

Invasion of the Dead (Languages): Zombie Apocalypse and the End of Narrative

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The dead are rising... and rising...

If every culture has its signature monster, ours is the zombie. Others have had their day in the sun (so to speak): ghosts in the 1910s, alien invaders in the 1950s, vampires in the 1990s. But even though monsters of yesteryear still skulk around in the dark corners of popular culture, scoring an occasional hit by reinventing themselves (as happened with the vampire turned Prince Charming courtesy of *Twilight*), zombies have won the popularity contest hands down. Zombies are everywhere these days: from blockbuster TV series, such as *The Walking Dead*, to bestselling books, movies and video games. Even a short list of recent zombie productions will be hopelessly out of date by the time I have finished writing. “Perhaps we can say with certainty that the zombie is more popular now than ever before; it has even seemed to have crashed the boundaries of narrative and stepped into real life” (Lauro and Christie 1).

And yet the zombie is such an unlikely winner of the monsters’ sweepstakes. As opposed to the sexy vampire, the zombie is ugly, revolting and most of all, irredeemably boring. A monster must be threatening, but zombies are threatening in a particularly monotonous way: they rise from the dead, eat the living, rise again etcetera. Following the winning formula of George Romero’s films *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), zombies are depicted as mindless killing machines whose particular brand of horror is viscerally nauseating: the graphically portrayed intersection of rotting flesh and insatiable appetite. In its visual emphasis, the zombie differs from other monsters whose origins lie in narrative: as Kyle Bishop points out, “the zombie is the only supernatural foe to have almost entirely skipped an initial literary manifestation, passing

directly from folklore to screen” (13). And while popular literature has caught up with the visual media by now—the texts I will discuss below are novels rather than movies or video games—the fact remains that there is something profoundly anti-narrative about the zombie. The vampire or the alien comes with a ready-made narrative formula, forged through its long literary tradition. But this is not the case with the apocalypse of the walking dead. The reason for their rising is often left unstated or disposed of perfunctorily; and the entire plot falls apart into a series of repetitive attacks. Even when the infestation is beaten back, there is no sense of closure but only of postponement.

But paradoxically, this anti-narrative monster is supremely successful in generating narratives. It almost seems that the proliferation of zombie texts in popular culture follows the dynamics of zombie infestation, in which the number of the infected grows exponentially. And despite their different media, readership and message, these narratives share certain distinctive features. Among these features are intertextuality, pseudo-realism, vitiation of agency and self-reflexivity. They constitute what might be called the narrative grammar of the zombie and it is this grammar and its cultural and political implications that are the subject of my essay.

Franco Moretti famously describes fictional monsters as “metaphors” that express underlying fears and anxieties of their culture: “Wishing to incarnate Fear as such, they must of necessity combine fears that have different causes: economic, ideological, psychical, sexual” (105). There are many fears that the zombie may express: fear of the body, fear of death, fear of social disintegration. But I will argue that central to the narrative semantics of the zombie is the fear of language, or rather, the way language becomes decoupled from meaning in the age of the mass media and the internet.

This seems counter-intuitive: is not the defining feature of the zombie the fact that it does *not* speak? Most critical discussions of the zombie link the creature to what Julia Kristeva called *the abject*: the impure, revolting bodily interior; the disgusting physicality of the flesh. Devoid of self-consciousness, zombies are insensate flesh, reflecting “*a bodily approach to personal identity*”: the view that we are nothing but “a certain type of material object” (Larkin 17). The horror of zombies supposedly resides in their lack of language and self-awareness: once turned into zombies, our “bodies, once so familiar, become unrecognizable monsters” (Greeley 167).

But in fact, the distinctive zombie modality of the apocalyptic narrative emphasizes precisely what Derrida would call the “dissemination” and “deferment” of meaning, in which the very incompleteness of the semantic

structure generates its endless elaborations. The inconclusive, open-ended closure of a zombie text is an invitation to a sequel that simply repeats the basic formula without resolving its paradoxes. The zombie is a metaphor for the fear of language that has become separated from the intentions of the speaker and of narrative that has become independent on the external conditions of truth. Rather than yet another apocalyptic narrative, the zombie invasion is an apocalypse *of* narrative.

Tribulations du jour

The apocalyptic narrative, especially in its Western incarnation, is largely derived from the *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, the last book of the Christian Bible. Despite its problematic theological status, this text has had an enormous influence upon the imagination of the West, infecting it with what Derrida called “the disorder or delirium of destination” (24). Used as the foundation for various millenarian or schismatic movements throughout history, it has recently experienced a renaissance in the United States where the theology of so-called “dispensational millennialism” has become mainstream, with millions of people confidently believing that the obscure prophecies of the *Revelation* will come true in their own lifetime (Guyatt 7).

But apart from its religious impact, the *Book of Revelation* has also become a template for secular apocalyptic narratives, which follow the well-trodden path from the violence of the Tribulations to the advent of the millennium. Lee Quinby describes this narrative formula as the transition from the “world destruction” to “a new, transformed earth” (4). In its secular incarnation, the apocalyptic narrative substitutes a qualified utopia for the perfection of the millennium. This plot structure exists in the alien-invasion movies of the 50s, in the visions of nuclear war of the 60s, and in the plague narratives of the 90s. The utopia is not always a full-scale social improvement but at least there is an indication that things are going to get better (Gomel 120–33).

Narratives of zombie apocalypse, however, flout this formula. In Tony Monchinski’s *Eden* (2008), the traditional apocalypse is simultaneously evoked and dismissed: “Some survivors refer to the coming of the undead as ‘the plague’. The more religious among us dub it ‘the apocalypse’ or ‘end times’. No savior has appeared. The origins of the outbreak are unknown. The nature of the contagion, spread by bites, is unclear” (25). Both religious and secular apocalyptic templates are not so much inadequate as irrelevant to the experience of zombie infestation.

In David Moony's long *Autumn* series of zombie novels, the dead are lumbering automata who literally suffocate the living with the massive pressure of their rotting bodies. The series, depicting attempts of small groups of people to survive among zombies, is a potentially endless chain of confrontations, with each new episode repeating the basic pattern rather than functioning as a step toward closure. At the end of the first book, one of the characters asks "Is there any point?" (308). The honest answer is "no," and yet the series has become increasingly popular, as the dead fall, rise, fall again and so on *ad infinitum*.

Just like the plot structure of the traditional apocalypse is flouted by zombie texts, so is its meaning. The word *apocalypse* means *uncovering* or *unveiling* and most apocalyptic narratives, whether religious or secular, culminate in the revelation of hidden knowledge. The knowledge may be of theological, scientific or social nature but in all cases its uncovering ushers in the narrative resolution of the apocalyptic plot.

The *Revelation* makes clear the cause for the Tribulations that have preceded it. In popular fictions that adopt the apocalyptic plot, the nature of the revelation depends on the genre of the text. In science fiction (SF), the revelation is couched in quasi-scientific, rationalistic terms, while in fantasy it involves some sort of supernatural manifestation. This distinction is important. Regardless of the veracity of the proposed "scientific" explanation, SF's emphasis on science enables an "entry into... a material and often rational discourse," eliciting a cognitive response from the reader (Roberts 9). Fantasy, on the other hand, appeals to emotions and/or to religious beliefs.

Zombie apocalypses, however, often dispense with revelation altogether. Even when some explanation for the plague of the dead is offered, it is often perfunctory and leads to no resolution. The trajectory of the invasion is not affected and neither is the reader's response. The zombie plague may be explained by a virus (as in Walter Greatshell's *Xombies* and Mira Grant's *Newsflesh Trilogy*), a supernatural incursion (as in Christopher Golden's *Soulless*), or not at all (as in *Eden*). In all cases, the text has exactly the same structure—or rather the same absence of structure—and the same emotional impact: that of monotonous, numbing horror.

Of course, the above does not cover all the varieties of zombies, some of whom display more human-like characteristics, as in the recent movie *Warm Bodies*. But the typical zombie apocalypse does focus on "the grunting, slobbering, staggering, lumbering zombies who will eat your brain and flesh at any cost that we've all come to know and love" (Greene

31). The nature of this “love” can only be understood through analyzing the peculiar transformations effected by the zombie in the structure of the most enduring narrative form in Western culture. More traditional apocalyptic narratives are still popular, as evidenced by the bestselling status of the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, spinning out the plot of *Revelation* into a multi-volume Christian adventure. But the zombie’s endless Tribulations, with no millennium in sight and no revelation forthcoming, shift the entire meaning of the apocalyptic plot from its resolution—whether utopia or millennium—to its duration. And to a surprising extent, the endless duration of the zombie apocalypse is characterized by focus on textuality, language and media. If the traditional apocalypse is about knowledge, the zombie apocalypse is about information.

“Movies are right”

Zombie narratives often explicitly foreground their derivation from other texts. If originality is a cardinal virtue of “high-brow” literature, intertextuality is a distinguishing feature of popular culture. In the age of the electronic media, borrowing, adaptation, sequels and fan fiction have become stock-in-trade of movies, video games and genre novels alike. Zombie fictions are even more versatile than is the case in popular culture as a whole, easily migrating from graphic novels to movies, TV, print and back again. The AMC TV series *The Walking Dead*, for example, is based on the ongoing comic book series of the same title by Robert Kirkman, which appropriated many elements of George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*. In turn, the TV series has generated print tie-ins by Kirkman and Jay Bonansinga.

But not only is the zombie universe highly intertextual; it is also highly metafictional, “laying bare” (in Shklovsky’s sense of the term) its own textuality. Rather than pretending to be unique, each zombie text openly acknowledges its dependence on its cinematic and literary predecessors. Grounding in popular culture is as important for surviving a zombie apocalypse as a stock of ammunition. In Christopher Golden’s *Soulless*, for example, the media-savvy characters cheer that “movies are right” after disposing of a zombie with a shot to the head (93). The zombie invasion in the novel is represented as an inevitable consequence of popular culture’s apocalyptic obsession, a word made (undead) flesh:

Every freaking day some government moron comes on TV and tells us something awful is going to happen, a dirty bomb is going to take out a major American city, terrorists are coming, the environment is going to poison us, the world's going to flood. The media choke us on this crap [...] ever since 9/11 they've just been waiting for something worse to come along, like it's inevitable. Well, here it is. (Golden 80)

Soulless starts in a TV studio where a live-broadcast séance goes horribly wrong, inadvertently opening the door to a mass invasion of hungry spirits. The entire novel is framed by this broadcast, blurring the line between the apocalypse and its media representations.

In Mira Grant's *Newsflesh* trilogy (of which more below) the epidemic of a zombie virus has resulted in George Romero's movies being regarded as survival guides. In the future world, you better be media-savvy if you want to escape becoming lunch: "Fans of Romero's films applied the lessons of a thousand zombie movies to the reality of what had happened... and humanity survived" (*Deadline* 76). The two main characters of the trilogy are called Georgia (to honor Romero) and Shaun (in honor of the 2004 zombie comedy *Shaun of the Dead*).

But zombie intertextuality is not limited to the genre itself. One of the most popular zombie texts is Seth Grahame-Smith's mashup *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), combining the text of Jane Austen's novel with gore-laden scenes of fighting the walking dead. Other mashups have been written, combining classical texts or historical figures with assorted monsters, but none has achieved the popularity of the Austen-and-zombie cocktail, suggesting that there is something about the figure of the zombie that resonates with the notion of the literary canon or perhaps with literature as a whole.

This is reinforced by more subtle ways in which zombies attract literary allusions. In Carrie Ryan's *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (2009), for example, the survivors of an unexplained zombie apocalypse live in the walking-dead-infested forest, protected by a maze of chain fences. When the heroine Mary tries to escape through the forest, she finds out that the key to the maze lies in Shakespeare's sonnets.

Intertextuality, in Kristeva's famous definition, is the condition of all literature, as the meaning of the individual text becomes dependent upon the ever-growing and potentially unlimited textual corpus: "[A]ny text [...] is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). The metafictionality of zombie narratives

acknowledges the dynamics of predation implicit in this notion: texts absorb and transform each other, just as the walking dead do to the living. If the endless proliferation of the walking dead threatens to consume humanity, the endless proliferation of self-replicating texts threatens to consume meaning. The corpus becomes the corpse.

The babble of Babel

Max Brooks' *World War Z* (2006) is subtitled "an oral history of the Zombie War." Modeled on Stud Terkel's *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two* (1984), it is composed of personal narratives and recollections of people who have fought and eventually beaten back a zombie uprising. The novel is clearly an attempt to revive the patriotic "we-are-in-it-together" spirit of *The Good War* in a fictional setting. After all, if the Nazis were bad, zombies are even worse, and so the book can delight in scenes of grisly slaughter without any residual moral ambivalence. Brooks' action ranges across the globe, involving nations other than the US, especially China where the supposed zombie virus originates, and Israel which manages, rather improbably, to save its own entire population. The author's political sympathies are clear in the depiction of these and other countries, and the entire book reads like a cross between a survivalist manifesto and a neo-con fantasy.

However, the most interesting aspect of the book is its mockumentary form. Mockumentary is a TV and cinematic genre, which deliberately undermines the boundary between reality and fiction by presenting the latter as the former. Brooks' novel, on the other hand, undermines the boundary between fantasy and history, not by pretending to be historical but rather by making history fantastic. Terkel's book aspired to be more authentic than ordinary analytical histories by appealing to the supposedly "unfiltered" eyewitness memory. But if exactly the same narrative form can be used to give a flavor of authenticity to a series of events that not only did not happen but could not have happened, then the very idea of individual memory as being uniquely reliable becomes suspect. Indeed, numerous studies have shown that memory is "infected" by culturally ubiquitous narrative templates to such an extent that eyewitness accounts always include an element of confabulation.

Brooks' novel dramatizes, in its very form, the collapse of what Lyotard called master narratives: the overarching ideological structures that regulate conditions of truth. This collapse has left behind a rapidly growing arena of competing "little narratives," each claiming its own truth

grounded in the subjective personal experience of the speaker (Lyotard 27). The babble of supposedly international voices in *World War Z* (though speaking with an unmistakable American accent) echoes the postmodern Babel.

The question is, however, whether any other monster would do. Could Brooks have written *World War V* (for vampire) or *A* (for alien) and achieved the same effect? Of course, alien invasion texts are a genre unto itself and even vampire wars are not unheard of, as in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) or Guillermo Del Toro and Chuck Hogan's *The Strain* (2009). However, I argue that aliens and vampires cannot void the historicity of narrative in the same way as zombies. Since aliens and vampires are narrative agents, with their own goals and desires, they inevitably acquire a metaphorical meaning, representing whatever enemy the author's social-political milieu responds to, from communists in the Cold War alien-invasion movies to urban anarchy in Matheson. Even if not granted a narrative voice, their alternative point of view penetrates the text, occasionally creating a counterweight to the righteous violence of the humans, as in *I Am Legend*.

But contemporary zombies have regressed from metaphors to ciphers. As Julia Round puts it in her discussion of Kirkman's *Walking Dead* graphic novels: "Unlike Romero's zombies, Kirkman's are depoliticized: emptied of metaphorical or symbolic significance. They become a negation. [...] The dominant elements of Kirkman's world are emptiness and stillness" (166). Precisely because the zombie is a blank entity with no interiority of its own, no subjectivity whatsoever, it can serve as a stand-in for loss of referentiality in discourse. The zombie does not represent a concrete enemy but rather the signifier "enemy" that can apply to anybody.

If memory becomes unmoored from history, individual identity loses its foundation. The zombie acts in narrative and yet has neither volition nor subjectivity. In this void of agency it figures the postmodern condition of a constructed subjectivity, regarded as a confluence of external forces, a phantom of discourse, or what Foucault called "a new wrinkle in our knowledge" (xxiii). In the endless repetition of *I* in Brooks' first-person stories of zombie fighters, it is revealed as a sliding signifier attached to nobody in particular: the zombie pronoun that briefly animates the speaker, creating an illusion of subjectivity, before moving on to somebody else.

Other zombie texts are even more explicit in foregrounding the illusory, discourse-dependent nature of the self. The dead do speak, after all, telling us that we are all zombies.

The flesh made word

Walter Greatshell's *Xombies* (2004) is not a typical zombie narrative. It has a rather elaborate explanation for the Agent X virus that turns fertile women into blue-skinned zombies that attack and infect their male counterparts. Instead of the survivalist shoot-to-kill ethos that dominates most zombie texts, it presents a more complex blend of social and sexual critique as a band of men on a nuclear submarine tries to come to terms with the swiftly unfolding apocalypse and to preserve some kind of hierarchical order. And it is narrated in first person by a heroine who, at the end of the novel, crosses over into zombiehood.

Lulu, a teenager, is temporarily immune to the virus because of her delayed menses. As she struggles to hold her own in the male world of a military submarine, her distinctive narrative voice, plucky and independent, makes her the focus of the reader's identification: a common strategy used in the *Bildungsroman* to ensure sympathy with the developing protagonist. *Xombies* is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts: it ends with Lulu's achieving social and physical maturity. However, in the world of the Agent X (initially developed to confer immortality), female maturity means becoming a zombie.

And yet, Lulu continues her narration, bridging over the chasm between life and death. This seemingly contradicts the very idea of the zombie. The walking dead "are not intelligent and therefore they are not persons" (Delfino and Taylor 44). It is precisely that absolute void of subjectivity that distinguishes zombies from other fictional monsters. The horror of the vampire is the horror of "transformation"; the horror of the zombie is the horror of "loss." But having lost her being, Lulu still keeps her narrative voice.

This impossible voice articulates the paradox at the heart of the zombie narrative, which generates an agency that is rooted neither in the body nor in the soul. A zombie is a purely textual agent: it acts because the exigencies of the plot make it necessary for it to act. The zombie apocalypse is indifferent to explanations because zombiehood denies both material and spiritual definitions of subjectivity: whether created by a curse or a virus, a zombie is beyond ontology. It exists only by virtue of the text in which it is embedded. And thus, a zombie is an ultimate literary character stripped of the illusion of psychological or ontological verisimilitude.

Narrative theory reminds us that literary characters are not people: they are textual constructs, “marks on the page [...] They have no psychology, no interiority, no subjectivity” (Warhol 119). Without what narrative theorists call their ‘mimetic’ aspect, all literary characters are zombies. Lulu’s impossible narration is yet another instance of metafiction, in which the zombie apocalypse sheds light on the textual construction of identity. Her zombie *Bildungsroman* reveals the fluid, provisional nature of all first-person narratives, in which subjectivity is momentarily created out of linguistic and social rules of discourse:

Dead? Obviously not, or I could not be writing this. In limbo was more like it... Eternity. Empty eternity...

Here is a fairy tale:

Once upon a time I was alive. The end. (Greatshell 343-346)

The blogging dead

Mira Grant’s *Newsflesh* trilogy (consisting of the novels *Feed*, *Deadline* and *Blackout*) follows the fortunes of the adoptive siblings Georgia and Shaun Mason in a world overrun by zombies and social media. The zombies are a product of a mutated virus called Kellis–Amberlee that resulted from a cross of two different strains meant to cure cancer and common cold. Thirty years after the Rising of the dead, the world is limping along with the help of medical technology, political conspiracies and the Internet. In the course of the trilogy, conspiracies are uncovered, news ratings fluctuate, blogs are posted and people rise from the dead.

Grant’s trilogy differs from other zombie narratives not just in its rationalistic SF format (there is nothing supernatural about the virus), but more importantly, in the self-conscious way it conflates zombies and technology. The infection is described using the language of the Internet: *going viral*, *feed*, *deadline*. Blogging has become the most important social activity in a world in which going outside the protected housing runs the risk of running into a horde of the infected. Shaun and Georgia are professional bloggers and journalists (in the zombie world, the two are interchangeable), who uncover more and more convoluted conspiracies, involving CDC, Presidency and assorted members of the scientific and political echelons until the entire plot collapses under its own weight.

This narrative complexity does on the level of the plot what the multiple

stories of *World War Z* do on the level of the voice: expose the way in which body and text have become interchangeable. Paradoxically, the abject corporeality of the zombies, instead of bringing the body into the discourse, makes it into a virtual phantom that can be manipulated, duplicated, posted, corrupted by a virus and restored. Georgia dies at the end of *Feed*, becoming a zombie, dissolving into a splatter of incoherent ravings (duly posted online) as she confronts “the death of the conscious mind. My body would continue to walk around, driven by raw instinct and the desires of the virus, but Georgia Carolyn Mason would be gone. Forever” (2010; 357). “Forever” is not very long, as she is restored in *Blackout*, thanks to cloning and memory transfer: a somewhat damaged copy but better than the rest of her clones whom she destroys with no second thought. Where identity is as transferrable as a Word file, death is never final.

As identity becomes a virtual construct, so does the truth. The Masons treat their blogging as a sacred mission to bring the truth to the world awash in governmental conspiracies. Paradoxically, though, the more they extol their own journalistic commitment, the more does the line between reporting news and manufacturing it becomes invisible. The Rising elevates the online media to the status of not just the arbiter but the creator of reality: “People didn’t trust regulated news anymore. They were confused and scared, and they turned to the bloggers, who might be unfiltered and full of shit, but they were fast, prolific, and allowed you to triangulate the truth...” (2010; 41). “Triangulating the truth” is another way of describing the echo chamber of the Internet, in which one group’s conspiracy theory is another one’s gospel. And indeed, *Newsflesh* dramatizes the media manufacture of reality almost to the point of parody, as the Masons and their group of blogger friends tip the presidential election, cause the destruction of Oakland, unwittingly unleash a massive zombie outbreak upon Florida and eventually rewrite the political reality in the US and the entire world.

In the world of zombies, reality has become indistinguishable from reality TV. Describing his adoptive parents, Shaun says: “when... the world was changed forever... they decided to become stars in the highest-rated reality show anyone had ever seen. The news.” (2011; 214). This equally applies to him, his sister and indeed, everybody else in the trilogy, whose blogs, online fiction, emails, messages and other textual productions constitute their identities. Excerpts from blogs accompany the first-person narratives of Georgia and Shaun, uncovering the textual strategies by which a psychologically believable character is constructed

from “the representational effects the novelist creates in structuring the novel” (Warhol 119). As we are sucked into the pathos of Georgia’s and Shaun’s relationship, we are also constantly reminded that they are nothing but “marks on the page,” textual zombies (119).

The “real” zombies of the novels are progressively de-materialized as the trilogy develops. *Feed* opens with a graphic description of Shaun poking the walking dead with a stick and then escaping their shambling, cannibalistic horde. At the end of *Blackout*, the elaborate medical precautions that structure the life in the zombie world are dismissed as “security theater” and the zombie condition is revealed as being potentially reversible. It is not the walking dead that are the real threat but rather the establishment that attempts to control and cure the plague.

The revelation at the end of *Blackout* is that the virus is here to stay and it is a good thing too: “Kellis–Amberlee has been trying to adapt to us, and we have been trying to adapt to it. But our government, believing that it has the right to decide for everyone, has not allowed that adaptation” (2012; 620). Zombies are not the problem; the government is. To borrow the title of Nicholas Guyatt’s book, the end of *Blackout* wishes everyone “a nice Domsday!” (Guyatt 1).

Zombie epistemology

Intertextuality, self-reflexivity and explicit foregrounding of information exchange and circulation characterize the zombie apocalypse. This distinctive mutation of the traditional apocalyptic narrative responds to the specific conditions of the postmodern production of knowledge. The zombie is a cultural trope for the way language shapes subjectivity.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard describes the grounding of truth and knowledge in a particular concept of unified subjectivity, as statements are “incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy” (36). But this incorporation no longer exists: rather than guaranteeing the truth of a statement, the subject becomes a mere function of discourse. This reversal finds its expression in the figure of the zombie.

The zombie is what might be called “a subject degree zero”: the total void of self, existing only through the impersonal dynamics of endless replication. Thus it becomes a fitting metaphor for the condition of language in the age of mass media, in which both factual statements and narrative forms become divorced from any intra-subjective intentionality or indeed, from any grounding in a speaking subject. The zombie virus is a computer virus made flesh: the code that propagates through a

reproductive chain of signification, and yet signifies nothing at all.

The zombie invasion, thus, is an anti-apocalypse that destroys the traditional narrative structure of *Revelation*. Instead of the Tribulations issuing in the millennium, the story of the walking dead goes on endlessly (or at least until the audience gets bored) and then migrates into a different medium where the cycle is repeated. In this sense, it perfectly encapsulates the dynamics of the Internet where no conspiracy is ever completely resolved and no fear is completely buried. Through electronic media, language and narrative have become self-originating, self-sustaining, and self-consuming.

The zombie, thus, is indeed a perfect monster for the cyber-age. But rather than lamenting the loss of meaning and the void of subjectivity which the walking dead express, perhaps we should come to terms with the “Newsflesh” and learn to enjoy its endless permutations. After all, the traditional End of Days is hardly preferable to the slog of the zombie apocalypse, where, at least, another sequel is surely coming.

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ABSTRACT

The essay analyzes the narrative and semantic features of the zombie apocalypse in popular culture. It argues that the zombie is a figure for the decoupling of the connection between language and meaning and the loss of what Lyotard called “master narratives.” Rather than yet another apocalyptic narrative, the zombie invasion is an apocalypse *of* narrative. The link between zombies and language is expressed in such narrative features as repetition, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and explicit foregrounding of the production and circulation of information. The essay discusses these features in a number of zombie texts, such as Max Brooks’ *World War Z* (2006) and Mira Grant’s *Newsflesh Trilogy*.

BIOGRAPHY

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