life and the reality of death” (Twohy 2008, p. 47).

One of the other key messages embedded in recent zombie films has been that we – the living – must be self-reliant and prepared to face the worst that an apocalypse can offer, including the realities of governments that are at best, no longer set up to support private citizens and at worst, uncaring and incompetent. Social breakdown – evidenced by the need to commit violence against the bodies of those we previously loved and depended on, and to break many of the everyday norms concerning property and behaviour – is a key theme associated with zombies and zombie apocalypses. Not only are zombies breaking the laws of life and death, and challenging the relationship of the state with its citizens, but the living citizens are also forced to break the established moral and ethical codes in order to survive. The issue of survival has been taken up seriously by groups such as the Missouri-established, but increasingly international, Zombie Squad set up in the wake of 9/11 and the film *28 Days Later* (2003). Group members, initially attracted to discussions of how to survive a zombie apocalypse more successfully than film characters, have become advocates for disaster preparedness, working with organizations such as the American Red Cross, the Disaster Preparedness and Emergency response Association, Youth in Need, Habitat for Humanity and Meals on Wheels. The organization, while dedicated to preparedness for manmade and natural disasters dem-

onstrates, by its very existence, scepticism about the capacity of national emergency preparedness infrastructures and a refusal to trust their own survival to official responses and officials (Generation Zombie reference, last chapter). At the same time, the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) makes use of the zombie apocalypse as a framework for disaster preparation and information: if you are prepared to survive a zombie outbreak you are prepared for any and all disasters.

Cutting across these themes, zombies are viscerally unsettling and downright terrifying – their presence challenges deeply entrenched constructions of identity and self in addition to the physical threat they represent. According to Warner (date), “a zombie is a body which has been hollowed out, emptied of selfhood” (p. 357). To be bitten by a zombie is a violation of the boundaries of the flesh; to become a zombie is to lose ‘self’ – the essential qualities that distinguish one human from another – the core concept upon which much of our understanding of others and ourselves rests. The ‘self’ is constructed in relation to the norms and practices of the society around us. When that society crumbles, as it always seems to do when confronted by waves of zombies, the structures that have contributed to the construction and maintenance of ‘self’ dissolve. The zombie assault on the self-reflexive ‘I’ as well as the challenge to our humanity is at the core of the zombie apocalypse as we struggle with the decline of established narratives and cultural norms. While the human body may be recognizable, there is no longer a recognizable or responsive ‘self’ or ‘I’ at home and any sense of humanity has eroded away. The self is constructed out of multiple and fluid identities (Stryker 1980) which are attached to social roles and positioning. These roles and social positions are located in relation to the broader social structure and cultural practices. When these structures crumble, the ‘self’ is no longer anchored. The zombie is not just an attack on the identity and self of the infected. It challenges the identities and constructions of self of the entire society as well as the ways in which we treat each other.

Such has been the challenge mounted by zombies, the monsters for our era. They affront our sense of self, they attack the foundations of our society, they challenge the boundaries between life and death, obligation and anarchy that form the parameters of our way of life. Zombies are relentless, unthinking, unforgiving, infected. They have become the mirror of contemporary social, economic and political strife and while they place our social and religious norms in doubt, until recently they have offered no alternatives and no clues for what a new relationship might look like. However, an exploration of the ways in which zombies have made their way into youth culture and the manner in which the zombie metaphor has been applied to young people has, I suggest, much to tell us.

Zombies and Young People

Young people are living in a world where zombies are embedded in the everyday narratives and experiences of growing up. Toy aisles are host to soft toy zombies, nerf ball zombie guns, action figures from *The Walking Dead*, zombified classic

fairytale princesses, as well as Mattel's *Monster High* series adolescent fashion dolls. Children are the prime audience for the animated film *ParaNorman* (2012) that featured zombies as a way to look at issues of bullying and how to fit in. *Zombie Hotel* (2006) is an award-winning animated series about two zombie children who attempt to pass as human to attend their local school. *Daddy, I'm a Zombie* (2011) and its sequel *Mummy, I'm a Zombie* (2014) are Spanish animation films about Dixie, a 13 year old reanimated as a zombie who must juggle middle school and teen love with saving the world from destruction. Television and film are building zombie-themed programming directed at the youth market. Phone and console games are also targeting the young. Mobile phones, consoles and tablets allow children to play the hugely popular video game *Plants vs Zombies* that involve the player defending his/her home from an army of zombies, and any number of other games on numerous platforms have been released with children in mind including *Zombies at my Neighbours*, *Zombie Cart*, *Zombocalypse*, *Zombie Shoot* and *Zombie Mall*. There is a lot of zombie action aimed at a young audience.

But the young are not just immersed in a popular culture that ultimately uses zombies as a way to reflect broader social anxieties. The zombie metaphor has been applied to young people just as it has been applied to larger social and political issues. Most recently, zombification is a stand in for a set of moral panics swirling around young people in contemporary culture. The zombification of the young takes two major pathways: zombification via technology and zombification through medication. In the first, young people are routinely depicted as zombies addicted to technology on the one hand – becoming inert, unresponsive and either/both aggressive or lethargic. In the second, they are constructed as over-medicated into a compliant, soul-less zombie state, particularly by ADHD medications. By either route these zombie young become slow witted, low achieving, lethargic and/or aggressive.

Video game playing is constructed in the media as the cause of sleep deprivation and declining social skills (see for example Baker 2012) that serve to zombify young people, while technologies such as mobile phones are linked to youth isolation and alienation. Social anxiety around the use of technology by the young finds an outlet in the zombie metaphor. The catchier media headlines depict children as 'engineered techno zombie children', 'tech zombies' and 'digital zombies'. Australia's *Daily Telegraph* newspaper shifts the blame to parents by asking, "Are you raising a digital zombie?" Technology is apparently turning our children into zombies, but so is medication. Almost 800,000 children in the UK were taking ADHD medication; in Australia the number of children taking ADHD medication has doubled in the last decade reaching almost 70,000 by the end of 2013 (Corderoy 2014). According to Thomas et al. (2013), "medication prescription rates have also increased twofold for children and fourfold for adolescents" while "the prevalence of parent reported diagnosis of ADHD in the US rose from 6.9 % in 1997 to 9.5 % in 2007. In the Netherlands it doubled over a similar period and other countries have also seen similar rises". There has been a 41 % rise in diagnoses of ADHD among children aged 4–17 years in the US in the last decade; two-thirds of these young people are prescribed drugs such as Ritalin or Adderall leading to headlines such as

“Ritalin turned my son into a zombie” (*The Star*, 2014) teacher descriptions of students who have lost their “life spark” (Corderoy 2014), and arguments that normal childhood behaviour is being pathologized and drugged as schools struggle to enforce curricula and norms that are no longer useful or appropriate. Children and adolescents are, in these views, losing social skills, energy and identity. The use of the zombie metaphor to give voice to the moral panic around children, technology and medication is telling. Young people, it turns out, *are* one of the broader social anxieties that zombies allow us to articulate.

And the Young (Zombies) Shall Inherit the Earth

However, there are new indications of an evolution of form and function in the zombie universe. Interestingly, it seems that the emerging shift in zombie lore emerging from films and novels is specifically focused on the young. If, as many have argued, shifts in zombie behaviour and characteristics reflect larger social and cultural issues, then the shift that is currently emerging must be of particular interest to educators and educational researchers.

In a market long dominated by Barbie and Bratz dolls, the zombie has recently been reinterpreted as a teenage franchise in a global toy market. Mattell, Inc. has created a multimedia *Monster High* range that includes a broad range of consumer products aimed at adolescents including fashion dolls, stationery, bags, key chains, various toys, play sets, video games, TV specials, a web series and direct to DVD movies. The franchise characters are the offspring of famous movie monsters such as Frankenstein, the Mummy, werewolves, vampires and, of particular interest here, zombies. Ghoulia Yelps (see also Chapter xx, this volume), one of the central characters of the *Monster High* franchise, is 16 and the daughter of two (nameless) zombies. She has inherited a number of the usual zombie traits including the shambling walk, stooped posture and seeming inability to articulate words beyond the production of groans and moans. According to Ghoulia,

I cannot function without a proper schedule and I do not process last-minute change very well. My zombie nature also means that I walk rather slowly, have trouble making facial expression and can only speak...well...zombie <http://www.monsterhigh.com/en-us/characters/ghoulia-yelps>.

She prefers to eat, “Brains ...just kidding”. She prefers instead to eat, “rapidly prepared, mass-market cuisine” (Translation: I like fast food.) She is, however, particularly bright and thoughtful and her grunts and groans actually comprise a complete language. She displays an explicit love of learning, along with books and reading. While she is depicted in the *Monsters High* DVDs and television series as stereotypically hunched over and lurching, as a doll she is upright and svelte with luminous pale skin, tall slim build, pale eyes, and thick tonal blue hair. In all depictions of her character – dolls, video, books – she is trendily dressed with a slight psychobilly vibe. Ghoulia has a unique identity and clear sense of ‘self’ which runs

counter to the loss of self and soul that characterizes much of the zombie mythos. In addition, she is hungry not so much for brains but for knowledge. Ghoulia dwells in a world in which zombies have social lives, friends and a love for learning and self-development – a world in which zombies have a future and a legitimate role. Instead of holding a mirror to an abject humanity, Ghoulia is presented as an aspirational role model. While one of the terrors associated with becoming a zombie has traditionally been the loss of self or identity, Ghoulia has a strong sense of self and personal narrative, which seems to set her apart from the majority of zombie depictions. Self-awareness and personal narrative link Ghoulia with other emerging zombie tropes.

Ghoulia is not alone in signalling a shift in the ways that zombies may exist and what they may represent. The young adult novel *Warm Bodies* (Isaac Marion 2011) and associated movie *Warm Bodies* (2013) challenges and evolves the established pathway of zombie-human relations. In the older view, unchallenged since the seminal Romero films of the 1960s, the movement from human to zombie was a one-way street. Humans became infected, turned into zombies, and remained mindless human-eating zombies until their bodies finally decayed away. *Warm Bodies*, however, marked a profound shift. The central characters were young adults. Zombies were revealed to have various degrees of inner lives, retaining vestiges of their human selves that faded over time. Eventually some zombies devolved into skeletal figures called Boneys, creatures with no remaining shred of humanity or individual identity. Boneys will tear apart zombies or humans without qualm. Eating brains, the traditional meal of the zombie becomes more important in this context as it gives them access to the memories of their victims, allowing them to remember what it felt like to be human and delay or avoid becoming Boneys. The central character struggles to remember who he was before death and zombification, managing only to retrieve the first initial of his name, 'R'. R falls in love with one of the surviving humans and in his quest to keep her alive and comfortable with his presence, his path back to human-ness begins. Love and belief pulls the zombies back towards being human. As R develops increasingly strong feelings for the human he rescued his humanity reasserts itself and his body slowly returns to life.

This new universe gives us an entirely new continuum. Zombies take up an interim and transient position in a new universe between skeletal Boneys and fleshed humans. This shifts the ontology of the zombie universe. Zombies are no longer the opposite of living human. Instead, they are a transient phase from which an individual may emerge as either increasingly human or as increasingly Boney. The capacity to hold on to and even reconfigure 'self' post-zombification is also being seen in the soon-to-be-aired CWTV show, *Zombie* (2014). The focus of this television series is a female character – young medical resident Liv – zombified when zombies attack a party she is attending. Sense of self intact, Liv attempts to continue her (after)life and finds that by working for the coroner's office she can access enough brains to keep her human-eating tendencies in check and find a purpose to her existence. Like R she finds that eating a brain gives her access to slices of the memories contained within (<http://www.cwtv.com/shows/izombie/about>). Liv's

ability to continue this existence is premised upon her ability to pass as one of the living, essentially passing as human.

This new zombie ontology is extended in the young adult novel *The Girl with all the Gifts* (Carey 2014). In this universe, the polemic of human versus zombie is again disrupted by the evolution of a new group. Unexpectedly, zombies or ‘hungries’ as they are called, sometimes breed. The pivotal character of this book, Melanie, is the child of two hungries and as the story unfolds it seems that there are many, many more children like her. This unpredicted coupling results in children who are born zombies and therefore crave flesh, but who also demonstrate superior physical attributes and rational thought. These children, unlike their zombie parents, are capable of controlling their urges, of social behaviour, rational thought and affect, language and learning. They have a growing sense of self and a unique identity, but they are not human nor are they on an R-like journey towards (re)becoming human. These zombie children are an evolutionary leap. A new form of life suited to changed conditions.

The novel emphasises the power of social structures and culture. For the new group of young zombies, learning and socialization is key to their development; without this they risk falling into a vicious tribal existence. Melanie, the zombie-child central character of the novel, *The Girl with all the Gifts* (Carey 2014) represents the new generation whose zombie characteristics uniquely equip them to survive and thrive in a post-apocalyptic world. Melanie is characterized by her endless desire to learn; her thirst for knowledge is, in effect, stronger than her thirst for human flesh. Melanie is not human, but she does have a strong and growing sense of self and purpose, as well as a strongly developed empathy, much of which is linked to her ongoing education, whether from classrooms and books or from experience. As the story unfolds and it becomes evident that there are other zombie children like Melanie the need to educate them to ‘become’ provides the concluding narrative. What the humans perceived as ‘dead’ creatures are, in fact, the rise of the new world order. The book tells the story of the painful break down of the old order and the slowly growing realization – by Melanie and those around her – that this is a world coming to an end. There will be no recovery. Melanie and the other zombie children, evolved to thrive in the changed conditions will build a new order. This brings with it opportunity and responsibility.

Concluding Thoughts: Apocalypse Now

These young zombie characters – R, Ghoulia and Melanie – represent an emergent shift in the zombie metaphor: from abject monster caught between life and death to evolutionary lifeform armed with the skills to survive the post-apocalyptic landscape. Given the close relationship between the representation of zombies and ways in which society is changing, this is an interesting movement, one with implications for the ways in which we depict the young and the educational provision we make

for them. The zombie was originally that which had lost its humanity and audiences of the time found this horrifying. This threat has underpinned the depictions of zombies every since. In an era the Pope has referred to as a “piecemeal World War III” (BBC News 2014) the question of what it is to be ‘human’ has rarely been more important. The AMC cable television series, *The Walking Dead* (2010–present) specifically takes up this theme, using the zombie apocalypse as the backdrop to a human drama that brings into focus the cost of survival in terms of our own sense of humanity. As it continues to evolve, the metaphor of the zombie is increasingly an exploration of what it means to be human rather than a depiction of decaying after-life or failed death. As the amateur movie reviewer known as [Colorscheme](#) notes, “This is how zombie-type characters are used best, when they force us to examine what makes us human.” Against this exploration of what it means to be ‘human’, it is fascinating to note that many of the most recent depictions of zombies speak to a sense of hope and a belief in the capacity of the young to flourish in the changed global conditions.

It seems pivotal that these newer zombies do not require a return to the previous state of living human to sustain a sense of self. If we are to believe in these newer models and to follow them through to their logical conclusion the new generation – an evolutionary move forward from our own – will create a new society that is better suited to the new worlds in which the young will find themselves and a new form of post-human. As Melanie says in relation to the way in which the surviving adult humans treat the children of hungries,

If you keep shooting them and cutting them into pieces ... nobody will be left to make a new world ... they won't be the old kind of people but they won't be hungries either. They'll be different. Like me, and the rest of the kids...they'll be the next people. The ones who make everything okay again (Chapter 71, para 51).

The young who grow up in contemporary times *will* be different. And the world *will* change. The emergence and resilience of the zombie apocalypse metaphor is evidence that we are experiencing rapid and painful change, individually and as a society. As Melanie says, the young people born into this new environment won't be the ‘old kind of people’ but neither will they descend into a self-less and abject existence of the traditional zombie. As Melanie notes, they will be ‘the next people’. All of this has potentially profound implications for education. In *The Girl with all the Gifts*, the character of Melanie's teacher acts as her protector and defender as well as her educator. Miss Justineau realized, as the book ends, that her world was gone but that it was her obligation to educate the ‘next people’. In the world outside youth literature, we cannot construct the young in our image or use schooling as a mechanism for unproblematic social reproduction. The world for which much of the schooling system has traditionally prepared young people does not exist for them. Like Miss Justineau, as educators it is our obligation and our joy to defend, protect and above all, educate the ‘next people’. But as we do, we should understand that the world and the future belong to them. They are the ‘ones who make everything okay again’.

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