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APOCALYPSE REVISITED: THE ROLE OF THE ABJECT IN ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S *STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE* AND THE MILLENNIAL ZOMBIE OUTBREAK NARRATIVE

ABSTRACT: This article analyses how sociocultural anxieties are evoked through representations of the abject in the horror genre. Evaluating deeply held sociocultural fears and concerns, as they emerge through horror texts at the turn of the century (*fin-de-siècle* and millennial), has identified shared preoccupations at these times. These include fear of disintegration of the self and loss of individual agency, and fear of invasion, the collapse of society, and an overall loss of purpose and order. These themes are expressed through the literature of both these periods as states of madness, infection and degradation. This research locates the zombie resurgence in the gothic, rationalising the cyclical nature of millennial sociocultural anxieties, and the way these can be mapped through extant horror texts. A focus on the gothic and its perennial expression of sociocultural anxieties serves to draw parallels between Victorian and millennial horror narratives, demonstrating a historical continuity with its culmination in the hollowed-out walking dead of modern-day zombie apocalypse narratives.

With a view to examining continuity, this essay will consider parallels between *fin-de-siècle* and millennial horror narratives, with a focus on the gothic and its perennial articulation of sociocultural anxieties. Persistent preoccupations are mapped historically and further highlighted by an exploration of prominent examples from the Victorian and the millennial periods. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Zack Snyder's 2004 reimagining of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* are closely analysed, demonstrating marked connections between *fin-de-siècle* fiction and the current resurgence of zombie fiction and film, which can be located within the gothic tradition. Recurrent themes of fear of collapse and disintegration of both society and the self, loss of agency, and invasion are common to the literature of both periods. These themes are articulated as sites and states of infection, madness and decay.

THE GOTHIC MODE AND MILLENNIAL HORROR TRENDS

In the opening sentence of his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, H.P. Lovecraft remarks that "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (1). Jerrold E. Hogle describes the sub-genre of gothic fiction as "an entirely post-medieval and even post-Renaissance phenomenon" (1). Tales from classical antiquity (Pliny's, Plautus's and Lucian's tales of hauntings, for example) pre-date what has long since evolved into the now familiar form of gothic horror (Felton). Writers including Poe, Lovecraft, Shelley and Radcliffe have formed part of an extended lineage of gothic writers, the father of whom is widely accepted to have been Horace Walpole, whose 1764 work, *The Castle of Otranto*, popularised the genre. With a rich history, the gothic has been shaped by social and historical trends, developments in science and technology, changing attitudes towards religion, and the position of the individual in society. Since its inception in the mid-eighteenth century, the gothic mode has not been restricted to any historical setting, however, and its tropes and conventions have continued to evolve and persist for contemporary audiences.

Routinely sidelined in favour of the literary canon, as it was back in the time of the so-called "penny dreadfuls" and "shilling shockers," the gothic continues, however, to perform an important role of mirroring societal discontent and tensions between the individual and society. In expressing these concerns, recurrent motifs have been adapted over time. Critical literature observes that horror fiction tends to increase in popularity at the turn of a century (Thompson; Hughes; Edwards). With a view to examining continuity, this essay will consider parallels between *fin-de-siècle* and millennial horror narratives, with a focus on the gothic. Specifically, I will closely read Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, a preeminent gothic text of the Victorian period, and Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead*, an example of the millennial zombie narrative. Stevenson's work, representative as it is of Victorian, post-Darwinian anxiety, not only features a clear set of gothic conventions, but also accesses its reader's anxiety via the psychological core of horror's agency: the abject. I argue that the millennial zombie narrative is a direct and graphic representation of post-9/11 fears of invasion and outbreak, which again relies heavily on the abject to manipulate its arguably more horror-savvy audience.

Ruth Anolik describes "the subversive gothic inclination to empathize with the other, the non-normative, transgressive figure who troubles the category of the norm and transgresses the boundaries necessary to create the norm: the monster" (7). In order to represent the monstrous, gothic fiction depends on its capacity to confront its audience with the abject, commonly through a spectacle of pathology: infection, madness, disability. Paradoxically, the abject simultaneously repels and attracts.

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection provides a means of apprehending the horror audience's response to, and compulsion to engage with, that which is repulsive, disgusting

and uncomfortable. For Kristeva, the abject is concerned with the collapse of boundaries, borders. She talks of "the fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" (12). Katherine Goodnow adds that the abject is that which "threatens the collapse of order by threatening the collapse of meaning and the annihilation of the self" (30). Kristeva describes the corpse as one such device: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (93).

Fred Botting, for whom the gothic ended with the advent of Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* of 1992, perceives the mode as a type of nostalgic return to a time when Self, Other and monstrosity were clearly divisible. No longer a truly transgressive genre, he argues, the postmodern, commodified hyperreality of technoculture has rendered the horrors of the gothic outdated, marketable artefacts. Van Elferen, however, argues that,

> even if Gothic's transgressive gesture now moves within a commodified hyperreality, and therefore is nowhere near its 18th century precursor either with regards to its cultural context or its effects thereupon, it is still here, and recognizable as such. Why does it still occur, if it is redundant? (132)

The gothic narrative has found a place in a modern context, via a new trope: the ubiquitous, millennial zombie may be viewed as the modern-day descendant of the gothic cast. Kyle Bishop's research into the development of the cinematic zombie firmly establishes the place of the zombie in the gothic tradition, and he contends that zombie cinema is "among the most culturally revealing and resonant fictions of the recent decade of unrest [after the 9/11 attacks]" (10).

Tony Magistrale asserts that "horror monsters can and should be interpreted as historical signifiers of their particular time" (xiv) and that the horror narrative conveys the dangers of historical moments. Gothic fiction has been described as being historically influenced, owing to its tendency to "appear at times of great social stress and economic uncertainty" (Hoeveler 4). At the turn of a century, there is typically a spike in horror fiction, a direct response to sociocultural anxieties, such as fears of contagion, cynicism about science and technology, a sense of alienation, and war (Jay and Neve).

As Magistrale observes, horror reflects societal fears, and may be considered "nothing less than a barometer for measuring an era's cultural anxieties" (xiii). Stephen King, whose vast body of horror fiction borrows from gothic tradition, holds that the genre expresses "fears, which are often based in political events, economic concerns and manifest themselves as psychological phenomena, rather than supernatural, [and] give the best work of horror a pleasing allegorical feel" (484).

At the end of the nineteenth century, gothic fiction reflected anxieties about colonial decline and post-Darwinian concerns of degeneration and atavism. Kelly Hurley describes the '"gothicity" of a range of scientific discourses and asserts that "degeneration ... is a gothic discourse, and as such is a crucial imaginative and narrative source for the *fin-de-siècle gothic*" (45). In *fin-de-siècle* narratives, such as Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, degeneration, along with a clear gothicisation of medicine is also apparent. The post-Industrial Revolution preoccupation with medical knowledge and the lived experience of sickness pervades late-century writing and, especially, a number of *fin-de-siècle* narratives. Bruce Haley observes that "their correspondence indicates that many prominent Victorians were, or thought they were, constantly afflicted" (12). Metaphors for illness shaped the Victorian novel, and, in some instances, the influence worked both ways. Boluk, for example, explains the way that writers of the time anticipated future medical endeavour, with *Jekyll and Hyde* representing "an important foreshadowing of twentieth-century scientific research" (namely, psychoanalysis) (37).

Ostensibly scientific texts, such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Cesare Lombroso's *The Man of Genius* (1889) and Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892), were non-fiction bestsellers of the day and their themes of atavism, degeneration and social deviance fuelled Victorian imaginations. The emerging sciences of the Victorian degenerationist era also included criminology, criminal anthropology, sexology and evolutionist psychiatry (Reid). English and Continental scientists alike, including Henry Maudsley and Edwin Ray Lankester, championed the theory of degeneration, recognising that life "did not always move from the simple to the complex, and envisaged instead a future characterized by arrested development, atavistic throwbacks, and the disintegration of overly evolved civilians" (Reid 8). Eager for intellectual debate on these issues, literary London of the *fin-de-siècle* enjoyed discussions on evolutionist theory between Stevenson and scientists such as psychologist James Sully, and anthropologist Andrew Lang. Periodicals, such as the *Cornhill Magazine*, *Longman's Magazine* and *The Academy*, featured such discussions, and were a crucial part of the cultural context of *fin-de-siècle* evolutionary debate.

The Industrial Revolution resulted in unprecedented urban population growth, which led to paranoia about the dangers of, among other things, contagion, social decay and the rise of a criminal underclass. Urban settings became common backdrops for Victorian fiction, most notably in the work of Dickens, Wilde, Stoker and Stevenson. A prominent trope of gothic fiction is that of the decaying or haunted environment, a common metaphor for psychological or moral decline (Otranto's haunted castle, Wuthering Heights's cursed house, Usher's crumbling ruins). The concept of the individual struggling against their own "Other," lurking in psychological undercurrents, emerged as a central theme in the Victorian consciousness. A distinct preoccupation with the Other pervades urban gothic Victorian fiction; Davis uses Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as a typical illustration of "the prevailing Victorian concepts of racial disparity that associated Otherness with, among other things, criminality" (53).

With an intense focus on abhumanness or the abject and the threat posed by the degenerate to civilised society (and civilisation itself), Victorian gothic fiction in turn offered provocative and persuasive arguments for social regulation and scientific scepticism. This Victorian fixation on degeneration and Otherness has its roots in Imperialist thought. John Barrell identifies imperialism and racism in a broader cultural pathology of race-hatred ("orientalism"), as evidenced in the work of De Quincey and other Victorian writers. Gothic fiction's moral perspectives, in essence, suggest cures for personal, and therefore societal, sickness.

At the turn of the millennium, a foreboding sense of apocalypse pervaded (millennial computer bugs, super viruses, preoccupations with disaster narratives). Kirsten Thompson states that, "social anxieties, fears and ambivalence about global catastrophe ... took explicit narrative form in American cinema of the late nineties and continued into the first years of the twenty-first century" (1).[1] This, of course, was compounded by an event that destabilised the global village in a singular way: 9/11. The terrorist attacks spawned a multitude of horror narratives, whose very nature shifted; they became "darker, more disturbing, and increasingly apocalyptic" (Briefel and Miller 1). Despite advancements in science and technology, communication, and weapons technology, a global unease persists, underscored by a sense of unpreparedness and powerlessness in the face of chaos (Carroll). A number of critics and academics observe the increase in zombie narratives (Bloom; Bishop; Stratton) at this time. With no real literary ancestor, or presence in gothic tradition, the zombie originated in "Afro-Haitian religious thought and practice, and is traceable ... to colonial-era Kongo religion from Central Africa" (McAlister).

Bishop, who has written widely on zombie cinema in contemporary popular culture, argues that,

> the fundamental generic conventions of gothic fiction in general and zombie cinema in particular make the subgenre the most likely and appropriate vehicle with which to explore America's post–9/11 cultural consciousness. ... Because the after effects of war, terrorism, and natural disasters so closely resemble the scenarios depicted by zombie cinema, such images of death and destruction have all the more power to shock and terrify a population that has become otherwise jaded to more traditional horror films. (11-12)

With their master/slave theme, the racist undertones of 30s and 40s Hollywood zombies expressed imperialist concerns about colonialism and slavery. Hogle notes that:

> Zombies are empty figures of the dead usually lurching silently about and, as reworkings of age-old Caribbean traditions, playing out their symbolic roles ... as manifestations of the enslavement and victimizations imposed on native or transplanted peoples by

> continuations of past outrages (such as the primal crime of slavery itself) in the history of the Western world. (3)

In the 1970s, Romero's plodding, invasive zombie horde narrative critiqued the steady, yet relentless, spread of American consumer culture. Directly following 9/11, Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and Paul W.S. Anderson's *Resident Evil* (2002) spawned a modern resurgence. Featuring jarring jump cuts, ultra-violent scenes of rage and infection, and an apocalyptic dysphoria, these became the new, millennial zombie narratives. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz assert that "this accelerated and pathologized zombie is not only transformed for the age of digital reproduction, but the threat it poses as a biohazard also explicitly links the zombie to the millennia-old tradition of plague writing. This once supernatural figure is now a figure of plague" (6).

The next section provides a close analysis of two selected texts, with a view to understanding why audiences consume horror and how these two periods of time reflect a cycle of social anxiety/illness. Correlations can be found between the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* and millennial horror narratives, which both reflect sociocultural anxieties and preoccupations. Through narratives of terror, illness and transgression, a society's most deeply held concerns may be charted and exorcised. The role of the abject in horror involves a complex system of repulsion and attraction, tied both to the individual's experience of identity and a greater sociocultural context. In exploring this process, it is interesting to observe recurring anxieties and themes in horror narratives over time.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S *STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE* (1886) AND ZACK SNYDER'S *DAWN OF THE DEAD* (2004)

Horror fiction of the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* has at its core a preoccupation with evolutionary theory. Post-Darwinian fears of atavism and savagery renewed an earlier gothic awareness of the impact of the haunted past on the present, and culminated in paranoia about primitive states upsetting modern civility. Late Victorian ideology was infused with Continental scientific research, by way of Bénédict Morel's medical theories of degeneration and Lombroso's determinist criminology. Julia Reid acknowledges the "marked cultural interactions" (3) between the scientific and literary worlds of the nineteenth century and Robert Louis Stevenson's work in this interdisciplinary space:

> Inhabited by characters whose mental pathologies drive them to savage bestiality, insanity, or death, (Stevenson's) tales figure the irruption of primitive states of mind in the supposedly civilized present. Yet ... they also reveal the tacit conflict between hereditary and environmental explanations of degeneration, undercutting the emphasis on biological inheritance, and suggesting that degeneration stems rather from the denial of savage instincts. (10-11)

The urban population explosion following the Industrial Revolution created an underclass of urban poor, fostering anxieties about the threatening Other. The Dickensian slum dwellers who had elicited sympathy from the early nineteenth-century reading public had, by the end of the century, been constructed as a delinquent mob.

With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, a new readership of popular fiction emerged: mechanisation and capitalism meant more leisure time and money for the individual, particularly in the middle classes. As Anthony Trollope observed in 1870, "We have become a novel-reading people. Novels are in the hands of us all; from the Prime Minister down to the last-appointed scullery-maid" (104). Amanda O'Callaghan describes the "seismic intrusion of a commercial class into the established social and political structure" in the nineteenth century, which prompted "an obsession with scrutiny across (and within) all social groups." Reid states that, "Critics viewed mass literacy and education, cheap literature and a growing newspaper press as both causes and symptoms of degeneracy" (74). Lurid tales within the covers of the popular "penny dreadfuls" satisfied contemporary readers' tastes for sensationalist, escapist tales. For Stevenson, whose well-documented, lifelong struggle with chronic physical illness also influenced this focus on science and degeneration, these appetites reflected another sickness: a worrying literary degeneracy and the threat of a decline in values.

Jekyll and Hyde's focus on individual duality examined hypocrisy, crime and duplicity. Linda Dryden observes that, "In showing Jekyll increasingly under the control of Hyde, Stevenson gave fictional form to an emerging anxiety of the late nineteenth century: the perception that the race itself was succumbing to degenerative tendencies that threatened the very fabric of society" (253). But while Stevenson was writing in this cultural context, his intention was not to moralise in the spirit of his peers. David Punter describes Hyde's behaviour as a form of "going native," owing to Jekyll's anxieties (3). Although the idea of this lurking duality plays on the fears of atavism held by Victorian society, Stevenson's aim is to caution against repressing primal urges. It is this denial of savage instincts that causes anguish to the subject of *Jekyll and Hyde*. Heidi Strengell asserts that:

> The Gothic gnome, that is, the 'dwarfish' and 'ape-like' half of the personality is hidden at the cost of hypocrisy and oft hideous crimes. Therefore, a disguise is needed, which causes further tension and the fear of getting caught. Tension also intensifies from the constant threat of transformation. ("The Monster" 1)

This description refers to the central gothic trope in *Jekyll and Hyde*: the gothic double. This concept of alternating personality had been around since the mesmerists, who noted that hypnotised personalities were frequently livelier than their conscious, waking counterparts. And almost twenty years prior to the publication of *Jekyll and Hyde*, Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) involves an autonomous life under the influence of opium. In *A*

Chapter on Dreams of 1888, Stevenson discusses a series of his own dreams, where recollections from one dream are carried to the next, so that he finds himself leading "a double life—one of the day, one of the night" (43). Critics have acknowledged Stevenson's direct influence on later psychiatric work on dual personality, including that of the psychoanalysts (Stiles). Although his earlier works, "Markheim" (1884) and *Deacon Brodie*, deal with the moral implications of leading double lives (and the moral consequences of facing one's double, or Other) *Jekyll and Hyde* explicitly employs scientific language and extant medical knowledge (notably, the "new sciences" of the degeneration-centric *fin-de-siècle*) to present an allegorical case study. Specifically, criminology, anthropology, evolutionist psychiatry and sexology are drawn upon to invoke ideas about biological inheritance and environmental influence. In examining the book's characters, Reid notes that "the characters of Utterson, Lanyon, and Poole are unsettled by Hyde because they reject the savage side of their nature ... Their atavistic responses therefore spring not from heredity but from cultural beliefs—about the importance of denying savagery. Significantly, atavism also needs to be activated by external influence" (102).

The implied danger here is of denying one's potential "otherness," or capacity for becoming abject. Stevenson's belief, however, is that everyone possesses a potential for such savagery (abjection). Jekyll, it can be seen, is not so much transforming into the beast; rather, his already present inner beast is being activated. Bishop states that, in Stevenson's work, this duplicitous potential demonstrates how "fear of being or becoming the Other ultimately means fear of disenfranchisement from society and the risk of becoming a literal monster" (97). Stevenson's work, both in fiction and essays, consistently reinforces this idea of inherent degeneracy. Thus, there is not so much a concern about the threat of infectious degeneracy per se, as that of an infectious triggering of these latent impulses. And in late-Victorian psychology, contagion was considered more instrumental a trigger for degeneration than heredity determinism.

For Stevenson, who was frustrated by the hypocrisy he observed in his sociocultural environment, affected displays of respectability and morality were symptomatic of a defective society. Stephen Arata notes that, in this novella, Stevenson "continually turns the question of Hyde back on its interlocutors so that their interpretive procedures become the object of our attention," ultimately turning "the class discourses of atavism and criminality back on the bourgeois itself" (36). Further, Arata describes the attempted subjugation of Hyde as "a parody of bourgeois respectability" (49). These internal and external influences correspond with the gothic's preoccupation with threats originating from within and without. Much like the Victorian degenerationist interest in heredity versus environment, Stevenson's interests lay in conflicting tensions, relating to the hopes and fears attached to scientific discovery, the duality of identity, and the civilisation and debauchery of urban environments. Nowhere in Stevenson's oeuvre is his employment of the double more explicit than in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Botting asserts that the novella's doubling "discloses the ambivalence

of identity and instability of the social, moral and scientific codes that manufacture distinctions" (141). The shift from Jekyll to Hyde is not transformative but revelatory. Jekyll describes the powder he takes as "rattling the doors of the prison-house of (his) disposition" (41). By the narrative's conclusion, Arata notes, "the doctor's body metamorphoses continually from Jekyll to Hyde and back again, as if to indicate that we need no longer distinguish between them" (40). This metamorphosis instils the narrative with constant tension, heightening the audience's sense of terror.

Stevenson also uses doubling in creating the spaces of his characters' urban setting. As Hurley asserts, "the Gothic certainly does not scruple from identifying the urban slums as sites of especial abjection: as with the surreal Soho neighbourhood, 'like a district of some city in a nightmare,' described in *Jekyll and Hyde*" (162). In the urban gothic sub-genre to which *Jekyll and Hyde* belongs, the city is the site of liminality, danger and crime. The crumbling, countryside mansions and forbidding, haunted castles of earlier gothic narratives gave way to the anonymous, shadowy streets of *fin-de-siècle* literature. Warwick (qtd. in Mulvey-Roberts 289), who notes the city's uncanniness, and ruinous state of death-in-life, also describes, "the alienation of the urban subject, leading to paranoia, fragmentation and loss of identity." Jekyll and Hyde's urban, professional world is fraught with danger, with its "muddy ways, and slatternly passengers" (22), an environment that Victorian readers connected in their collective consciousness with Jack the Ripper's hunting ground during the autumn of 1888, a place of corruption and vice. In his analysis of these "dark spaces," Anthony Vidler finds:

> 'Outside', even as the spaces of exile, asylum, confinement, and quarantine of the early modern period were continuously spilling over into the 'normal' space of the city, so the 'pathological spaces' of today menace the clearly marked out limits of the social order. In every case 'light space' is invaded by the figure of 'dark space', on the level of the body in the form of epidemic and uncontrollable disease, and on the level of the city in the person of the homeless. (279)

Jekyll's house is another instance of doubling in Stevenson's narrative. Superficially, as both residence and laboratory, it reflects Jekyll's own dual role of patient and physician. Vladimir Nabokov argues that "just as Jekyll is a mixture of good and bad, so Jekyll's dwelling place is also a mixture, a very neat symbol, a very neat representation of the Jekyll and Hyde relationship" (188). O'Callaghan observes that "the building itself suggests illness and disembodiment" (140) and discusses the prevalence of the "malign" building throughout Stevenson's fiction. Another prominent "malign" structure, in gothic tradition, is Poe's House of Usher, which, like Jekyll's home, is the ruinous embodiment of moral decline. Jekyll's house, reflective of its inhabitant's bifurcated identity, exhibits two distinct aspects: one of order and the other chaos. The house is, as it were, suffering from its own malady, which Utterson views as originating in the morally transgressive figure of Henry Jekyll.

Karl Miller holds that literary doubles are often concerned with escaping, explaining that "one self does what the other self can't" (74). A point for consideration here is Stevenson's own ill health, and his later self-transformation in the Pacific. Roslyn Jolly describes his "double identity during that time, and the ensuing 'cult of personality' that formed in his final years and persisted after his death" (173). The author and critic G.K. Chesterton analyses the text thus: "The point of the story is not that a man can cut himself off from his conscience, but that he cannot. The surgical operation is fatal in the story. It is an amputation of which both parts die" (67). And, as Hurley notes,

> There are two things the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic represents again and again. The first is the spectacle of the human subject undergoing dissolution, a spectacle which provokes hysterical anxiety in Sartre's analysis, a sense of metaphysical estrangement in Todorov's, repression and denial in Freud's, abjection in Kristeva's. The second is the symptom of nausea. (44)

These themes repeat in millennial gothic texts. The zombie is among the most prevalent of the monstrous tropes we see in the fiction of the new *fin-de-siècle*. Just as Stevenson's readers found the monstrous Hyde irresistible, millennial audiences appear to be equally addicted to the gruesome, decaying spectacle of the walking dead.

As the 1990s came to a close, fearmongering about the "millennium bug" ran rife. This forecast of a global meltdown on 1 January 2000 brought with it predictions of planes dropping from the skies, catastrophic security breaches, and worldwide systems and communications disabling. These anxieties found expression in disaster narratives, both in fiction and popular cinema. *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998), *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998) and *End of Days* (Michael Hyams, 1999) tapped into these global social concerns. This millennial catastrophising in turn sparked religious prognostication, dystopian fiction with apocalyptic undertones—Don De Lillo's *Underworld* (1997), Koushun Takami's *Battle Royale* (1999), A.D. Nauman's Scorch (2001) and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), for example—and a general unease about things spiralling out of control with the dawn of the new century.

In the midst of these global doomsday imaginings emerged the horrific events of 11 September 2001. The terrorist attacks resulted in a proliferation of disaster and trauma narratives, including *Diary of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 2007), *Quarantine* (John Erick Dowdle, 2008), *I am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007), *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005) and *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008). Associated fears emerged, in the guise of a new xenophobia (foreigners as the unpredictable, potentially threatening Other), emanating from the US. The rest of the Western world was hungry for narratives reflecting external threat: alien invasion, terrorist attacks and, most notably, zombie outbreak narratives. Nicole Birch-Bayley describes the zombie film as reflecting "the worst-case fears of an apprehensive media culture, entertaining the same anxieties about world events, in this case, a fear of

terrorism and epidemic in the zombie form" (78) and refers to Western culture's millennial "crisis culture." Norris, Kern and Just view this cultural outlook as "a kind of vernacular expressing the concerns of a culture waiting for the next terrorist attack, the next outbreak of violence or the next pandemic" (28).

At the forefront of the modern zombie resurgence was Zack Snyder's 2004 remake of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. Modern audiences were positioned to respond to themes of outbreak, mass media virality, relentless consumerism and government surveillance. Combined with deeply held anxieties of biological outbreak—avian flu, SARS, H1N1 and HIV—these concerns led to a preoccupation with contagion. Romero's lurching zombies may have reflected mid-century contagion anxiety, but the living dead of such films as *28 Days Later* and *Resident Evil* were updated to tap into a biological model of viral infection. Again, Boluk and Lenz's connection of the "accelerated and pathologized zombie" (6) with its biohazard-like menace, to earlier plague writing creates a compelling lineage.

The zombie occupies "the position of uncontrollable threat that was once associated with the plague" (6). In ascribing agency to the plague, Artaud argues that it has a "preference for the very organs of the body, the particular physical sites, where human will, consciousness, and thought are imminent and apt to occur" (qtd. in Jannarone 39). This idea that plague targets the organs at the centre of the individual's identity would seem a fitting metaphor for the zombie. "A zombie outbreak," Boluk and Lenz argue, "is an event in which the anxieties associated with social connectivity come to the fore—the more boundaries between self and other are broken down in plague time, the more the contagion spreads" (7). It is evident that zombies are linked, in popular culture, with plague and apocalypse, as well as loss of self. In millennial texts, they are updated with culturally appropriate features.

Muntean and Payne assert that "in a culture suffused with a heightened sense of imminent terror and incalculable dread, meaningful fictional monsters must not only respond to the form of the prevailing cultural anxiety, they must also equal or transcend the depths of its possible horror" (244). Snyder's zombies "move like cheetahs, bounding over buildings, and climbing on walls" (Weise 161). Barbara Creed reminds us why we seek this cinematic abjection: "Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images, being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat)" (10).

Abjection in Snyder's film is conveyed through his modern zombies, which are brutally realistic and unflinchingly grotesque. His remake was filmed during 2003's SARS outbreak, and the director noticed similarities between his text and news bulletins, both loaded with panic and misinformation (Bishop). This cultural context added a further dimension to the reading of the original text. As Bishop explains, "Romero's key trope from *Dawn of the Dead* is

that humans in this age of technology and routine labor are essentially zombies already" (189). While the millennial context was permeated by a sense of slavish and senseless consumerism, additional factors ensured the favourable reception of the remake. Claire Kahane reminds us that "our response to 9/11 made disturbingly clear how much our perceptual experience as well as our psychic life is filtered and managed through films we have seen, even experienced as films we have seen" (107).

In Snyder's remake, we find ourselves confronted with an inescapable, relentless outbreak, a paranoid suspicion of other individuals, adversarial consumerism, and ultra-violence. In Romero's original, the so-called Bliss Montage features main characters running rampant through the shopping mall in which they have barricaded themselves, engaging in a joyful orgy of shopping, in a display of what Bishop calls "a fantasy of gluttony" (11). Briefel and Miller argue that "the conflicts of Romero's Bliss Montage have proved appealing to post-9/11 films seeking to evaluate their own status as adversarial commodities ... particularly subversive at a time in which shopping represents patriotic duty, rather than a form of self-expression or leisure" (147). This subversion of consumerism may also be read as a rejection of the simultaneous loss of self (and hollowing-out of the person) that has taken place.

David Youssef discusses the significance of the "spatial and temporal being uncanny places in the urban context as laboratories for the irrational component within a cultural unconscious" (312), and goes on to remark that:

> Industrial and modern ruins, by virtue of their outsideness to the normal temporality and spatiality of capitalist production and consumption, avails them as depositories for various strata of cultural anxieties ... This way of seeing them also leads to their cordoning off ... as criminal spaces in which anti-social behaviour occurs. (312)

Lennard Davis fuses this concept of urban decline with the appetite for millennial conspiracy theorising, asserting that "Millennialist sects and the audience for Hollywood blockbusters share, for example, a certain delirious investment in the destruction of the metropolis, a key image in fundamentalist religious rhetoric, survivalist literature, millennialist groups and the disaster film" (158). Susan Sontag has observed the satisfaction audiences derive from "the aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess" (44). This recalls the abject revulsion audiences enjoy in their response to sensationalist depictions of the walking dead and their decaying forms.

Kevin Westmore describes Snyder's reimagining of *Dawn of the Dead* as "a depiction of American fears and concerns in a post-9/11 world that also explores the inability of people to create and develop lasting, trusting relationships on any level" (137). One of the factors at play in Snyder's text is that of class difference. The character Steve is representative of upper-middle-class avarice, and his self-interest results in the death of other characters, a further,

damning indictment of capitalism. In the film's opening scenes, we see a chaotic hospital environment (recalling America's beleaguered healthcare system) in which only a nurse, Ana, displays any compassion or sense of vocational responsibility. Doctors are portrayed as indifferent to and removed from their patients and colleagues in what may be read as a critique of impersonal modern healthcare provision. Later in the film, all but one of the survivors will be from working-class backgrounds.

There exists, in millennial zombie film, a sense of disconnectedness between characters—a mistrust for fellow survivors. This can be seen as a direct expression of sociocultural anxieties concerning disenfranchisement and alienation in a globalised society as divided as it is connected by technology and social media. As Bishop reminds us, however, "because anyone can become infected ... at any time, everyone is a potential threat; paranoia, therefore, becomes a crucial tool for survival" (29). In this present era of viral connectedness, we fear the faceless Other that lurks online and in the anonymous space of digital media. The same vigilant mistrust the Victorians held towards the faceless, teeming multitudes of their new urban environments is echoed by today's conspiracy theorists, and by vulnerable, yet voluntary, consumers of mass media and participants in social media.

Parallels may be drawn between the zombie and the gothic trope of the double. Zombies embody Freud's argument for the double as a symbol of the uncanny. In witnessing the abjection of the cannibalistic, degenerating corpse, our unease is activated by the awareness that it is our potential undead doppelgänger. Kim Paffenroth notes that, in Snyder's text, "with such a heavy toll of characters turning into zombies, the consistent impression in the film is that zombies are from within the group of survivors: they are an internal threat and not from outside—whether that threat is from failed intimacy or callous self-interest" (22).

The zombie has become a figure loaded with meaning that today's audiences have a singular fix upon. Whether we are processing anxieties regarding (global) neoliberal capitalism, the emergence of biological superbugs, the manipulation of viral media, or sleeper-cell terrorism, the zombie, in its soulless, relentless pursuit of the very organ of our consciousness, is a universal signifier. In the words of Comaroff and Comaroff, we have come to view the zombie as a "'walking spectre,' an object of collective terror and desire. Similarly, Clery discusses the 'terrorist genre' of haunted Gothic fiction in late 18th century England, where industrialization was ... restructuring the nature of work-and-place" (794).

Through fiction imbued with gothic horror tropes, both periods reflect and express collective terror in the face of uncertainty and upheaval.

Despite the differences in their specific social and political frameworks, both the Victorian and millennial periods are infused with this heightened sense of anxiety and a fear of the effects of scientific and technological progress on cultural and individual autonomy.

During both of these periods, we find a marked mistrust of the Other, irrespective of whether its residence is seen to be in the teeming, post-industrial urban slum or the ever-expanding, intangible network of the online environment. Horror fiction and its audiences continue to be re-examined, and the connection between emerging forms of representation and their associated sociocultural concerns is a significant point for consideration. With its perennial articulation of such preoccupations, the gothic serves as both a means of recognising its audience's deeply held anxieties and a guide to charting a cyclical progression of these, over time.

NOTES:

In her text, Thompson discusses the concept of "millennialism," stating that it "refers to a specific form of eschatological belief that draws from Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature and that understands that the end of the world has been both preordained by God and prophesied in the Bible" (3).

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