

Facing the Sublime: The Zombie Figure, Climate Change, and the Crisis of Categorization

Elaine Chong

Abstract

In the article, zombies are presented as the 21st century's way to encounter the sublime, and as a way to rethink the rigid binaries in Western culture and our effects on climate change. By applying Edmund Burke's treatise, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the terror equated with witnessing something neither alive nor dead is capable of creating feelings of the sublime. The horror instilled by the zombie is because this figure defies categorization in the most basic way –it exists between life and death. The author uses Marjorie Garber's work *Vested Interests* that explores a "third" category that questions typical gender binary. This crisis of categorization works similarly with the zombie figure because it too lies in the middle of a stable, unchallengeable binary –that of life and death. This binary becomes permeable in zombie fiction, throwing the reader into a psychological state capable of experiencing the sublime. Zombies have evolved in each retelling. However in each the brain is the vital organ necessary for a zombie's survival, including *Warm Bodies*, *World War Z*, and *I Am Legend*. Through a close reading of *I Am Legend*, the author argues that the existence of the zombie narrative parallels how the Western world has treated the planet and contributed to climate change. Zombies are a destructive vision of humanity, and through the "third" space that zombie literature provides, society is able to encounter the environmental damage it is inflicting on the planet.

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To wonder about the monstrous idea of an incessantly hungry horde of the Undead is to face the Sublime, or that which causes mind-numbing terror, yet the zombie monster continues to romance the American public. Beholding the sublime in full view renders minds unable to do anything from terror and despair, and so readers of the 21st century have turned to literature. With novella *I Am Legend*, by Richard Matheson, we explore how the zombie creature psychologically affects readers through main character Robert Neville. We include viewpoints by Edmund Burke with his ideas of terror and the sublime as well as Marjorie Garber on the crisis of categorization. We chose the 1954 work *I Am Legend*, as it is widely accepted as the starting point of the current zombie monster's incarnation, which we will use to illustrate the zombie figure as an essential, and obviously popular, introspection-causing literary monster through its crisis of categorization.

The voluntary engagement with the zombie literature genre points to our society's hunger for induced introspection. Both engendered *from* our cultural anxiety and is reflective *of* our cultural anxiety, the zombie literature genre provides this introspection when we no longer know up from down, or indeed, life from death. The figure of the zombie provides a welcome relief in its crisis-causing appearance, forcing readers to stop absolutely everything else in order to reflect upon questions they might rather leave alone during day-to-day life. Through the veil of fictional literature, however, readers voluntarily face the sublime, and thus are given the chance to conquer it.

The Sublime and the Third

“Through indiscriminate suffering men know fear and fear is the most divine emotion. It is the stones for altars and the beginning of wisdom.”

– Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

The zombie monster, as it is rendered in late 20th and early 21st century American literature, causes in the reader's mind a unique psychological

experience of not just facing the sublime in nature in all its horrifying and awesome powers, but also of witnessing the binary codes of the First World culture being razed to the ground with a crisis of categorization.

We begin with Edmund Burke's explorations of terror and the sublime in order to lay the foundation for our argument that the zombie figure, as a fictional symbol of terror, efficiently represents overwhelming anxieties (such as climate changes) and induces introspection. In his 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke declares that terror, or any thing that may "excite the ideas of pain and danger...is a source of the *sublime*" (Burke). In this sentence Burke describes the relationship between terror, pain, and the sublime. Pain, as a herald of death, an "emissary of this king of terrors", increases in strength in the mind because of its status as signifier to the most terrifying state of being – that of not existing at all (Burke). Burke goes on to explain how, as "an apprehension of pain or death," the state of being afraid "effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning" (Burke). In fact, fear causes our bodies to react as if we were in "actual pain" (Burke). As it is "impossible to look on anything as trifling... that may be dangerous", it matters not what dimension or size the thing causing the fear is (Burke). If the viewer "consider[s them] as objects of terror", these objects are then "capable of raising ideas of the sublime" (Burke). This sheds light upon the fact that living creatures smaller than us, such as spiders or snakes, can cause immense fear, because of the danger they pose to our beings.

In the context of zombie literature then, the mere suggestion of a creature that once was human, is the size and shape of a human, and once could feel, think, and reason like a human, but is neither alive nor dead, proves nearly impossible to kill, and only preys upon living human beings for energy to continue their existence, proves more than adequate to create substantial terror. *Though entirely imaginary*, this idea of the zombie, of an (almost) unconquerable threat posed to our beings is just as "capable of raising ideas of the sublime" as, say, the immeasurable ocean (a terror to mankind for many centuries until recent domestication through scientific and technological advances). The idea of the zombie monster astonishes readers, and, as Burke says, "astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (Burke). The astonishment that arises from engaging with zombie literature comes not from the concrete details of the zombie monster itself, but rather from the fact that this creature absolutely defies categorization. It is this loss of ability

to place, name, categorize, and through the act of scientific sectioning, *understand* an object, that causes fear and horror – more precisely, the horror of losing one's understanding of reality. It is this defiance of categorization we explore next.

In her book *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber eloquently argues that cross-dressing is a “third” category that interrupts the societal construction of the gender binary; we intend to borrow the argument for the “third” category and apply it to the zombie figure. Garber clearly states in her introduction “the 'third' is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis” (Garber 11). It is not itself another category, but a *possibility* of something other than the two choices presented as inevitable fact. Therefore, introducing a third choice to a stable binary has the effect of “reconfigur[ing] the relationships between the original pair, and put[ting] into question identities previously conceived as stable, unchallengeable, grounded, and 'known'” (Garber 13). She argues that the spectacle of a cross-dresser or transvestite confuses and provokes a society that has been taught to neatly and unhesitatingly categorize every human as either strictly female or male. With the insertion of the cross-dresser, a crisis of categorization occurs, “disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances” (Garber 16). Individuals new to the experience of entertaining the idea of the transvestite, or the “third”, are given the opportunity to monitor and question their reactions. The “third” category incites introspection regarding the hitherto solid, comfortable, familiar binary. The idea of a cross-dresser or transvestite implicitly asks: Why *shouldn't* a third category of gender exist? The same crisis of categorization occurs with the introduction of the idea of the zombie monster – but to a greater degree, we contend, for what binary seems more “stable, unchallengeable, grounded, and 'known'” than that of being alive or dead?

As interrupting the binary is the effect or purpose of the “third” category, it should now be self-evident as to why the idea of the zombie monster provides such terror to contemporary readers – it is neither alive nor dead, yet has qualities of both. Its body rots, yet needs energy to survive. It moves, but does not breathe. It is capable of action, but does not have (or does not appear to have) volition of thought. Zombies have no sex or gender once they have left the realm of humankind and become zombies – they are an uncategorizable, unnameable, unknowable “it”. The idea of the zombie implicitly asks readers: What defines alive and what defines dead *now*?

Garber explains the crisis of categorization further as “...a failure of definitional *distinction*, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another” (Garber 16, emphasis mine). The main horror of zombie literature comes from forcing readers to imagine their familiar world with one exceptional difference: the once clearly defined and upheld binary of life and death is now, astonishingly, “permeable”. The reader is thrown into psychological chaos, having come face to face with the sublime, an occurrence so great their minds are filled with only one object: the living dead.

A discussion of the general characteristics of the zombie monster shows that the living dead ironically evolve with each new piece of writing. Consider, first, how obscurity deepens mystery and fear. Edmund Burke states “When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes” (Burke). An object that is terrible must have elements of mystery that prevents one from gaining full understanding; the lack of knowledge heightens the fear of the object. The contradictory and evolving nature of the zombie then understandably keeps contemporary readers (and characters) fully engaged – until the monsters are fully understood, they can never be fully conquered.

All zombies have the same beginning: while the length of time spent officially deceased does not appear to matter, they must be dead first, and *then* come back to “life.” This stems from the Haitian legend of the voodoo masters who commanded the dead to rise again and labor in the fields (Kee). Since the zombie monster has since passed into American consciousness and literature, however, the conversion from human to zombie has changed from a voodoo master's call to virus left unexplained, and the creatures' only purpose seem to be devouring those still alive. They have the power to convert live humans into undead zombies, but they do not seem aware of it. With this basic foundation, each North American rendition of the zombie monster changed slightly. They started off slow, as discussed in detail in the anthology *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* (Christie). They shambled, they walked, they crept, they lurched, they crawled – but they never stopped. The slow but steady persistence gave a feeling of the inevitable – you can run, you can hide, but we *will* eat you. The first zombies also were assumed not to have physical sensations – limbs might have been hacked off, blown off, and still unfazed, the undead continued to hunt the living down (Christie). They seemed immortal, except

that the brain was still the weak point. Though they did not seem to be able to think, reason, communicate, talk, or remember their human lives, that particular organ was still essential to their survival: the brain had to be fatally wounded to finally stop a zombie. This tradition continues today, as seen in texts like Max Brooks' *World War Z* and Isaac Marion's *Warm Bodies*.

However, along the way, many of these characteristics inexplicably changed. Speed no longer remained an issue. Zombies can move quickly now, as in works such as *I Am Legend*, *World War Z*, and *Warm Bodies*, and as discussed in *Better Off Dead*. The inability to talk has also been overcome, the gift of gab granted, showing there is capability of thought and reasoning, as in *I Am Legend* and *Warm Bodies*. In *Warm Bodies* particularly, most expectations and stereotypes of the zombie are broken. Written from the perspective of a zombie, who is ultimately responsible for starting a revolution – and evolution – readers finish *Warm Bodies* expecting from now on thinking, talking, and endearing zombies. The highly unpredictable, evolving nature of the zombie – that of an unstoppable, essentially immortal cannibal who nonetheless spends its downtime slouching, drooling and staring at walls, and who in recent texts have been given the power to think and communicate – forces characters and by extension readers to consider nothing else but this sublime monster. Coming face-to-face with this fantastic creature, readers undergo a crisis of categorization and ask themselves many questions: Is it alive? Is it dead? Am I alive, or am I the one who is dead? The killer question of course, is: what defines “human” anymore?

The boundary-breaking zombie creature, the sublime, and the “third” cause necessary confusion, and ultimately, introspection. By presenting the zombie as the indiscriminate enemy against all of mankind, authors of zombie literature force readers to ask themselves what, exactly, is this creature doing that is so evil and inherently wrong? The answers are disquieting. One: the zombie endlessly consumes the dominant species to sustain its destructive way of life. Two: its existence throws the entire planet out of balance. Three: it never thinks about what it is doing, and never dies. Four: it converts everyone else into a zombie. In other words, the zombie existence parallels the First World culture and treatment of the planet. One: in the First World, outsourcing work overseas to Second and “Third” Worlds (only called “third” because of their non-status as either first or second) is a common practice, saving corporations money by buying cheap labor akin to slavery. Two: the human race has unarguably caused havoc with the environment in the

shortest amount of time. Weather patterns have changed; entire species of animals and vegetation have gone extinct. Three: with each generation, our culture's exploitation of the Earth and its inhabitants only grows more and more sophisticated with all our rapid advancement of technology. Four: The Second and Third worlds want to be modern, but as "modernity" is actually a code-name for "Westernity", we can safely say that they want to be like us. Thus we as readers are forced to acknowledge that the zombie is our reflection, distorted, grotesque, but true.

The sublime encounter between the human and the zombie creates a third space for readers to consider the environmental consequences of First World culture. This horribly familiar creature so terrifies us because it is a monstrous figure not born of humankind, not purposely created by humankind, but *is* humankind – and constantly evolving, just as we are. Unable to express itself, the zombie, hungry for life, feeds off of the living. Unable to face head-on the overwhelming truth that our beloved culture encourages killing the planet, our society, hungry for introspection, turns to zombie books so that readers may glance at the truth from an angle, out of the corner of their eyes, quickly looking away and back again, slowly processing through literature what seems unbearable in direct words. The zombie monster, in all of its obscure contradictions, deftly represents what the First World culture fears most and is guiltily aware of: not that the secrets to immortal life will continue to elude us, but that the quest for immortality through godlike knowledge and technological power over the entire planet ultimately strips us of our humanity.

The Other Reflection

"There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses."

– Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*

This paper chooses to analyze an example of zombie literature instead of the more established zombie film genre, as studies show that the act of reading has a more profound effect psychologically than of watching a film – engaging with a text, which technically consists of mere black marks on a page, triggers reactions in the brain invaluable to our ideally constantly developing psyches. The act of reading is akin to entering the mind of another, an experience that can be both traumatic and uplifting. With words, a system of symbolism, inherently obscure in form, readers' minds are presented with an idea of a world within to enclose themselves during the

duration of reading. The idea must be compelling and concrete enough that readers feel as if they were there, but vague enough that the readers' minds are allowed to stretch it to infinity with their imaginings. As Burke says, "...the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give raises a very obscure and imperfect *idea* of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description than I could do by the best painting" (Burke). (Indeed we might say the act of reading is in itself a "third" space, allowing readers to traverse the great length between absolute knowledge and absolute ignorance.) More importantly, reading literature encourages development of empathy for others different from ourselves. If we consider the "Other" as someone else on whose differences we focus on, rather than the similarities, the zombie figure best represents the ultimate Other of this generation and time period.

The perspective offered in *I Am Legend* yields insights on how, depending equally on our will to live and our willingness to understand, our behavior towards the sublime Other in the form of the zombie changes drastically. In *I Am Legend*, Richard Matheson chooses an omniscient narrator to present the main character's thoughts and movements. Though Matheson calls his living dead 'vampires', "we know a zombie when we see one," says Peter Drenell (Christie). Robert Neville, the last man alive in Los Angeles because of his immunity to the plague causing vampirism, spends his days fortifying his house and killing the undead as they sleep, and spends his nights safely inside his home, drinking his mind into oblivion as an attempt to ignore the calls from the undead that he come outside (Matheson 6). Through flashbacks and scientific explorations on Robert's part, it is revealed that the cause of the living dead plague is indeed a bacteria, which spread across the globe via sudden, strange, and violent dust storms, decimating the entire population save, apparently, one. The occurrence of these mysterious dust storms coincides with the rise of the mysterious infection, pointing towards a connection between the fates of the dying and undead human race and the unnatural environmental happenings. However, the reader is left to wonder at the scarcity of acknowledgments towards the environment during this apocalypse.

The few mentions of the environment in *I Am Legend* effectively reflect Robert's state of being. The novel opens on a "cloudy day" (Matheson 1). Even with the threat of the undead coming awake at sunset, he clings to the "lifetime habit of judging nightfall by the sky [which] on cloudy days... didn't

work" (Matheson 1). He periodically endangers his own life because of this "habit" that he is unwilling to change. Consider, too, the mural on Robert's living room wall, which is the only constant mention of the environment in the novel. It is a stark piece with a "cliff edge, sheering off to green-blue ocean that surged and broke over black rocks... over on the right a gnarled tree hung over the precipice, its dark branches etched against the sky" (Matheson, 5). Other than this artificial representation of nature inside his home, *his* environment, Robert rarely comments on the state of the world outside, and when he does, it is with bitterness and an urge to control. When he visits his wife's crypt, he hears birds chirping and dismisses it as "senseless singing. Once I thought they sang because everything was right with the world, Robert Neville thought. I know now I was wrong. They sing because they're feeble-minded" (Matheson 24-5). This dismissal of birds seems to act as proof of his dominant intelligence and status. Safe in his home with a "giant freezer" which, with "jaded eyes", he surveys "the stacks of meats down to the frozen vegetables, down to the breads and pastries, the fruits and ice cream," he does not ask questions about the connection between the environmental destruction and the simultaneous destruction of the human race as he knows it (Matheson 5). His mind is occupied with not just staying alive, but specifically maintaining a First World lifestyle, complete with four-course meals and luxurious liquor every evening after a hard day's work of hunting the infected ones. After going to the burning fire pit to "shove" bodies into the "great smoldering pile of ashes", "he stopped at a market to get some bottled water" (Matheson 14). It shows of a great disconnect between Robert's internal state and the reality of the external world. Like the mural, he remains static for the majority of the novel, obsessing with keeping his house, his castle, his world, in order, ultimately losing his humanity in the process.

As readers we follow Robert's point of view, naturally falling in line with the thinking that he is right to protect his house, that he is right to kill as many of the living dead as he can – in short, that he is right to uphold the status quo of humanity as it was before. This is a mistake. Through Robert's obsession with routine and order, Matheson asks whether struggling to perfectly contain every problem in neat little boxes is the solution to processing traumatic events. Robert is understandably severely traumatized from having his deceased baby daughter Kathy snatched from his arms and thrown unfeelingly like "a bundle of rags" into a huge fire pit where, as the law commands, all infected persons must be taken in order to keep the unknown plague from spreading (Matheson 58). After this, his wife Virginia

soon dies from the infection as well, but Robert refuses to suffer the same anguish and horror of watching his beloved burn with faceless others. From this decision arises the consequence of having to bury her twice. The first time is after she dies from the plague; the second, after she awakes from death and comes home for him (ostensibly to convert him to join her in the ranks of the undead), necessitating that he kill her to exact his survival as a human being (Matheson 66). Desperately alone and burdened with guilt at killing his beloved in her undead form, Robert Neville reacts to the sublime Other by labeling all those infected as the enemy to be destroyed at all costs, and decides that as the last man alive, it falls to him to do the job.

He obsesses with schedules, neatness, and keeping order. When he approaches the crypt where his wife is, he thinks in sorrow, "Why couldn't he have Kathy there too? ...If only she could be there, lying across from her mother" (Matheson 25). Finding the door to the crypt unexpectedly open, he sees a "man lying in one corner... body curled up on the cold floor" as if he were cold and had just searched for a slightly warmer place to sleep (Matheson 25). Robert reacts in immediate rage: "grabbing the man's coat in taut fingers, he dragged him across the floor and flung him violently out onto the grass" (Matheson, 26). A minute later, he "threw out the flowers... and cleared away the few leaves that had been blown in because the door had been opened" (Matheson, 26). This scene in the crypt is telling in a couple ways. First, Matheson calls the intruder a "man" - not a "vampire", or the "living dead", but quite simply a "man" that Robert throws out without a second thought, like the flowers and leaves that were dirtying the place where he had lain his wife to rest. Second, he is firmly holding onto the idea that every thing has its place - the dead (his wife, his daughter) belong in a cemetery, and anything else (flowers, leaves, the man) will be kicked out. He must have things a certain way: the sacred space he has set apart for his wife's dead body must be kept clear, clean, and neat, without nature stumbling in or invading. He likewise "destroy[s]" the living dead with a calm, calculated eye (Matheson). By focusing obsessively on his idea of how the world should be, essentially closing himself off to any other viewpoint, Robert Neville becomes the monster.

Robert's transformation from man to monster becomes especially apparent in the third section, when he meets Ruth, a live woman. At first, the phenomenon of "A woman. Alive. *In the daylight*" is "such an incredible sight... that his mind could not assimilate it (Matheson 109). After three years without human contact, this is akin to seeing the sublime, so amazing that his

“brain refused to function” (Matheson 109). But after three years without human contact, he reacts to her running away by chasing her down in the field, thinking, “He had to catch her” (Matheson 111). He, the living, thinks it natural that he should hunt down and capture this other being in order to gain knowledge. When he does catch her, the woman is so terrified she starts “battling” him as “his hand lurched out and he caught her by the right shoulder” (Matheson 112); finally at the limit of his frustration, “With a snarl of rage he drove his right palm across her face. She staggered back, then looked at him dizzily. Abruptly she started crying helplessly...Neville stood there gasping, looking down at her cringing form. He blinked, then took a deep breath. 'Get up,' he said. 'I'm not going to *hurt* you'”, seconds after he had struck her, hard (Matheson 113). What would have been considered an act of unforgivable violence just three years prior now does not register on his moral scale. After three years alone in his world, Robert has “learned to stultify himself to introspection... I am predominately vegetable, he often thought to himself. That was the way he wanted it” (Matheson 109). Beyond morality and internality, another detail shows plainly that he has lost the will to live, but on a biological scale: Robert – who in the beginning of the novel was always angrily forcing down the “wordless, mindless craving of his flesh” (Matheson 8) – now, when a woman has appeared before him, has “no physical desire for her” (Matheson 124). Soon he admits to himself that the idea of establishing a relationship again between a husband and wife and having children and responsibilities to others, well, “that was more terrifying” than if Ruth were not infected (Matheson 128). As Darwin said in *On the Origin of Species*, life wants to live – the never-ending battle for life drives entire species for generations, and yet Robert feels nothing at all. He might as well be dead.

The redemption comes from the discovery that Ruth not only has the vampiric bacteria and lives with it, but that there is an entire society of these beings. He has been killing them in his daily hunts, unable to discriminate between the infected but adapted vampires and the insane vampires who have been unable to adapt to the bacteria. With the explanation given in Ruth's letter (recall Burke's argument about the importance of words affecting a stronger emotion), Robert Neville is able to finally open up his mind, seek to understand the Other, and thus regains a bit of his humanity by acknowledging his guilt and monstrosity: “He had killed their people and they had to capture him and save themselves. He would not fight.” Encountering the Other allows him to reflect on his destructive way of life, helping him realize that he has become the monstrous Other. Captured and

fatally injured by the new society's military, he looks out the window at the new society and sees how terrified they are of him, for he is the abnormal one now. "Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many, and not the standard of just one man" (Matheson 159). In his final moments he understands that he has been living a dead life; that his standards for humanity are outdated and wrong; and that, for this new society to succeed, he, the threat, "a scourge even worse than the disease they had come to live with", must be eradicated, and he does not blame them for it (Matheson, 159). With this understanding of the Other, he dies, and passes into legend for the next evolution of the human race.

Matheson shows in *I Am Legend* that an obsessive fixation on the status quo of the past culture and a refusal to look at the Other as an opportunity for introspection leads to the main character's demise after a late realization of his capacity for inhumanity. However, late, as the saying goes, is better than never. At the end of his life, Robert Neville exchanges violence against and fear of the Other for knowledge and understanding of the Other. In other words, he exchanges inhumanity for humanity. He inspects his kinglike mentality of bestowing upon himself the power to kill everything that was ruining his idea of the world *should* be, and exchanges that mentality for acceptance of how the world *is*, coming to understand how his role as living legend of terror in this new world must end. His choice to make this positive exchange, of ignorance for knowledge, and fear for understanding, is symbolic of his having had to live with the unbearable sublime, traumatized, and process it. From interacting with the crisis-causing monster, truth about the past emerges, and also instigates a process towards new truth; that is, readers gain the ability to see truthfully how the world works now – how we are acting now – which in turn helps us to begin to change the future, so that it is precisely not like the present. If trauma is having to glimpse the unbearable sublime, then zombies are the perfect monster to symbolize our overwhelming problems, because we are forced to look at the zombie head-on, even though we would rather face our overwhelming problems askance. Through zombie literature, we encounter the fictional Sublime Other, and in this safe space of literature, are given the chance to process real trauma.

Full Circle: Conclusion

The zombie literature genre induces the necessary introspection for which our society is hungry. While we in the First World may be subconsciously aware that we are destroying the planet with our lifestyle, it feels too overwhelming to face this truth head-on. It is much easier to conjure up a

monster in the realm of public fantasy and point fingers: There is the problem! That is the enemy! Of course, in reality, the enemy is ourselves.

Most scholars studying the zombie figure argue that it is a critique of the consumerist lifestyle, which we agree with, but have added onto. The zombie figure allows readers to face our collective societal guilt regarding climate change through literature, and offers reassurance in our creativity and ability to adapt to overcome this problem. The consumerist lifestyle and climate change are most certainly related. The dominant species (humans) has crafted the planet (which includes the environment and all other species of animals and plants) to *fit its ideas* of how the world (for humans) should be. Naturally this imbalance is not sustainable, and is in fact killing the planet. Zombie literature signifies this one and the same truth with the fictional device of a monster. In this particular subset of the horror genre, the dominant species are zombies, and in order to sustain its destructive existence, they *nearly* end up wiping out the rest of the planet. There would cease to be any more life at all, none, if they were allowed to have their way. However, zombie literature is always apocalyptic, not post-apocalyptic – the duration of the apocalypse is explored, dealt with, and overcome.

What are the results of the traumatic encounter between the human being, the previously believed dominant species, and the zombie, the threatening-to-be-new dominant species? The human race unites under the common cause of survival and realizes two important things: One, the human races (African, Asian, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, etc.) are not all that different from each other, once one is able to (or is placed in a situation that forces one to) look past the societal constructs of politics, religion, etc. and two, the zombie race and the human race are not all that different from each other either.

Armed with that knowledge, characters and readers can then make decisions. As in *I Am Legend*, one can make a rigid schedule to continue the serious business of living as life was in the past – but once one stops trying to understand the Other, one loses one's humanity and becomes the monster.

There are reasons that the idea of a zombie apocalypse continues to romance the public consciousness, and they do not all have to do with the (for some) delicious feeling of inducing a state of terror while safe in the knowledge of being safe in reality. It is not just the ability to imagine the chaos of our human world coming dangerously undone, and then walking away after closing the book. It is not just the gore, the violence as both entertainment and solution; it is not just imagining the relief of finally giving in to our pent-up feelings of savageness and frustration without actually doing so during the day-to-day grind. It is because the zombie speaks to us in a way that

encourages us to listen. Yes, it is because inside every human is a zombie, and inside every zombie is a human. The figure of the zombie speaks to us because it tells us that yes, we have made mistakes, but also, that we are all capable of change. Yes, the zombie says: there is hope.

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