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"Romancing the Corpse":

An examination of the representations of zombies in young adult paranormal romance

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Statement:

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Romancing the Corpse" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Zombies have long been understood by critical theorists as representing social anxieties and problems - including colonialism, war and capitalism. A stable identifiable figure since Romero's *of the Dead* series, recent romantic texts have positioned the zombie as a sympathetic lover. This thesis asks two main questions about this shift in the genre and representation. Firstly, how does the zombie in young adult fiction represent ideology and identity; secondly, is this new representation an opportunity to stage a broader understanding of diversity?

This thesis seeks to understand the change in the zombie from monster to romantic hero. *Romancing the Corpse* will focus on four central texts which foreground the zombie as romantic partner: *I Kissed A Zombie and I Liked It* by Adam Selzer, *Warm Bodies* by Isaac Marion, *Dearly Departed* by Lia Habel and *Generation Dead* by Daniel Waters. Firstly, the zombie in young adult paranormal romance is argued as representing the non-citizen, using Agamben's work on bare life and the state of exception. Using literary analysis, it will then examine how the trope of the zombie has changed with the move in genre from horror to romance. Finally, the thesis interrogates the implications of these works' engagement with civil rights and social justice questions through the figure of the zombie, also drawing on audience research approaches.

Romancing the Corpse

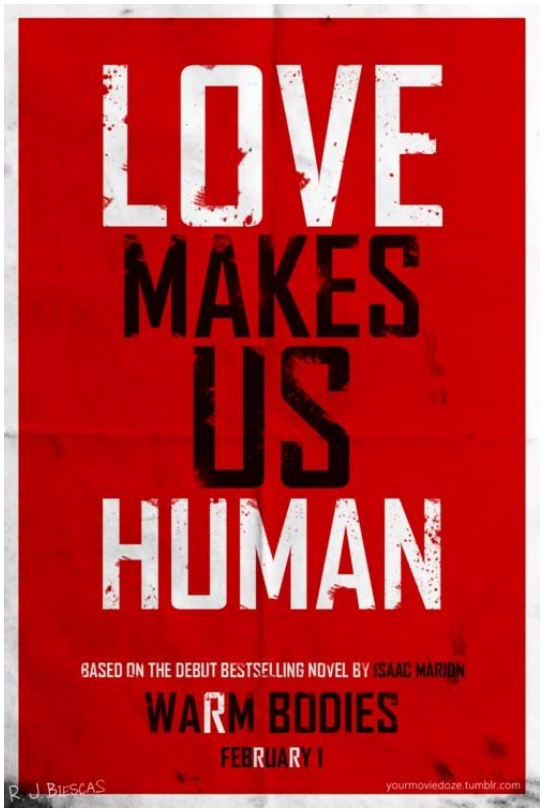

Figure 1. Fan art by R J Biescas.

> **The *zombie*, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life - it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. (Seabrook 94)**

From the 1930's, the zombie that has taken hold in Western imagination is a mindless corpse representing a core loss of personhood or identity. George A Romero in the 1970s reinvented the zombie in a series of apocalyptic films, drawing in part from the earlier zombie movies, vampire narratives and alien invasion stories (Bishop 94). The conventions set forth by Romero in his early films have become staples in zombie narratives written and

directed since. After another surge in zombie films from the early 2000s, zombie literature began emerging in the mainstream, led by books such as *World War Z* by Max Brooks and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies,* an adaptation of Jane Austen's classic by Seth Grahame-Smith. With this presence in the market in both film and literature, it was predictable that the monster would filter into works for young adults (readers around 13-18 years old). In a strange turn, zombies in young adult literature are not the same monsters they have always been, but have become protagonists with agency and romantic heroes. In this thesis, I analyse this adoption of the zombie into young adult paranormal romance.

Prior research on zombies has predominantly considered filmic representations. The monster created by Romero, originally referred to as a "ghoul" in *Night of the Living Dead* is one of the most recognisable models of the zombie today. In the typical construction, the zombie is a human that has returned from the dead to mindlessly seek out and feed on human flesh or brains[1]. Modern zombie narratives are typically apocalypses, with the zombie as both pitiful victim and a danger that must be destroyed. For Kyle William Bishop, such apocalyptic narratives show the destruction and impotence of society and government structures in the face of zombie attacks (11). Humanity is free from the restrictions of society and law, and Bishop argues that the enemy to the survivors is not so much the zombies but other humans (24). Aalya Ahmad proposes that the apocalypse is a social critique of grim realities in the current world including inequality and repression (130-1). The zombie's revolutionary potential is anarchic as they cause complete breakdown of an unequal and capitalist society rather than an organised resistance (Ahmad 131). In one of the few essays about agentic zombies, Sutler-Cohen also proposes that zombies are a metaphor for

[1] The eating of brains is not one of Romero's ghoul/zombie tropes, but rather from Dan O'Bannon's *Return of the Living Dead*.

inequality (187). The zombie becomes a distinct social class, marginalised and oppressed, whose very existence threatens society (Sutler-Cohen 187). Zombie stories, Sutler-Cohen says, weave realities into a moral code (184). I will argue here that where the zombies of Romero stood against, for example consumerist society, the zombies of young adult romances stand for an end to discrimination.

The young adult texts I discuss here adapt the traditional figure of the zombie, not only to make it more sympathetic, but to create a believable romantic hero. These zombies - across multiple books, series, authors and publishers - are granted agency in that they think, act, and feel. Where the zombie had previously been mindless and speechless, I argue that the romantic zombie recovers its voice (literally, in some texts) to fight for its own political rights. I will argue here that the new romantic zombie is more concerned about inequality.

Methodology

Located in cultural studies as a discipline, *Romancing the Corpse* uses the methods of textual analysis, genre studies and audience research. I will now discuss my key underpinning theoretical perspectives on the importance of the author's intentions, ideology and the means to assess ideology, and to establish a definition of genre.

Stuart Hall, an influential thinker in the founding of cultural studies, proposed that culture is essentially "shared meanings" (*Representations* xvii). Meaning is produced by everything we do, but it also regulates and organises our social life and discourse with others. For Hall, culture is a system of representation. Culture is also not necessarily limited to high art, as Raymond Williams wrote "culture is ordinary" (93). While key cultural

theorists acknowledge that there continues to be a hierarchy of high versus low or popular culture in modern social discourse, they also deny that this binary means low or popular culture is trivial or less worthy of study than high culture. Culture is not distinct from systems of power as it acts as a hegemonic force. Hegemony in this case refers to Antonio Gramsci's definition as a continuous and uneven struggle by the dominant class, culture or other grouping to present their world view in such a way that it is considered as common sense. Hegemony is not enforced or commanded, rather the non-dominant classes in general 'consent' to it (Gramsci 12). My use of the term ideology here refers to Gramsci's and Hall's theories. Ideologies, for Gramsci, are "implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life" (qtd in Hall "Gramsci's Relevance" 20). There is no singular 'dominant ideology', but rather a struggle of conflicting beliefs and ideas that requires consent, not just coercion (Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance" 16;22). Hegemonic power and ideology work on both individual and structural levels to create group-based inequality (Sidanius and Pratto 846). Popular culture's relation to hegemony is complicated, as Fiske argues that popular culture "contain[s] both the forces of domination and the opportunities to speak against them" (25). Crawford argues that genre, considered lower in status to high literature, can be considered as less policed and therefore allowed to speak more directly to themes and voices that might otherwise be silenced (2).

This thesis examines ideology rather than the beliefs of the authors or their authorial intentions. This is based upon the belief that the views of the author cannot be read from the text itself, and that the text reflects the beliefs of wider society. However, while no deliberate intention is examined, it will be argued that the texts can often be read as having

a particular overt message and likely to convey particular meanings. As children's literature scholar John Stephens states "narrative without an ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language" (8). The text speaks about the wider culture, rather than just reflecting the author's individual worldview. Peter Hollindale is even more literal: "a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the values of the world its author lives in" (19). As such, in this thesis I will be discussing the wider ideology of a text as portrayed through novelistic strategies such as plot and character.

To discuss an ideology, one needs to construct a reasonable means of assessing that ideology, such as the implied reader position. Just as the author cannot be read from a text, what an individual reader takes away from the text is also not something that can be read within the text. In *Language, Ideology in Children's Fiction*, Stephens established a construction of communication that can be used to read the text:

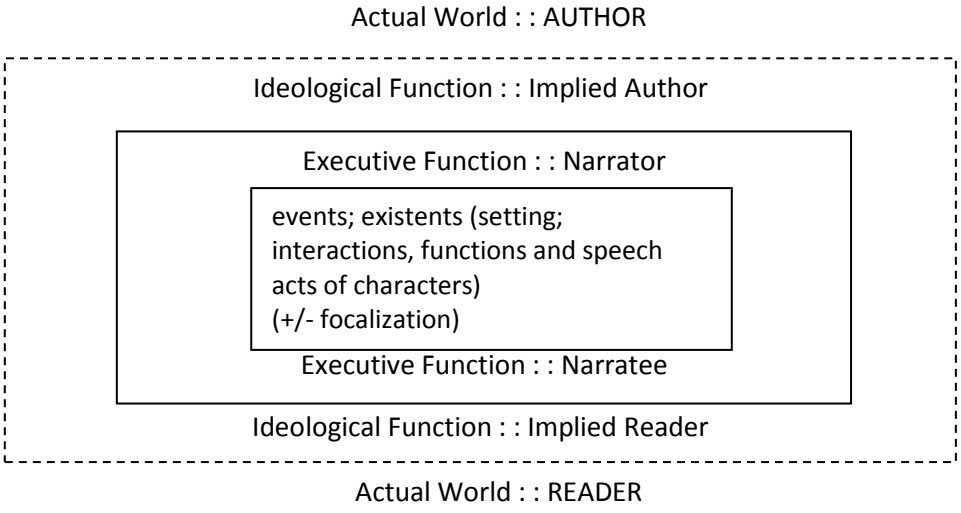

Figure 2. Frame of narrative transactions (Stephens 21).

The real author is not examined in this thesis, but rather the text itself creates the world with what is drawn from or created by the narrative. These ideological functions are the level of ideology that is examined in this thesis. I will use the language within the text to posit how the text positions the implied reader. McCallum draws on Bakhtin to argue that texts work at "constructing and inscribing an interpretative position" (*Ideologies* 15), or implied reader. For Bakhtin, there is no singular meaning of a text or singular reading position (McCallum, *Ideologies* 16). Stephens describes the role of the implied reader as a "role implicit in the text which is equivalent to conventional social roles in the actual world" (54). While this position can be influenced heavily by narration, implied readers can be set up to occupy a position opposite that of the character or narrator (McCallum, *Ideologies* 207). In short, the implied reader is "an implied stance constructed out of a socially determined language in the context of some dominant social practices and inherent ideologies" (Stephens 59). Audiences, of course, do not necessarily adopt the position of the implied reader.

As well as constructing an implied reader position from which to study the texts, I will also be engaging in audience response research analysis for the final chapter. As Roland Barthes wrote, "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148). Ian Collinson also argues for a nuanced approach to reading texts in understanding the reader as an integral role in the process of making meaning - which is never cohesive or singular (5;7-8). This thesis, while interpreting and analysing the chosen works on my own terms, highlighting the political significance of the romantic zombie or how the zombie is represented as a lover in the generic conventions, also seeks out interpretations of how readers create their own meanings of the same works. This approach will not attempt to analyse the psychology of

the reader, but rather to gain a more detailed understanding of how the narrative attempted to position the reader via the implied reader within the work itself. My audience research has been conducted at arm's-length from the reader, using reviews that have been posted publically on the internet. This approach offers a wide range of instances of readings of the chosen texts emerging from a naturalistic context, rather than one shaped by my own research questions. Goodreads, as a community of readers and arena to share new books and reviews, is a significant source. As of the writing of this introduction, the website boasts thirty million members, nine hundred million books and thirty-four million reviews.

In *Romancing the Corpse* I examine the role that genre has in transforming the conception of the zombie. Genre is the collation of certain types of art, music or literature (and more) by similarities in style, structure, theme or tropes. From these similarities, a genre also creates expectations in its audience: a romance will focus on a relationship, an action film will likely contain scenes such as explosions or gun fights etc. While genre for books is at first determined by a publishers choice in BIC[2] subject categories, it can be further refined or redefined by bookstores and readers themselves. The issue of genre, whether it is fixed or fluid, is still a topic of debate within media and literature studies academic communities. *Romancing the Corpse* will analyse texts that fall between recognisable genres horror and romance, forming paranormal romance. It is also important to note that these texts are designated as young adult works, which further influences the generic conventions.

[2] Book Industry Communication - standard subject categories used by those involved with books, such as publishers and libraries, to categorise their titles.

Romance scholar Pamela Regis rejects the conflation of formula and genre. Regis explains that formula, which itself normally carries negative connotations, is often mistaken as genre and vice versa, as she accuses Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* of doing (24-5). Instead, Regis defines eight "essential elements" of the romance novel, noting the broader themes rather than specific instances and situations that constitute a formula (23-25). However, this is still a prescriptive description of genre, particularly when genres blend. Joseph Crawford in his analysis of the history of the paranormal romance novel argues that these sort of rules or elements do not reflect the way genres actually function. Genre, to Crawford, is not fixed but rather in flux as it changes and is defined differently by the readers, booksellers and publishers (8-9; see also Wilkins).

This insight that genre is fluid becomes especially significant considering the texts are for a young adult audience. Young adult[3] is a classification, not a genre, defining in a broad sense that the text is written about or for young people, around the ages of 13-18. Horror and romantic elements, such as scenes of death, torture or sex, are usually more restrained in young adult texts, based on whether it is considered age-appropriate. If included, these scenes would invite greater scrutiny and controversy from the publishing industry and reading communities. This thesis will adopt a broad and flexible definition of genre, not a prescriptive set of events or "elements", as Regis uses. While these texts can be constructed as young adult paranormal romance texts, this genre itself is relatively new in terms of academic analysis.

[3] Colloquially known as YA

Previous academic work on horror and the Gothic tend to use psychoanalysis, particularly from Freud's work on the unconscious and repression, such as Carol Clover, Barbara Creed, Tania Modleski and Fred Botting. While I would argue that cultural products have inherent meaning in their representations, I do not use psychoanalysis extensively. I follow Cynthia Freeland's approach in her discussion of horror film. While she acknowledges the history of psychoanalysis in horror film analysis, she does not rely on a psychoanalytical approach, arguing that most academic writing drawing on psychoanalysis generalises in its attempts to explain viewers interests and responses (17;21). Given that questions of the right to life and threats to that life are raised in these zombie narratives, I will draw from Foucault's work on biopower and Agamben's on the bare life and the state of exception.

Biopolitics for Foucault derives from the theory of sovereignty, of the sovereign who has the right of life and death (240). Biopolitics is the control over the human species, their relations, and their environment. What was once the sovereign's right to take life and let live, becomes the modern State's power of regularisation and of making live and letting die. Agamben draws out this concept to formulate the construction of the ultimate biopolitical life - the bare life and the state of exception. Agamben argues that when the sovereign decision on life becomes a decision on death - of which this line is blurred - biopolitics becomes thanatopolitics[4] (*Homo Sacer* 122). The bare life, a concept which Agamben draws from various laws and examples across different systems and historical eras, is essentially "a life that may be killed by anyone - an object of violence that exceeds the sphere of both law and sacrifice" (*Homo Sacer* 86). As I will argue in Chapter One, zombies embody this bare life.

[4] Others also use 'Necropolitics', see Mbembe.

While the theories of Agamben has previously been linked with apocalyptic zombie narratives, it is important to note the distinguishing feature of romantic zombies: their agency. The aim of my work on the zombie in these new narratives is to explore how to addition of agency creates a position of empathy for the zombie, as I will argue in Chapter One in Agamben's terms, the zombie is one who has been reduced to the bare life, the unprotected realm of the non-citzen. Zombies in these texts are still classed as lesser than human, as previous mindless cannibalistic zombies before, but they can *speak* of their resistance to being in what Agamben calls a state of exception, that is a suspension of law and legal rights.

Scope

The selection of the primary texts was through an examination of mainstream published novels. The reason why books was chosen over other forms is that many films tend to stick with more traditional representations of zombies (as Romeroesque: rotting and mindless cannibalistic corpses). Zombies have no literary tradition, as the monster went straight from Haitian Folklore and jumped into Hollywood films (Dendle 1). Little analysis has been done of zombie literature, though books and short stories including zombies have been published for decades. The rise of zombie romance, particularly in young adult texts, has not been researched though these texts are popular (one has become a movie, *Warm Bodies*) and their numbers are growing.

Texts were discovered primarily through reader-created lists on GoodReads for books containing zombie romance[5]. The lists are user-generated, as there are no official BIC subject category for this very specific sub-genre. The lists tended to be wide ranging, of publishing type (self-published and mainstream published), but also loose in theme (some include books which are a romance novel set in a zombie apocalypse, rather than a romance with a zombie).

To narrow down the selection, two criteria were established:

1. Does the text contain a romance in which one partner is a zombie? (that is, is called a zombie in the text on a regular basis, identifies as a zombie etc).
2. Is the existence of zombies widely recognised within society?

The texts that contained both these elements were all young adult texts. Of texts that are part of a series, the following books (including additional ebooks) in the same universe would also be included even if the romance is not continued throughout. The complete list of selected texts, followed by a short introduction to each text, follows:

- *Warm Bodies* by Isaac Marion
- *The New Hunger (Warm Bodies* ebook*)* by Isaac Marion
- *Generation Dead* (book 1) by Daniel Waters
- *Kiss of Life* (book 2) by Daniel Waters
- *Passing Strange* (book 3) by Daniel Waters
- *Stitches* (*Generation Dead* ebook) by Daniel Waters
- *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It* by Adam Selzer

[5] For example, see *Zombie Romance*

- *Dearly Departed* (*Gone with the Respiration* book 1) by Lia Habel
- *Dearly Beloved* (*Gone with the Respiration* book 2)by Lia Habel

Warm Bodies is a standalone novel, with one ebook prequel. The story centres around a zombie, who doesn't remember his name but it started, he thinks, with an R. R 'lives' his zombie life in an abandoned airport, until an expedition for food (human brains) leads him to find Julie. R eats Julie's boyfriend Perry's brains, and he comes to feel the memories and love Perry had for her. The novel is told through R, narrating in the first person. *The New Hunger* is a prequel with stories from various perspectives of the main characters of *Warm Bodies.*

Generation Dead by Daniel Waters is a three book series, with one ebook of short stories in the same diegetic world. In this world, teenagers in America are inexplicably coming back to life, and society is struggling between their own fears and reintegration of a new generation. In the first book, *Generation Dead*, a goth girl called Phoebe is intrigued by the newly dead as her high school becomes open to them, particularly by the 'differently biotic' Tommy. The series is predominately told in third person from a variety of perspectives.

In *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It*, paranormal beings recently revealed themselves to the world (or "came out of the coffin") when it was discovered that a corporation, Megamart, was raising zombies to use as free labour. Ally is not a fan of the supernatural herself, but is drawn to a goth crooner called Doug, who turns out to be a zombie. The novel is told from the perspective of Ally.

Unlike the previous novels which are set in a similar world to this, or the near future, *Gone with the Respiration* is set over 100 years into the future where climate change has drastically affected the world and what is left of the North American population has moved south to Central America. While there are numerous factions, the two main rivals of the novel are the New Victorians and the Punks. New Victorian teen Nora falls for Bram, a soldier in a crack military unit made of zombies. The series is told from varying first person perspectives.

These books contain common themes and elements. Each book specifically uses the word zombie, meaning an undead human being. However on the whole they are not rotting nor mindless to the extent of more traditional zombie tropes as in Romero's films. Each zombie type is capable of cognitive function, although require assistance to become "human-like" again. Apart from *Warm Bodies*, there was no specific zombie apocalypse and zombies do not - as a whole - pose a threat to humanity. However, zombies are discriminated against by the living: either shot on sight or made powerless by human society and law. In the case of *Warm Bodies*, despite the zombies' humanity being regained, they are still treated as dangerous. Each book contains a romance between a female human and a male zombie. Each couple works together despite society's view that their relationship is unnatural. They face constant pressure from others to break up. Interestingly, books from different publishers, places and authors all seem to contain similar elements and concerns about social discourse of politics and identity.

Romancing the Corpse focuses on three figures within these zombie romance novels: the zombie as non-citizen, the zombie as romantic hero and the zombie as white and

heterosexual. What I hope to show is a new understanding of an old monster, transformed though it may be.

The first chapter offers an analysis of how the chosen texts create sympathy for the zombie protagonists and how these protagonists reflect Agamben's theories of the bare life and the state of exception. This chapter draws upon previous scholarship of the zombie to draw links between the Haitian, Romeroesque, and new romantic zombies. In analysing the plot of the novels, I assess the zombie's role as non-citizen and how the texts attempt to position the reader to challenge discrimination and inequality in society.

Chapter Two is an exploration of how the zombie romance has adapted conventions from romance, horror, and young adult works. While this chapter acknowledges the previous research on romance and paranormal romance, most of this research is focused on books marketed for adults, aside from such outliers as *Twilight*. Important to the analysis of the generic conventions is the construction of the lover, which is notably different for the zombie from the more frequently analysed figure of the vampire, and the developments on gender and its impact on the story.

Finally, the third chapter works to problematise the novels' discourse on identity through the depictions of the main characters. While the zombie stands in for someone of minority status or political identity, the majority of the characters themselves are straight and white. The analysis explores the concerns the novels have about inequalities and discrimination, and will use analysis of published responses by readers to integrate, or differentiate, between how the novels construct meaning and how readers negotiate their own meaning from the work.

Chapter One

Monsters are transgressors of the natural order, defying binaries such as of human/non-human or living/dead. However, monsters are also dangerous, "a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (Cohen 6). Gothic studies scholar, Fred Botting, proposes that monstrosity destabilises power relations, at the same time opposing and defining the norms of society (*The Gothic* 10). Alterations of the monster shift its significance and value, as the monster is always responsive to cultural and societal shifts (Botting, *The Gothic* 199-200). In this chapter, I explore how the romantic zombie fits, or rather doesn't fit, within societal norms.

Once associated with racially charged images of Hollywood sensationalised black magic in early films from the 1930s, the zombie changed from a corpse slave powered by Voodoo[6] to a horde of mindless cannibals. The non-agentic zombie has stood traditionally as an image of the loss of self, which is important for the construction of the romantic zombie. More recently, the zombie has become a heroic being in young adult paranormal romance novels. These zombies become to protagonists, heroes and narrators of their stories, with mental abilities and cognition equivalent, or only slightly lesser, than humans.

This thesis seeks to understand how these novels use the zombie as a mode of representing loss of political agency and citizenship, evoking concern for minority and civil rights. I propose that Giorgio Agamben's theory on bare life and the state of exception,

[6] The spelling of Voodoo is as the American (mis)representation of the Haitian Voudou beliefs.

engaging in Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, enables us to better understand the cultural and political meanings of agented zombies.

Zombie Representations

The scholarly tradition of examining the representation of the zombie is tied in with the past of the zombie as a postcolonial figure. While the new zombies in paranormal romance bear little resemblance to the Haitian *zombi*, the historical progression of the zombie is of great importance to understanding how the monster is a manifestation of cultural anxiety. Given the dominating influence of the cinematic zombies representations, the anxieties evident in the portrayal of those cinematic monsters are, as I will argue, shared by literary representations.

While there have been numerous literary works on zombies, a significant portion of the scholarship is cinematically based. Zombies, unlike other monsters such as the vampire or werewolf, was not established in European Gothic literature, but directly drawn from folklore into Hollywood (McIntosh 1-2). A significant portion of the zombie literature draws from the tropes of the cinematic zombie making an analysis of romantic zombie doubly significant. I will draw on this literature on cinematic zombies to develop my own discussion.

There have been numerous theories of how the zombie functions as playing out cultural anxieties. While this is not a new theory in the realm of the Gothic, horror and monsters (see Botting, *Gothic Romanced*), my focus here is on works that discusses zombies more specifically. For example, a popular understanding of Romero's 1978 *Dawn of the Dead* is that the zombies - and importantly, the survivors themselves - represent as well as critique

rampant consumerism (see Horne; Harper; Loudermilk; Bishop). The aim for this chapter is to understand how the zombie as romantic hero, resembles or contrasts with such earlier representations.

One of the key theoretical texts in understanding the role of the zombie is Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry's "Zombie Manifesto", which argues that the zombie is posthuman. As I suggested earlier, zombies exist within boundaries - human/non-human, life/death - much like Haraway's figure of the cyborg. The cyborg is a hybrid figure of machine and organism; this blurring of boundaries resists the traditional binary system, providing for a positive understanding of a world without limits (Haraway 149). Working from the spirit of Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto", Lauro and Embry argue that the zombie "reveals much about the crisis of human embodiment, the way power works, and the history of man's subjugation and oppression of its "Others"" (87). As opposed to the liberating figure of the cyborg that combines oppositions, the zombie is eternally betwixt binary categories and does not stand for positive change, just the destruction of hegemony (Lauro and Embry 91, 95). Lauro and Embry's work is important, for the understanding that zombies both are of and are against oppression and inequality. The zombie is both powerless and powerful in the apocalypse (or rebellion). While "The Zombie Manifesto" is eminently useful for all analysis of zombies and zombie narratives, the type of zombies that this thesis will discuss are more recent and, as will be argued, contrast with the conclusion that the zombies only stand for destruction.

Writing of George A Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, Stephen Harper proposes that zombies function as a *lumpenproletariat* - a Marxist term referring to the underclass, or outcast - of shifting significance and "walking symbols of any oppressed social group". This

function, Harper continues, is in part derived from the origins of the zombie, where zombies were synonymous with oppression and slavery. I propose that Harper's description of the zombie as *lumpenproletariat* can be equally applied to other texts as well, and in none clearer than in the case of romantic zombie texts. Given this politicising of the zombie figure, this thesis seeks to answer the question of how does it work when the zombie gains sentience and agency, and becomes a figure of romance. Other academics, such as Ahmad and Sutler-Cohen have likewise connected the zombie to that of a minority figure. However, of these works only Sutler-Cohen's chapter considers the figure of the sentient zombie.

According to Kyle William Bishop, zombie cinema is a monster of the zeitgeist representing cultural anxieties about social and political injustices (15). His own work, extensively analysing films from *White Zombie* to *Land of the Dead*, recounts the various representations of zombies as historically and culturally specific anxieties: race, Cold War, Vietnam, consumerism and so on. Bishop proposes that the zombie monster itself is not the only place to read into representation and significance, that the monstrous behaviour of the human survivors is also integral to the texts. Bishop's analysis of apocalyptic narratives is still relevant to the story of the zombie in young adult paranormal romance texts. It is the humans of these texts that participate in discrimination, oppression, and outright hate crimes against zombiekind, and in some cases even threaten the lives and safety of other living humans.

Drawing on the work of scholars such as Lauro and Embry, Harper and Bishop, it can be seen that the zombie is a standing signifier of alterity. The zombiiness, or assumed zombiiness, of someone becomes a cause for concern in the diegetic worlds and an excuse for the elimination of rights. The overarching message in the chosen texts, as will be argued

further in this chapter, is about access to human rights and dignity. Societal institutions, such as politicians, the media and corporations, are not able or not willing to assert human rights, and in some cases these institutions are the cause of the inequality. The books represent human rights (or zombie rights) to be as much an individual issue as a social one.

The Bare Life and State of Exception

It is my contention and my reading of the romantic zombie that it continues the tradition described by Harper's as presenting the zombie as *lumpenproletariat*. In some texts, the zombie takes on the role of a minority figure very literally. While analysis of the zombie as minority will be examined in detail in Chapter Three, in this chapter I will examine the broader scope and meaning of the figure of the romantic zombie as lacking in basic political agency and being exempt from conceptions of human rights. Previous scholarship has also defined the zombie in this way, however I argue that the romantic zombie makes the inequality seem more invidious because of their agency. I have selected the work of Giorgio Agamben - primarily, *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception* - to further draw out the implications present in the chosen texts in this regard.

Drawing from Roman law, Agamben begins his examination of Bare Life with the understanding of the Homo Sacer. The Homo Sacer, or Sacred Man, was a figure judged of a crime that was unable to be sacrificed, but may be killed by anyone (*Homo Sacer* 86). The figure's sacredness, Agamben discusses, may refer to his impurity or that his life belonged to the gods, but nonetheless he was "outside both human and divine law" (*Homo Sacer* 73).

Agamben modernises the concept of the sacred man to the bare life in the Western world (*Homo Sacer* 100). The law is suspended for the person under bare life, and means for that person that theirs is a "life exposed to death" (*Homo Sacer* 88).

> This violence--the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit--is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. (*Homo Sacer* 82)

The state of exception is a "no-man's-land ... between the juridical order and life" (*State of Exception* 1.1). Agamben admits that it is hard to define, being in close relation to civil war, insurrection and resistance (*State of Exception* 1.2). In essence, a state of exception is the suspension of law, one that Agamben identifies with historical events such as Guantanamo Bay in the US or the Nazi concentration camp in which the suspension is not temporary but rather becomes a permanent spatial arrangement inhabited by the bare life (Mbembe 12-3). This suspension of law extends to abolishing citizenship, denying basic human rights and allowing for violence, as Agamben states, "everything in the camps is truly possible" (*Homo Sacer* 170). Agamben makes clear his point:

> Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense. (*Homo Sacer* 170)

As Agamben's work overwhelming signifies, this state of being is not restricted to non-Western or non-democratic states and is no longer truly an "exceptional" state (*Homo Sacer* 125).

The zombie has been employed as metaphor for those persons whose exclusion from 'life' secures biopower's continued capacity for violence. Using works such as by Agamben, Arendt and Mbembe, Gerry Canavan argues that the science fiction zombie fulfils a role contiguous with traditional horror cinematic representations in exploration of dehumanisation of the Other, structural injustice and biopolitical control under capitalism. Canavan shows the zombie is stand in for both the dehumanisation and the possibility of resistance. Jon Stratton is another who uses Agamben to draw significance between modern zombie films (from the 2000s) and displaced persons. Stratton interprets that the bare life - the exclusion from basic rights of the modern state and living in a legal limbo - enables displaced peoples to "become associated with a condition mythically exemplified in the zombie" (267). However, romantic zombies are a different element compared to these narratives. While previously the zombie was a pitiful creature, it was also one of immense and immediate danger to the survivors (which, Stratton identifies, is equivalent to media representations of refugees (277-8)). A key difference in the romantic zombie from these previous representations is that the romantic zombie has agency: they are able to think, act and speak. The romantic zombie is no longer a danger, so empathy with the monster is more likely and encouraged by the texts.

The Legality of Zombies

Reading these young adult zombie romances through Agamben, there appears a particular stance against the politics of the adult world. In each text the young adult human protagonists are empathetic to the state of the zombie, however this is not a dominant

position in the wider society. The zombies are widely seen as a threat to society, or ignored as much as possible. Living adolescent protagonists have or develop sympathy for the living dead, as they could become a zombie at any time and recognise that the zombies are still human despite their decaying bodies. Both adults outside the home and parents, who are uncomfortable with the relationship their living daughters have chosen, articulate this discriminatory politics. Adult politics is also depicted within the law.

The diegetic worlds of the *Generation Dead* series and *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It* are similar in that they are set in what is presumably an alternate present or the near future. Zombies are recognised as living-dead humans, but they are classified as non-citizens. In *I Kissed a Zombie*, there is some legal precedence for zombies however. A large company called MegaMart was found to have been using zombies as slaves in their storerooms. Creating more zombies is illegal (Selzer 82). The vampires - the only other posthuman discussed in the book - of this diegtic world have rights in human society, but this protection does not extend to zombies. Although the law was fought to free zombies from MegaMart, they live in Agamben's State of Exception, as do the zombies of *Generation Dead*. The zombies of both worlds hold no legal status. Zombies cannot hold jobs, go to college (Selzer 111), access social security (Waters, *Generation Dead* 276) or adopt (Selzer 114). Zombies cannot have health care, a library card, travel overseas, vote or drive (Waters, *Generation Dead* 277). Their rights as a human citizen, their basic human rights, are annihilated and refused as soon as they 'die'.

There is an effort in *Dearly Departed* to hide the existence of zombies from the civilian population. Agentic zombies are drafted into the army of New Victoria to create an elite squad, and Bram (the romantic zombie hero) is one of these. The enemy undead

ultimately prove too overwhelming to be controlled, and the zombie virus is spread into the city. After a battle within the city limits itself, the zombies are unable to hide and debate rages over whether to allow zombies to exist (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 442). In other territories, undead are being hunted and murdered (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 443). The inability for the law to define the zombie allows for them to be used and killed. They live in a realm where the common law is suspended, as in Agamben's bare life and state of exception.

It seems clear that the zombies in these novels are instances of bare life. In the strictest definition, the bare life is "neither human nor animal, but rather an inhuman kind of life that exists at the limits of ethical and political categories" (De Boever 30). On the surface, the romantic zombie articulates real world oppressions. However, a deeper reading of these books also shows an ideological stance on human rights. For Agamben, the current concept of human rights is problematic:

> In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state. (*Homo Sacer* 126)

Agamben's theory also draws on the work of Hannah Arendt, who identifies two types of rights: the universal human rights, and the rights of the citizen. According to Arendt, it is only in the realm of the political community - where the citizen is located - that rights offer genuine protection (Lechte & Newman 17). In the act of dying, previously designated citizens become external to law. The zombies returned are non-citizens, akin to 'illegal'

immigrants[7] and refugees. While the universalising idea of human rights should grant any person an equivalent political status before the law as any citizen, and this is enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 6), this is often not the case in reality[8].

Jon Stratton uses various zombie films to literalise this link between zombies, bare life and displaced peoples. Stratton uses the present real world conditions of globalisation and wide spread displacement to draw parallels to zombie representation. The fear, Stratton argues, is "not the resurrection from death, but the state of living death that is the fate of the zombie" (267). Becoming a zombie is a very real fear in these texts and that is what draws the implied reader into a position sympathetic with the zombie. These zombies are just teenagers, drawing on the discourse of the innocence of the child. As cultural studies scholar Henry Jenkins argues, this childhood innocence "presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political; we imagine them to be noncombatants whom we protect from the harsh realities of the adult world". The romantic zombies are depicted as victims of more powerful forces, whether virus, unethical corporations or unknown. This is particularly prominent in *Generation Dead* where teenagers are the only ones returning from the dead.

The conception of zombies as non-citizens (whether explicitly stated in the novels or implicit) in these texts do not just mean that some people in society are treated badly, but in these diegetic worlds everyone is at risk. Anyone can become a zombie and lose their

[7] 'Illegal' is in quote marks to separate legally supported immigration (valid visas, for example), although according to the UNHCR and Article 31 of the "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees", everyone has the right to seek asylum and contracting states should not count illegal entry as a crime or impose penalties for this action.

[8] Brief examples would be the establishment and continuation of dentitions centres for refugees, asylum seekers and 'illegal' immigrants.

citizenship status. At the end of *Generation Dead*, Phoebe's best friend Adam dies in protecting her and is soon resurrected as a zombie. However in the following book, *Kiss of Life*, it becomes clear that no actual crime has taken place according to the law. The case is settled upon the fact that since Adam is still 'alive' in a sense, no actual murder took place. This is just an example of how slow the law is in keeping up with the undead or protecting them effectively. In some instances, the partner of the zombie confronts their parents "What if I became a zombie, what would you do?". The books establish empathy for the zombies by showing that this removal of basic rights can happen to anyone.

The Voiceless and the Revolutionary

While more traditional images of zombies, both Haitian and Romeroesque, are defined by their loss of voice, will or 'soul', the romantic zombie retains or regains these elements. English academic Kevin Boon is dismissive of zombie fictions which eliminate the traditional element of loss, stating that they use the word zombie but is "essentially a marketing ploy that exploits the popularity of zombie stories by invoking it in the title without presenting actual zombies in the plot" (60). Boon's conception of loss refers to the Romeroesque zombie's loss of will, personality, or self, yet I will suggest these young adult paranormal romance books do represent loss, but in a different way, referring to the loss of citizenship.

The very strong political overtones of *Generation Dead* emphasise that these zombies are a new minority and political identity. The status of zombies as a minority is explicitly articulated, as the principal of the high school states, "Prior the events of recent years

[referring to the zombies beginning to rise from the grave], the term 'diversity' had been most typically used to describe a diversity of culture, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Today the term may also be applied to diverse states of being" (Waters, *Generation Dead* 100). These zombies or differently biotic persons are able to speak for themselves: from *Kiss of Life*, Tommy goes across the country and to Washington to argue on behalf of undead rights; in *Dearly Beloved* there is a group of zombies called The Changed who actively protest for zombie rights and act as a charity in supporting other undead.

The debate on human rights is also criticised by some scholars for overlooking the role of agency. In *The Borders of Punishment,* Katja Franka Aas and Mary Bosworth argue that seeing those disempowered as lacking agency is a "damaging parallel process of objectification". For Aas and Bosworth, seeing the disempowered only as a victim rejects their individuality, just as the way migrants and detainees are treated by governments. Bare Life, as argued by Doty, is often conceptualised upon the basis of there being no potential for resistance or agency (140-1). The zombie, however, is a form of resistance in bare life. Tyson E Lewis uses the example of George Romero's *Land of the Dead* to argue that a form of revolutionary agency emerges from the liminal status of the zombie (91). The zombie challenges all previously held notions, crossing the boundaries of life and death, challenging the role of law and government in security (as the apocalypse becomes 'every man for himself'). The romantic zombies are also revolutionary, through the power of love.

The revolutionary aspect of the zombie in breaking unjust hegemony has been explored previously by Aalya Ahmad. Ahmad argues that the zombie works as a challenge to racism and class privilege (131). While the romantic zombies have a voice, it is often not their own words that rally for change. The zombie heroes remain quiet on page and while

they do revolutionary acts - such as Tommy, going to play football on the high school team despite the protests and media - more often than not it is the human characters that are standing up for them and their rights, most notably their girlfriends. When Tommy does leave town to argue for zombie rights in Washington, he literally leaves the story as well only appearing in occasional emails. The political action of the zombies has varying degrees of success. Often the law and the rights of zombies remain unchanged, but zombie rights activists seek to change social perceptions first. The general implications are that changing the minds and hearts of the people will lead to more success in the legal and political arenas. It takes only one romance to change society, for the better, or so these novels suggest.

Violence, the State of Exception and the Zombie

The role of violence for the zombie in romantic texts is starkly different from more traditional Romeroesque zombie narratives. While *Warm Bodies* and *Dearly Departed* do maintain some of these tropes - the mindless cannibalistic zombie – it is significant that the living are unable, or rather unwilling, to recognise the difference in those zombies that are able to control their appetite for human flesh. Despite the violence wished upon them, most zombies of these texts don't respond in kind. These stories illustrate Bishop's conclusion that zombie narratives identify the monstrosity not within zombies but within humans (24).

In the chosen texts, humans impose upon the zombie population a state of exception. Agamben explains the state of exception as:

> ... not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept. (*State of Exception* 1.1)

From the works of Agamben and Arendt, John Lechte and Saul Newman deduce that in the name of security or purity of the nation, the violation of human rights becomes acceptable (2-3;13). Securing the life of some - the citizens - is always at the expense of others (Lechte & Newman 3). This is the justification for the atrocities against zombies in the novels, whether the zombies are infectious or not. Agamben also explains, using French history under Napoleon, that the evocation of security does not even need to be spurred by an actual threat or attack by an enemy (*State of Exception* 1.1).

In *Generation Dead*, zombies are non-citizens, and in the following books the state of exception is ramped up as the authorities begin to fear zombie retaliations. A state of emergency is declared and zombies truly become the "internal externalised" as they also are subject to special rules and laws. Zombie teenagers who do not live with their parents are deemed a danger and a curfew is set for them. However, through the use of the villain's perspective, it becomes clear that zombies are not the ones causing these crimes. Rather humans dressed as zombies are committing these crimes (even going so far as creating masks to look like specific zombies). These criminals murder family pets, exhume graves and pretend to murder people (hiding them away instead) while dressed as zombies. The displacement of these crimes onto zombies is accepted by the media, another adult-run institution with no connection to the real world of the adolescent protagonists. Even a special Undead Crimes Unit is formed - not to protect zombies from crime, but rather to punish them. This is similar to Sutler-Cohen's argument that agentic zombies work to

become *part* of the society they once belonged to, but the conservative (living) majority continue to oppress and threaten zombies into submission or destroy them outright (190).

The state of exception is justified as a necessary part of providing security for the nation, which works in *Warm Bodies* as the zombies are presented in the vein of Romero's films as mindless cannibals. In the diegtic world the zombies are the cause - or possibly, in part cause - of the apocalypse; they hunt and kill humans. A sympathetic position for the zombies, however, is created with the narration of R. R, a zombie, falls in love with Julie, a human, by devouring the brains of her then-boyfriend Perry. The two lovers work to be together despite their families and societies opposing the pairing. In the story, the zombies 'live' at the airport; an indistinct area between boundaries in itself. The humans have tried to recreate life in a reclaimed sports arena, with makeshift houses and streets in the stands. It is not only the zombies that are of bare life and the state of exception, but everyone in *Warm Bodies*. Perry spirals into despair and resignation of life as it is in this apocalypse: living in a stadium with no hope, just killing zombies and, often, losing the battle. A voice, presumably Perry's or others R has eaten, speaks in R's mind: "*What is a city and why do we keep building them? Take away the culture, the commerce, the business and pleasure, is there anything left? Just a grid of nameless streets filled with nameless people?*" (Marion, *Warm Bodies* 145; italics original). In a strange comparison, the zombies have their own functioning society, with rites and traditions. R gets 'married' to another zombie and together they adopt zombie children. Zombie children are taught in 'schools' how to attack and eat humans, just as living children, who are no longer taught reading or history, are taught skills of how to kill and how to survive (Marion, *Warm* Bodies 34-35; 73;119). Both

sides privilege their own lives and the sanctity of their societies above that of the other. Both sides deny the other the right to live, their lives "exposed to death" to use Agamben's words.

Julie provides a counterpoint to the endless pessimism of death. She looks to the future with hope (Marion, *Warm Bodies* 113; 129-130). She and R are alone in this grey world, trying desperately to dream of hope. He doesn't like her differentiation of human/dead, rather preferring to believe that they are both human (Marion, *Warm Bodies* 41). With this desire for the future, R is physically and mentally changing, becoming more than a zombie. But he enters an in-between state of no longer a zombie and no longer a human, and this places him external to both zombie and human societies. The couple are hunted by both living and dead for daring to go beyond the boundaries. In the end, the old societies are abolished, and a new one - represented by R and Julie, the two who dared to dream - takes its place.

The endings of the other texts are not as clear cut as in *Warm Bodies*, zombies still face discrimination, but the endings are mostly positive. Being in love with a zombie has made the human lover and her family or society, think more about zombie rights as well as their own lives. Zombies have taught them how to *live* better lives and that society is only improved by the greater inclusion of everyone.

Thanatopolitics and the Zombie

Agamben places thanatopolitics at the point when a biopolitical decision on life becomes a decision on death - "this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones" (*Homo Sacer* 122). Elaborating on Agamben's bare life, Achille

Mbembe argues that necropolitics (Agamben's thanatopolitics) creates "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (40; italics original), including slaves and colonised populations. As Canavan states, these colonised populations are not only analogous to the zombie as monster, but is the very situation in which the Haitian *zombi* myth was developed (177). The traditional mindless zombies were soulless, deprived of their very individualism, their humanity, and the bio/thanatopolitics is the mechanism by which this is achieved. In the romantic zombie novel, their dehumanisation by thanatopolitics is made all the more horrific by their continued individualism.

The texts have varying interpretations of zombies: in *Generation Dead*, zombies are merely American teenagers who 'woke up' after death; in *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked it*, zombies were created as slaves for an unethical organisation, but were 'freed' through medication that restored their minds; in *Dearly Departed* there are two types of zombies: those who can retain, or regain agency through medical intervention, and cannibalistic killers*;* in *Warm Bodies,* zombies are mindless cannibals, but through the radical act of love, are slowly changing back to a human state. Becoming a zombie still means a fundamental "loss" for the victim, as with traditional representations. While Haitian and Romeroesque zombies show that loss through loss of will, personality and agency, these zombies have a social and political loss.

While imitating the bare life and the state of exception on a fictional level, these zombie texts can be read as critiques of society's perception of the Other and how the exclusion of the Other does nothing but hurt society itself. In Moretti's words:

> The literature of terror is born precisely *out of the terror of a split society*, and out of the desire to heal it ... the monster, then, serves to displace the antagonisms and horrors evidenced *within* society *outside* society itself. (qtd. in Moreman & Rushton 8, italics original)

The inclusion of the romantic relationship is part of making the implied reader sympathetic to the position of the zombie. In the narratives, the antagonists dehumanise not just the zombies but other humans as well. The implications of the way the antagonists react to others also emphasises the role of rights. The meaning of the narrative that can be deduced using this analysis is that all humans are worthy of rights and love transcends all boundaries. In these societies, anyone is at risk of becoming a zombie - some more than others - and thus we should challenge discrimination.

Chapter Two

While traditionally the zombie is mindless and incapable of rational thought, contemporary scholars still debate over the definition of what exactly constitutes a zombie (Dendle 2). I will argue here that the zombie has evolved, as any "living, breathing folklore" should (Dendle 2) and this evolution allows for new narratives that have zombies as protagonists and even heroes, as Bishop proposed (196). This is in contrast to Boon's argument about 'fake' zombies that uses a more static definition. As such, this chapter explores the evolution of the zombie as presented in zombie romance texts. I will first define the conventions of the genres drawn on by these the works and then lead into a discussion on the gendering of the zombie's bodies and formation of sexualities within the narratives.

Romance and the Zombie

The zombie romance texts chosen for this study are based on two main requirements: 1) the text contains a romantic relationship in which one partner is a zombie, and 2) the existence of zombies is widely recognised within the diegetic world of each text. While both adult and young adult texts were considered, it was only young adult texts that fit both criteria. The young adult category itself is not a genre, but encompasses a wide range of genres. Rather, the young adult category is ascribed to a text by whether it is clear or reasonable to assume that it is written for or targeted at a young adult audience - from around thirteen to eighteen years old (McCallum, “Young Adult Literature" 214). A work can also be classed as young adult if it contains a protagonist who is a young adult themselves

(James 5). Trites highlights the connection of the young adult novel to the process of maturation itself, which can be a young person becoming an adult (*Bildungsroman)* or at any stage in which personal growth takes place (*Entwicklungsromane)* (10). One of the important stages in maturation is the negotiation of relationships and sexuality, which marks a rite of passage from childhood towards adulthood (Trites 84). Numerous young adult scholars draw on the scholarship of (adult) romance to compare similarities and differences[9]. There are two ways to take this use of romance scholarship: either young adult romance is a subset of romance, or an independent genre. While I acknowledge that the primary genre of romance has *some* influence in the style and production of the young adult romance, my focus is on the positioning the young adult romance as a separate genre.

The romance genre is loosely defined as containing a love story that is central to the plot. In the case where there is a love story but it is a minor or subsidiary plotline - such as where the romance is a sub-plot - these titles are often referred to as having 'romantic elements' ("Romantic Genres"). Romance is largely known as fiction *for* women as well as *about* women (Marks 10; Botts 62-63; Frantz & Selinger 3). Regis argues that the romance novel puts the heroine's desires first, rather than her just being the object of the desiring (28-29). McAleer illustrates that the heroine's point of view became influential to romance as Mills & Book[10], a 20th century British publisher of romance, established the centrality of the heroine's point of view - known as Lubbock's Law - in their editorial policy (Ch. 6).

The romance novel and its essential elements are altered when romances are written for young adult audiences. The budding romantic relationship for the young adult

[9] For example, Beth Younger's *Learning Curves*; Amy Pattee's *Reading the Adolescent Romance*; Virginia Schaefer Carroll's 'Re-Reading the Romance of Seventeenth Summer'; HIla Shachar's 'A post-feminist romance: love, gender and intertextuality in Stephenie Meyer's Saga' in *Theorizing Twilight*

[10] Mills & Boon is so strongly associated with romance narratives, that the publisher name has become a phrase in the Oxford English Dictionary to mean a popular romance novel (McAleer, Introduction).

protagonists reflects of their discovery of who they really are, but also lets them explore societal boundaries, beyond the control of their parents (Younger 74). Leavenworth and Isaksson propose that the female protagonist's self-discovery is heightened and emphasised within paranormal romance by the Other's potential marginalisation (23). In their analysis of paranormal texts, vampire lovers have stable personalities, enabling greater focus on the development of the female protagonist (Leavenworth & Isaksson 24). Younger argues that unlike romance for adults the young adult romance can have non-traditional endings (75). A traditional ending for adult romance, as defined by Regis and often upheld by other scholars, is optimistic with a successful courtship of a couple (22;38[11]). This is often referred to as the Happily Ever After or HEA (Frantz & Selinger 3). Young adult texts are not bound by this Happily Ever After: "young women can see that satisfying endings can exist without the obligatory attachment to a male partner" by "allowing heroines to be self-determined, their social status and self-worth *not* dependent upon attachment to a male" (Younger 75, 76, respectively. Italics original). In general, I consider the non-HEA to be one of the defining differences that separate young adult romances and the romance genre.

The chosen texts can be considered as paranormal romance, a romantic fiction with supernatural or paranormal elements (Crawford 8). However, academics differ on whether paranormal romance is a sub-genre to romance, horror, fantasy and crime/mystery. As such, McLennon argues the definition of paranormal romance needs to be broad, as it is a highly flexible genre hybridising numerous conventions from other genres. In the case of the chosen zombie romances, I consider their primary generic conventions to be drawn more

[11] Also supported, for example, by McAlister and Roach

from horror and romance, and as such I will not be examining the role of fantasy or crime in this analysis.

Reading paranormal romance strictly as a subgenre of romance and horror, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Malin Isaksson refer to paranormal romance as "promiscuous" genre, borrowing structures and conventions from a range of other genres (17-18). However, their genre analysis depends heavily on comparing their chosen texts to Regis' eight essential elements, which Crawford rejects (Leavenworth & Isaksson 19; Crawford 8). Ndalianis also discusses generic hybridity in that paranormal romance texts can be horror reshaped towards romantic ends, or overlaying the romantic with horror (75). Ndalianis' explanation is the closest to how I choose to analyse the role of romance in the zombie romances, focusing on the role of how the zombie has been adapted from horror into romance.

Paranormal romance has its critics, whom reject new romantic or humanising renderings of monsters as depriving the monster of their 'original' meaning. Gothic scholar Botting decries the romanticising of monsters, such as Dracula: "Pushed to the limit of meaninglessness, romance turns to its subsidiary gothic form, to provide it with some limit, some point at which meaning can be recuperated" (*Gothic Romanced* 7). Elizabeth Zimmerman and Angela Tenga refer to "true monstrosity" of the vampire and zombie that romantic texts have destroyed ("Vampire Gentlemen"). Similarly, Jules Zanger interprets the modern romantic vampire as a double erosion of metaphysical and religious status as well as folkloric attributes (18-9). However, these critics are damning of romance as a genre and its influence for paranormal romance. Sam George and Bill Hughes are more inclusive, arguing

that the new forms of monsters, including romantic monsters, allow for new approaches to studies of monsters and the Gothic (1, 3).

The young adult paranormal romance is a combination of conventions and tropes. The young adult paranormal romance, in general, portray a strong romantic plotline between a human and a monster. Each couple struggles to be together, flying in the face of common social perceptions that their relationship is unnatural and wrong. Perhaps the most well-known of this sub-genre is *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer. The popularity of the vampire in paranormal romance can be ascribed to its depiction in classical texts as a being of passionate sexual desires, and in more recent texts, as a sympathetic anti-hero. While some critics have considered that *Twilight* has had a powerful influence on young adult paranormal romances (Diamond 41), I argue that the figure of the romantic vampire is very different from the romantic zombie.

The Vampire as Romantic Hero

The comparison between the zombie and the vampire is inevitable. Dendle illustrates the difference between the two monsters with Dracula, a dashing aristocrat of intelligence and filled with sexual desires, against the zombie, a rotting corpse lacking in any psychological or social presence (1). While the zombie has become a hero and even protagonist, the juxtaposition remains. Although there are female vampire protagonists in young adult paranormal romance as well, this section is limited to male vampires for sake of comparison to the male-only zombie romantic heroes[12].

[12] Thus, the use of gendered language is deliberate. While there are female zombies, which will be discussed later, they are never the ones at the focus of the romantic plotline.

While having long been a creature of seduction, it wasn't until the 1970s-80s that the vampire became a heroic, if tragic, figure (Kane 88). Auerbach allows for this new rendering of monstrosity by her proposal that "every age embraces the vampire it needs" (145). Dracula is an example of the changing monster to suit new societal situations, as Freeland's study explores an increasing attractiveness and sympathy for Dracula, as depicted in films across the 20th century (126). Many scholars mention the importance of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* as the turning point of the vampire in the 20th century and granting the vampire with his own authorial voice (Bodart 12; Freeland 150; Williamson 29; Picart & Greek 108; Kane 107-8). While the 'Otherness' of the vampire was the source of fear for earlier narratives, the 'Otherness' of vampires of the late 20th century was formative of the empathy for, and identification with them (Williamson 29; Picart & Greek 108).

There are numerous theories as to why and how the change from monster to heroic lover occurred for the vampire. For Murphy, the vampire becoming heroic- using examples of Angel from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Edward from *Twilight* - is not due to re-invention of the monster itself, but rather a "re-costuming of the heterosexual male romantic lead" (57). From Ndalianis' descriptions earlier, Murphy's conclusion would be that these novels are essentially romances overlayed with horror rather than horror being reshaped. Murray's, however, is dismissive of the changing monster, referring to vampires having become "teen romance fodder" (57). On the other hand, Harford ascribes what she refers to as the domestication and rehabilitation of the vampire to changes in cultural attitudes and social movements such as civil rights, gay liberation and second wave feminism (308). For example, in *Twilight* vampires are reconfigured as a minority group facing discrimination (Harford 308). Botting takes a similar view to Harford, that that a change in the greater cultural

conditions and values can cause what was once a figure of fear, taboo and horror to serve an entirely different function (*Limits of Horror* 38). As an example, Botting discusses how the vampire has been domesticated through extensive consumerism of the vampire image (*Limits of Horror* 40). Given the political prominence of minorities and Otherness in the chosen texts, the readings by Botting and Harford provides for a more suitable analysis than Murphy's interpretation.

In romantic fiction, the vampire is usually considered as a dangerous lover or similar to a Byronic hero (Williamson 36; Overstreet 25; Stein 213-4). This type of hero is also referred to as the alpha hero, or Alphaman, the term originating from early Mills and Boon editorial policy. The Alpha, derived from Alan Boon's 'law of nature', is so named because "any female of any species will be most intensely attracted to the strongest male of the species, or the Alpha" (McAleer, Ch. 6). The Byronic vampire is "handsome, dark, brooding, emotionally unavailable, physically perfect" (Overstreet 25) and is reminiscent of Gothic heroes such as Rochester and Heathcliff (Lutz xi; Harford 305). Young adult vampire fiction encodes the vampire as a Gothic hero and thus stories become a "nostalgic recreation of 'Victorian' gendered power relations" (Priest 58). The dangerous hero also takes form of the villain (Regis 112-3), and in vampire fiction the hero himself is a physical threat to the very life and soul of the heroine. A oft-repeated trope in vampire/human romances is that the vampire finds it hard to 'control himself' around the heroine (such as in *Twilight*, *Buffy*, *True Blood*), and often feels disgrace or disgust at himself for this weakness. His lack of control could, in my opinion, refer to the 'hydraulic' model of male sexuality. A common perception of male sexuality is the notion that men 'need' frequent sex, it is a drive that needs release or else lead to 'discharge' in destructive ways (Heise 288). The male vampire *needs* to feed,

as the male human *needs* sex. For the romantic narrative, the objective is to tame the dangerous lover's ways (Regis 112), as opposed to the traditional vampire stories in which the objective was to kill the monster. For Regis, societal disorder exhibits itself within the two lovers' themselves and to order society, the heroine must successfully tame him (114).

This section has shown that the figure of the vampire has been adapted over time to become increasingly attractive and a sympathetic character. In romance the vampire becomes a dangerous hero, but in the context of someone to fall in love with and tame, rather than kill. Zombies are not the same romantic heroes as vampires, as they adapt the generic conventions of the romance novel in a very different fashion.

The Zombie as Romantic Hero

Zombies, one could argue, have had to change much more than vampires to fit into the role of the romantic lover. While there have been movies portraying zombies in a romantic relationship, these are strictly as comedies parodying the very possibility of a relationship[13]. In the modern zombie romance narrative, zombies are a minority group existing within society and yet set apart from it, and denied what is considered basic rights for humans. The love story transgresses the boundaries established by this human-focused hegemony.

Through romance, these zombies become agentic, cognitive beings; they are able (some through the use of medication or other interventions) to think, to rationalise and make decisions. The issue of agency is very important for the romance, as to have a

[13] Such as *Return of the Living Dead III* and *Zombie Honeymoon*

relationship both parties have to be emotionally engaged. McAlister argues that the romance novel requires "compulsory demisexuality", a sexual attraction only to those they have an emotional bond with ("First Love, Last Love" 2). This, according to McAlister, intersects with the narrative of the one true love, "because our protagonists only have one true love, true sexual pleasure is only possible for them with only one partner" ("Dissolved in a Mutual Fire" 4). Drawing from McAlister's focus on emotional bonds as integral to a true romance, a zombie without agency cannot fulfil the role of a romantic hero as they are unable to emotionally bond and reciprocate affection.

As examined earlier, the vampire is the alpha male - a dominating, dangerous lover who must be tamed; the zombie lover in contrast is more akin to the 'New Hero' or the sentimental hero - a man who is nurturing, attentive to the heroine, and who must be healed (Regis 113; Zidle 26-9). R, Bram, Tommy, Zombie Adam[14] and Doug are as Regis describes: still strong and manly, but wounded physically, psychically, or emotionally (113). As is common in the romance genre, "the novel chronicles the heroine's taming of the dangerous hero or her healing of the injured hero, or both" (Regis 206). Zombies are closer to the New Hero, a man who wants love and commitment from the outset, and acknowledges that the heroine strengthens him (Zidle 25). In this, the role of the heroine is empowered "not only from her success in curing the hero, but from her confidence in *knowing* that he needs her" (Zidle 27, italics original). The heroine herself has changed too; she doesn't need a man to look after her and rather finds over-protective, demanding or controlling men to be a turn-off (Thurston 97-9).

[14] As distinct from Adam in his human state, being that it is during the sequence of events that Adam, a human, is transformed into a zombie. Most zombies, including the other heroes, are already zombies from the start of the narrative.

The zombie partner is at once a defender and protector of the young women, but also needs her love to give him purpose and power. The heroine's attempts to heal their zombie partner their partnership is an attempt in itself to reorder society, however, they are not always successful. This is similar to Regis' claim that romance depicts a flawed society, and the couple's successful courtship remakes society for the better (31). By engaging in a romantic relations with a zombie, the human lover makes a symbolic stand that zombies are people too, and that they should not be discriminated against or indeed killed.

The Zombie Body

Far from their decaying predecessors, the zombie body in these young adult romances is described as a paler human[15]. The zombie body is constructed as inferior to the human body, it is a body *lacking*. The zombie body lacks colour in skin, hair and eyes. It lacks in grace and fluid movement. This is particularly true of the heroic male zombie and female zombies. Some zombies do continue to exhibit physical signs of death, yet these are minor characters. The relationship between the zombie body and the conventions of romance are very particular. The zombie body can also lack in wholeness - missing parts and pieces. While the heroine heals the hero in emotional ways, she can also physically heal him. Her love can literally restore his body.

Heroic male zombies are not significantly repulsive or disgusting. Instead, they are more like female zombies in that they are dominantly normative. R from *Warm Bodies* "could almost pass for a Living man in need of a vacation" (3). Being able to 'pass' is

[15] Most characters in these stories are depicted as or presumed to be white by their lack of description. Race will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

mentioned repeatedly throughout the corpus. In *I Kissed a Zombie*, Ally isn't even aware that Doug is undead on their first few dates. Amusingly, she describes him as a very convincing goth who "had the look of a corpse that just crawled out of the grave", before she finds out he does actually live in his grave (Selzer 40). The descriptions for the heroes are rather clean for zombies, being described mostly as pale but handsome with no significant disfiguration (Waters, *Generation Dead* 7; Selzer 220, Habel, *Dearly Departed* 142). Adam is unique in the chosen texts in that the reader has seen him as both human and undead. When Adam is a human, Phoebe notes admiringly "his face had slimmed down to reveal a strong, angular jawline. His upper half, always big, had broadened out into a wide V from his narrow waist" (Waters, *Generation Dead* 11). In *Kiss of Life* after he was murdered, Adam the zombie becomes "Adam, her tower of strength, had been laid low, reduced to the helplessness of an infant. His long, once-athletic body was now awkward and shambling, and his thick limbs jerked as if they were being pulled by unseen strings. His broad shoulders slumped when he walked..." (Waters, *Kiss of Life* 4). Nora is surprised upon first meeting Bram that "nothing was... broken. Or missing. Nothing about him was weird" (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 142). He's tall and trim and strong, with silvery eyes and ice-white skin covered in scars, but she considers that he may be "[b]lessed among zombies" (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 142).

Male zombies who are not the hero are much more gruesomely described. This detailed account of their physical appearance is very different from the description of the romantic hero who is described as being close to a 'normal human' or even suggesting that it would be 'easy to pass as human'[16]. In contrast, other male zombies have visible signs of deadness: rotting bodies, missing flesh and exposed bone, missing eyes, ears or limbs

[16] For more details on the zombie as passing, see chapter three

(Marion, *Warm Bodies* 5; Waters, *Generation Dead* 206; Waters, *Kiss of Life* 14-15; Waters, *Passing Strange* 308; Habel, *Dearly Departed* 55-56; Selzer 74-76). The non-hero male zombies tend to delight in their scary appearance, particularly in *Generation Dead* as they deliberately try to intimidate the 'breathers' (living humans). While some are already grotesque from their violent deaths, others further their own abjection by performing body modification on themselves, such as slicing their throats to give the appearance of gills (Waters, *Passing Strange* 190). In the *Generation Dead* series, these zombies are much more outspoken against human oppression. They often refer to humans in pejorative terms - blood bags, bleeders, beating hearts or breathers -, and call themselves the Sons of Romero (Waters, *Generation Dead* 306; Waters, *Kiss of Life* 236). But while they deliberately inspire fear, the Sons of Romero do not harm humans. One of their stunts involved adapting mall mannequins with paper mache and wigs to resemble zombies (Waters, *Kiss of Life* 276). However, those who wish to see all zombies killed make masks that look similar to the Sons and carry out horrific crimes (Waters, *Kiss of Life* 236, 270, 384). The human group deliberately sets out to make society fear zombies. There would not be as much of a display in humans framing the more human-like zombies in these crimes. These zombies are completely abjected. Julie Kristeva refers to the abject as that which is expelled, "what I must permanently thrust aside in order to live" (3). It is a violent rejection of what is not familiar, but Other (Kristeva 12-3). This group argues the zombie is not returned human, but rather demons. They are the Other that must be thrust aside and destroyed in order for the humans to live.

The spectacle of the damaged male body is a staple of romance, according to Heinecken (164). Male suffering embodies the containment of male power, which in turn

"underscores an essential *lack* on the part of the man: the lack of the woman who can take away his pain" (Heinecken 164, italics original). Yvonne Tasker's analysis of the male body in action films can also be drawn upon here. Tasker's work, *Spectacular Bodies* examines the role of hero in terms of identity constructions through gender, class, race, sex, sexuality and nation. While her book relates to action cinema, her analysis of the body is relevant here for the zombie hero, who is completely embodied by suffering. In the boxing narrative the body is the locus for power plays; the suffering male body is thus a struggle for self-control and power (Tasker 125-6). While the heroes' bodies are not as significantly altered as the minor characters, they are, or can be, healed by the heroine. In *Warm Bodies,* love is a literal cure that turns zombie back into human. Meeting Julie for the first time - while munching on her boyfriend's brains - R is able to respond to the sensation of Perry's memories and act on his/Perry's desire to keep Julie safe. Falling in love with Julie, R regains his heartbeat and his entire body becomes functioning again. He is completely restored and able to stand by her side as an equal. In *Generation Dead*, while the zombies are not cannibalistic, they return from the grave with little ability to move, think, or express themselves. Lacking much control over their bodies, the zombie body is a physical incarnation of their powerlessness in society, discrimination and marginalisation. Zombies who are accepted back by their parents and return to their family home are better able to function, physically and cognitively. The zombies' better retention of abilities is thus associated with love (Waters, *Generation Dead* 379).

Female zombies, if they appear in the text, are described more like the male heroes. In particular, Karen (the main narrator in *Passing Strange*) is described in exquisite detail with no sense of the grotesque. Her legs look "like they had been carved from veinless block

of pure white marble" (Waters, *Generation Dead* 1), her hair is platinum blonde (Waters, *Generation Dead* 91) and her eyes are described as diamonds (Waters, *Generation Dead* 172) which all human characters describe as the most beautiful they have ever seen. Even though she is damaged throughout the series, her body is uniquely capable of healing itself (Waters, *Passing Strange* 31; 378). Chas in *Dearly Departed*, a minor female zombie, has a metal jaw replacement on which beautiful floral imagery has been inscribed upon it (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 70). This character is not presented as disgusting and abject. When the human heroine Nora first meets Chas, she describes Chas' energetic gait and happy smile (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 180) rather than her disfigurement.

The ideal of normative feminine beauty applied to zombies is especially clear in the sub-plot of Sylvia and her relationship to her body. Initially, she is taken in by the Hunter Foundation for augmentation, to have more control and function of her body - to become more human. Karen and Phoebe find her in a lab, having been dissected, although the actual picture of the scene is not described but merely through dialogue, "She's been taken apart!" (Waters, *Kiss of Life* 347-351). There is more detail of Sylvia's time in the lab in the short story collection *Stitches*, where Sylvia is narrating as she is being operated upon ("Doll Parts"). The story is almost an extended tale of plastic surgery. When she meets her friends after the procedure, she notes the irony in that they only discuss how pretty she is or how she moves, as do the doctors who performed her surgery, speaking only "about her body, about the assembled pieces, and not the mind that gave those pieces life".

The body is significant in the context of patriarchal discourses "that seek to prescribe only certain body shapes, physical features and behaviours as desirable" (Flanagan 40). Victoria Flanagan's analysis of the body in futuristic fiction provides a counterpoint. Like

Haraway's cyborg, the zombie is a fractured identity, somewhere between life and death, human and not-human. In the futuristic young adult texts Flanagan chose, the advance in technology allows for an exploration of subjectivity and the body. The female zombie body, in stark contrast to Flanagan's study, concedes to patriarchal and normative discourses of the body. These discourses are perpetuated through the traditionally beautiful Karen or through hiding and changing deformity as with Chas and Sylvia. The female zombie are not abjected, as male zombies are.

The role of the acceptable body can be related to the need for reader identification. The role of the heroine as narrator was established in romance especially under Mills & Boon (McAleer Introduction; Dixon 14). From the 1980's however, this convention became more flexible, as readers wished to see the narrative from the hero's point of view (Thurston 99). Author Laura Kinsale proposed in "The Androgynous Reader" that the romance reader identifies strongly with the hero, and very seldom the heroine whom the reader is represented by and in competition with at the same time (32). Kinsale writes that "through her own and the hero's eyes, the reader watches and judges the heroine" (35).This claim is supported by Botts, who argues that the hero represents the reader's "other", or her Jungian shadow self and the heroine is the reader's consciousness attempting to integrate with the shadow (66). The shadow-hero is representative of the qualities society deems masculine only: sexual experience and skill, anger or aggression, and danger (67). This may explain why the male heroes are 'clean' zombies without decay or extensive bodily 'Otherness', because the reader must also identify with them. Perhaps asking the reader to identify with a Romeroesque zombie would be difficult enough in itself, let alone making the reader believe

in a love story with a half-decayed corpse. As a result of taming or healing the hero, the *reader* feels fully integrated (Kinsale 42; Botts 71).

Love is our resistance: freedom and repression

Gender politics, generational and familial conflict and the rule of law and society are all thematised in these zombie romances. The role of authority and social institutions in young adult fiction is well covered by Trites' seminal work, *Disturbing the Universe*. Using Foucauldian analysis, Trites argues that many young adult novels are written to encourage the adolescent reader into a "measure of social acceptance" (27). Stephens is more confronting, arguing that in children's literature is the intention "to foster in the child reader a positive appreciation of some socio-cultural values ... including contemporary morality and ethics" (3). This is not to say that readers will and must conform to the values and ideologies presented within novels, as Trites and Stephens write of the impacts upon the implied reader of the book. The values and ideologies within a text are not always about preserving the status quo, as argued by Basu, Broad and Hintz, romances in dystopian novels "steer the adolescent lovers to stand up to dystopian forces in order to create a better world for each other" (8).

Unlike in the vampire narratives, sex is hardly a consideration in the zombie romance novel. The romantic couples kiss, hug and go on dates. Perhaps sex with a zombie would be too confronting, given the usual portrayal of the zombie as a rotting, decaying corpse. Trites argues that most young adult texts are concerned with the policing of adolescent sexuality,

with the literature often as an "ideological tool to curb teenagers' libido" (85). Further, the adultist power that the authors of YA hold is tied to gender politics, and usually end up "affirming the patriarchal status quo, no matter how good their intentions" (95). Adultist powers and adultism is defined by Jack Flasher as an elitist position being held over children, primarily by adults, who see themselves as more superior and have significant power over the child regardless of their individuality ("Adultism"). The heroine dating a zombie has to contend with her parents, friends or society policing her sexuality. This policing of the heroine's sexuality can be read differently in each of the novels. In some cases, the heroine wins over any objections and in others she fails.

The role of feminine agency and patriarchy within romance is a contested issue. Modleski interprets romance as a type of revenge fantasy, where the woman brings the man to his knees (37). The man acts as the villain of the novel who must be overcome by the women. The heroines reject male authority, attempts to compete with him, and finally conquers him through love - even if meaning the heroine must sacrifice her pride and betray her true self (Modleski 36). Roach has a very different approach, that the romance is a reparation fantasy to help women readers "deal with a paradoxical relationship toward men within a culture still marked by patriarchy" ("Getting a Good Man to Love"). Women both desire and fear men, and the romance novel is a safe arena to explore this contradiction. The romance is a tale of redemption, especially when perceiving the Happily Ever After as a required ending.

There are numerous situations in these texts in which patriarchal society acts as a stakeholder in the heroine's choices. A patriarchal society, used in this way, refers to a society which promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified and male

centred and leads to the oppression of women as Other (Johnson 5;10). The objections by the girl's parents and others are not so much that the heroine is involved with a man per se but rather that he is a zombie. Even strangers involve themselves in the sexuality of the young women, using coarse language, such as “necroslut” (Habel, *Dearly Beloved* 57-8) and denigrating the heroine's desires (Habel, *Dearly Departed* 295-7, 407; Marion, *Warm Bodies* 175). Parents will warn their daughters off a relationship with a zombie, seeing that there is no future for life with a zombie (Selzer 113; Waters, *Generation Dead* 279; Marion, *Warm Bodies* 198). The parents concerns are that the zombie would be no provider for their girls, in most cases unable to access education, get a job, get married and have a 'normal' life. In this, the zombie theme allows rearticulation of conservative ideals. In *Generation Dead*, it is strange Phoebe's parents react negatively when she is dating Tommy, fearing that hate for him will translate into attacks on her as well and yet after Adam returns as a zombie and Phoebe begins to date him, they have no objection. In *Warm Bodies,* Julie's father Grigio refuses to acknowledge that the zombies are becoming human again, and attempts to kill both R and Julie for their perceived sexual transgressions.

Pete in *Generation Dead* has an unhealthy obsession with women, marked out by his constant bragging about alleged sexual conquests (that never really happened) and his violence (emotional harassment, physical violence and threats of violence) towards women. He was once in love with a girl who died but never returned as a zombie. Throughout all three books of the series he confuses girls’ names, especially Phoebe and Karen, with the one he loved, Julie. Pete is very explicit about his belief in the role as protector of women and their sexuality: "It is only a matter of time before these things start to want to get with real girls ... We have to protect her from *herself*" (Waters, *Generation Dead* 151).

In *I Kissed a Zombie*, the vampire guidance counsellor flatly disapproves of the fact that Ally is in a "mixed relationship" (Selzer 83) and warns her that she must convert. A vampire at Ally's school, Will, aggressively pursues her throughout the novel (Selzer 50, 199-20, 157-9). He assures her that he will have her, regardless of her objections. Will does not just mean that she will be his girlfriend, but that he will force vampirism upon her.

Will and Pete are very similar in their hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers, in part, to the assumed dominant position of men and subordination of women (Connell, "Hegemonic Masuclinity" 832). It is also important to note that that this formation of masculinity is generalised and not a fixed character type (Connoll, *Masuclinities* Ch. 3). A fundamental aspect of hegemonic masculinity, argues Davidson, is that women exist as potential sex objects for men (645). In another variant of hegemonic masculinity, taking a more fatherly role perhaps, the heroine becomes an object lacking agency and requiring surveillance "for her "own good" (Pomerantz 150). She is unable to make legitimate or correct decisions regarding her sexuality, and so parents, antagonists or the occasional male stranger attempt to get involved and put these powerless girls in their place. While the heroines of the text do need help in certain situations - Adam and Doug literally give their life, or second life, to save the Phoebe and Ally respectively - they are not maidens in distress. The heroines quickly rebuff anyone who attempts to restrict or deny their agency and their desires. The heroine berates their parents for such "bioist" or discriminatory views and they reject other men's attempts at flirting. When the heroines reject Will and Pete, they become dangerous adversaries threatening rape and violence to further emphasise their masculine power and control over women.

While the texts uphold the hegemonic monogamous heterosexual relationship as superior, they also challenge the diegetic society's own sense of what is deviant or normal by choosing to stay with a monstrous Other. Despite the societal expectations and denigration, the heroine always goes with her heart. The peer pressure for her to act a certain way is resisted - to a certain extent. As Kathryn James says of transgressive literature, "its ability to challenge entrenched systems of meaning and dominant ideologies is questionable" (151). There is a conflict between progressive and conservative ideology within the chosen texts. In the next chapter, this conflict will be further extrapolated in terms of race and sexuality.

Chapter Three

The monster is a liminal being, as we have seen, both within and outside the 'natural' order. Cohen argues "[a]ny kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual" (7). The figure of the zombie has been a particular locus for discussion of race. Conceptions of race and the Other has been crucial to understanding the role of the zombie in previous media, and the romantic zombie continues this. In this chapter, I will argue that the romantic zombie is a combination of progressive and conservative ideology, depending how the zombie is read. On the one hand, the romantic zombie brings minority issues to the foreground of the texts. The romantic zombie is often discriminated against and sometimes the books very explicitly link their oppression to that of real world minorities. On the other, the majority of the main characters in each text are white and heterosexual.

Although there is also a clear case to discuss the zombie as representing disability, due to the limited space, in this chapter I will focus on the intersection of race and queer theory in representations of the romantic zombie. While there are many novelistic strategies important to the development of the story, I focus primarily on the main characters themselves. Characters in particular are important to children's and young adult fiction, as Maria Nikolajeva suggests "characters are supposed to provide models and statute examples" (qtd. in Nodelman 157). Characters in children's books, also, are much more likely to be judged as if they are real people because of their status as role model (Nikolajeva 146).

The chapter will conclude with audience research on how readers react to the representations of the zombie as a minority figure.

The importance of diversity of representation

There is still a divide in the scholarship as to whether writing for children and young adults is essentially didactic or whether it is a more complicated work that challenges as well. Stephens proposes that, usually, the purpose of writing for children is to teach or foster in the reader appreciation and understanding of socio-cultural values (3). The adolescent novel for Trites is about the protagonist learning to negotiate social forces and power, they will need understand in order to mature successfully (as in, become a functioning adult in society) (3). Noga Applebaum follows a similar didactic line, proposing that many science fiction texts for children disempower the reader by promoting an adult agenda (12). On the other hand, critical analysis from other scholars show dystopian texts to "function as cautionary tales" with young adult protagonists that bring hope to save the world (Hintz & Ostry 10-12). These messages are seen as progressive by dismantling a corrupt and unequal society that adults merely accept. Alison Lurie in her book *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups*, predominately writing on classic children's novels, argues that rather "most of the great works of juvenile literature are subversive in one way or another: they express ideas and emotions not generally approved of or even recognized at the time" (4).

Some scholars draw on these opposing views to argue that children's and young adult books both contain societal expectations and challenge hegemonic structures in society. Jacqueline N Glasgow argues that books provide young adult readers with both the

tools to understand the world and social relations but also as a challenge to normative systems of privilege and oppression ("Teaching Social Justice"). In a similar way, Robyn McCallum concedes that while literature for young people is in some ways influenced by culture and society, it also *shapes* the culture ("Young Adult Literature" 216-217). Hence the representations of many aspects of life, such as gender and sexuality[17], in young adult texts can work not only as a teaching tool but a challenge to young readers to expand beyond societal norms.

While didactism is strong in young adult scholarship, generally this comes at the cost of understanding the audience's relationship to the text and the possibilities for a resistant reading of the text. Popular culture, for Hall, is neither purely resistance, nor merely conservative, but rather "the ground on which the transformations are worked" ("Deconstructing 'the Popular'" 442-3). It is the complexity of representation, and potential associated meanings, within these young adult books that I explore.

The Zombie as Racialised Identity

The zombie has been critically analysed as being representative of black/white relations (McIntosh 5-6). The Haitian *zombi* is a product of post colonialism, from French-colonised Haiti Western Christianity combined with African beliefs in a system that came to be known in the West as voodoo (Bishop 42). A *zombi* was generally considered to be someone who was resurrected literally by a *bokor* or sorcerer, or someone who had been

[17] See Learning Curves by Beth Younger, and Death, Gender and Sexuality by Kathyrn James

poisoned in a way to simulate death. Deprived of will, memory and consciousness, the *zombi* becomes a slave (Acjermann & Gauthier 474).

The Haitian *zombi* was not an object to be feared; the fear was of *becoming* a zombie. As Bishop states, the *zombi* was "a folkloristic manifestation of a colonial or postcolonial society's greatest fear: subjugation, marginalization, and enslavement" (59). The *zombi*, however, is not just a slave, as Lauro and Embry argue "the zombie narrative is, in some ways, a reprisal of the Haitian Revolution and a story of slave *rebellion*" (96, emphasis mine). Rebelling slaves during the Haitian Revolution were depicted as supernatural themselves, "[f]anatic and insensate hordes of blacks rose as a single body to overwhelm the more 'rational' white troops" (Davis, qtd in Lauro and Embry 98). After the revolution, the anxieties around Haiti as an independent black republic circulated the Americas and Europe (Kee 9). Tales of supposed Haitian primitivism, such as zombies and cannibalism, dehumanised the people of Haiti and was used to justify the US occupation (Kee 9, 13; Wisker; Inglis 46).

As the *zombi* entered Hollywood cinema, the horror changed: "the zombie master's power was to harm whites and reduce them to a servile condition similar to that of blacks" (Kordas 21). The zombie is still a victim, but becomes a violation of racial norms of the black-white binary and a threat to racial purity (Phillips 28). In a postcolonial reading, Phillips extrapolates on the conception of the zombie as Creole:

> Whereas miscegenation is a threat to the social order, through the production of mixed race citizens, the zombie metaphor shows that boundaries of identity associated with the skin are permeable and unfixed. (29)

Kee agrees with this, stating that in early zombie films black zombies were not an explicit threat in themselves but rather the dark magic of Haitian Voodoo (15). Typically in these films, "the white male could defeat black "corruption"; the white female could be saved" (Kee 15).

The zombie again changes form through Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, and sequels *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*. Here, there is a stark contrast between how the zombie's race is conceptualised. In *Night*, Romero had an African-American, Duane Jones, in the lead role - marked as a first for horror (Bruce 60). Jones' character, Ben, struggled for survival against zombies and living (white) humans. Eventually his death at the hands of a group of rednecks who were unable to distinguish between him and the zombies, "becomes a scathing condemnation of unchecked violence and social injustice" (Bishop 120).

Richard Dyer provides an interesting counterpoint to the more usual 'zombie as sub-altern or black' arguments. In *White*, Dyer argues that whiteness is represented as death in Romero's films. Zombies are predominantly white or have whitened skin (due to makeup) (*White* 211). Dyer notes that Romero's films are unusual in their positive depiction of black men. The black hero is the only, or one of the few, survivors of zombie attacks (*Matter of Images 142*). The black men in Romero's films have control over their bodies and the skills to survive, whereas many of the white characters lose control of themselves, resembling the uncontrolled form of the zombie (*White* 145). As an example of this white loss of control, Barbra is traumatised by the zombie attacks and is in an almost catatonic state, while Ben acts quickly to fortify the house (Bishop 116).

In some accounts, the zombies' racial attributes are quite literally blurred. They are often depicted as grey, in a sense erasing racial difference: no longer black, no longer white. Ahmad proposes that "[z]ombies function ... as a gray go-betweens between subaltern and supremacist, black and white, selves and others" (132). As Kee demonstrates, the Haitian zombie and ruling of Voodoo vanished from zombie fiction "so that zombies came to represent any ethnic group" (10). Therefore, with this background, the representation of race in zombie stories and of zombies becomes critical.

The Romantic Zombie as Racialised Identity

The romantic zombie texts work in a manner that reads as progressive, speaking on behalf of the rights of 'others' and the marginalised in a fictional society. However, the main characters of the books are white and heterosexual and perpetuate those hegemonies by offering little diversity at all. I do not pass judgement on the works or authors as to whether the texts are intentionally whitened or heterosexist, or whether they are offensive because of this. For Shannon Sullivan, literature and art in particular "perform subtle emotional work that richly engages the nonreflective aspects of white privilege" (1). As such, I will explore the issues of the racial codings of the zombie using postcolonial theory and examine the problem of passing within the texts.

Mbembe recounts the rise of modern biopower - or rather, necropolitics - and considers the plantation system and slavery to be a manifestation of the state of exception.

> First, in the context of the plantation, the humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of a shadow. Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a “home,” loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether). (Mbembe 21)

Here, the slave is alive but kept in a state of injury: "[s]lave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life" (Mbembe 21). Frantz Fanon likewise notes "[i]t is not that a lack of value is assigned to life, but that for the "native", life is already a living death" (Gibson 14). As Fanon says of the black man, "he has no culture, no civilisation, no "long historical past" - it is not of concern or respected by whites" (34). The zombie of the four texts can be read as a creature of colonialism as well. The romantic zombies have been deprived of their home and their rights over their bodies and political status, as Mbembe proposes above. They are exiled from the culture and society in which they were born, and in some cases cannot or choose not to remember it.

The texts I have been discussing here promote zombie integration into human society; for the zombie to be treated as no differently than the living human. The zombie is repeatedly marked as being a minority figure in society: there are few zombies in society, they are discriminated against, and unable to participate in society as fully as anyone else. There are zombie hate crimes, murders and lynchings. Sometimes the theme of zombie as minority is made very explicitly, as seen in Chapter One with *Generation Dead* and *I Kissed a Zombie*. Yet for all this, the hero or female zombie's appearance is often referred to as being 'passable'. The bodies of other zombies are decaying, rotted, missing, lacking, and marked as Other, however the bodies of female zombies and of heroes are actually white; they are

merely pale with none of the bodily grotesqueness of the other zombies. Blackness, in Fanon's work, is the very mark of difference: "I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (116). In white society, the raced bodily identity is the prime identifier of someone. The zombie sets up this contradiction of a white and 'passable' minority figure. The passability of the zombie is similar to Fanon's thesis, that "[s]ince freedom is "given" by the White, recognition is only possible if the Black man becomes White, or at least extremely light-skinned, but definitely unlike the real Black" (Gibson 33). The reintegration of the zombie ending is also contradictory within the books, as society fails to achieve enlightenment in *Generation Dead* and *I Kissed a Zombie*. In *Warm Bodies,* it is the zombies who change, such as R who literally lives again, so as the society will accept them.

The human female of the couple is coded, and physically is, white. Fanon writes of the man of colour and the white woman:

> By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love.
>
> I am loved like a white man.
>
> I am a white man.
>
> Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization . . . .
>
> I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.
>
> When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. (63)

His descriptions of the desire to be white in some ways echo the sentiments of the zombies in their relationships. For R, the eating of brains and being with the living Julie makes him feel less dead, and in the end this becomes literal as he becomes a living human

again. The most problematic, however, is Tommy in *Generation Dead*. After the school dance, when Tommy admits to Phoebe that the main reason he is with her is because he believes that love makes zombies more human:

> " I . . . I just . . . thought," he began. "I thought that . . . if . . . I . . . could get a girl . . . a real girl . . . to love . . . me . . . to kiss . . . me . . . I'd come back . . . even more."
>
> And there it was again, Phoebe thought, turning back toward him. "A girl," he said. Not "Phoebe." *A girl*. (Waters, *Generation Dead* 380)

In the texts, the girl's parent/s warn her about being with a zombie and all it could entail, becoming herself a target of hate crimes against zombies. She has to stand up for her somewhat silent partner, and asks of people to treat him with dignity and respect and not reject their inner humanity. It is not just the relationship that the zombie uses, whether intentionally or not, to access living (white, Western) culture, but also the heroine's voice. Tommy disappears from the story's action in *Kiss of Life* and it is Phoebe who has to continue talking on behalf of zombies. Speaking on behalf of the oppressed can be a method of silencing them and replicate imperialist hegemonies:

> The problems of speaking about people who are 'other' cannot, however, be a reason for not doing so. The argument that it's just too difficult can easily become a new form of silencing by default . . . But whites can never speak for Blacks. (Spivak and Gunew, qtd in Wisker)

Williamson, in her critical examination of the vampire, discusses how Anne Rice's novels have the vampires themselves as narrators; "the "other" speaking first hand" (Gelder, qtd in Williamson 40). However in these romance texts, the zombies might be main

focalisers or autodiegetic narrators, and yet they need the living to speak for them within the narratives.

The Romantic Zombie as Queered Identity

One zombie who does speak for herself is Karen in the *Generation Dead* series. Karen is a secondary character in the first two books and then becomes the centre of the narrative in the third. She is also gay, however the books complicate and obscure her sexuality. There is little to hint at her being gay until she comes out halfway through the third book, *Passing Strange*. Karen's gayness seems to play very little role in the novel, highlighting more her alterity as a zombie. There is not much response from other characters or self-reflective comments on her gayness either. In the briefest of comments, Karen says that her mother hit her when she came out to her parents, which should be very disturbing particularly for a novel pursing an agenda of equality to ignore the larger implications of this act (Waters, *Passing Strange* 150).

Even mentioned in the title itself, *Passing Strange*, the issue of 'passing' in the novel only refers to her zombiness rather than any other marker of difference (from the norm white/abled/male hegemony). Passing is when an individual member of a minority group assumes an identity as a member of the dominant group. This may be to avoid discrimination and stigma experienced by the minority group while at the same time gaining the benefits and advantages of being part of the dominant (Brown 33-34). While passing has been mentioned repeatedly in the books, in terms of the physical appearance of a zombie

passing or would be able to pass as human, this topic is also not brought up in relation to intersectionality.

Passing Strange foregrounds Karen's feelings about needing to pass, and the responses from others who tell her how dangerous it is if she is found out (Waters, *Passing Strange* 39, 65, 201). Of passing as human, she says:

> For a while it felt like fitting in. But then I realized that it was even better than fitting in. I'm hiding in plain sight. I may seem like everybody else, but I'm, really, really different. And I like that. (Waters, *Passing Strange* 39)

Her appearance is consistently noted within the series as being similar to a living human being. In the first book, she is told that she could be a model for zombies, to help society accept them better, due to her expressive face and higher level functioning than other zombies (Waters, *Generation Dead* 247-8). Angela says that Karen could be the "public face of the differently biotic" (Waters, *Generation Dead* 247). Her looking and acting in a non-zombie-like way is prized, in that Angela believes that is how the living will finally accept them. Angela's argument is similar to some who believe that, for the group as a whole, LGBTIQ people should come out of the closet. Being 'out' challenges social conventions and the more it is seen, the more familiar and acceptable it becomes (Cooley & Harrison, 6). However, Karen challenges this by saying that it would probably make the human population even more afraid if they would be unable to tell who is zombie and who is living, perhaps further speaking to the fears of keeping humanity 'pure'.

In part, the lack of queer characters or description of their relationships could be due to the publishing industry as a whole and potential lashback from conservative parents,

although not an excuse for a lack of diversity. In Priest's assessment of young adult vampire novels, she notes that even though vampires have long been associated with homosexuality and gay identities, young adult books (such as *Twilight* and *House of Night* series) play down that association (60-1). *House of Night*, starting with the book *Marked*, does have homosexual characters, but in many scenes the main character explicitly distances herself from queerness, even using the word queer as a slur (Priest 61-2). As I am arguing the same in zombie romance texts, the characters in vampire novels purport to be accepting of difference and yet the texts are in many ways still quite conservative.

Intersectionality of the Romantic Zombie

Perhaps most damning to the text's apparently progressive ideology is the fact that none of the zombie romance texts work on an intersectional level. While the books may use the language of civil rights and invoke images of hate crimes, zombies do not face intersectional discriminations. Perhaps, this can relate to the majority whiteness of them as white functions as an invisible identity according to Dyer: "[a]s long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we [whites] function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people" (*White* 2-3).

Black zombies are sometimes in the background as very minor characters (Coalhouse, a potentially racist name, in *Dearly Departed* gets a larger role in the sequel, but is still a minor character). There was also one Asian-American zombie in the *Generation Dead* series, Takayuki, again a minor character. There are minor human characters of other races, such as

Pamela in *Dearly Departed* is of Indian heritage (6), and Nora Julie's friend in *Warm Bodies* is called a mulatto (54) and but these are brief one-off comments that are not interrogated, or for Nora, challenged. That it is the friend of the main character and not the main character themselves that is raced is also of interest. The zombie is constructed as a raced identity but the real raced identities are largely ignored and overshadowed by the zombie identity. Given that the novels are set at an indeterminate time (aside from *Dearly Departed*), it could be given that the fight for black or LGBTIQ rights is over. However, even if the narrative is meant to exist in a post-racial, post-queer time, this is still problematic. Mary J Couzelis explores the topic of race in dystopian novels, but the conclusion she reaches is especially apt for this argument:

> Novels that ignore race or present a monochromatic future imply that other ethnicities do not survive in the future or that their participation in the future is not important. Even narratives where authors present racial tensions have been eliminated in the future risk trivializing contemporary encounter teens have with prejudice. (131)

Zombies are a fictional identity which the story uses to explore the issues of diversity and equality without using real minorities. Instead, the zombies absorb all the discrimination and stigmatisation of race and queer identities for themselves and personify this in white bodies. Murat Aydemir argues that "[t]hough various forms of oppression and contestation are intertwined, this should not be taken to imply that they are all similar, let alone that they amount to more or less the same thing" (22). The real world struggles of inequality and discrimination are conflated with fiction and fictional identities. This can be seen either as a tool to explore these issues without confronting actual existing prejudice and racism, or

another method of dehumanising or ignoring true minorities. Crawford argues that vampire is similar, in that vampirism "seems to serve as a displacement of real-world racial difference, replacing it with notional 'others' who still looks like 'us' (i.e, white people)" (174). In some ways vampires have stood for other outsider groups, yet Crawford proposes that vampire romances more generally erase marks of otherness and actually perpetuating the mainstream (white, heterosexual) American culture (175).

Audience Research: Reading Civil Rights Across Straight White Bodies

An analysis of a text is rather incomplete without taking the audience into account (Kitzinger 167). I have used this thesis to establish my own interpretation of the ideologies present within the corpus. In this section however, I use audience reception research to read and attempt to understand how others' read the same text, functioning as a potential point of departure. Where I have argued in this chapter that the text's have a complicated relation to the themes of diversity in how they use the zombie body, I wanted to examine further as to whether these are widely recognised and how the audience negotiates this meaning.

The basis for this research is from Hall's model of encoding and decoding. Hall proposed that the way audiences respond to television is much more complex than sender/message/receiver. Rather, he argued the importance of recognising the polysemic nature of cultural texts, recognising that multiple meanings can be taken from the same text. Texts can be structured with a dominant ideology or encoded with meaning, however it is in the decoding and the reception of the text that the meaning can be resisted or negotiated.

Hall identified three main reading positions: the dominant-hegemonic reading would be an ideal case where the reader decodes the message as it was encoded; the negotiated code is a mixed approach, while understanding and adopting the dominant definitions on a broad level, applies differently at the local level; and the final approach is the oppositional reading, where the reader decodes the message in a globally contrary way ("Encoding/Decoding" 101-3). As Fiske succinctly concludes: "[a]s audiences have different material sociocultural positions, so their discursive practices and ideological frames must also differ" (399).

For my audience reception research, I chose to examine reviews on Goodreads. GoodReads (goodreads.com) is a massive international community website, and while the site is in English, reviews are sometimes posted in other languages, or both English and another language. Each title has its' own page, and reviews and ratings for every ISBN and edition are collated under the title itself. Due to time and word constraints, only the first 300 random reviews of the first four books of each series will be analysed, apart from *I Kissed a Zombie*, which had only 238. These books are: *Warm Bodies, I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It, Generation Dead* and *Dearly Departed. Warm Bodies* had the largest number of reviews with over 8000, and it can be argued that this text had a wider audience, due to the 2013 movie based on the book.

Due to the nature of the responses gathered, it is not possible to find out the demographics of the readers. While these are young adult books, it does not necessarily follow that their main audience is comprised of young adults. A study in 2012 by Bowker ("New Study") identified that 55% of buyers of young adult fiction are 18 or older, and 78% of the time they were purchasing the book for themselves. In 2014, a similar study

("Children's Books") found that 79% of buyers of young adult fiction were 18 or over, and again tended to buy most of the books for themselves.

Rather than modelling behaviour, influences or beliefs of the readers, my small study is to solely examine reader's interpretations of the books to contextualise and frame my own analysis of the ideologies present within each of the works. I propose, as I have argued throughout this thesis, that the dominant reading of these texts focuses on the inequalities between people marked out as different, using the zombie as the fictional marginalised minority. Extending from this, I have argued that these texts discuss civil and human rights and prejudice, even as they present marginalisation as experienced by straight, white bodies.

The main goal in assessing these reviews is not to establish whether the books were liked or disliked, but rather to analyse whether and how readers' read the books through the ideological and identity issues I have discussed in this chapter. That is, do readers identify the zombies as a minority group experiencing prejudice? Where previous chapters identified particular ideologies within the books as being set up for the implied reader, this section is to analyse if and how those ideologies were recognised by real readers.

Among the sample I gathered, almost half *Generation Dead* readers commented on the book as representing the zombie as non-citizen and speaking on issues of civil rights, inequality and prejudice. This is, perhaps, because of the very explicitness of the zombie as minority in this text.

One particularly detailed review by Emma (Miss Print) (August 24 2009) listed real world examples of discrimination to draw a direct comparison:

> In its Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that separate schools for black and white students were unconstitutional ... This ruling was key to the civil rights movement and efforts to end segregation ... Fifty years later, Daniel Waters' debut novel Generation Dead offers a new take on integration and the fight for civil rights.

The other novels did not have as many reviews connecting civil rights, inequality and prejudice. Only 18 surveyed of *I Kissed a Zombie* noted this theme. *Dearly Departed* also had 18 which ascribed to the theme of inequality in general, although many of them focused on classism and disability[18] rather than race or sexuality.

> She [Ally] is living in the "post-human" era, in a world where vampires, werewolves, and zombies live amongst humans. Like other oppressed minorities, their struggle for basic rights and acceptance is a constant uphill battle.
>
> Nancy, August 1 2014 for *I Kissed a Zombie and I Liked It.*

> It was interesting to me that the dead who retained their minds were still treated as disenfranchised citizens. People did not want to extend the same rights to the dead that were entitled to the living. This mirrors some of the debates that are swirling through America currently.
>
> Andrea at Reading Lark, May 31 2013 for *Dearly Departed*.

[18] Perhaps further emphasising my earlier point that a study of the zombies through the lens of disability studies would be useful.

Reviewers of *Warm Bodies* rarely explicitly mentioned the zombie as representative of minority groups. Vague comments were made about 'overcoming difference' or 'not accepting the status quo', and about the book having a message, moral, or societal commentary, but the reviewers did not explain what they meant by this. However, I found it interesting that one repeated topic was that the theme of humanity as all one was repeated throughout reviews of any of the four books, although strongest in *Warm Bodies*.

> Dead or alive, Punk or Royal, we're all human, and we all need to treat each other better.
>
> The golden witch, October 16 2011 for *Dearly Departed.*

> And as Marion continues his mission to humanize zombies, the readers get to explore and wonder about the true meaning of being human.
>
> Nafiza, May 3 2011 for *Warm Bodies.*

While the idea of all humans regardless of race, colour, sexuality or death, is meant as a Utopian ideal, the concept of humanity is often critiqued for its limited and narrow acknowledgement of difference. The idea of all being of one race, the human race, is a colourblind attitude and holds with it implicit discrimination. The underlying and implicit nature of colourblind humanity is essentially universalising what is white and male (Vint 12). Colourblindness is an attempt to erase race, where whiteness is the non-race and the standard by which all should aspire (Sullivan 191). This recalls Foucault's account of racism, that to survive and keep 'pure', the Other must be killed (255). Cultural products also reflect this problematic position of being both progressive and conservative. For example, Kwan analyses *Star Trek*, often praised for its' examination of racial and cultural divides, as actually

perpetuating racism through the (white, European) homogeneity of the Federation ("Seeking New Civilisations"). As I have argued earlier, this is similar to the problematic white minority representations within the chosen zombie romance texts. The reviewers comments about 'humanity' don't isolate 'humanity's' implicit whiteness within the books. The books themselves don't interrogate this either, as I discussed earlier, so it may be these reviewers' took the works at face value without critiquing what *vision* of humanity was being represented.

Writers of many of the reviews that accepted the texts message of being about discrimination and prejudice, also spoke about the zombies as literal representations of minorities, rather than allusions or metaphors for minorities.

> But it doesn't feel like a zombie novel--indeed, at the beginning, it hardly feels like the zombies are zombies at all. More like they're a metaphor for some other minority or misunderstood group. Like if you replaced "undead" with "gay" you'd have the same book.
>
> Lucy, August 24 2009 for *Generation Dead.*

> I'm sure that you could say that zombies in this book could be seen as safe analogs of racial, cultural, or religious differences.
>
> Patrick, August 24 2009 for *Generation Dead.*

While the novels do draw on the real world experiences of those facing discrimination and prejudice, this reading of zombies as literally a stand-in for real world

minorities is problematic. These example comments seem to treat minority groups as singular and whole, as if one group can merely be picked up and put into a fictional world as a lesson to readers, such as with Patrick's "safe analogs" comment. This is precisely the criticism I argued earlier for the texts themselves. The zombies are one-dimensional in that, regardless of intersectional identity, they are all only talked about in terms of their zombiness.

Perhaps related to its more explicit connections between civil rights, inequality and prejudice, *Generation Dead* also had some reviews (20) that were resistant to this message. For comparison, the other books had between none and two reviews that referred to the "preachiness" of the text. *Generation Dead* was still perceived to have been advocating for, pushing or proposing a message of equality, but some reviewers rejected the novel as being politically correct and boring:

> Prejudice is bad! Ugh, we get it already!!!!
>
> Toocrazycosmoyahoo.com, August 24 2009

> Yeah, I get it. Intolerance sucks. Idiocy sucks. Irrational thinking sucks. But why couldn't the story just be told instead of force-feeding the readers with the lesson of tolerance? People are people, no matter what their skin color is. And in this case, no matter what their pulse status is either. Ok. I get it.
>
> Donna, January 09 2010

While many of the reviews seemed to understand diversity as an important issue in the real world, they seemed frustrated or resistant to what was to them an overly didactic approach in *Generation Dead*. It is also worth noting that Donna's review also harkens back to my discussion earlier on 'humanity' and colourblindness. This highlights a complication, particularly in young adult texts, between didacticism and the enjoyability of fiction. For Perry Nodelman, disguising the didactic within the pleasurable experience of reading is particularly key for children's literature (36). If this holds true, then for these reviewers, the novel did not adequately disguise its educational purpose.

It was very rare for reviewers to acknowledge and choose to comment on the homogeneous societies of the texts. Out of 1138 reviews, only five of the reviews explicitly stated the contradictions of the zombie white minorities in the books that I outlined earlier in the chapter.

> I actually quite enjoy Miss Pamma: she brings a little diversity into a whitewashed society and a little female ferocity to the table, but I couldn't look past her less-than-involving pages
>
> Jessie (Ageless Pages Reviews), November 29 2011 for *Dearly Departed*

> However, complete erasure of POC[19] or LGBT[20] (except for a few very minor side characters, most of whom are depicted as violent and angry) is much worse and

[19] People of Colour
[20] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

makes the book seem like a ‘white people experience -isms’ book, rather than a study of discrimination and privilege. I hardly think this was the author’s intent, but it’s especially disappointing because Waters seems very sensitive to issues and people otherwise.

Kira, January 16 2013 for *Generation Dead*

The book is overwhelmingly political. The action is cushioned between lecture after lecture about accepting those who are different from the majority. I absolutely agree with Waters in terms of minority rights. But if that is his focus, he should write about actual minority characters and leave the undead to fantasy authors and audiences.

Leanna, August 24 2009 for *Generation Dead*

The use of zombified (my bad, living impaired) teens is ridiculously mined for it's parallels to other minorities. Their poor status in society and the bigotry placed upon them should elicit my sympathy but instead it angered me that the author felt that zombies should be placed in the same league as hate crimes against teens of different races, religions or sexual preferences. It's so overt and so slavishly heaped upon the reader as to remove the need for thought. I don't approve of the hate crimes seen in this novel but I refuse to emotionally connect with the concept as portrayed here.

Adele, January 25 2010 for *Generation Dead*

I’ve said before that the whole “fantastic” prejudice theme is overdone - and it is. But I’m not going to slam a book for that because I also think it can be a decent way to

explore prejudice if it is done right.

Sadly, I don’t think this book did that.

Fangs for the Fantasy, December 27 2011 for *Generation Dead*

Diversity is a key issue for these reviewers. The problems here are twofold: one, that the texts draw on the comparison to real world prejudices for a fantasy creature - such as with Fangs for the Fantasy, Adele and Leanna - and two, that people of colour or sexualities other than heterosexual are not in the book or shunted to the background - as Jessie and Kira comment on. Leanna and Adele's reviews in particular contrast with earlier comments by Lucy or Patrick, who depicted the zombie as almost a 'stand-in' for any minority. For Leanna and Adele, to use the zombie as an analogy for minority rights is in itself offensive, refusing the concept of a "safe" way to explore issues of discrimination and inequality via metaphor, contrasting with earlier reviews. Again, the topic of whether young adult fiction is primarily didactic comes forth. Earlier reviewers' preferred the aesthetics of the novel to be stronger than the 'preachiness', however, these reviewers wanted a stronger diverse presence.

These responses from readers proved to provide some interesting and alternative readings of the zombie texts. Many considered the themes of the books to be about civil rights, prejudice and inequality, yet some found the works to be preachy and overbearing. While readers did identify the minority issues being claimed by the zombies, few criticised the books for adopting the real struggles of civil rights movements for white, heterosexual

zombies. Perhaps again, this could relate to Dyer's arguments about the invisibility of whiteness, that many reader's perpetuated in their discourse on the novels.

The problem with the lack of real diversity in the novels is that children and young adult literature is often considered to be a teaching tool, to help young readers learn the way of a society and sometimes also to challenge it in a positive way. The plot does seem to mostly impart a positive anti-discrimination message on reader's, however, this message has reduced impact when it merely reproduces white heteronormativity.

Although this was not identified by most reviewers of these books, the lack of minority characters in fiction - particularly children's literature - has not escaped all readers. A significant online campaign was established this year called 'We Need Diverse Books' (or #weneeddiversebooks) by authors Ellen Oh and Malinda Lo to not only raise awareness of the lack of diversity, but also to encourage people to think of solutions and take action by purchasing books with diverse characters and by diverse writers. A study reported by the New York Times identified the dismal proportions of children's books including people of colour. Walter Myers, the author of the New York Times article wrote:

> Books transmit values. They explore our common humanity. What is the message when some children are not represented in those books? ("Where are the People of Color")

In a 2005 article, Kaavonia Hinton and Theordorea Berry examined some of the different ways that a lack of diversity has a real impact on readers such as: they "may believe that they have no value and little or no importance in society"; that minority readers may

read less due to a "cultural mismatch"; and that ultimately, multicultural literature "can play an important part in saving the lives of students by validating their existence" (285).

As campaigns like #weneeddiversebooks and articles such as Dean's identify, the lack of diversity in novels can be an invisible issue to many people, due perhaps to their own identities or familiarity with main characters who are straight and white. As I mentioned earlier, this could be due to hesitations of those who create the books to confront a controversial issue, which would be worthy of study in itself. If, as some argue, young adult books are primarily to support the reader's integration into adult society, what does it say if that reader never sees a character like themselves being the main character of a book? If culture is portrayed through texts, what does it mean if people of colour or LGBTIQ don't even *exist* in the work? While diversity may not have been a concern to the majority of readers in my sample, the topic of needing diversity in the publishing industry has not been silent and its' importance continues to be argued.

Conclusion

Zombie purists may reject against any alteration of Romero's established zombie. But Romero adapted his own monster multiple times, first transforming the Haitian zombie to a cannibalistic horde, then re-creating zombies that rebelled against the extermination of their kind in *Land of the Dead*. It is precisely these differences that allow the zombie to - pun intended - stay alive. Monsters are not just external to humankind, they *are* us.

The romantic zombie draws on aspects of its' predecessors. He is undead, a living corpse with a slow and decaying body, and sometimes cannibalistic. The romantic zombie retains, or regains personality, thought and agency. This curious change in the zombie is what led me to write this thesis. While there were zombie romances in books for both young adult and adult audiences, only young adult books tended to have the relationship in full view of their society.

I agree with Botting that more and more so, the “monstrous others become sites of identification, sympathy, desire and self recognition” (Botting, *Limits of Horror* 38), and it is the systems, institutions and culture that become the terrifying inhuman. In the case of the zombie romances, these systems oppress victims of disease and circumstance. The texts position the zombies as minorities, rejected from human society and targets of discrimination and hate crimes. The zombie is, as its' predecessors were, a figure of Agamben's bare life and the state of exception. Only now, we actually *care* what happens to them: the zombie retains agency and voice and we hear the cries of the oppressed. Their

humanity is not lost, but rather denied to them through social and political loss. It is through romance that their humanity is acknowledged, and sometimes, regained.

The configuration of a young adult paranormal romance combines elements of horror and romance while still being distinct from both. Primarily, scholarship on this genre centres on the vastly more popular vampiric representations. In romantic texts the vampire and the zombie are very different types of heroes, based on the history of other texts and how their monstrous forms have been adapted over time. Where the vampire is powerful, dominating and sexy, the zombie is weak, a victim of circumstance. The vampire requires a woman to tame his wild ways and the zombie needs a woman to heal him, sometimes very literally. In the paranormal romance, the body of the zombie is also altered, but this differs depending on the gender and role of the zombie. The romantic heroes are merely paler than living humans and not significantly altered by their deaths. Female zombies are still entirely bound within patriarchal discourses of feminine beauty.

In Chapter Three, I examined the way alterity is inscribed on the zombie through the use of characterisation in the novels. The depiction of the zombie as Other was inherently problematic as the zombie was simultaneously represented as a minority figure, different from mainstream or living society, and yet is still predominately white and heterosexual. The construction of the zombie as both Other and normal (according to a white/heterosexual hegemony) complicated the novels' previous claims for equality on behalf of the zombie. The refusal to examine intersectionality or 'real' minorities in the diegetic world was also critiqued. Finally, the audience research took a broad view of reviews of each of the first books on Goodreads to see how reader's interpreted and interrogated these concepts of the white zombie passing as a minority figure. Broader themes of civil rights, discrimination and

diversity were identified by many reviewers, however, in the end very few reviews argued that the texts lack in diversity and found the zombie as a minority figure problematic.

Zombies as a cultural artefact give us great insight. Scholars previous, such as Dendle and Bishop, refer to zombies as being indicators of current social anxieties. If so, these zombie romances would indicate that society longs to be united. To bring an end to discrimination and inequality, and respect others whose lives and faces are different, for in the end we are all human. But seeing cultural texts as true depictions of social desires is problematic. Whether through implicit assumptions or even possibly deliberate choice, 'The Human' is marked as white and heterosexual, merely reproducing hegemony and ignoring or rejecting diversity.

The realities that cultural products hope to reproduce or challenge are much more complicated than what Peter in *Dawn of the Dead* said: "They're us, that's all".

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