FEAR AND THE MONSTROUS HUMAN: FROM MARY SHELLEY’S
FRANKENSTEIN TO THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE OF MAX BROOKS’
WORLD WAR Z

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concept of fear and the monstrous human. The first part of this paper treats Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as an examination of fear as a cycle that produces rage when confronted by the moral detachment and shaming of others. The second part of this project addresses aspects of societal fear manifested in the zombie monster and set within the paradigm of the zombie apocalypse as posited in Max Brooks’ *World War Z*. The conclusions reached in this discussion suggest that compassion and reason are the antidote for the social toxin of terror.
Table of Contents

- Introduction ................................................................. 4
- Part One—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: The Creature’s Cycle
  Of Fear and Victor’s Moral Detachment .................................. 6
- The Cycle of Fear, Otherness, and Rage .................................. 7
- Science and Accountability .................................................... 17
- Shame and the Loss of Personhood ......................................... 25
- Discussion of Part One ....................................................... 34
- Part Two—*World War Z*: Reflections of Human Nature in the
  Zombie Apocalypse ........................................................... 36
- Zombies and Fear ............................................................. 38
- The Worst of Us ............................................................... 40
- The Best of Us ............................................................... 54
- Discussion of Part Two ....................................................... 63
- Works Cited ..................................................................... 65
**Introduction**

In Western society, fear is displayed through mass media and inculcated into the mind of the individual and community, sometimes without his or her conscious awareness. The fear item is named and the response is dictated. A supreme example of fear inculcation with a directed response happened after the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. From 9/11 came the so-called “War on Terror,” the passing of the Homeland Security Act in 2002, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and its effect on the civil liberties of the American people, exponentially increased National security, a reawakening of racially motivated hostility and racial profiling, and elevated aggression of the American Armed Forces.

With the passage of time and the emerging of cooler heads, the fear response by the US government to terrorism is being debated. Some voices weigh in on the side of a balanced response while others firmly contend that the response is reactionary. In any case, the fear die has already been cast, the effect of which has spread rapidly throughout Western society.

Western popular culture has responded to this fear—this nagging fear—of more sudden and devastating attacks on Western soil. This fear is not precisely unfounded since attacks have happened since the attacks of September 11, and they have happened all over the world. These attacks have been a direct assault on the Western values of liberty and progress. Worse still, the enemy is faceless, ubiquitous, beyond reason, and seems to be spreading like a contagion. There is an overarching sense that something is terribly wrong with the world, and what is wrong is out of human control.
Thus, the fear is no longer directed merely toward violent radicals but also toward senseless violence within communities, racism and intolerance, hatred and despair, the devastation of arable soil, and global climate change. Fear presses in on all sides, faith seems extinguished, and those entrusted with protecting the public are both suspect and losing power. Born of this fear a new monster—a human monster—is revealed. This faceless creature is a summing up of the anxieties of Western society and brings with its hordes misery, death, destruction, and an end of human civilization. Western culture is introduced to the zombie apocalypse.

The zombie monster has existed in the human imagination for decades. Arguably, the first zombie in English literature is the “Creature” in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Zombies are, after all, the reanimated bodies of the dead. Additionally, Mary Shelley’s novel discusses fear and the dark corridors of the human heart. Fear is not new, and neither is the concept of the monstrous human.

The concept of the zombie plague outbreak is nothing new either. However, how the zombie is perceived today as a physical manifestation of mindless consumerism, a steadily creeping demise of economic stability, an end to personal freedom, and most importantly, a contemporary model for the “us and other” proposition, is very new indeed. The zombie is a reflection of modern societal fear interpreted in popular culture beginning with its marked resurgence since September 11, 2001.

This paper will discuss, in two parts, human fear as it is considered in the novel and cinematic versions of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Max Brooks’ *World War Z*. The first part of this paper will focus on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and will discuss fear as cyclical, consuming, and ruinous, and will study how questionable ethics can exacerbate
the repetitive nature of fear. The second part of this paper will hone in on the extremes of human responses in reaction to devastating fear as set forth in Max Brooks’ *World War Z*. The purpose of this paper is not to give a solution to fear, but perhaps expose it in the same way as one might light a candle in a dark room.

**PART ONE**

**Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: The Creature’s Cycle of Fear and Victor’s Moral Detachment**

What is truly amazing about the 1818 novel Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, is that it delivers, to staggering depths, insight into the human heart. Part of this insight is an exploration of the dark corners of the soul, the unbearable weight of guilty secrets, the consuming acid of vengeance, and the sorrow of loneliness and rejection. Indeed, *Frankenstein* is constructed with many layers, all of which carefully enfold the two main characters of Shelley’s novel within the question: “What makes us human?”

Frankenstein’s Creature becomes alive and self-identified. Untutored in the moral boundaries of civilized autonomy, yet contemplating himself worthy of the same rights as others, he grieves that his hideous appearance condemns him to scorned oblivion. However, he asks nothing more than peaceful co-existence with another like himself. His simple request is denied and therefore consequences his furious vengeance.

Victor Frankenstein defies the natural world, meddles with technologies he does not fully understand, and creates an intelligence he cannot control—all with devastating consequences. He constructs a Being who ultimately escapes him and inflicts violent mayhem on an unsuspecting public. Victor Frankenstein is the popular cultural meme of
the mad scientist working with impunity beyond the reach of the everyman. The fear of agents or agencies working in secret and without accountability has been portrayed often throughout the history of cinema.

In modern Western culture, the philosophical questions raised in *Frankenstein* are woven into many films that form a *Frankenstein* archetype. Films such as the 1931 production of *Frankenstein* and 1994’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* bring interpretations of the book to the screen. *Frankenstein* remains present in the popular culture of the modern West, simply because the questions it has grappled with for almost 300 years are questions still asked in 2015. An examination of *Frankenstein* through Mary Shelley’s novel, the 1931 Frank Whale film *Frankenstein*, and the 1994 Kenneth Branagh film *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* will uncover the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his Creature and the moral detachment in Frankenstein that drove the Creature into a cycle of fear.

**The Cycle of Fear, Otherness, and Rage**

The first derivative of the dysfunctional relationship between Victor and the Creature is a cycle of fear. This fear is manifested in the othering of the one feared, namely Victor’s othering of his Creature. The consequences of the fear and othering is rage, the consequence of this rage is violence, and the violence returns again to fear. David Hume says in *Treatise on Human Nature* that “[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (T 2.3 3 p. 415). Frankenstein rejects the Creature based on a horror that is spurred by his fear of the Creature’s ugliness. Controlled by his cowardice, Victor believes he must spurn the
Creature to conceal his own culpability from his community. In so doing, he overlooks the responsibility he ought to have, and his reason falls beneath the weight of his emotion. Likewise, the Creature escapes in confused terror, and kills in a rage created by this terror and sense of despair.

Not only is the Creature alone on the fringes of his world, but so is Victor. On one hand, the Creature is imprisoned in the state of Other\(^1\) through no fault of his own, and merely by virtue of living is he rejected so completely. The horror of otherness consuming the Creature may be likened, as Ronald Britton observes, to “when a mother looks at a newborn baby and sees a monster” (9). It is especially terrifying because “[t]his monster is not super-human; he is all too human” (9). Thus, the Creature is confused with nowhere to turn except to the one who first rejected him, since what else can Victor represent to the Creature if not his father.

The Creature is enraged by the unequivocal injustice of his existence because he did not ask to be formed as he was; neither did he cause offense enough to be turned out upon his first breath except that he was formed as he was. Yet, the Creature imagines himself, not only as a thing of ugliness, but also as a thing lacking in mind. Therefore, when the Creature learns to read and communicate, he is both frustrated and outraged that Frankenstein not only refuses to respond to reason, but also betrays the Creature’s trust so completely. “Shall each man find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and

I be alone?” (Shelley 122). The Creature senses that he needs personal interaction with another Being in order to become more fully human, and as Claudia Rozas Gomez states, “humanization rests on social connectedness” (362).

Frankenstein’s lack of acceptance causes rage in the Creature and sickens his soul to madness. However, the Creature, despite his rage, is trying to claw his way into relationship, whereas Frankenstein, in his cowardice, is trying to claw his way out of relationship. As Wendy Lesser remarks, Victor’s obtuse cowardice prevents him from comprehending “his child’s first sounds, tentative smile, and outstretched hand as anything but menacing” (17). To Frankenstein, the Creature is a thing, not a human being, and certainly not his child. Frankenstein not only complies slavishly with what he sees and feels rather than allowing himself space to think and reason, but also he cannot conceive of the possibility that he could be wrong. Moreover, Claudia Rozas Gomez observes that he has “no expectation that the outcome could be anything other than what [he] imagined it to be” (364).

The Creature rejects Victor’s dismissal into otherness because he must establish his own humanity by forming a thinking being’s existence: he must build his own way of being in the world. Therefore, he learns to read and to write—the hallmarks of humanness. Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, connects one’s own understanding of his or her humanness to the acquisition of education. Certainly the new-born Creature can be equated with an uneducated person. Freire assumes such as an undeveloped or “uncompleted” human being, and states, “both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness” (43). It is only in
Frankenstein’s rejection that the Creature is dehumanized, and therefore seeks to dispel his maker’s erroneous conclusion by educating himself.

By learning to read, the Creature is able to prove his humanness after all. When he is rejected a second time, even as a human being of knowledge, the Creature begins to see Frankenstein as his oppressor. Freire comments that “sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity…become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (44). Had Victor accepted the Creature, they could have been spared from the violence that followed. Even without personal relationship, they could have moved toward meaningful lives.

Perhaps the Creature’s mistake lies in returning to Victor, rather than first establishing his fortune elsewhere as a complete person of knowledge—a notion that never actually occurs to him as a solitary yet autonomous human being. This is because the Creature must free himself from the bonds of otherness placed upon him by Frankenstein. The freedom the Creature seeks is, according to Freire, “acquired by conquest, not by gift…it is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (47). The Creature must be seen as a person in the eyes of Frankenstein in order to move forward.

Claudia Rozas Gomez points out that “[a]s the Creature realizes that language can connect him to the rest of the world he positions and privileges language as a science worthy of study and as the key to connectivity with others and with the world” (365). The Creature’s need for humans to complete his own humanness is confirmed during his stay with the farmer family. He learns to speak and read, thus reinventing himself as human. When
Frankenstein rejects the Creature’s fully visible humanness, the Creature responds with rage.

Hollywood has explored the cycle of fear and the motivations of Frankenstein and his Creature in cinema. In *Frankenstein* (1931) directed by James Whale, and *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (1994) directed by Kenneth Branagh, the concepts of fear, otherness, and rage are closely examined. What is noteworthy about the characterizations of both Frankenstein and his Creature in the 1931 film is that both these characters are depicted on screen as opposing sides of the spectrum, yet still very much alike. When the audience first sees Victor Frankenstein, he is ghoulish among the tombs in a cemetery, waiting for the grave-digger to leave. A camera close-up reveals a wan, thin-lipped, gaunt face, with a glint of madness in his sleep-deprived eyes. He digs up a coffin, embraces it, and whispers of the deceased man within, “He’s just resting, waiting for a new life to come” (Whale). His movements are fearful and erratic as he looks around nervously.

Later on, when the audience sees Frankenstein’s monster for the first time, the face of the Creature slowly rotates into an extreme close-up—no doubt as a means to startle a 1930s audience. The Creature’s dead eyes are set deep in his pale, expressionless face. In the next moment, his face contorts with howls of terror at his first glimpse of fire. Fear is the earliest emotion the Creature experiences.

In Whale’s interpretation of *Frankenstein*, the Creature is voiceless, but for grunts and snarls, and it is difficult for the audience to recognize the Creature’s nature so carefully developed by Shelley in her novel. Then again, the voicelessness of the Creature adds to its othering in a way that could be undermined in the limited time of the film should the
Creature have the ability to speak his thoughts and feelings to sympathetic audiences. Unlike the novel, this cinematic Frankenstein does not instantly reject the creature and initially defends its right to exist, saying “I believe in this monster as you call it” (Whale). The audience accepts that the Creature is not fully a person and therefore not owed the same level of justice as a human being. This opinion is cemented after the Creature’s unintentional murder of little Maria. The camera captures the fear on the Creature’s face when he understands he has harmed the child. However, because the Creature is voiceless, the audience cannot know if the Creature is afraid for himself or grieved by the harm he did.

The art of film allows for much to be said without words, as later, Maria’s father carries her limp body through the town’s streets, grim and resolute in contrast to the celebration of the Frankenstein wedding. The black and white film transforms light to grey in the tomblike setting of narrow cobblestone streets between claustrophobic stone buildings, as the father walks toward the lively town center. Prophetic of Bergman, the imagery is unforgiving with the father’s grief as lonely as the grave, and contrasted by joy as the rest of the world makes merry in the next street. Horror, fear, and isolation are evoked intensely by the sight of a child sagging lifeless in the arms of a grieving parent. This image may be thought of as the very portrait of the Creature, in grief, carrying the terrible burden of Frankenstein who, now dead to him, was his only means of linking himself with the human race.

Whale conceives the Creature as a mindless brute pursuing Victor for a reason unknowable to the audience other than an intense and ferocious evil. Devoid of mind, the Creature is certainly a monster out of control and wreaking harm, while Victor seems to
emerge from his original madness and returns to his senses—a hero come lately—and altogether removed from the irresponsible and cowardly ennui of Shelley’s Victor. In the 1931 film, as in the novel, Victor does not confront his responsibility for the Creature.

Wendy Lesser refers to Victor’s inability to confront as “lassitude”, and observes that “[t]hose of us who accompany Frankenstein to the end of his tale will become familiar with this lassitude. It overtakes the young scientist every time there is some decisive action required, and insures that he will be effectively immobilized while the monster is out killing his friends and relations” (17). In the novel, Frankenstein remains frozen in his fear, and it seems ironic that Frankenstein’s fear-wasted life should end in a frozen wasteland. Lesser adds that Frankenstein “never takes the blame as a parent; he never admits that the monster, if loved and educated, might have turned out well rather than badly” (18). Clearly, Frankenstein bears the brunt of the blame for the Creature’s depraved behaviour. Yet, James Whale allows Frankenstein a measure of vindication, perhaps if only to show the unbridgeable divide between Victor and the Creature: regardless of reason or ethics, Victor, the apposite person, must triumph, while the Creature, who is the grotesque non-person, must fail.

Another effect of the Creature’s voicelessness in the 1931 film is that the audience cannot know the mind driving his rage. The 1931 film skirts some of the horrors of the novel. It does not allow that the cowardice of Frankenstein lends itself directly to the death of Elizabeth, his father, his brother, and the wrongful execution of Justine. The epilogue of the 1931 film pictures Frankenstein recovering from his ordeal safely in his bed—now that the monster has been burned to death in a windmill—happily delivered to the bosom of his fiancée and family who are all very much alive and none the worse for wear. Thus,
Frankenstein is not held accountable for his actions, rather he is characterized as the sympathetic hero who had, albeit, made an unwise decision that is then minimized as inconsequential when compared to the violence done by the monster. Whereas the Creature, as nothing more than a monster after all, simply by being a monster, deserves to die.

The 1994 film, *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, is a shift from the 1931 Whale film and at least a partial return to the original novel. This time, with Robert De Niro as the Creature and Kenneth Branagh as Victor Frankenstein, the audience is given a Creature of voice and intellect who squares off against the foolhardy Frankenstein in a battle to the death. Violent, grotesque, and beautifully filmed, Branagh envisions both of Shelley’s lead characters as unhinged, frail, and gravely defective. During the stunning scene when the Creature is initially birthed, he is brought forth by, and physically onto, Frankenstein. This birthing is accomplished in a single motion that implies an indivisible oneness between the two beings. Susan Tyler Hitchcock remarks that “the creation scene became a monotonous technological birthing; De Niro’s naked body emerging out of a vat of primordial slime, physically midwifed by Frankenstein, played by a sweat-soaked, bare-chested Branagh” (320). Thus, when Frankenstein looks at the Creature in horror, Branagh has already demonstrated that the die is permanently cast such that Frankenstein cannot change his mind about his connection to the Creature without consequence.

The 1994 film is not as tolerant of Victor Frankenstein’s cowardice as is the 1931 film, nor as intolerant toward the Creature. The Creature is certainly terrified upon
Frankenstein’s rejection of him, but Branagh entertains greater latitude to an exploration of the Creature’s unspeakable rage and subsequent violence than did Whale. Boris Karloff’s portrayal of the Creature in the 1931 film seems sedate and melancholy beside De Niro’s seething, calculating, and vengeful monster. John Rieder remarks that the Creature “gives an angry, eloquent voice to the repressed Other, and so the novel is both a stunning portrayal of the logic of alienation and a strong indictment of it” (29). Assuming a closer relationship with Mary Shelley’s vision, Branagh presents a Creature that is the Other, but unlike his impotent counterpart in the 1931 film, this Creature not only demands, but also appropriates a voice for himself, a voice to which Frankenstein is cautioned to heed. Frankenstein adheres to a wildly flawed sense of moral superiority and does not feel obligated to offer the Creature even a modicum of comfort.

This is where the 1994 film utterly succeeds as a study of calculated violent rage that is still, bizarrely enough, pierced through by the Creature’s relentless attempts to reason that he is a person notwithstanding. The Creature asks of Frankenstein at one point, “Did you ever consider the consequences of your actions?” (Branagh). The Creature himself is most certainly the ultimate consequence for Frankenstein. That the Creature is wholly a person is proven by his awareness of not only his place in the world but also of his impact on those things in his world, including the life of his creator.

As the Branagh film shows the unity of Frankenstein and the Creature at the moment of the Creature’s birth, so the film also shows their unity at Victor’s death. The Creature, holding Frankenstein in his arms, weeps now with sorrow where rage was once his only impetus, and confesses, “he was my father” (Branagh). Shortly after, as floating ice bears away the Creature’s burning pyre, he has achieved “both his and Victor’s
annihilation” (Bernatchez 213), which brings full circle Branagh’s concept of “a coextensive relationship between [the Creature’s] creator and himself that is only actualized in death” (213)—and this concept is underpinned and propelled by the Creature’s rage.

The 1994 film delivers the twisted avenues of rage to a dismayed audience. The Creature tells Frankenstein plainly, “I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine, and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other” (Branagh). When the Creature is betrayed, he certainly indulges his violent rage. He murders Frankenstein’s brother, frames the innocent Justine, and on Frankenstein’s wedding night, rips the beating heart from Elizabeth’s chest. Exhibited is unquenchable rage, fully indulged, and fully actualized.

When studying fear, otherness, and rage, there arises the notion of human culpability. It is Victor Frankenstein who, through his own action or inaction, has been at the heart of the Creature’s violent behavior. The Creature, othered by both his creator and the world of human beings, is driven by fear, loneliness, and finally by rage. In Mary Shelley’s novel, Frankenstein is given a position of sympathy rather than one of fault and it is the Creature to whom the majority of blame is assigned. In the 1931 film Frankenstein, the Creature is condemned once again, while Victor Frankenstein seems liberated from his earlier foolishness and absolved of his part in the death caused by the Creature. However, in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, both Creature and creator are held accountable for their own actions and Victor Frankenstein is openly impugned for the Creature’s existence.

It is justice being done, after all, and meets with what the audience expects to see. In fact, justice is what the audience needs to see in order to feel that the story has reached
an equitable completion. The innocent must be exonerated and the guilty must be punished. Thus, the story of *Frankenstein* is also one of guilt and conscience, and ponders these as dilemmas within the individual personhood of both Victor and the Creature.

**Conscience and Accountability**

Frankenstein’s Creature is the central focus of Mary Shelley’s novel because he is a monster, but only until he speaks. Peter Brooks observes that “this hideous and deformed creature, far from expressing himself in grunts and gestures, speaks and reasons with the highest elegance, logic, and persuasiveness. As a verbal creation, he is the very opposite of the monstrous: he is a sympathetic and persuasive participant in Western culture” (81). When Frankenstein begrudgingly agrees to hear the Creature’s tragic tale, the audience immediately sees that the Creature is thoughtful and not the mindless thing Frankenstein first insinuated. Victor’s character comes into question as Shelley’s story reveals how flawed reason corrupts Victor’s understanding of morality, his science, his ability to perceive the Creature as anything but a monster, and these failings effect the moral compass of the Creature.

Victor’s rejection of his Creature based on his personal intolerance speaks loudly to his amoral nature, and subsequently indicts his logic for not only beginning but also for continuing in his work. After all, could he not see the Creature’s face as he built it? Lars Lunsford discusses how Frankenstein, from the very start, devalues the life of the Creature before the Creature has yet spoken or sinned, and observes that “Victor doesn’t value the life he is to create so much as what the creation will give him” (175). Kim Hammond remarks that “Frankenstein is not a pillar of reason; detached, objective, rational, measured and cautious, working only for the benefit of advancing humanity. His intended experiment
is potentially dangerous and ethically flawed. His rush to develop the technology is motivated by the anticipation of his own reward over and above due care and caution” (190). It is fame and admiration Victor craves.

Victor Frankenstein wants what he wants—at any cost. He offers a magnanimous but immature rationale about the possible remunerations provided by his experimentation: “I could banish away disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (Shelley 22). Firstly, his reasoning suggests that death is the enemy of humanity, and does not allow that death balances the human race—as it does all living things—on a planet with finite resources. Secondly, Frankenstein’s reasoning is flawed, and therefore all the work that follows in this reasoning is also flawed. Thirdly, for all of Frankenstein’s prattling about the good of his work, he sets aside the good in trade for adulation. Victor presumes he is acting within the boundaries of noble virtue by doing a great thing worthy of fame. This is not true because he falls short of what is both noble and virtuous.

Aristotle defines the noble and virtuous person as a person who purposely strives toward that which is virtuous with a mind to become a person of virtue—no one is born virtuous. Virtue is a choice demonstrated by what one believes and how one behaves, and Aristotle states that “the good and noble things in life are won by those who act rightly” (Arist. NE 1.8, 1099a5, trans. Ostwald). Virtue is won—or achieved—by moral individuals. Those who possess virtue are, according to Aristotle, individuals who have attained excellence in two areas of Self: the first being intellect and the second being morality.
Intellectual virtue, the first aspect of virtue, requires being taught, and “for that reason requires experience and time” (II.1,15). It is implicit within Aristotle’s concept of intellectual virtue that if one must receive teaching, there must also be a teacher. Frankenstein throws off the teaching of the established, reputable teachers of his time in favor of his untutored intellectual arrogance, which, in turn, sends him chasing after pseudo-science. His father warns him, “my dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash” (Shelley 20). Victor, to some extent, agrees with his father because he refers to the writings of the discredited scientists as “wild fancies” (21). Nevertheless, he continues on this path, ignores his father’s advice as coming from a man without a scientific mind (21), and thus neglects formal, accredited instruction. Therefore, the time he spends in study only serves to broaden his lack of intellectual virtue. This lack forms the groundwork for his unethical science, and ultimately, his destruction.

Morality, the second aspect of virtue, is what Aristotle refers to as *ethike*, from the Greek *ethos*, which describes the practice of virtue that normalizes within a person as habit. Virtue, through habit, underpins not merely the individual’s worldview but, most importantly, his or her way of being. Morality is learned, because according to Aristotle, “none of the moral virtues is [sic] implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit” (Arist. NE. II.1, 15, trans. Ostwald). However, the individual is born with the ability to learn; hence, intellect and morality together form virtue. Aristotle states that virtue is “implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this ability to completion and fulfilment” (II.1, 25). From a young age, Frankenstein dismisses moral virtue when he ignores the principles of intellectual virtue.
Victor’s interior system of virtue is corrupted, and what is wrong begins to seem right to him—he loses his ability to reason morally. “By one of those caprices of the mind, which we are perhaps most subject to in early youth, I at once gave up my former occupations, set down natural history and all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation, and entertained the greatest disdain for a would-be science which could never even step within the threshold of real knowledge” (Shelley 22). Frankenstein begins to surmise, to his own peril, that authentic science is incomplete and a boundary to greater study. From this moment on, the rules of ethical science no longer, to his mind, apply to him.

Victor’s science is selfish and does not reflect rational benevolent goals to profit the human condition. Kim Hammond points out that “Victor’s disastrous science can hardly be considered to constitute enlightened humanitarian progress” (191), and this great failure is intertwined with Frankenstein’s monumental “lack of the social responsibility, accountability and liability necessary for a rational and free society” (191). Victor’s dismissal of the ethics firmly established and adhered to by the learned scientists of his day is morally deficient—not because he does not understand them—but because he thinks himself above them: “Sir Isaac Newton is said to have avowed that he felt like a child picking up shells beside the great and unexplored ocean of truth. Those of his successors in each branch of natural philosophy with whom I was acquainted, appeared even to my boy’s apprehensions, as tyros engaged in the same pursuit” (Shelley 21). Frankenstein devalues and disrespects his peers and sees them as novices overshadowed by his own intellectual superiority. Hammond adds that in “Frankenstein we see that knowledge and expertise, in the wrong hands, and with no structures of social accountability, can be
dangerous, and as such present a risk to society” (192). Frankenstein rebels against established scientific authority, fails in reason, and proceeds along a faulty line of scientific inquiry. Yet, like a petulant child, he stubbornly demands his own way. Susan Tyler Hitchcock comments that Victor’s creation and treatment of the Creature has become a metaphor “promoting some vague sense that human enterprise, detached from its moral mooring, has gone monstrously awry” (306).

David Hume wrote thoughtfully about the philosophy of ethical choices in *Our Obligation to Virtue*. He posits that just because a person is struck by an excellent idea, it does not necessarily mean that the idea is beneficial. Instead, according to Hume, an idea that is truly good, will not have in its *reasonable* course, a destructive nature. Hume observes that “a man has but a bad grace, who delivers a theory, however true, which, he must confess, leads to a practice dangerous and pernicious. Why rake into those corners of nature which spread a nuisance all around? Why dig up pestilence from the pit in which it is buried? The ingenuity of your research may be admired, but your systems will be detested” (106). Certainly Victor Frankenstein has a brilliant scientific mind. Certainly it is genius that brings him to the connection between life and electrical galvanization—as it is postulated in the *Frankenstein* universe.

Nevertheless, somehow, somewhere, Frankenstein crosses a line that Hume suggests reveals a deficiency in Frankenstein’s character. Hume posits that it is redundant to argue in favor of good manners, appropriate behavior, good humor, and kindness because these virtues are already accepted as good and valuable in an evolved culture. He points out that “[v]anity alone, without any other consideration, is a sufficient motive to make us wish for the possession of these accomplishments” (107). Society accepts its established
good as the best possible way of being because, among other reasons, it knows the alternative. “All our failures [in virtue] proceed from bad education, want of capacity, or a perverse and unpliant disposition” (107). It is not Frankenstein’s intellect that is defective; his moral compass is askew. This, in turn, contaminates his science, because it is not argued that his genius is adequate until the audience sees his genius corrupted.

Ethics and human conscience must be of primary importance in any endeavor that impacts either nature or society. Kim Hammond agrees with Hume’s argument and posits that scientific pursuit requires “transparent, responsible, and accountable science and technological development within a democratic arena with an emphasis on communal benefit, not personal gain” (192). Frankenstein has chosen to ignore this dictum in favor of his theory because his flawed reason does not connect the moral good to the intellectual good. He assumes the pursuit of the intellectual good will necessarily consequence the moral good, and not the other way around.

Frankenstein’s lack of ethics, haste, and fear combine to affect the fundamental flaw in his logic, which in turn, ultimately lays the groundwork for his ruin. What compels his flawed logic are the vices of hubris and lust for accolades. “So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein,—more, far more will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (Shelley 28). Hume responds to Frankenstein with his estimation of human vice “that there is not, in any instance, the smallest pretext for giving it the preference above virtue” (Hume 109).
Hume also suggests that those arrogant “knaves” who attempt to succeed by circumventing the rules will, invariably, fall victim to a self-inflicted stumbling block that is set in place by their own poor reasoning which is, in turn, corrupted by intrinsic vice. People cannot transgress both Nature and Society and escape unscathed because they are still compelled by their actual motive. If that motive is vice, then they are inevitably “betrayed by their own maxims; and while they purpose to cheat with moderation and secrecy, a tempting incident occurs, nature is frail, and they give into the snare; whence they can never extricate themselves, without a total loss of reputation, and the forfeiture of all future trust and confidence with mankind” (Hume 109-110). This is precisely what happens to Victor Frankenstein until he is buried alive beneath his own device.

Victor is desperate to complete his work—not for the sake of humanity—but to vindicate his own ego. He sees himself as the chosen one: “I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their enquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret” (Shelley 31). Then later, as a god: “I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter” (31). Yet, he is still fearful of discovery in a way that not only suggests his guilt, but also his determination to continue at any cost. This is seen in the 1931 film when the characters of Elizabeth, Moritz, and Waldman pay Frankenstein an unannounced visit at his laboratory. At Elizabeth’s pleading, Victor begrudgingly unlocks the door. Once inside, the visitors see the experiment Frankenstein is about to undertake, and immediately Dr Waldman questions Frankenstein’s ethics. Frankenstein responds with disdainful indignation:

Where should we be if no one tried to find out what lies beyond? Have you never wanted to look beyond the clouds and the stars, or to know what causes the trees to
bud? And what changes the darkness into light? But if you talk like that, people call you crazy. Well, if I could discover just one of these things, what eternity is, for example, I wouldn't care if they did think I was crazy (Whale).

Uncomfortable questions are asked of Frankenstein when other people of science see his work and, since he has anticipated such questions, he purposely shields his work from the eyes of other scientists. From the beginning, he has no intention of being accountable for his work. Since his work “lacks democracy and transparency” (Hammond 190), he does not profit from discussions that “serve to warn of the dangers or ethical implications of his intended experiments” (190). Victor’s self-centered science is coupled by an antisocial goal which displays a “lack of the social responsibility, accountability, and liability necessary for a rational and free society” (191). As Elizabeth says to Victor in the 1994 film during a confrontation about his lack of priorities, “Oh, isn’t it convenient? Or doesn’t it fit in with your plans? Don’t you think of anything or anyone other than yourself?” (Branagh). Victor wants only the gratification of scientific discovery, but not the discipline of protocol. The audiences of Frankenstein feel very certain that Victor does not represent any of their interests during his scientific experiments.

Again, the words of the Creature in the 1994 film echo potently, “Did you ever consider the consequences of your actions?” (Branagh). Likewise in the novel, the Creature asks, “How dare you sport thus with life?” (Shelley 68), while in the 1931 film, the character of Dr Waldman delivers an ominous caution to Frankenstein when he tells him “you have created a monster and it will destroy you” (Whale). One theme to which the
Frankenstein films remain faithful to the novel is that Victor Frankenstein’s lack of moral compass and secret, unfalsifiable work plunge him into darkness, and result in the violent reaction of the Creature.

**Shame and the Loss of Personhood**

Frankenstein, on one hand, acknowledges that he disregards ethics as an obstacle to the evolution of human science. He says, “I had gazed upon the fortifications and impediments that seemed to keep human beings from entering the citadel of nature, and then rashly and ignorantly I had repined” (Shelley 21). His words are implicit with the presumption of himself as Nature’s master and echo with the sounds of Georgian patriarchy. Vered Arnon considers the intrusive manner in which Victor Frankenstein approaches the natural world, and likens it to rape:

When he discovers the secret of the mechanisms of life, he is breaking nature’s hymen. The violence perpetrated by the monster his efforts create is the pain and destruction of both body and psyche that is wrought by rape. What he does, creating life out of death, is not in accord with nature. It is a violation of natural principles, and in Shelley’s projection, can only result in havoc and destruction (npag).

Frankenstein does not greet the natural world with awe and respect, but as one who plunders whatever he chooses, and conquers by force. The Creature, on the other hand, is a Being of innocence flung into Victor’s clandestine world. He is not born wicked, but through the example of Frankenstein’s callousness and rejection, he comes to learn the ways of darkness, rage, and violence. The Creature’s cycle of fear caused by
Frankenstein’s detachment and rejection has also produced a toxic level of shame in the Creature.

When the Creature first stirs to life, Victor is horrified, and remains permanently repulsed by what he has created. “Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch…it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived” (Shelley 36). ‘It became,’ says Frankenstein, as though the physical ugliness of the Creature—created by Frankenstein—is somehow the fault of the Creature. Immediately, Frankenstein separates himself from a position of blame, and seeing the ugliness of the Creature, assumes he must be evil—therefore justifying the separation in his own mind.

Like a rape victim, as suggested by Vered Arnon, the Creature is overcome by crippling shame that compels him to violence. Sally K Severino and Nancy K Morrison posit that the Creature becomes violent in reaction to the shame caused by Frankenstein’s rejection. The Creature believes himself to be ugly and disgusting because Frankenstein believes it and they suggest that “what we see in the face of another, we live within ourselves. Disgust is important because, when someone looks at us with disgust, we feel disgusting” (5). Therefore, when the Creature can receive no help from Victor, he seeks to heal himself: he seeks to heal his intellect by learning and his spirit by loving. His body is beyond hope, except for the hope of his physical appearance becoming moot through the existence of another like himself. Thus, he begs Frankenstein to create another.

Severino and Morrison add that “when we are met with shame, horror, and disgust, we are left in a state of feeling ugly and unwanted. We feel ashamed as the creature
experienced from Frankenstein’s reaction to him. This state of shame can be repaired within a relationship of genuine love” (7). The Creature intuits his need for another to love him as he is and therefore tells Frankenstein, “I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects” (Shelley 103-4). Again, it is Frankenstein’s actions that spur the Creature’s madness when Frankenstein destroys the Creature’s mate.

Victor still imagines himself in control, even to believing that he must destroy the mate to save the human race (121). So deep is his prejudice against the Creature that it is beyond recovery. It is “obsession with science that has become pure objectification. The sense of the sacred in creation is lost. Innocence is destroyed. The creature is created out of unrestrained power” (Severino and Morrison 7). Just as Wendy Lesser posits that Frankenstein is so revolted by the Creature that any movement, no matter how innocent, is perceived as a threat, so Frankenstein sees the Creature’s smile at his newly created mate as an expression of “the utmost extent of malice and treachery” (Shelley 121), instead of one of hope, joy, and the end of loneliness.

The Creature is the object that will bring Victor the renown he craves, but when the Creature falls short of Frankenstein’s vision, he is rejected. Lunford adds that “this failure of Frankenstein to value life over fame becomes the well-spring of his suffering” (175), and of the violence to follow. Frankenstein’s maniacal denial of his culpability leads to the death of every person he loves—or of those who love him. Lunford adds that “the rest of the novel reads as the story of a man who at every turn is given the opportunity to put the lives of others before himself” (175), but does not.
Josh Bernatchez examines Victor Frankenstein as more than the Creature’s maker; Victor Frankenstein is the Creature’s torturer. It is the constant pain inflicted by Frankenstein that drives the Creature to his consuming wrath. Victor, in his obtuse detachment, does not consider the Creature as a person with sensibilities. He sees himself as the only one of consequence in the situation, and “always insists on his categorical moral distance from his creation” (208). He abandons the Creature, and returns to his apartment later overjoyed to find that his “enemy had indeed fled” (38). The tragedy of the Creature’s life is precipitated by Frankenstein’s refusal to be accountable for the Creature he first makes and then rejects for no transgression other than his ugliness—a transgression for which Frankenstein, not the Creature, is solely liable.

In spite of Frankenstein, the Creature attempts to prove his personhood because he is capable of understanding both reason and justice, and because he knows his own esoteric needs. Huber, Widdifield, and Johnson state that the Creature, “upon receiving life…had fears, as well as biological and social needs…In the beginning of his “life” these characteristics flourished, but through time they were thwarted when he suffered the pain and rejection by society because of his offensive appearance” (268). Knowing that Frankenstein is revolted by his ugliness, the Creature appeals instead to Frankenstein’s reason when they first meet again. “Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace” (Shelley 68). He then petitions Frankenstein’s duty to justice:

The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of
murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! (69).

Josh Bernatchez supports that the Creature does not perceive himself as a beast devoid of morality and reason and “insists that he is of the same essential nature as humans” (208). In the same way that Claudia Rozas Gomez points out that the Creature must connect with humans to know his own humanity, Bernatchez makes the connection that the Creature cannot prove his ability to reason if he is alone since “virtue is a capacity that must be exercised with others and is stifled in isolation” (208). It is for the first reason that companionship is essential to his existence, that he proves himself a person of human sensibility. It is for this second reason that the Creature seeks to bond with Frankenstein—or a created substitute—if only to introduce himself as a moral being. He needs a companion, not just as someone with whom to keep company, but as one who will help him nurture higher levels of emotional existence such as altruism and equanimity. For a brief moment, it is as though Frankenstein forgets his bigotry and sees the truth in the Creature’s supplication that he must build another. Frankenstein struggles with himself:

I compassioned him and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred...I thought, that as I could not sympathize with him, I had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which was yet in my power to bestow...I concluded that the justice due both to him and my fellow creatures demanded of me that I should comply with his request (Shelley 106-107).
In that moment, when Victor gives his word to the Creature that he will provide him with a companion, he sets in motion an unstoppable chain of events. He knows the Creature is watching, waiting, and looking to this companion as his vehicle of escape into a quiet and reasonably happy life. The chain of events might have ended in a peaceful parting of ways with the Creature taking his bride and leaving Frankenstein. The point is, Frankenstein fails to see that his journey with the Creature will necessarily end upon some juncture, either good or bad.

Because Frankenstein dehumanizes the Creature, he does not think there is any dishonor in breaking his word to him. He says, “I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like him, and trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged” (Shelley 121). Further, Frankenstein believes the Creature is a monster with no right to companionship. “Even though Victor has been integral to the creation of the situation he bemoans, he insists that he alone is the innocent sufferer; he denies the creature’s right to sympathy or justice” (Bernatchez 209). Frankenstein’s skewed sense of morality will not allow him to think mercifully. Victor “initially agrees to create her…Yet the creature’s categorical monstrosity is finally cited as justification for Victor’s destruction of the female” (209). It is this action of hypocrisy as Frankenstein first allows the Creature a measure of personhood only to wrench it from him that sends the Creature careening down his path of vengeful rage. He confesses that “[t]he wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future he depended for happiness” (Shelley 121). Frankenstein knows fully that he will wound the Creature terribly by destroying his mate, but does so anyway, without a moment of compassion. It is here that Frankenstein establishes himself as the other monster in Shelley’s tale.
Mary Shelley sketches out the moral dilemmas inherent in creating a creature from dead bodies, and reanimating it into a separate living and breathing entity. Cinema adds its voice to Shelley’s discussion through art-on-film that provokes the audience to consider specific arguments through the interaction of on-screen characters. John Mack posits that “the significance of any such fantastic creature derives…from its specific artistic realization. The crucial question to pose in this context is not ‘what is the underlying cause of the cinematic monster’s effect?’ but ‘what is the meaning for me of the monster in this film?’” (qtd. in M. Grant 125). In the case of *Frankenstein*, the Creature speaks to the notions of autonomy and conscience. The Creature desires personhood. He seeks a name through fellowship with his creator; he seeks fulfillment through fellowship with a mate; he seeks meaning through fellowship with self. In the same way, the audience sees and questions Frankenstein’s motives, culpability, and ethics.

Joyce Carol Oates posits that Victor Frankenstein does not understand his mistakes. In fact, she submits that Frankenstein has no moral epiphany, despite his words, and he is in utter denial up to the moment of his death. He is not merely frozen physically, but frozen is his final state of being: frozen in opinion, frozen in ethics, frozen in bigotry, and frozen in his unending cycle of cowardice and self-righteousness. Oates comments that “the inhuman creation becomes increasingly human while his creator becomes increasingly inhuman” (545). In the 1994 film, this concept is movingly depicted as the Creature, cradling Frankenstein’s dead body against his chest, weeps as though beyond comfort. It is clear that the Creature now acutely understands what it is to be human, but “the lesson of the ‘Frankenstein monster’ is revealed as lost on Frankenstein himself” (545). Although Victor and the Creature both tell their tales, there is no one who can truly grasp the depth
of these stories—especially not each other. Thomas H. Schmid remarks that “each character’s story [spins] a tale of personal isolation to an essentially uncomprehending listener of varying sympathies” (23). It is this level of loneliness that forms both their existences.

Frankenstein cannot escape what he has created, neither can he face what he has created. When Frankenstein admits to this truth, it is too late. Half-frozen upon the ice, he admonishes Captain Walton who has rescued him, “[y]ou seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been…[N]othing can alter my destiny; listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined” (Shelley 13). Yet, it does not seem that Frankenstein is coming to any moral convergence; he is merely admitting to snares that led to his defeat. Frankenstein never acknowledges his many sins against the Creature. Oates asks the question, “if Frankenstein is not to blame for the various deaths that occur, who is?” (547). This is the puzzle Victor cannot decipher, and the reason he is unable to resolve it is simply because he has experienced no moral awakening. In the end, he maintains that his destiny was irrevocable. Yet, this is only so because of his unethical choices.

In the 1994 film, during Victor’s death scene, Captain Walton asks the Creature his name, and the Creature replies, “He never gave me a name” (Branagh). Because the Creature is rejected by Victor so permanently, his pursuit of a name—an identity in the world—is thwarted. Of the prospect of a mate with whom to live a purposeful life, the Creature says “I do know that for the sympathy of one living being, I would make peace with all” (Branagh), but when this hope is permanently dashed, the Creature is left with no
other means of self-actualization than fellowship with himself. However, he has no comprehension of what he truly is. He confronts Victor, saying “[y]ou gave me these emotions, but you didn’t tell me how to use them...And what of my soul? Do I have one? Or was that a part you left out?” (Branagh). The audience appreciates the Creature’s reasonable questions but is puzzled by Frankenstein’s absurd response: “[t]here was something at work in my soul which I do not understand” (Branagh). Regardless of the varied opinions of reader or audience, whether or not the Creature possesses a soul after all is a truth the Creature must know for himself. Regrettably, the Creature’s one remaining question of his own personhood seems to hover at the end of the novel, as it does within the 1931 and 1994 films, and then drifts away, unanswered, into the ether.

In the novel, the Creature leaps out the ship’s window on to the ice where “he was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance” (Shelley 166). Lost in darkness and distance...alone, apart, and set adrift on an ocean of facelessness. He is for all time invisible and nameless to the rest of the world. He cannot even depend on his hideousness to afford him the notice, even harshly given, of another human being. Thus he goes unfinished, having never learned anything about himself, except his unplumbed potential to love and his capacity for unhinged violence. He recognizes this truth and mourns his life in recollection, saying “when the images which this world affords first opened upon me, when I felt the cheering warmth of summer, and heard the rustling of the leaves and the warbling of the birds, and these were all to me, I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation” (166). Frankenstein’s Creature cannot embrace a life without meaning. Everything that brings value to life is either lost or unavailable to him.
The Creature’s tragedy rings true with audiences because he seeks no more than most people in Western society, many of whom suffer under the weight of disenfranchisement. To live in a world that denies one personhood and compassion is, for some people, a world that eventually becomes worthless. Susan Tyler Hitchcock observes that “at its heart Frankenstein speaks of an eternal conflict in the human condition. It is the tension between what we have and what we desire, between that which is firmly in our grasp and that which we can dream but not materialize” (323). The creature’s mournful statement “I should have wept to die; now it is my only consolation,” echoes his profoundly human grief when his personhood is disrupted, his individual sense of self collapses, and his heart’s desire is lost to him forever.

Discussion of Part One

Human curiosity mutates into intrusion at times, and this can be said of Victor Frankenstein’s driving ambition to create a living being. Like a shroud covering the instances of unethical human curiosity, Mary Shelley’s morality tale floats as a mist, and from that mist, the monster speaks. Popular culture has sought a satisfactory analysis of Frankenstein and his Creature in the 1931 film Frankenstein and the 1994 film Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in order to understand the scope of human carnage wrought by an encompassing level of fear and an abysmally deficient code of ethics. A discussion of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, based on both the novel and the novel’s interpretation in cinema, and the problematic relationship between Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, can focus meaningfully on the cycle of fear in the Creature which begins as a result of the moral detachment of Frankenstein, and leads to their mutual destruction.

The Creature experiences fear at the beginning of his life which is exacerbated by
Victor’s rejection of him. Emotionally wounded and physically ostracized, the Creature suffers from a profound shame that evolves out of his ignominious state of otherness. The only person who can remove his shame and rejection is the one, Victor, who first places it upon him. Hoping to reason with Victor, man to man, the Creature is rejected and betrayed. Crushed by his disappointment and thwarted at all attempts to reason with Victor, the Creature flies into a vengeful rage, and sets out to do violence. In the end, the Creature is unable to claim his personhood and dignity from Victor. He cannot make a meaningful life for himself, and after Victor dies, the Creature drifts into oblivion as a work incomplete, cast off as worthless.

In the case of the Creature, his violent rampage might have been reduced or prevented altogether had Victor Frankenstein been a principled individual who maintained an ethical standard during his scientific pursuits. Clearly, Victor’s moral detachment instigates the cycle of fear in the Creature which culminates in mayhem and death. Victor is arrogant, cavalier, and certainly repents of his creation, yet does not take responsibility for the Creature’s actions. He does not understand when the Creature responds with calculated vengeance because he cannot believe the Creature is a person and not a mindless monster. Because he believes the Creature to be a monster, he does not provide the compassion the Creature needs to turn from the monstrous.

Mary Shelley’s work of fiction echoes truth in the real world of modern Western society where people live daily with disenfranchisement. Under the weight of rejection or marginalization, a backlash of violence and anger is seen like a steady stream through mass media. The moral detachment of the “haves” intensifies the rage of the “have nots.” Clearly, Mary Shelley wrote from within her own society as a woman of her time, and
therefore the clash of virtues between Victor Frankenstein and his Creature demonstrates that society’s habit of othering certain “undesirable” individuals and removing their personhood for perceived disparities that are entirely unfounded is the old story of all prejudice including bigotry and sexism—in the case of *Frankenstein*, the story is almost two hundred years old. If moral detachment aggravates fear and violence, then surely virtue and compassion can alleviate them, and of all the themes that can be drawn from *Frankenstein*, perhaps this concept is the one most relevant in today’s volatile society.

PART TWO

*World War Z: Reflections of Human Nature in the Zombie Apocalypse*

At the heart of the zombie mythology is paranoia and fear. There is a suspicion of conspiracy, of corruption, of contagion—of what is inside escaping and what is outside invading. The zombie mythos embodies the fear of losing identity, culture, and control. In its apocalyptic theme, the zombie genre represents the antithesis of human civilization and personhood. Audiences are not only forced to identify those things that best represent human values, but also to cringe at the very worst traits of human nature. The zombie contagion removes all hitherto reliable social infrastructure and replaces it with chaos. Themes in the zombie tradition strip away societal and personal autonomy until there remains no recognizable ties to normalcy. Audiences keenly sense the human survivors grappling to maintain a grip on their humanity and immediately empathize with to the first sign of human community, even if that community is unhealthy, because any link to humanity, however tenuous, is better than a zombie. Thus, all zombie tales are human tales.

The necessary companionship between human survivors, as well as the struggle for hegemony of zombies and a rapidly decaying civilization, allows for the interplay of
thought and reason where the essentials of mutual humanity becoming mutual goals. The social quest for that which best exemplifies what is “human” is the common ground that emerges, and if common ground is not possible, then survivors must not only fend off zombies, but must also contend with each other. However, in spite of conflict, humans gravitate to each other because there is a feeling of safety in numbers. Reasonable access to community is usually reassuring, and this is because most humans have an expectation of amelioration from human civilization. The zombie is the supreme inverse of human concord because the zombie has been emptied of its humanity—it is not civilized.

The zombie apocalypse—the end of the civilized world as it has been—describes human beings stranded in a world where zombies exist, and requires the audience to suspend belief in order to capture the message. Aside from moaning zombies, there is something of greater importance that is being explored through the notion of a zombie apocalypse: in modern Western society, the zombie mythology has dictated those things fundamental to the groundwork of human civilization. But first, humans must struggle to master their better natures. Max Brooks’ novel World War Z and the film World War Z (which bears little resemblance to the Brooks novel) examines how the zombie apocalypse amplifies the very worst and the very best of human nature.

**Zombies and Fear**

David Frauenfelder states that “movies are endlessly reflective of our shared values, aspirations, and beliefs” (210) and, in turn, inform attitudes and philosophies of individuals within the audience. Further, “good stories have a profound effect on all cultures and …comparison of similar stories from different cultures can illuminate both sides in ways
otherwise impossible” (210). What is interesting about the zombie genre is that it opposes what Western culture would consider shared values, hopes, and dreams. Moreover, the zombie apocalypse does not differentiate between cultures. Daniel W. Drezner in “Night of the Living Wonks” remarks that “[b]ecause they spread across borders and threaten states and civilizations, these zombies should command the attention of scholars and policymakers” (npag). In fact, zombies cross races, economic status, age, gender, religion and a myriad of other human differences until all humans are lumped together in one dizzying nightmare. Marian Kester Coombs comments that “[t]here is never just one meaning to a symbol as rich as the zombie. People have feared many things in many guises over the centuries, but some fears are eternal and universal” (42). No one wants to be eaten by a zombie.

Described by Drezner as “a reanimated being occupying a human corpse with a strong desire to eat human flesh” (npag), the zombie is now an established mythology within Western popular culture. Just as biblical tradition and Roman and Greek mythology have underpinned much of the understanding of legend and story in Western culture, so have the symbols of heroes, villains, and monsters. Susie O’Brien and Imre Szeman discuss the ways in which mythologies within popular culture tend to rest on the historical as well as the symbolic. O’Brien and Szeman define myth as a “form of signification that works to express and, more or less invisibly, to justify the dominant values of a culture in a particular historical moment” (62). The zombie monster within the zombie apocalypse scenario speaks to the worries of society regarding both national and global issues—historical and current—from suspicions of government ineptitude to the inadequacies of the health care system to global warming. O’Brien and Szeman state that “myths are not natural but
historical, the products of particular relations of power” (62). The zombie apocalypse signifies the fear felt by society about matters directly affecting people, but beyond their control. This fear has been accumulating over time and the fervour surrounding Western society’s recent affinity toward the zombie apocalypse, since September 11, 2001, could be contemplated as the crescendo of this building fear.

Daniel W. Drezner contends that the zombie apocalypse “stories end in one of two ways—the elimination/subjugation of all zombies, or the eradication of humanity from the face of the Earth” (npag). It is not surprising that the zombie apocalypse hones in on humankind’s reaction to fear and panic and its subsequent behaviours. People are trampled as other people heedlessly stampede. Once the initial panic subsides, the grasping for resources such as food and water begins. Then there are the few who stop, turn, and help others get to safety. What begins to emerge from the level of chaos brought about by widespread disaster are the extremes of the moral nature existing in human beings, and a peaked interest in what is human as opposed to what is zombie.

Symbolic of the invader, zombies are, since September 11, 2001, the metaphorical enemy who wishes to harm citizens of Western society, and must be identified. Michael Shermer writes “[d]istinguishing between zombies and non-zombies…hints at the deeper problem of xenophobia, which evolved as part of our nature to be suspicious of outsiders who, in our evolutionary past, were potentially dangerous” (npag). Sadly, September 11 served to inculcate fear as truth in the minds of many people, and from this fear the zombie apocalypse experienced its rebirth. Today, there seems to be a sweeping awareness that there are zombies lurking around every corner.
A striking truth about the zombie apocalypse is that, when it happens, it happens to everyone everywhere—which is why the zombie apocalypse is such an extraordinary tool for considering common fear behaviours. Todd K Platt states that “to ignore these massmediated representations [zombies] of fear and terror is to ignore one of the largest and most enduring cultural sites in which thought and discussion of and about fear and terror occurs” (549). People, both average and extraordinary, are caught together and either become zombies or must survive zombies. Therefore, conversation about fear becomes a positive thing. Mark Conlund Anderson remarks that Western audiences “have come to expect that a monster is never just a monster but rather a metaphor that translates real anxieties into more or less palatable forms” (208). The zombie apocalypse mythology addresses the real fear items that tax society such as pandemics and natural disasters within a present day mundane setting, and thereby remain relevant enough to hold the attention of modern audiences who may then address their very real fears from a safe distance.

The Worst of Us

Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenze discuss the inhumanity of people toward each other during situations of crippling stress as keenly defined in the apocalyptic zombie story. “A recurring trope of disaster narratives and specifically the zombie genre is that one frequently finds that the greatest enemy is not the disaster, in this case the zombies, but other people” (143). A glaringly noticeable trait in zombie books and films, almost without exception, is that some human beings in the zombie apocalypse are far more dangerous than the zombies. In both the film and the novel World War Z, Max Brooks speaks to a wide range of social ills that raise their ugly heads from violence-producing fear, to
outrageous elitism, to shady corporate and government schemes, to consumerism, to ecological concerns.

In *World War Z*, the film version, Gerry Lang and his family must stop at a pharmacy to get medication for one of the children. He leaves his wife and daughters for mere moments, and returns to find three men violently assaulting his wife. He must shoot one of them before the other two abandon their efforts. A police man runs toward them after Gerry kills one of his wife’s assailants, but continues past them in search of diapers and baby formula. When the Langs escape the store, they find their vehicle has been stolen. Gerry is close to panic himself, saying “We gotta get out of here. We gotta get off the streets” (Forster). All around this young family, people are running, tripping, flailing, and falling. There are fires in the distance, explosions, the sound of a hundred sirens, and the terrified screams of children.

People, in their panic, are losing control of their ability to reason. With this loss of reason, comes a loss of self-control, and people abandon their usual principals. Boluk and Lenz add that “losing control of one’s reason and turning against the social body to become an instrument of infection produces disastrous social changes” (143). However, not all of the rush to save oneself regardless of the safety of others is done in a blur of mindless panic. Brooks discusses, in the novel *World War Z*, how fear and survival also interact with the issue of elitism, wealth, and power.

In a juxtaposition of the rich and the poor, the poor become the mindless zombie masses with the powerful elite barricading themselves away. As an individualist society, North Americans are not generally accustomed to seeing themselves as part of a collective.
Zombie movies reveal what June Pulliam refers to as the “destructive individualism” (47) that is so often represented as typically North American. In the World War Z novel, a group of powerful and rich celebrities have taken shelter in a mansion on Long Island while a camera crew films their staged reactions to the horrors of the zombie outbreak for reality television. Blinded by their bubble of hyperreality, these celebrities cannot see that they themselves could possibly be at risk. Allowing that they themselves are an equal part in the state of the world is not part of how they understand their being in the world. More importantly, they cannot see the lack of morals inherent in conducting a reality show that focuses on human suffering whilst drinking champagne as their publicists and entourages maintain their lifestyles. The surviving humans, trapped in their homes without water or light, watch these celebrities with their smartly dressed designer dogs while the rest of the world collapses into violent chaos.

In Brooks’ novel, the celebrities are, as Pulliam describes them, “incapable of forming class consciousness because [they] cannot see the totality of existing society” (47). They are rich, and therefore entitled. Spoiled by the privileges of wealth and fame, they have been differentiated by measuring the individual “against an undesirable norm” (48), that is to say, against those who have no privilege, and also by “demonstrating to what degree s/he is different from others rather than emphasizing any commonality” (48). In effect, the powerful elite stand above everyone who is not rich and wealthy, because no lines of similarity are drawn—they are something exceeding the rest of the population. The zombies, in this case, are everyone else.

When survivors discover the location of the mansion, they mass themselves together and invade it. A body guard describes the scene as “bedlam, exactly what you
thought the end of the world was supposed to look like…I hadn’t fired a shot…We’d been paid to protect the rich people from zombies, not against other not-so-rich people who just wanted a safe place to hide” (Brooks 88). In the zombie apocalypse, wealth and fame are meaningless. Those people who are nothing more than celebrities have lost their niche to the rapid changes of the fracturing social system.

The idea of celebrity and fan devotion is examined in the 2009 film Zombieland. A band of Los Angeles survivors happen into the home of movie star Bill Murray, and find that he is still alive in the house. Murray invites the star-struck group to stay and immediately all heads turn to Murray’s Ghost Busters films (Fleischer). There is no purposeful conversation about what is happening to the world or any focus given to the grim reality of their common situation. Nicholas M. Kelly discusses this aloof reaction to the zombie apocalypse as a reflection of cultural ambivalence to violence. The zombie genre provides a detached method of dealing with real world violence, and remarks that the Zombieland characters’ back-handed attitudes toward the death all around them are “fictive results of a world ever more abstracted and immaterial” (86). Here, the abstracted and immaterial marries with hero worship: the survivors are more concerned with watching Ghost Busters with Bill Murray than they are with the cannibalistic zombies in the driveway.

The film mounts a scathing indictment of the fans of celebrities after the survivors accidentally kill Bill Murray. They roll his body in an expensive rug and dump him unceremoniously in the back yard. Nevertheless, Bill Murray continues on as a pop culture icon, whether or not he is dead or alive, and this rejection of Murray’s personhood is realized as his fans “remain in the mansion overnight and, gathered around Murray’s
fireplace, play monopoly” (91), with Murray’s actual money. Surrounded by and enjoying a movie star’s wealth and possessions as his body is flung into the manicured flowerbeds on the grounds of his mansion, the survivor characters in Zombieland, as well as the reality television celebrities in World War Z expose the dark side of celebrity and fan adulation, themselves displaying a zombie-like devotion to empty ideals.

The powerful people clamoring to maintain their preferred status is seen in the film World War Z as politicians and high ranking army officers are refused help, not only because there are no available people to rescue them, but also because there is no safe place to harbor them (Forster). In Brooks’ novel, people threaten to sue, even though there is no method or means of doing so. The greedy politicians who consider themselves above the law are brought into line, and “seeing a senator given fifteen lashes for his involvement in war profiteering” (149) proves that status and elitism, in the zombie apocalypse, are things of the past. The zombie apocalypse destroys completely, and this utter destruction includes the social imbalance of modern society.

In the novel, World War Z, Brooks considers the nefarious dealings of one Breckinridge “Breck” Scott. Mr. Scott lives in a geodesic greenhouse dome in Antarctica—far removed from the zombie apocalypse. Virtually inaccessible, Mr. Scott has been free to capitalize on the zombie plague by way of a vaccine called Phallanx. Mr. Scott has promoted Phallanx as a preventative measure against the zombie virus, thought to be “African Rabies”, but he is well aware this vaccine is completely ineffective. However, after finding a loophole to slither through, the insufferable Mr. Scott is happy to collect his millions by trading on the fear of the public. He states his logic:
The only rule that ever made sense to me I learned from a history, not an economics, professor at Wharton. ‘Fear,’ he used to say, ‘fear is the most valuable commodity in the universe…Turn on the TV…What are you seeing? People selling their products? No. People selling the fear of you having to live without their products.’ Fuckin’ A, was he right. Fear of aging, fear of loneliness, fear of poverty, fear of failure. Fear is the most basic emotion we have. Fear is primal. Fear sells. That was my mantra (Brooks 55).

Jonathan Maberry writes that “Max Brooks’ novel World War Z speaks to our fear of a global pandemic and its mishandling by world governments” (22). Zombies are the fill-in-the-blank fear simile for the modern West, and in the case of Breck Scott, represent the fear of ineptitude and corruption on the part of government and public health officials—not to mention the predatory nature of capitalism. The Phallanx vaccine does not work, and the doctors, the F.D.A., Congress, and the Surgeon General know the truth. However, “[w]ho was going to blow the whistle? This was a win-win situation! Everyone got to be heroes, everyone got to make money” (Brooks 57). Breck Scott represents corrupt public agencies who, rather than protecting the people, either line their own pockets or seem to flail from the outset.

Aaron Smith-Walker and Fatima Sparger Sharif discuss a profound lack of trust in government, where people view “the state as simply helpless—helpless to prevent the evils perpetrated by malevolent individuals and groups, even those operating outside the state” (341). The question becomes, can the government be trusted to behave ethically? Brooks depicts congress voting for a drug they know will not work. In the film, at the first setback, the government betrays its word to Gerry Lang that they will guard his family while he
searches out a cure for the plague. His wife and daughters are put off the safety of the ship and sent as refugees to a so-called *safe zone* in Newfoundland (Forster). The audience cannot judge the trustworthiness of the government in either the film or the novel, since the most audiences see are middle-managers who follow orders from the higher echelons.

The zombie apocalypse explores “the portrayal of local versus national officials where local officials are generally portrayed positively while national officials exhibit a more questionable character. These tensions revolve around trust and belief in whether the government can provide for the public good” (Smith-Walker and Sharif 341). The undepicted agent or agencies in command seem morally ambivalent. This idea is portrayed eloquently in the film *World War Z* when Gerry is strapped to a hospital gurney and questioned by a W.H.O. official. Gerry will not look at the man asking the questions, but instead eyes the man standing in the corner of the room quietly observing. When asked why he is looking at the silent man, Gerry replies, “[b]ecause he is the one in charge” (Forster). This motif of ambivalent government and health agencies is present throughout the zombie apocalypse genre, with a special corner designated to ethics within the scientific community.

The ethics of scientists are called into question in *28 Days Later* (2002) when animal activists release the so-called Rage Virus, one that has been created as a candidate for biological weaponry (Boyle). In *The Crazies* (2010), a military plane carrying a manufactured pathogen crashes into a field and pollutes a town’s water supply forcing the government to move in and kill a town filled with surviving witnesses (Eisner). In *Resident Evil* (2002), a corporate scientists drops a vial carrying the zombie virus, which results in the global zombie apocalypse (Anderson). A man-made virus is released in the film *I Am*
Legend (2007), which leads to the military blowing up all the bridges connecting a zombie-infested Manhattan from the rest of the United States, with Robert Neville as the lone scientist barricaded into his laboratory searching desperately for a cure (Lawrence). In each case, the ordinary person bears the consequence for their government’s inability to prioritize the people’s needs above its own clandestine and self-serving motives.

In the novel World War Z, Breck is so outrageously blasé about his actions that he actually blames the public for trusting his Phallanx vaccine in the first place. “Shit, you wanna blame someone, why not start with all the sheep who forked over their greenbacks without bothering to do a little responsible research. I never held a gun to their heads. They made the choice themselves. They’re the bad guys, not me. I never directly hurt anybody, and if anybody was too stupid to get themselves hurt, boo-fuckin-hoo” (Brooks 58). The overall social observation seems to be that “the image of the national government is none too flattering. Either bumbling and incompetent, or short-sighted and vicious (and often both), the highest level of our government is depicted as a poor performer, and probably hostile to citizens to boot” (Smith-Walker and Sharif 360). It is this sense of government insouciance that is perceived by modern society as not only common, but likely.

There is no place to hide from zombies. At least, no place is safe for long. The film World War Z, defines this lack of safety when Gerry Lang and his family escape the pharmacy and manage to gain access to the apartment block across the street where a man lets them into his home. Gerry urges the family who offers shelter to come with him to a rescue point, saying “I used to work in dangerous places and people who moved survived and those who didn't...movement is life” (Forster). Now that the zombies have invaded every corner of the land, there is no place left untouched by their virulent influence.
Nowhere is clean.

The zombie invasion becomes an environmental metaphor. They are a pollutant. Irene Rosenberg-Javors suggests that Western society has “come of age in a world dominated by...catastrophic diseases, climate change, economic uncertainty, terrorism, and endless wars...no one knows what is to come...an apocalyptic world of diseased zombies and human survivors gives us a window into the concerns” (91) of audiences. Yet, it is not only the land and the structures that have become unsafe, because it is not only what the zombies do to the living, but what they leave behind as the horde moves on. They consume everything.

In the film *World War Z*, the living consumers who trample over and tear away necessary commodities from each other in the pharmacy, are not much different from the consuming zombies who trample over each other and tear the necessary commodity of flesh away from the living. Zombies do nothing else but consume, and in the film, if they are not actively consuming, they stand still, “waiting for stimulus” (Forster). That is, they wait until a person to eat happens along.

The insatiable need to consume is mirrored by today’s Western capitalism. In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Jean Baudrillard remarks on Marx’s notion of “the obscenity of the commodity” (22), and expounds on it suggesting “the market is an ecstatic form of the circulation of goods, as prostitution and pornography are ecstatic forms of the circulation of sex” (23). People are besieged with the market, and those flogging their wares are indeed, as Breck Scott says in the novel *World War Z*, “selling the fear of you having to live without their products” (Brooks 55). Individuals are told what they need and when and why they need it, all day, every day. Baudrillard adds “[t]he word is free, but I
am not; the space is so saturated, the pressure of all which wants to be heard so strong that
I am no longer capable of knowing what I want” (24-25). Consumerism is approaching
mindlessness in Western society. Elizabeth McAlister understands zombies as
“autonomous but incapable of autonomy” (473), because they are stripped down in nature
to the very bottom line of existence. “They are not commodified but they consume; they
are hyper-consuming. The most horrifying and excessive aspect of film zombies is their
violent cannibal drive” (474). Therefore, zombies are the consumer that consumes until it
self-consumes. But consumption is not reflected by expenditure alone.

The prevailing threat of terrorism and violence has also produced another angle
from which to look at consumption. Gayle R. Baldwin writes “[t]he Terrorist must be
stopped or you will find ‘him’ at your door…‘he’ will not stop until the whole world is
consumed” (418). Like the zombie who cares not for its own safety and maintains its
relentless advance even though it risks being destroyed, the terrorist has become
synonymous with suicide or the devaluation of his or her own life. “For the Terrorist,
selfdestruction is better than capture: for “Z” [zombie], every remnant of flesh must be
consumed” (418). In popular culture, the modern Western idea of the Terrorist is a
marriage of fear and consumption. Thomas Riegler remarks that “[a]fter 2001, besides the
fear of terrorism there was a growing awareness of further threats like pandemics, natural
disasters, or the breakdown of society” (115). Thus, zombies also infect.

In the epic disaster films like 2012 and Deep Impact, the very rich, well-connected,
or lucky are able to save themselves. In 2012, the billionaires of the world board enormous
ocean-going arks (2009), while the winners of a national lottery in Deep Impact join
scientists and other experts in an enormous underground habitat (1998). However, a contagious epidemic crosses all lines of culture, wealth, or politics. Regarding the novel *World War Z*, Riegler speculates that “anything can happen, in any kind of scenario, on any given day” (109). In short, everyone everywhere is susceptible.

On a positive note, Daniel W. Drezner, in his paper “Metaphor of the Living Dead: Or, the Effect of the Zombie Apocalypse on Public Policy Discourse,” notes the report of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after it released “Zombie Preparedness 101, a comic book designed to educate readers in how to prepare against a zombie attack” (830), and concludes that it can be decisive. “One of the strengths of the horror genre is that it allows people to talk about present-day problems without addressing them directly” (832). By preparing for the so-called Zombie Apocalypse, people have actually prepared for a real-world crisis. Melissa Nasiruddin, Monique Halabi, Alexander Dao, Kyle Chen, and Brandon Brown, agree with Drezner and discuss Max Brooks’ *World War Z* as a way to “elucidate the potential for comprehensive dissemination of knowledge” (810). Zombies are an excellent tool to teach the public about lethal diseases, and Nasiruddin et.al. submit that the “reimagining of zombiism as a virulent, incurable disease makes it an effective analogy for understanding of and the interest in other infectious diseases” (810.) In today’s world of insidious viruses, learning how to stop the spread of contagion might be as easily perpetuated as the *wash your hands* or *cover your mouth* imperatives.

Because zombies not only reflect the human condition, but the human condition in the world as it is today, the real world fear of contagion is consistently explored in the zombie mythology. Contagion is clearly a social phobia in the West because of all it entails;
it is not merely death, but also loss of identity. The ‘pandemic’ keeps the zombie relevant within popular culture in a world fighting Ebola, SARS, and Avian Flu. Todd K Platts states that “zombies engender terror because of ingrained phobia of infectious contagion, loss of personal autonomy, and death. From a cultural view, zombies represent a monstrous tabula rasa whose construction registers extant social fear” (547). Zombies are not only the carriers of disease; they are the virus itself. Actually, they are the ultimate catastrophic environmental disaster.

Slavoj Zizek speaks about human beings working both for and against the environment, and states that the environment is “where the fate of humanity literally will be decided” (157). One aspect of the zombie apocalypse is the imagined loss of control over the natural world, and this anxiety is mirrored by the real world uneasiness over global warming, the deterioration of arable soil, the shortage of fresh water, and erratic growing seasons caused by climate shift. In the face of these many crises, Zizek suggests that the idea of control is hubris in the human race who want to introduce ideology into the natural world, and thereby feel in control (158). When something goes terribly wrong in nature, some people choose the belief that God is punishing humanity for their sins, because “[i]f God punished you, it’s still a universe of meaning” (158). Therefore, a judgement from God means that a higher power is still in control no matter what human beings may do. It is difficult for most people to accept that some things happen for no reason at all.

In World War Z, there is no known reason behind the zombie plague, and the trail to patient zero goes cold in both the novel and the film. The audience is forced to accede that the zombie outbreak simply happened. Zizek states that “nature is not a balanced totality, which then we humans disturb. Nature is a series of unimaginable catastrophes”
(159). For example, nature swept the dinosaurs from the earth, and replaced them with mammals. We are reminded of this because “[o]il reserves under the earth are material remains of unimaginable catastrophes” (159) that have taken place in the natural world. Human beings do not exist apart from nature but as a part of nature, and face, therefore, the same catastrophic influences. The zombie apocalypse further impresses that any notion of human beings having control over nature is absurd.

In the modern West, people advocate for green living and the protection of the environment, but most still maintain their creature comforts. Zizek submits that the environment has become a chic trend, and wonders if people think they are doing their part simply because they recycle their tin cans (177). Ecological morality rings hollow if the same people are living in ecological wastefulness, even though, according to Zizek, they pay out thirty dollars each month for an African foster child, because it then becomes “a kind of bribery to make sure that you really do not have to change your own lifestyle” (178). He suggests that such living is simply hiding away and postponing “the moment when we really have to do something…ecology today is the main field of pseudoactivity” (178). The zombie apocalypse decrees a radical change for all people—provided they live.

In the novel World War Z, the character of Joe Muhammed is a disabled veteran of the zombie war and is presently a bicycle repairman. During the night, he participates in his local neighborhood security group. Since the procedure for disposing of destroyed zombies is to incinerate them in mass graves, the smoke from these fires creates enormous trailing clouds, usually toxic, in the sky. Joe remarks that on his night patrols “[y]ou didn’t even have the moon or the stars anymore, too much crap in the atmosphere” (Brooks 153). He recalls the world before the zombie plague, and ponders the luxury he once took for
granted. “Did I really need a three-thousand-square-foot house, three bedrooms, two baths, a kitchen, a living room, den, and home office?” (153-54). In the zombie apocalypse, the greed of human beings and their careless mismanagement of the earth and its resources returns to bite them back—literally.

The zombie apocalypse is a means of seeing the human species through a magnifying glass. However, anything seen through a magnifying glass is necessarily magnified, while all the aspects of the scene not immediately within the field of the glass, remain small, even insignificant. Because the zombie genre tends to pull attention toward pain, horror, disease, and death, it obscures awareness of those few positive things that are actually better seen because of its presence. The zombie apocalypse does not embellish human nature. It does not improve upon it. It does, however, reveal it completely, and sometimes beautifully.

The Best of Us

Welles Crowther was what people would call a suit. A twenty-four year old man just out of Boston College, he worked as an equities trader in New York—in the south tower of the World Trade Center. When the hijacked airplanes hit the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11, 2001, the people on Crowther’s floor fled in terror, and when they could not run through the smoke and debris, they huddled together in the darkness and hoped someone would rescue them. That someone was Welles Crowther. With a red bandanna wrapped around his face, he led eighteen people to safety. He ran in and out of the building three times with different survivors and could easily have left. The last time he ran back into the building he did not come out because the crippled tower collapsed. “His body was found in March 2002, alongside several firefighters and emergency workers bunched in a suspected command post in the South Tower lobby” (CNN.com). Since
September 11, Boston College holds their annual “Red Bandana Race” which is so named for Mr. Crowther. The College writes that “On September 11, 2001, he died a hero, saving the lives of others and becoming known as ‘The Man in the Red Bandanna’” (Boston College). Mr. Crowther was, on any other day, an ordinary fellow who loved sports and was a good student. On the last day of his life, on arguably the worst day in New York City history, Mr. Crowther fully became. Like a butterfly from a chrysalis, a hero broke forth. He was one of the few who stopped and turned back, and like the heroes imagined in the zombie apocalypse, revealed in the midst of death and destruction the very best of humanity.

It is not surprising that the zombie genre made a resurgence after September 11, 2001, in response to a sudden overwhelming fear of agents and agencies who seek to do harm and who cannot be reasoned with. Robert A. Saunders reports that “the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon sparked a national fear of the faceless horde of enemies slavishly obedient to the objective of dishing out extreme violence” (81). The main feature of the zombie apocalypse is the zombie horde, doggedly attacking the living, and the horde consists solely of the faceless, anonymous dead.

Similarly, domestic attacks in North America as seen in the 2013 bombing of the Boston Marathon and the 2014 shooting of the unarmed soldier at Parliament Hill in Ottawa, led to the shocking realization that the enemy squatted inconspicuously within an unsuspecting society, ready to strike without warning. Thus, anyone can be a zombie including neighbors, friends, and loved ones, and the most damaging consequence of this new anxiety is that everyone becomes suspect. Zombies are now “mass-mediated effigies of the transformative geopolitics of fear in a post 9/11 world, effectively teaching a new
generation how to fear” (Saunders 90). This new generation is being taught to fear, but not the exact details of what and why, such that there is fear but one finds it difficult to pinpoint what that fear is. Likewise, the attraction to zombies in modern Western society makes little aesthetic sense—one must delve deeper.

Lev Grossman remarks that “[i]t’s not easy to put your finger on what’s appealing about zombies. Vampires you can understand. They’re good-looking and sophisticated and well-dressed…You can imagine wanting to be a vampire or at least sleep with one. Nobody wants to sleep with zombies. They’re hideous and mindless” (61). Therefore, it is more than fetishizing monsters when it comes to zombies—it must be something else entirely. Perhaps they serve as representatives of the zeitgeist of Western society; zombies are a sign of the times that interpret the signs of the times. “If there’s something new about today’s zombie, it’s his relatability” (61). Zombies are a perfect reflection of today’s fear-gripped mindset. That said, both the novel and the film World War Z give a curt retort to this fear, and provide alternatives to look to—a different way of thinking that qualifies fear and makes it controllable.

In the novel, Max Brooks imagines the U.S. President as a man of understated elegance and honesty. However, there is a clear departure from past disaster tales where the American President character is prominently figured. The President is portrayed as a heroic figure in the 1996 alien disaster flick Independence Day. After delivering a recollection of the Gettysburg Address to a ragtag group of volunteer American pilots, the President dons a flight suit and tells his military chief “I’m a fighter pilot…I belong in the air” (Emmerich). In 2009’s end-of-world disaster epic 2012, the President is interpreted as a noble, lonely-at-the-top gentleman who understands and graciously accepts his own
redundancy as “an old politician” (Emmerich) when weighed against the survival of the human species. He chooses to remain behind to comfort those who cannot be saved, and grieves, “I’ll be the last President of the United States of America. Do you know how that feels?” (Emmerich). In the 1998 asteroid disaster film Deep Impact, the President throws off the formality of his office in his final televised address. Appearing in front of the camera in a moment that is clearly unscripted, his shirt collar is unbuttoned and his sleeves are rolled up. He does not attempt to offer any hollow words of comfort and chooses instead to deliver the unvarnished truth.

Our missiles have failed. The comets are still headed for Earth, and there's nothing we can do to stop them. So, this is it. If the world does go on, it will not go on for everyone…The impact of the larger comet will be nothing less than an extinction level event…Within a week, the skies will be dark with dust from the impact and they will stay dark for two years. All plant life will be dead within four weeks.

Animal life within a few months. So, that's it. Good luck to us all (Leder).

There is an expectation that the U.S. President will be noble, even if he cannot save himself. However, the zombie apocalypse presumes that all people, great and small, will collapse under the strain and terror of the zombie plague. Thus, when a hero steps out of the seething masses, there is a startled pause.

In the film World War Z, as soon as Gerry Lang lands on the aircraft carrier he is informed “the President is dead…the Vice President is missing” (Forster). There is no governance except what is found on the ship, and it is apparent that the country is splintering fast. However, in the novel, the U.S. President is alive, although exhausted, afraid, and breaking under the pressure of what is happening. When the surviving world
leaders manage to gather themselves together, the President speaks not only to the future of the human race on the earth, but also to the withered condition of the human spirit.

The narrator discusses how the President acknowledges that since the zombie outbreak “[w]e were a shaken, broken down species, driven to the edge of extinction and grateful only for a tomorrow with perhaps a little less suffering than today. Was this the legacy we would leave to our children, a level of anxiety and self-doubt not seen since our simian ancestors cowered in the tallest trees?” (Brooks 267). What makes Brooks’ characterization of the President heroic and valuable to the climate of today’s popular culture is that he fully maintains the formality of his office, thereby creating an air of continuity, which then comforts the suffering people. He does not speak to the physical aspect of the zombie war, since not all people can fight or stay strong. “We had to prove to ourselves that we could do it, and leave that proof as this war’s greatest monument” (267).

What he addresses is humanness—a truth that is shared by all surviving individuals. Shortly afterward, the President collapses and dies, and the remaining citizens of the United States neither know nor mourn his passing.

Cornel West discusses how human beings are riveted by suffering, because suffering is always intensely personal, and in being personal, it is contemplative. West uses a quote from Socrates as his jumping off point: “[I]t is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day…for the unexamined life is not worth living for man” (Plato. Apology 38a, trans. Jowett). West then poses his questions: “How do you examine yourself? What happens when you begin calling into question your tacit assumptions and unarticulated presuppositions and begin then to become a different kind of person?” (3). If the aim of the
zombie apocalypse is to expose social fears and force people to examine themselves, then opening a dialogue is a place to start quelling some of these anxieties. “It’s by learning how to die, examining yourself and transforming your old self into a better self, that you actually live more intensely and critically and abundantly” (3). West is speaking to a change of mind—the end of a way of thinking that permits evolution and maturity. The death of the old self leads to the rebirth of the new self. Human consciousness advances in the wake of new thought.

The President is offering the sort of hope that can be earned through work and through coming to terms with and resolving social fears, instead of people waiting in the dark indefinitely and depending on others to rescue them. He is inferring that every person who works for it can be a rescuer—everyone can be a hero, but people must first change their thoughts. In fact, the implication in the President’s words is that a complete change of outlook in ordinary individuals—who want it—is unequivocally do-able. As a result, people begin to realize that while their fears might be real, fearfulness is a choice.

Therefore, so is courage. In the end, everyone is the same in mortality. As West remarks, “we’re featherless two-legged linguistically conscious creatures born between urine and feces whose bodies will someday be the culinary delight of terrestrial worms. That’s us; we’re beings towards death” (5). In the zombie apocalypse, there are only individual human beings facing their own demons and relearning bravery. Brooks does not write a President who is in any way mythologized. Instead, he presents the portrait of a frail mortal who chooses for his better self before crumbling toward death. His heroism is simply in his manifest yet generic resemblance to his people.

Max Brooks discusses the remarkable bravery of a fictionalized Queen Elizabeth.
During the London bombing raids of World War Two, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the Queen Mother) were strongly urged to escape London to the safety of Canada. The Queen Mother replied, “The children won't go without me. I won't leave the King. And the King will never leave” (The British Monarchy npag). As feared, Buckingham Palace was attacked in a German air raid. Afterward, the Queen Mother acknowledged her anxiety during the bombing, but admitted that by being bombed “she would now be able to look the East End in the eye” (npag). The people of London were bolstered by their Queen’s intestinal fortitude.

Brooks follows the real world example of the Queen Mother, and posits it as apropos in the zombie apocalypse. Certainly, Queen Elizabeth has no power to command the elimination of the zombie hordes or to personally fend off a zombie attack. However, her superpower seems to be her great capacity to maintain a level head and to project the quintessence of Queen, as did her mother before her. In the novel, the Queen has died, and the character of David Allen Forbes, an Englishman who was with the Queen in Britain during the height of the zombie war, explains what transpired: “She wouldn’t leave, you see. She insisted, over the objections of Parliament, to remain at Windsor, as she put it, “for the duration”…I tried to make her see reason, begged her almost on my knees. Hadn’t she done enough with the Balmoral Decree, turning all her estates into protected zones for any who could reach and defend them?” (193). The best thing the Queen can offer, aside from her conditional shelters of stone and mortar, is her unconditional duty to her Crown. “Their task, their mandate, is to personify all that is great in our national spirit. They must forever be an example to the rest of us, the strongest, and bravest, and absolute best of us”
In the pandemonium of the zombie apocalypse, the Queen epitomizes unshakable stability, like a lighthouse in the storm.

Unlike the President who uses calmly spoken words of wisdom, Elizabeth embodies the mythos of *Queen* ontologically, surrendering her own Self in favor of an esoteric, otherwise meaningless, publicly perceived identity. “It is they who are ruled by us, instead of the other way around, and they must sacrifice everything, *everything*, to shoulder the weight of this godlike burden” (194; italics in text). Unlike the Long Island celebrities who identify themselves in terms of their fame and wealth, the Queen willingly forfeits her own individuality, and in so doing, provides a lifeline to personhood for her people. “They were viewed very much like castles…as crumbling, obsolete relics…but when the skies darkened and the nation called, both reawoke to the meaning of their existence. One shielded our bodies, the other, our souls” (194). Brooks’ characterizations of both the President and the Queen speaks reason and comfort to today’s societal fear that nothing and no one in power is truly constant.

Not each example of splendid courage in Max Brooks’ zombie apocalypse comes from those in a position of great power. There is also the courage of the everyday people. The character of Gerry Lang, in the film *World War Z*, is a hero in the company of heroes. His moral compass remains rigidly, stubbornly in place as he pursues the origin of the zombie plague. What is exceptional about Lang is a trait similar in Welles Crowther; Lang does not lose his composure or focus at any time.

Lang’s greatest test of courage is at the W.H.O. facility in Wales. Once he closes himself in the Lab, he must inject himself with a deadly pathogen, and then walk out among the zombies to prove that sickly or dying humans are overlooked by the zombies in favor
of healthy humans. Having lost contact with his family, unsure whether or not he will ever see them again, or if the injection of the pathogen will work, Gerry knows that if it does not work, the zombies beyond the glass door will devour him; or it will work, but he will die of the pathogen; or he will live, proving that deadly pathogens behave as a camouflage, but perhaps live on never knowing what became of his family. The scientists watch helplessly from a secure zone. When Gerry injects himself, one scientist remarks, “if he uses anything he took from the left case, he’s dead anyways” (Forster). It is a deadly risk Gerry must take, and does so because, in addition, he is painfully aware that if he dies, his death will also be a proof. It is for this noble cause that Gerry is willing to sacrifice himself.

Aristotle states that “the highest good…must be something final” (Arist. NE 1.7, 1097a25, trans. Ostwald). In Gerry’s case, making his family safe is his final end, because Gerry’s entire happiness revolves around his family—even if he survives and must spend his life searching for them. Therefore, the noble and potentially sacrificial act of injecting himself is his means of attaining his final end. “All virtue we choose partly for themselves…but we also choose them partly for the sake of happiness, because we assume it is through them that we will be happy” (1.7, 1097b). Without the injection, Gerry cannot make his family safe, and therefore, cannot realize his final end. He has no choice but to inject himself. Thus, as Aristotle explains, seeking one’s happiness is a pivotal act. One must participate in one’s happiness, since “it is among them that the victors are found” (1.8, 1099a5). Gerry is not necessarily an archetypal hero. The audience sees that he must be forced to take the mission in the first place. However, when he is in the mission and must act, he acts appropriately and immediately. Aristotle commends these type of people saying “the good and the noble things in life are won by those who act rightly” (1.8,
Gerry has been afraid, worried, weak, and unwilling. In spite of his own humanity, he did the right thing for the right reasons, and it is his right actions in spite of his own flaws that distinguish Gerry as a hero.

The zombie apocalypse exposes human nature with both its imperfection and excellence. Zombies cause society to see what it fears most. Yet, often to quell those fears, a hero rises up to fight the terrors from which the average person shrinks. These heroes stop and return for the ones who need help. The event that caused the resurgence of the zombie apocalypse, namely the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City, was an event that was not just stained with blood and death. It was also a day of extraordinary heroism from ordinary individuals, and it is this kind of everyday heroism that is an important motif of the zombie apocalypse genre.

Discussion of Part Two
While the zombie apocalypse mythology allows people to study their fears without naming them, it does not spare them the scrutiny of human nature through the magnifying glass of traumatic events. Since all humans are seen through the same unbiased lens, the zombie is the great equalizer. On one hand, the fear this creature engenders brings out the best traits of humanity and allows people to warm themselves in a hopeful glow that presents with aspirations and evolved principles—the very pinnacle of human civilization. On the other hand, the zombie also exacerbates cowardice, greed, and treachery, and intensifies the sort of fearful thinking which argues that the human race is destroying itself—and the earth—a little at a time such that the zombie apocalypse is always just one environmental accident away.
World War Z—both the novel by Max Brooks and the film by Paramount Pictures—examines how the zombie apocalypse genre analyzes and interprets social fears about government corruption and inadequacy, as well as the climate of mistrust in scientists, physicians, and other officials whose duty it is to protect the public good. The novel indicts corporate greed and the publicly perceived impunity by which conglomerates seem to operate. The film looks at global infrastructures, and how alarmingly pervious most are to sudden contagions and widespread social chaos. If there is a benefit to be gleaned from the fear elucidated by the zombie apocalypse, it is that the weaknesses of Western culture are exposed and can be bolstered. Possibly the most important message of World War Z, is in the fact that it is told in retrospect—human beings won the zombie war. People fought past their fear and survived. It is not a happy ending, but all things being equal, it is an equitable one.

World War Z is also a story of hope in the face of tragedy. It is rebuilding a world scarred by war, yet still seeing crops growing and the seasons changing and knowing that life carries on whether people choose to live in fear or not. Max Brooks presents an American President whose only offering is consistency, reason, and wisdom before he breaks under the strain of his office. The fictionalized Queen Elizabeth is depicted as an immovable rock, faithful to her crown, and devoted to her people; she dies protecting them in the only way she can—by remaining visible to them. The film offers the character of Gerry Lang whose sacrificial love for his family compels him to complete his mission, no matter the cost to himself. None of these heroic characters have great physical strength or special powers—all are subject to their fragile mortal bodies. However, each of these
characters has a devotion that simply emasculates fear, and by keeping their eyes fixed on this devotion, they are able to control their own personal distress.

The zombie apocalypse genre reflects a climate of mutable fears resonating through today’s modern Western culture, and since the zombie apocalypse genre postulates so many different aspects of societal fear it becomes the predominant metaphor for all societal fears. What the zombie apocalypse does best is expose how ominously powerful fear can be when people believe there is something to be afraid of. The lurching walking corpse that is the zombie gives a hideous face to this fear, and in doing, exposes most societal fears for what they are—monsters birthed by real world events. Yet, a fixed truth within the zombie apocalypse mythology is that zombies are dead and steadily decomposing. If people manage to withstand them, eventually, the zombies will crumble into dust.

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