

Monsters for the Age of the Post-Human

David R. Castillo

What is a Monster?

The etymology of the word *monster* has been traced to the Latin notion of *monstrum* (from *mostrare*, meaning to show, reveal, expose, unveil, display). This connection between the monster and the act of revealing (*mostrare*, and even *demonstrare*) was firmly established by St. Augustine and his followers. The term has also been linked to the Latin verb *monere* (to warn or admonish). This second ascription has gained ground more recently in etymological dictionaries, often associated with the description of abnormal births thought to prognosticate impending disasters (Huet 87). Whether they are viewed as signs of the divine will or interpreted as providential warnings, monsters have been “read” as *bodies pregnant with meaning* for much of the history of Western culture.

In the ancient world, hybrid creatures were also thought of as monsters, although not always evil: the mandrake is a cross between a human and a plant, the centaur between a man and a horse, Pegasus between a horse and a bird, the siren between a woman and a bird, and so on. Yet, as the dualistic Judeo-Christian tradition became dominant in Western culture, hybridity, abnormality, and the crossing of boundaries were increasingly associated with transgression, moral deformity, and evil intent. Hence, the abnormality of the monster would come to be

widely interpreted in European culture as defiance of law, whether it be the natural law or the established political and moral orders. The entry for *monstro* in Covarrubias' *Tesoro de la Lengua* (1611) reads in part "cualquier parto contra la regla y orden natural" (qtd. in Del Río Parra 24) (any birth against the norm and order of nature). Similarly, Covarrubias' French contemporary Jean Riolan discusses monstrosity in connection with the "perverted" nature of hermaphrodites in a 1614 essay. He argues that the sexual hybridity of hermaphrodite monsters is "a perversion of the order of natural causes, the health of the people, and the authority of the king" (qtd. in Daston and Park 203).

While monsters inspire fear, apprehension, and revulsion in (early) modern times, they are also objects of fascination in the curiosity culture of the Renaissance and the Baroque, and later in the Romantic period and beyond. In her insightful book *Una era de monstruos: Representaciones de lo deforme en el Siglo de Oro español*, Elena del Río Parra documents the existence of an early modern tradition within which monsters are viewed as fascinating rarities. Seventeenth-century author Rivilla Bonet y Pueyo, for example, remarks that monstrous births are worthy of curiosity and admiration for their novelty and rarity. His definition of *monstro* extends to encompass anything admirable due to an excess of malice, but also of goodness: "cualquier cosa admirable, no sólo por exceso de malicia, sino tambien de bondad" (qtd. in Del Río Parra 24). The admirable excess of which this seventeenth-century author speaks may indeed be linked to the pursuit of the "extreme" in baroque poetry, art and architecture (Maravall). More importantly for our purposes, this fascination with the rare nature of monsters and their excesses is at the root of the modern aesthetics of the fantastic.

As I have argued elsewhere, the modern fantastic is born in the context of the culture of curiosities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the meeting place between certainty and doubt, and between apprehension and fascination (*Baroque Horrors*). We are very much curious about the monsters we fear. We may be utterly repulsed by them, but we are also fascinated by their extraordinary nature, their perverted views, and their deviant behavior. As Barbara Benedict writes apropos English wonder tales and foundational Gothic fictions from *A Wonder in Staffordshire* (1661), *The Hartfordshire Wonder* (1669), and *Admirable Curiosities of England* (1682) to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and William Beckford's *Vathek* (1782): "Wonder tales and Gothic fictions . . . redefined curiosity as an aesthetic enterprise . . . Imaginary literature became the new arena for the exploration of forbidden areas and the testing of truth" (180).

In Spain, the literary exploration of forbidden areas inhabited by monsters can be traced back to the late Renaissance and early Baroque miscellanea, especially to Antonio de Torquemada's *Jardín de flores*

curiosas (1570) and Julián de Medrano's *La silva curiosa* (1583). These textual cabinets of curiosities incorporated sensationalist "news" and macabre stories and, in some cases, elaborate accounts of preternatural experiences that tested natural, moral, and epistemological boundaries. If other texts from the period, including teratology treatises and *relaciones de sucesos*, offer detailed descriptions of hybrid creatures, abnormal births, and other curiosities, the dark tales included in *Jardín de flores curiosas* and *La silva curiosa* draw a direct link between the figure of the monster and the mysterious realms of the preternatural and the occult.

Torquemada underscores the dreadful consequences of the witch's crossing of natural and moral boundaries. Even accidental exposure to the witch's craft results in monstrous forms of self-alienation in *Jardín de flores curiosas*. By contrast, the pursuit of forbidden knowledge, even black magic, is actually celebrated, rather than punished, in *La silva curiosa*. Thus, the dominant textual presence in Medrano's text is an eccentric first-person narrator, Julio, who is himself a sort of monster obsessed with morbid themes, forbidden knowledge, and perverse lifestyles. The two central characters of *La silva's* final section, "Parte de los epitaphios curiosos hallados por Julio," are Christóbal Salvage, a sorcerer who collects morbid objects and evil spells, and Orcavella, an undead witch who feeds on the blood of innocent children. The narrator refers to both of these characters as *monstro[s] de natura*.

As I have argued in *Baroque Horrors*, early modern ghost stories and dark fantasies featuring monsters like Christóbal Salvage and Orcavella are in fact the direct predecessors of Gothic and Victorian horrors. Clearly Salvage and Orcavella represent a different breed of monster than their Gothic and Victorian counterparts (full-blown literary horrors such as Vathek, Frankenstein, Mr. Hyde, Dorian Gray, and Dracula), but they all express and negotiate deep-seated anxieties about the consequences of human trespasses of the natural, social, and moral orders. As Joseph Conrad perceptively observed in a 1917 letter, "fashions in monsters do change, but the truth of humanity goes on for ever, unchangeable and inexhaustible in the variety of its disclosures" (46). Whether we are considering nineteenth-century or twenty-first-century horrors, or their late sixteenth-century predecessors, I would suggest that the revelations and warnings that come with our dark fantasies are both enduring and historically specific. Thus, death (to provide a particularly apt example) may well be a transhistorical source of anxiety, but our dark fantasies reflect/reshape our anxiety about death in historically specific modes. This is why, when it comes to taking stock of the meaning of horror fiction, I see social-historical and political readings, and feminist and psychoanalytic approaches as

ultimately complementary, in so far as they help us understand different aspects of our favorite monsters and their dwelling places.¹

Modern Vampires

Sorcerers and witches are still popular in our literary and cinematic imagination, but they tend to show up in fairy tales and adventure-type fantasies such as the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* sagas. Even vampires and werewolves have recently crossed over into coming-of-age teenage fantasies, starting with the popular TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and continuing with the hit series *The Vampire Diaries* and the *Twilight* book and movie phenomenon. In these, as well as in adult-oriented novels, movies, and TV series—such as Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* and their film adaptations, and the current HBO series *True Blood*—vampires and humans are sometimes difficult to distinguish from one another. Vampires are often “humanized” in these pop culture blockbusters. In the case of *True Blood*, the point is not necessarily that vampires are humanized, but, more accurately, that humanity is “vampirized;” that is, humans are represented as vampire-like monsters who are just as likely to prey on the vampires as the vampires are to prey on them.

True Blood goes further than *Buffy*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Twilight* in projecting a fantasy world in which vampires and humans may coexist thanks in part to the mass-production of a blood substitute for vampire consumption. The availability of this nutritional product allows some vampires to come out of the closet, so to speak. Their integration into mainstream society proves difficult, nonetheless, since most humans continue to think of them as evil spawns and dangerous predators. Many humans show scorn for those who associate with vampires. Their mantra is “God hates fangs.” Similarly, most vampires disapprove of those from within their ranks who treat humans as equals rather than as an inferior race. The mistrust between humans and vampires is exacerbated by the persistence of vampires who live clandestine lives while refusing to give up their favorite meal: human blood. The most intriguing twist of the series, however, has to do with the fact that vampire blood is shown to have hallucinogenic and sense-enhancing properties if consumed by humans. This leads to the development of blood markets that exploit vampires as well as humans. Hence, the series features a number of elaborate and graphic scenes in which human predators capture and immobilize vampires in order to harvest their precious blood to either consume it themselves or to sell it in the drug market.

We can say that *True Blood* makes explicit what some critics see as an implicit or latent yet central element in the modern tradition of vampire fiction going back to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. What I have in mind here is not simply *the return of the repressed*, at least not in the general sense in which werewolves and characters like Mr. Hyde represent a regression to a primal animality that lurks deep inside of us, hidden under layers of civilizing safeguards. Instead, I am thinking of the "economic repressed" that Karl Marx remarked upon when he referred to capital as a vampire-like machine, "a circulating thing which gains its energy only by preying upon 'living labor'" (Gelder 146).

Prior to the nineteenth century, the figure of the vampire was mostly found in folk tales which, as Ken Gelder notes, grounded him into a localized spot. Thus, the vampire was essentially a local or regional monster. By contrast, more recent vampires are defined by extensive circulation through and across regional and national boundaries. In Stoker's *Dracula*, the ancient vampire uproots himself from his native land of Transylvania, deep inside the Carpathian mountains, to travel to London, at the very center of the British Empire, where he plans to "sate his lust for blood and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless" (*Dracula*, qtd. in Arata 166). In its updated "world-traveler" version, the vampire may be seen as an apt mirror-image of the colonizer. Stephen Arata has called attention to this intriguing aspect of Stoker's novel. As he argues in "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization":

The novel thus sets up an equivalence between Harker and Dracula: one can be seen as an Orientalist travelling East, the Other – unsettling thought for Stoker's Victorian readers—as an Occidentalist travelling West . . . Dracula's preoccupation with English culture is not motivated by a disinterested desire for knowledge; instead, his Occidentalism represents the essence of bad faith, since it both promotes and masks the Count's sinister plan to invade and exploit Britain and her people. By insisting on the connections between Dracula's growing knowledge and his power to exploit, Stoker also forces us to acknowledge how Western imperial practices are implicated in certain forms of knowledge. Stoker continually draws our attention to the affinities between Harker and Dracula, as in the oft-cited scene where Harker looks for Dracula's reflection in the mirror and sees only himself. (170)²

If Stoker's *Dracula* can be read as a mirror-image of the colonizer, a personification of the "late-Victorian nightmare of reverse colonization" (Arata 166), more recent novels have provided historically updated and nuanced versions of the "economic repressed" that may be revealed in

and through the vampire metaphor. Thus, the iconic blood-sucking monster has presently been called upon to personify the institution of slavery in its modern version, and also to represent the predatory practices of global corporations in our post-colonial world. In his best-selling novel *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter* (2010), Seth Grahame-Smith reimagines the figure of the vampire in the context of a fictionalized reconstruction of Civil War America. In Grahame-Smith's historical fantasy, the genuine American vampires are white southern aristocrats who feed on helpless black slaves.

While Stoker's Occidental vampire may work as "a metaphor for capital" (Moretti 149) in the colonial age, Grahame-Smith's Americanization of the vampire theme turns this old world monster into an allegory of modern slavery. The novel's graphic scenes of mechanized blood extraction are particularly telling in this regard. Here is a good example: "Only now did I see the dark glass tubes running over our heads, running from the bodies on our left to the vessels on our right. Only now did I see the blood running into those vessels, kept warm by a row of tiny gas flames beneath. Only now did I see the chests of these 'corpses' moving with each shallow breath. And here the whole horror of it struck me" (192). The narrator's detailed description of the mechanized harvesting of blood from the bodies of immobilized slaves who are kept alive solely for this purpose suggests that this extreme form of human predation (the peculiar institution) ought not to be thought of as a "residual horror" or a left-over byproduct of a bygone era, but rather as a modern form of violence and exploitation. This may begin to explain why, despite its obvious cinematic plasticity, the above-quoted scene from Grahame-Smith's novel did not make it into the film adaptation, a mainstream shoot-'em-up movie that was released with the same title as the book in 2012.

We can find similar scenes of mechanized blood extraction in the vampire trilogy co-authored recently by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan, especially in the third novel of the series *The Night Eternal* (2011). Here the "efficient extraction and packaging of human blood" (206–7) takes place in slaughterhouses that have been converted into "blood factories" (86) following the Master's imperialist design. The Master is a Dracula-like figure whose American success is largely dependent on his business sense and his ability to understand the *mathematics of power* in corporate America: "The Master learned to align himself with influential power brokers . . . He devised a formula for the mathematics of power. The perfect balance of vampires, cattle, and wardens" (213). I interpret these references to the Master's mathematics of power as a cautionary note directed against corporate America. Thus, in keeping with the logic behind Moretti's and Arata's "economic" readings of Stoker's classic work, I would argue that the

novelistic trilogy co-authored by del Toro and Hogan accomplishes an insightful and effective updating of the vampire metaphor for our own post-colonial time. Briefly stated, the Master's vampire regime may be read as a dark metaphor of the objectifying tyranny of the present global market.

Post-Human Zombies

If the predatory practices of our favorite vampires, going back to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, mirror the darkest aspects of human nature and possibly reveal (mostrare/demonstrare) and warn against (monere) the "economic repressed" of Western modernity, what can we say about the blind cannibalistic drive of their popular zombie cousins? What kind of monsters are the walking dead? What do they reveal about us? What do they warn us against?

Since the release of George Romero's classic film *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the walking dead are imagined in cinematic fantasies and print fiction as agents of the apocalypse. In the post-Romero zombie culture, the rise of the dead is most often envisioned as a cataclysmic byproduct of the progress of human technology. This is something that the new walking dead share with the monstrous machines featured in such blockbuster fantasies as *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* sagas. Like robots and computers, zombies have no soul. Yet while the rise of the machines is motivated by their will to power, the rise of the dead is aimless. Unlike vampires and rebellious machines, Romero's walking dead have no agenda and no will. They are driven by an insatiable and unexplained appetite for living human flesh.

To be sure, Romero's zombies have no *anima*, no internal life-principle. They are animated instead by an outside force. Their behavior is remarkably similar to Terminator-style automatons, machines programmed to kill; except that there is no programmer and no master design behind their (up)rising. Unlike the "domestic" zombies associated with West African and South African religions and Haitian folklore, Romero's herds of walking dead have nothing to do with mystical or spiritualist practices. They are simply cannibalistic masses of decaying human flesh.

In the last few years, zombie fantasies have flooded the horror and sci-fi markets. They have taken over much of our popular print culture, as well as our screens, with such best-selling novels as Max Brooks's *World War Z* (now a major motion picture), short story collections like *The Living Dead*, comic book and TV series such as *The Walking Dead*, and countless video games. In fact, the walking dead have stepped

outside the boundaries of fiction to show up in the streets of our most populous cities, even in our own news cycles. Nowadays, it seems that every major town must host its own zombie walk. Remarkably, the CDC (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) have had to issue zombie-related statements.

Last summer, I received an intriguing email request from a columnist with *The Miami Herald*. The message illustrates the extent to which the zombie craze has taken hold of the public's imagination:

For the last 10 days, Miami has been riveted by the story of a nude, apparently psychotic man, perhaps under the influence of some drug, who attacked and nearly killed a homeless man, ripping off most of the fellow's face with his teeth before a policeman shot and killed the assailant. Since, all sort of references have bubbled up about, among other things, a Zombie virus. As mindless as this premise might be, apparently the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta felt compelled to issue a statement: "The flesh-eating living dead don't actually exist," said a spokesman for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "CDC does not know of a virus or condition that would reanimate the dead (or one that would present zombie-like symptoms)," agency spokesman David Daigle told the *Huffington Post*. I had already been thinking about the peculiar prevalence of Zombies and Vampires and Werewolves in our pop culture, with probably more references in TV and movies and books than religion. I just wonder . . . if folks like you have some explanation for this quirk in contemporary culture. (signed Fred Grimm, a columnist with *The Miami Herald*)

The Miami Herald would subsequently publish Grimm's article on the subject on June 5, 2012, with the title "Fear, anxiety drive zombie craze." While my own response arrived a few hours too late and therefore did not make it into the published piece, Grimm's article incorporated comments from English Professors Kyle Bishop (Southern Utah University) and David Schmid (SUNY Buffalo), and anthropologist Elizabeth Bird (University of South Florida). Notably, they all coincide in pointing out that our present fascination with monsters, especially zombies, bespeaks of—in Schmid's words—"a society driven by fears and anxieties of various kinds, including uncertainty about the future". Kyle Bishop, author of *American Zombie Gothic*, writes: "I thought we as a culture were simply seeing a renewed and increased interest in monster narratives as a gut-check reaction to 9/11 and the War on Terror. Now, however, the zombie has become something much more visceral, something that has taken hold of our collective unconscious" (Grimm). For her part Elizabeth Bird notes that

we use “our monsters to try to explain our society (and vice versa),” which is why zombies have become our favorite surrogates when it comes to expressing the fear of nuclear and pandemic catastrophes and environmental collapse, as well as “the idea that we are consuming ourselves” (Grimm).

If the modern vampire may have functioned as an apt metaphor for the predatory practices of capital in colonial and post-colonial societies, the zombie hordes may best express present anxieties about the dreadful fate of a world inhabited by post-human crowds of mindless, soulless consumers.³ I would further argue that our fixation with apocalyptic fantasies—world-wide zombie plagues, nuclear disasters, environmental collapse, and other man-made catastrophes—is fundamentally tied to the widespread conviction that there is no possible alternative to capitalism as a world-wide economic system, paired with the growing realization, or at least the suspicion, that the logical evolution of global capitalism will inexorably lead to our self-destruction.⁴ In a famous scene of Romero’s second zombie film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), a group of zombies approaches the shopping mall where the survivors have taken refuge. One of the survivors looks out beyond the glass doors and says “They are us.” Could this be the fundamental revelation of Romero’s films? Are we the true zombies? Masses of walking dead driven by insatiable, senseless, catastrophic consumption? This revelation would indeed come with a grim warning about our present and immediate future: the end of the human race (an apocalypse of our own making) is upon us.

Interestingly, when we examine some of the latest products of the global zombie culture, it appears as though the zombie masses that have taken away—literally swallowed up—our future are intent in cannibalizing the past as well. A perfect example of this recent twist in zombie literature is Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), a seemingly parodic reworking of Jane Austen’s nineteenth-century classic. The book cover emphasizes this parodic distance: “An expanded edition of the beloved Jane Austen novel featuring all new scenes of bone-crunching zombie mayhem . . . Complete with romance, heartbreak, swordfights, cannibalism, and thousands of rotting corpses, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* transforms a masterpiece of world literature into something you’d actually want to read.” Yet, in reading this bastardized version of Austen’s novel, I couldn’t shake the impression that much of Graham-Smith’s “expanded edition” functions as a pastiche, rather than a parody, in that it merely accentuates the ironic tone of Austen’s original work and her sharp criticism of the idle British aristocracy of the early nineteenth century. Thus, the presence of zombies seems to underscore

the monstrous (cannibal) nature of a decadent aristocratic body that feeds on the life-energy of local workers and distant colonial subjects.

Spanish Zombies

In Spain, we can find scores of walking dead fantasies, most of which have been published in the last few years, including your run-of-the-mill zombie apocalypse, as well as more nuanced parodies and pastiches. In January 2006 a young Spanish lawyer, Manel Loureiro posted a blog with the title *Apocalipsis Z*. As the number of daily visitors reached the half million mark, Loureiro secured a contract with Dolmen to publish a print version of the blog. The printed text came out in 2007 with the same title. Since, Dolmen has published dozens of Spanish language zombie fantasies in its dedicated series Línea Z, including Carlos Sisí's *Los caminantes*, which went through fifteen reprints between 2009 and 2012, and its equally popular sequel *Necrópolis*. Loureiro ended up publishing the continuation of *Apocalipsis Z* in two volumes that came out in the well-established press Plaza Janés, *Los días oscuros* (2010) and *La ira de los justos* (2011). For his part, Carlos Sisí would also venture outside of Dolmen's Línea Z with the third volume of his zombie trilogy, *Los Caminantes: Hades Nebula*, published by Minotauro in 2011. The popularity of Loureiro's and Sisí's respective trilogies has significantly contributed to the current boom of zombie fiction in Spain. This boom includes many original Spanish language works, as well as a multitude of translations of English language zombie novels, short stories, zombie survival manuals, graphic novels, and so on. Most of these works do little but recreate the zombie apocalypse, Romero style, while piling on the gore. Among them, I have selected a few narratives for commentary based on my own sense of what constitutes novel or revealing trends and variations in zombie themes.

One of the most self-consciously spectacular offerings of the zombie subgenre in Spain is Víctor Conde's *Naturaleza muerta* (2009). As the title suggests, Conde arranges his graphic scenes of zombie gore as macabre still lifes. The book's cover, designed by Alejandro Colucci, underscores this postmodern (or neobaroque) interdiscursive connection. Thus, Colucci's elaborate illustration is explicitly evocative of traditional still lifes and vanitas. We can see a fruit basket filled with fresh apples and grapes, a wheel of cheese made to look like an old-fashioned clock, and several ceramic containers, resting on a clothed kitchen table, alongside objects that symbolize human knowledge, such as an old book and a quill. The picture is complete with a severed forearm resting near a few pieces of bread at the edge of a napkin, which

partially covers fresh blood stains. In the background, a drawn curtain reveals a painted human skull at the bottom corner of what appears to be a Baroque vanitas. Colucci's illustration effectively captures Conde's pictorial imagination and neobaroque gusto. The following passage is a good example of Conde's pictorial technique:

Zurek permaneció fiel a su estoicismo incluso cuando vio como le arrancaban un cuarto de kilo de carne de sus michelines. Alargó desesperadamente las manos hacia atrás, intentando buscar un asidero para los dedos, pero lo que encontró fue un antebrazo amputado. Estaba tirado encima de una bandeja con vasos y jarras de cerámica. Al lado había un caballete caído sobre un macizo de gardenias. Captó la ironía del mensaje: alguien se había entretenido pintando una naturaleza muerta, mientras su pareja o sus hijos se bañaban en la piscina, sin llegar a sospechar que semejante elemento macabro quedaría añadido alguna vez al cuadro. En el fondo no alteraba el contenido, pues sólo había cosas muertas en la composición. (296)

(Zurek remained loyal to his stoicism even as he saw how they severed a quarter of a kilogram of flesh from his midsection flab. He desperately stretched his hands backwards, in an attempt to find something his fingers could hold, but what he found was an amputated forearm. It was lying on a tray with glasses and ceramic jars. Beside it, there was an easel fallen on a bed of gardenias. He realized the irony of the message: someone had been leisurely painting a still life, while his partner or kids were swimming in the pool, unsuspecting of the fact that such macabre element would add to the painting. In truth it didn't alter its meaning, since there were only dead things in the composition.)

Starting with the flesh severed from Zurek's midsection, and continuing with the amputated forearm of the anonymous artist displayed on a serving tray, alongside some glasses and ceramic containers, this scene may be best described as a macabre mis-en-abyme of "dead things." As the angle expands to include the immediate surroundings, we can see the artist's easel laying on a bed of gardenias, a final vision of destruction, but also the first image of something whole and alive in nature, not *naturaleza muerta*, but *naturaleza viva*. This final element of the composition allows us to draw a close connection with the novel's ending, which offers the same severe contrast, the same chiaroscuro, between "dead things" (the self-inflicted destruction of humanity) and the rapidly growing bed of invading greenery, which is said to be taking over the post-human Earth. Captain Piotr's view from his satellite post

in outer space offers the ultimate opening of the lens: “bosque tipo pangea . . . verdor agresivo . . . naturaleza que se veía por fin libre de ese cáncer llamado Hombre . . . Naturaleza Viva” (311) (Pangaea-type forest . . . aggressive greenery . . . nature that was finally free from the cancer of Man . . . Nature Alive).

In this sense, Conde’s *Naturaleza muerta* is not just a fictional chronicle of the death of Man, but also a post-apocalyptic utopia of the rebirth of Nature. Ironically, both the zombie pandemic and the rebirth of nature are caused by exposure to the same radiation. The final destruction of the human race and the post-apocalyptic image of a rersurging human-less planet Earth represents the fulfillment of the unauthorized translation of an Old Testament prophecy mentioned in an earlier passage: “una de las arcaicas traducciones del Antiguo Testamento . . . contenía un último capítulo en que se vaticinaba el fin de la humanidad y el reino de las bestias y de los árboles, y de todo lo natural que no incluyera a los hijos de Adán” (241). (One of the ancient translations of the Old Testament . . . contained a final chapter that prophesied the end of humanity and the kingdom of the beasts and the trees, and of the entire natural world, excluding the sons and daughters of Adam).

There are other moments in which the narrative reaches back into the past in search of ancient Judeo-Christian motifs and symbology that might offer grounds for speculation regarding the possibility of previous zombie (up)risings. Would the zombies have been present in the epoch-changing events of our past? Could they have been the key agents of Western history?

Zurek se preguntó si el regreso de los muertos no se habría producido ya en varias ocasiones, a lo largo de la historia, y por lo tanto no era un suceso aislado y excepcional . . . ¿Podrían haberse levantado los inquilinos de las fosas comunes de Europa y América para extender las plagas? ¿Se habría asentado tanto el cristianismo por la Europa aún humeante de las cenizas del Imperio Romano . . . gracias a que los testigos de aquellas plagas de pellejos vieron en ellas una prueba de que, efectivamente, existía la Resurrección? ¿Fue Jesús el primer zombie . . . y por eso regresó al tercer día para contaminar a los miembros que quedaban de su secta? (222)

(Zurek wondered if the return of the dead would not have taken place on several occasions already, throughout history, and therefore it wasn’t an isolated or exceptional event . . . Would the dwellers of mass graves in Europe and America have turned up to extend the plagues? Would Christianity have advanced so quickly

over the smoking ashes of the Roman Empire . . . thanks to the witnesses of zombie plagues who saw in them proof of the Resurrection? Was Jesus the first zombie . . . and that's why he returned on the third day to contaminate the remaining members of his sect?)

The notion that the undead may have walked the Earth in other historical periods is explored in a good number of recent novels, including *La muerte negra: El triunfo de los no-muertos* and *Quijote Z*, both authored by Házael G. González and published in 2010 in the Línea Z series of Dolmen. The first reimagines the great plague of 1348 known as the Black Death as a zombie outbreak. The second plays on classic cervantine motifs and situations, and on Cervantes' self-consciously parodic narrative style, to offer a bizarre pastiche featuring a man obsessed with zombie stories who takes to the road in order to become a zombie slayer.

Among the Spanish Golden Age classics, the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* has been subjected to the same kind of zombie refurbishing in an Ediciones Debolsillo bestseller published with the title *Lazarillo Z: Matar zombies nunca fue pan comido* (*Lazarillo Z: Killing Zombies Was Never Easy*), signed by a Lázaro González Pérez de Tormes. In this 2010 reworking of the original picaresque novel, first published in 1554, Lázaro becomes a heroic vampire warrior who fights a zombie plague that originated in the New World as a form of Indian revenge (167). His fighting comrades are the “desechos de la Corona” (83), a bizarre group of pícaros, prostitutes, and vampires, led by a homosexual nobleman and his morisco partner.

In these macabre pastiches, the monstrous subject-matter spills over into its container. These are not just monster narratives, but *monstrous narratives*, zombie monstrosities in their own right. A perfect example of this type of self-conscious monstrosity is Hernán Migoya's zombie reconstruction of the recent political history of Spain in *Una, grande y zombie* (2011) (*One, Great and Zombie*). Migoya's scandalous text features an undead Francisco Franco, who along with his sidekick Manuel Fraga, and a zombie army of politicians and journalists, led by the recently “converted” José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy, plan to resurrect the true and essential Spain: One, Great and Zombie. King Juan Carlos will also be “converted” to the imperial zombie cause near the end of the novel. In the final scene, the king and uncle Franco (“el tío Paco”) will team up to devour his majesty's mistress whose ripped body, ready for consumption (“hecha lonchas”), appears to be offered as an allegory of the people of Spain: the Spain of flesh and blood.

Migoya's exhibitionist cynicism is reminiscent of the dark eccentricity of Medrano's early Baroque fantasy in *La silva curiosa*, while his theatrical self-reflectivity seems closer to the cervantine style, especially in those passages in which fiction and reality meet face to face, often spilling into each other. The discussion of the conventions of the zombie genre or subgenre in chapter eleven, aptly titled "Ateniéndose a los desechos," echoes similar conversations in *Don Quixote* regarding the conventions of chivalric and pastoral literature: "—El concepto de zombi también ha cambiado con la evolución de la cultura popular—apuntaló Pere . . . Los zombis de ahora no son como los de hace cien años . . . No fue hasta los años sesenta cuando George A. (la A es importante) Romero lo cambió todo con *La noche de los muertos vivientes* . . . El creó esa noción pesadillesca de una invasión de zombis global. Los muertos vivientes de hoy son realmente eso" (192). (The concept of the zombie has also changed with the evolution of popular culture—noted Pere . . . Today's zombies are not like those of a hundred years ago . . . It wasn't until the sixties that George A. (the A is important) Romero changed everything with *The Night of the Living Dead* . . . He created the nightmarish notion of a global zombie invasion. The living dead of today are really that).

The conversation between Pere and Evaristo, "el héroe de la película" (192) (the movie's hero), moves into the scatological terrain when Pere points out some inconsistencies in the standard treatment of the zombie material: "Todo el mundo sabe que los zombis no cagan, otra incoherencia del mito. Porque entonces, ¿adónde van a parar todos esos cuerpos humanos que se comen?" (195) (Everyone knows that the zombies don't shit, another incoherence of the myth. So then, where do all those human bodies that they eat go?). Note the connection with the often cited conversation of Don Quixote and Sancho about whether or not the bewitched defecate in *Don Quixote* II, 23.⁵

One of the more interesting "cervantine" occurrences takes place in chapter seventeen, titled "La corta marcha," when the participants in the "III Zombie Walk de Barcelona" come face to face with the real thing. The crowd is carrying movies, books, comics, posters, and other zombie paraphernalia, "variada zarandaja relativa al *merchandising* y oferta de ocio referida al fenómeno" (all that nonsensical stuff that goes with the *merchandising* and the marketing of the [zombie] phenomenon). Some of the participants possess (and treasure) copies of Migoya's own book: "este libro que usted tiene abierto en sus manos" (307). The cervantine trick of dragging his work into the fictional world of the text allows Migoya to tie his own zombie novel (and its publisher and readers) to the marketing ploys that he is exposing. When the participants of the zombie "simulacro" (308) finally meet the real zombies, they are first

elated to come across such realistic hordes of parading comrades before they are literally swallowed up by the zombie phenomenon.

Speaking of being swallowed up by the zombie phenomenon, author Manuel Martín made a telling confession in the biographical note of his zombie novel *Noche de difuntos del 38* (2012) (Night of the Dead in 1936). His candidly cynical disclosure is reminiscent of the pícaro's confession in the prologue of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, except that the confession of the anonymous sixteenth-century author was about the scandal of his life (*el caso*), while Martín's is about the scandal of his writing: "Además, sus señorías, el acusado declara, que con premeditada alevosía mutó una historia de terror ambientada en la batalla del Ebro para transformarla en una novela zombi, harto como estaba de recibir negativas a sus intentos de publicación" (Moreover, your lordships, the accused declares that he transformed, with premeditated treachery, a story of terror set in the midst of the battle of the Ebro into a zombie novel, for he was tired of receiving negative reactions in response to his attempts to publish his work). Martín's confession is also an act of self-defense and an implicit accusation directed against the current culture industry (a zombie phenomenon in its own right), and against the (zombie) readers, i.e., those avid consumers of standardized zombie products that might have showed up for Migoya's "III Zombie Walk de Barcelona."

José Fernández Gonzalo concluded in his monographic study *Filosofía zombi* (2011) that "el zombie representa en este punto el mito del hombre posmoderno" (195) (the zombie represents at this point the myth of the postmodern man). With this assertion in mind, I would argue that Migoya's "cervantine" treatment of the zombie phenomenon and Martín's Lázaro-style confession reveal the true face of the (not so mythical) monster. On the one hand, the countless zombie books, movies, TV shows, and video games represent the kind of repetition of standardized models that we associate with marketing ploys and the dehumanizing objectification of mass culture. On the other, many of these same cultural products explicitly warn us about the devastating effects of the market forces that result in mindless and catastrophic mass-production and mass-consumption. This self-reflective cynicism is why the zombie phenomenon is the perfect monster for the age of the post-human. The zombies are us in more ways than one.

Notes

1. For psychoanalytic and feminist approaches, see Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* and Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. José Monleón's *A Specter is Haunting*

Europe is a classic example of the social-historical treatment of the modern fantastic.

2. Arata provides further evidence of this suggested equivalence between Harker and Dracula in the following passage: “The text’s insistence that these characters are capable of substituting for one another becomes most pressing when Dracula twice dons Harker’s clothes to leave the Castle. Since on both occasions the Count’s mission is to plunder the town, we are encouraged to see a correspondence between the vampire’s actions and those of the travelling Westerner. The equivalence between these two sets of actions is underlined by the reaction of the town’s people, who have no trouble believing that it really is Harker, the visiting Englishman, who is stealing their goods, their money, their children. The peasant woman’s anguished cry—‘Monster, give me my child!’ (ibid., 60)—is directed at him, not Dracula” (170).
3. While the notion of the post-human can be traced back to different (and often conflicting) theorizations, such as those of Robert Pepperell (*The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*) and Katherine Hayles (*How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*), this concept has been recently associated with the zombie phenomenon; see the multi-authored volume *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, edited by Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro.
4. As Slavoj Žižek writes in *The Ticklish Subject*: “The horizon of social imagination no longer allows us to entertain the idea of an eventual demise of capitalism . . . everybody tacitly accepts that capitalism is here to stay” (218).
5. See my discussion in chapter four of *(A)Wry Views* (2001).

Works Cited

- Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter*. Dir. Timur Beckmambetov. 2013. Film.
- Arata, Stephen. “The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization.” *The Horror Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder. New York: Routledge, 2000. 161–72. Print.
- Benedict, Barbara. *A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. Print.
- Bishop, Kyle. *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2010. Print.
- Brooks, Max. *World War Z. An Oral History of the Zombie War*. New York: Crown, 2006. Print.
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. WB Television Network Series. Dir. Joss Whedon. DVD.
- Castillo, David R. *(A)Wry Views: Anamorphosis, Cervantes, and the Early Picaresque*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001. Print.
- _____. *Baroque Horrors: Roots of the Fantastic in the Age of Curiosities*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010. Print.
- Christie, Deborah and Sarah Juliet Lauro. *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011. Print.
- Conde, Victor. *Naturaleza muerta*. Palma de Mallorca: Dolmen, 2009. Print.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Notes on Life and Letters*. Objective Systems Pty Ltd ACN 085 119 953. 2007.

- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Daston, Lorraine, and Katherine Park. *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*. New York: Zone Books, 1998. Print.
- Dawn of the Dead*. Dir. George Romero. 1978. DVD.
- Del Río Parra, Elena. *Una era de monstruos: Representaciones de lo deforme en el Siglo de Oro español*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2003. Print.
- Del Toro, Guillermo, and Chuck Hogan. *The Night Eternal*. New York: HaperCollins Publishing, 2011. Print.
- Fernández Gonzalo, Jorge. *Filosofía zombie*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2011. Print.
- Gelder, Ken. "Introduction to Part 5." *The Horror Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder. New York: Routledge, 2000. 145–47. Print.
- Grahame-Smith, Seth. *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010. Print.
- _____. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Philadelphia: Quirk Productions, 2009. Print.
- González, Házael. *La muerte negra. El triunfo de los no muertos*. Palma de Mallorca: Dolmen, 2010. Print.
- _____. *Quijote Z*. Palma de Mallorca: Dolmen, 2010. Print.
- González Pérez de Tormes, Lázaro. *Lazarillo Z: Matar Zombies nunca fue pan comido*. Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2010. Print.
- Grimm, Fred. "Fear, anxiety drive zombie craze." *Miami Herald Online*. 4 June 2012. Web. 11 December 2013.
- Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Print.
- Huet, Marie-Hélène. "Introduction to *Monstrous Imagination*." *The Horror Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder. New York: Routledge, 2000. 84–89. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. León Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.
- Loureiro, Manel. *Apocalipsis Z*. Dolmen: Palma de Mallorca, 2007. Print.
- Maravall, José Antonio. *La cultura del barroco: Análisis de una estructura histórica*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1975. Print.
- Martín, Manuel. *Noche de difuntos del 38*. Palma de Mallorca: Dolmen, 2012. Print.
- The Matrix*. Dir. Larry Wachowski and Andy Wachowski. 1999. DVD.
- Medrano, Julián de. *La silva curiosa*. Ed. Mercedes Alcalá Galán. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. Print.
- Migoya, Hernán. *Una, grande y zombie*. Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2011. Print.
- Monleón, José. *A Specter is Haunting Europe. A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. Print.
- Moretti, Franco. "Dialectic of Fear (Extract)." *The Horror Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder. New York: Routledge, 2000. 148–60. Print.
- The Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. George Romero. DVD.
- Pepperell, Robert. *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*. Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2003. Print.
- Sisí, Carlos. *Los caminantes*. Dolmen: Palma de Mallorca, 2009. Print.
- The Terminator*. Dir. James Cameron. 1984. DVD.
- Torquemada, Antonio de. *Jardín de flores curiosas*. Ed. Giovanni Allegra. Madrid: Castalia, 1982. Print.
- True Blood*. HBO Series. Produced by Alan Ball. DVD.
- The Vampire Diaries*. CW Television Network Series. Produced by Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec. TV.

The Walking Dead. AMC Network Television Series. Produced by Frank Darabont.
TV.

Castillo, David. "Monsters for the Age of the Post-Human" *Writing Monsters: Essays on Iberian and Latin American Cultures*. Eds. Adriana Gordillo and Nicholas Spadaccini. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 15 (Spring 2014): 161–78. Web.
