



Victimizing Zombies: A Study in Two Post – Apocalyptic Fictions

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ABSTRACT

Apocalyptic theory embraces a variety of ideas concerning reasons for the end of the world. In Literature the apocalyptic concept exists in exploring the conflict between good and evil, to convey messages or to reveal hidden expectations about the future.

In this respect, Zombism is a type of post-apocalyptic concept, where the aftermath of social collapse, bio-war and moral decay often depicted as rebirth of corpses to consume the living as a kind of renewal.

Post-apocalyptic theme, is depicted in *Zone One* by Colson Whitehead and *Rot & Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry. The two fiction - novels present how human nature can change during the collapse of civilization, and struggle to survive in a world stripped from humanity. Usually zombies are victimizers who eat living humans, yet sometimes this horror reality can be seen from a different perspective, they can be seen as victims for the modern miss use of civilization.

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الزومبي كضحايا : دراسة في روايتين في ما بعد نهاية العالم

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المُستخلص

تتضمن نظرية نهاية العالم مجموعة متنوعة من الأفكار المتعلقة بأسباب نهاية العالم. ويعود مفهوم نهاية العالم إلى بعض كتب التراث الديني والمعتقدات، مُحدداً كيف سيكون المستقبل المُحتمل نتيجةً لفقدان الإنسانية. ففي الأدب، يُستخدم مفهوم نهاية العالم لاستكشاف الصراع بين الخير والشر لنقل رسائل أو كشف توقعات خفية عن المستقبل. وتتناول الروايات المختارة ما بعد نهاية العالم؛ وهي قصصٌ من أفواه الناجين كتحذيرٍ للبشرية مما ينتظرهم في المستقبل بسبب سوء استخدام التقدم العلمي.

في هذا الصدد، يُعد موضوع الزومبي نوعاً من مفاهيم ما بعد نهاية العالم، فغالباً ما تُصوّر عواقب الانهيار الاجتماعي، والكوارث البيئية، وإساءة استخدام التكنولوجيا، والحرب البيولوجية، والانحلال الأخلاقي؛ على أنها إعادة الحياة للموتى لالتهام الأحياء كنوع من العقاب أو التجديد. ويعد الزومبي في الأصل، مفهوماً فولكلورياً موجوداً في الثقافة الهايتية، وعادةً ما يظهر بوصفه قلقاً وأمراضاً ناتجة عن الانهيار الاجتماعي.

أما موضوع ما بعد نهاية العالم، فغير واقعي، كما هو مُصوّر في رواية "المنطقة الأولى" لـ كولسون وايتهايد، ورواية "التعفن والخراب" لجوناثان مايبيري، وكلاهما رواية خيالية. تُصوّر هذه الروايات كيف تتغير الطبيعة البشرية مع انهيار الحضارة، وكيف تُكافح من أجل البقاء في عالمٍ مُجرّد من الإنسانية بسبب ظروفٍ قاسية. عادةً ما يكون الزومبي هو المعتدي، ويأكلون البشر الأحياء، ولكن في بعض الأحيان يُمكن النظر إلى هذا الواقع المُزعج من منظورٍ مختلف، إذ يُمكن عدّهم ضحايا لسوء استخدام التطور في العصر الحديث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الزومبي، ما بعد نهاية العالم، أكل لحوم البشر، التجديد

1. Introduction:

There are many unexpected backgrounds that can be used in apocalyptic novels, such as alien invaders, nuclear war and fierce weather. So what is the idea behind choosing zombies as a vehicle for grounding the actual future scenario. Zombie attack is the reasonable threat that appears as an effect of the unpredictable doomsday. The focus is on the survivor's behavior when social structures collapses (Domingo, 2019).

Being in fragile communities, where law and order is breaking down, due to mistrustful governmental plans, people suffer from psychological anxiety fear from a future that seems clearly collapsing. Zombie stories starts to raise up, and questions turn up to the minds, about what it means to be human (Lauro, 2017).

The Term 'Zombie' originally comes from the Haitian folklore, depicting resurrected corpse by using dark magic (Vodou wizard) to attack and consume living human. Later the concept transferred into western literature, shaping new forms and implications. One of the best definitions for the term 'zombie' is by the lawyer Emmanuel Felix in her book *Understanding Haitian Voodoo* (2009), she says: "[zombie] is a living dead, ... He is gone through a change of state and in a new mental and physical state. He loses all freedom of thought and action, and all will. His new life is filled with threats, and he is forced to work, ... etc." (p.47).

In Haitian literature, the symbol of zombie often represents slavery and political oppression especially during the time of Duvalier tyranny. The monstrous folklore merged to The United States during its occupation of Haiti during the twentieth century, but it took different interpretation of cannibalism representing how people survive in an uncontrolled civilization, dangerous societal breakdown and lack of humanity (Kumari, 2021).

In many zombie fictions, humans are the actual primary victims. They will turn to zombies after being bitten by a zombie, or will be consumed by a zombie. Usually, this is the expected scenario that horrifies the living people who fight to survive (Sabr, A. Jubair, A. Karyosh, 2015). Presenting zombie as a victim not a victimizer, and humans are the actual victimizers. That is the gap that this study is going to fill.

The study analyse two zombie fictions; *Zone One* by Colson Whitehead and *Rod & Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry. They are zombie apocalypse fiction - novels, dealing with a post-pandemic virus turning people to zombies. The novels concentrate on the psychological suffering of the survivors, due to killing the positive images of zombies for they are harmless, under the name of building a clean community. Characters struggle with moral complications in risky conditions. By using post-apocalyptic view, writers often envision possible science advancement of the future.

2. Literature Review:

The obsession with the apocalypse has become a trendy theme that overwhelm people in Modern age, maybe because of the fear of future or predicting the misuse of technology to create an assumed civilization that is hunting their minds.

Thomas H. Strickland, presents zombie in his study “*Zombie Literature: Analyzing the Fear of the Unknown through Popular Culture.*”; he concludes that the western culture anxiety of the monster inside man, that may rise due to social breakdown. Religious and social laws usually control the evil spirit within each man, so the collapse of theme sets such evil spirits free.

Simon Bacon in his “*Zombie Futures in Literature, Media and Culture*” explores zombies across poetry, television, films and literature. Assuring that zombie is a cultural imagination that presents the fear of climate change leading to famine that creates flesh eaters to survive.

What is interesting is that some authors start re telling classical literature through zombie themes like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016); which is a parody horror film to Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813. This blending of classical and horror is to criticize capitalism and societal breakdown, and it can be considered as a metaphor for the greedy capitalism which causes a wide gap between the poor and rich classes.

In *Warm Bodies* (2013), which is another modern romantic American film inspired by classical work of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The story shows the eventual romance between Julie and her dead lover (Hoult) who is a zombie. Because of their love his body becomes warm turning into human.

As for Maximus Williams’ fiction *Nuclear Coronavirus Zombies Duology* (2022) presents a tension among different countries leading to a nuclear blast. At the same time a pandemic virus attacks people turning them to zombies. It is an apocalyptic study foreshadowing how destructive power can be so harmful due to unchecked technology.

Most of the studies present zombie as an evil character, who can consume and hurt the living. While this current study presents a positive image of zombies; they are harmless. Actually they are victims, stripped its humanity and turns them into subjects in the hands of the oppressors. Being a victim is the gab that is not filled by previous studies. Accordingly, the contribution of my study is going to give a new perspective to zombie theme through a post - apocalyptic lens.

3. Mythology:

Apocalyptic Theory: a theory based on traditional beliefs that the world is going to end in a final destruction due to the ill use of civilization and technology, followed by redemption and rejuvenation (McGhee, & O’ Leary, 2005).

Religiously speaking, the Apocalyptic thoughts have ancient roots in the old Abrahamic religions usually linked with the end of the world. Judaism and Christianity both belief that the world is ending

in a dramatic way, for example in the *Book of Revelation*. As for Islamic version the belief of the return of Jesus Christ to defeat chaos and restore peace just like God's first Creation (Farouk, 2023).

In literature, the apocalyptic themes are explored as the idea of revelation and destruction as symbols or images to depict the new world order, that reshapes the destiny of humanity, it is called apocalyptic literature. Ideas though rooted in religious text yet it appears in secular topics, delivering prospective future scenarios (Martin, 2017)

Post-apocalyptic theory adapts fictions of challenges after catastrophic events forming new social structure. Generally, post-apocalyptic fictions are sub genres lay under the umbrella term of science fiction (Hoberek, 2012: 410). It explores narratives of survival, moral breakdown, dystopian, question of humanity and psychological effect of such disaster. Writers,

... investigated and expressed using fiction, especially the opportunity to show passion (conviction), to evoke the world from within (expressive power), and to remind us of what is particularly human in the unfolding of events (tragedy) (Holt & Zundel, 2018, p. 63).

Post-Apocalyptic narratives can be considered as a criticism to the existing social status, or an interpretation of the suspected danger that is ahead due to the expansion of technology (Stifflemire, 2017).

4. **Findings:** The study seeks to answer certain questions, that are raised in these novels.

Q1: Is there a connection between the real world scenarios and Zombies themes in literature?

Q2: Who are the actual monsters; the zombies or humans?

Q3: Are Zombies victims or victimizers?

5. Discussion:

5.1. Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*:

Zone One, is a horror fiction written by the American author Colson Whitehead in 2011, written by using post - apocalyptic point of view. A Virus attacks the United States as a cause to misshaped civilization. The infected people are turned to Zombies, that consume people. By time, things start to calm down, reconstruction and progression starts. The survivors of the apocalyptic world begin to repair the country and get rid of zombies, to build a new civilization suitable for living.

The atmosphere of an apocalyptic fiction, usually creates the fear from violence and diseases, as well as themes of loss of individuality and futuristic technology. In *Zone One* (2011), Colson Whitehead presents a fiction comparing between the past and present through flashbacks. The setting explores a horrific future where man loses his humanity due to social- moral collapse, a unique image of death and life. As if the author is warning us from a horrible future awaiting man (Fassler, 2022).

The novel starts with a survivor from apocalypse called Mark Spitz, who wants to clean Manhattan; the restricted area entitled 'Zone One', from zombies after the outbreak of the virus. Mark; the protagonist of the novel, armed other members called 'sweeper' to rebuild a greater civilization, and clean the area from all the infected people. One gets confused are the infected people with zombie virus due to civilization flaws, are the victims or the survivors who want to kill infected people out of fear of the spread of the plague through zombies, are the actual victims. It seems that both zombies and humans struggle to survive where the lines between life and death are blurred.

In *zone One*, the zombie virus is activated after defrosting, due to climate change in industrial China and then globally spreads causing pandemic reaching the United States. Unplanned civilization creates disorder in modern societies and fluctuating individuals to skels (zombies). The virus spreads through biting turns the infected to become mindless and vicious creatures, motivated to attack and infect others

(Williams, 2022). The fiction deals with aftermath pandemic, and the psychological impact plague on the survivors and how to clean the environment from the infected people. “Manhattan was empty except for soldiers and legions of the damned, and already gentrification had resumed.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 37). Usually the rich and upper class find ways to flee, leaving the middle and lower classes to face the pandemic alone, and preparing a clean society for them by sacrificing their lives:

The rich fled during the convulsions of the great evacuation, dragging their distilled possessions in wheeled luggage of European manufacture, leaving their thousand-dollar floor lamps to attract dust to their silver surfaces and recount luxury to later visitors, bowing like weeping willows over imported pile rugs. A larger percentage of the poor tended to stay, shoving layaway bureaus and media consoles up against the doors. There were those who decided to stay, willfully uncomprehending or stupid or incapacitated by the scope of the disaster, and those who could not leave for a hundred other reasons. (Whitehead, 2011, p. 56)

Whitehead presents a comparison through a recollection between an old world used to have morals and order with a modern world full with societal breakdown and fragmentation. It is a clear criticism to the materialistic capitalistic world (Giroux, 2011). The lower classes work for the upper ones, to serve a bigger picture. The author uses a lot of metaphors and images to describe the misery of modern materialistic world:

... a mote cycling in the wheels of a giant clock. Millions of people tended to this magnificent contraption, they lived and sweated and toiled in it, serving the mechanism of metropolis and making it bigger, better, story by glorious story and idea by unlikely idea. (Whitehead, 2011, p. 98)

In a world where the individual serves the machine, there is no space for empathy. Man turns into a machine crushes anything that stands in its way (Jameson, 2023). As for the stragglers, they never consider a threat, they are harmless, yet they have less percentage of the virus, accordingly, they should be sentenced to death. Life becomes nihilistic and chaotic. Man creates catastrophe and then instead of fixing it, he starts killing. “We never see other people anyway, only the monsters we make of them.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 30). Who is the actual monster, one might wonder while reading this story?

With a fragmented society, and loss of technology, after the pandemic, man relies on basic methods to survive. The community rebuilds itself into new groups using new rules and laws resembling the old world (Hurley, 2015). Yet it is a harsh reality and the characters try to survive in such cruel environment, being dissatisfied survivors think “There were plenty of things in the world that deserved to stay dead, yet they walked.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 111). The stragglers also try to survive by being attached to the happy past. Whitehead presents them as associated with the past places, and not like the traditional zombies, yet sweepers want to wipe them off, for “A society manufactures the heroes it requires.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 26).

The stragglers represent loss of humanity, they are seen unmoved either sitting or standing near stores or restaurants like animals, looking for rest places. They do not choose such places randomly, but they choose places they used to feel comfort before being infected in their previous lives. They do not intend to hurt or hunt, actually they have their own world, as if they are lingered to a past memory. Whitehead illustrates the difference between ‘stragglers’ and ‘skels’, the last “came to eat you...stragglers on the other hand, did not move” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 60). The sweepers; like No Mas, Angela and Carl, often humiliate zombies before they kill them, by playing games like “Solve the Straggler” and “Name that Bloodstain!” just for entertainment while on duty. Sometimes they “draw a Hitler mustache on one” and taking with them degrading photographs before killing them. (Whitehead, 2011, pp. 100-

102). Once Angela while talking to Carl, “reminisce about their time together in a bandit crew, ripping off weaker survivors for aspirin and thermal underwear” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 143). As she enjoys alcohol.

Sweepers give an excuse for themselves that they are giving the stragglers, the mercy built by killing them, “And what else but a being cursed with the burden of free will ...” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 125) For Spitz stragglers and skels are alike, both are zombies and both should be killed to build a new civilization away from plague. David Buchanan and Markus Hällgren, illustrate in their *The Dark Side of Group Behavior, Zombie Apocalypse Lessons*. Man in such critical events usually,

... include disagreement over killing a member of another group, tension between the options of compassion and revenge, and self-protection. Some core group members see others as a threat, and others want to build a more civilized world (Buchanan & Hallgren, 2020, p. 12).

It seems that the sweepers are not trying to fix the fragmented society, they try to widen the crack, they believe;

Best to let the broken glass be broken glass, let it splinter into smaller pieces and dust and scatter. Let the cracks between things widen until they are no longer cracks but the new places for things. That was where they were now. The world wasn't ending: it had ended and now they were in the new place (Whitehead, 2011, p. 151).

Mark hates how sweepers act in such a sadistic way in abusing zombies, he treats the stragglers with respect and sympathize them, as they resemble the people that he loves before the spread of the virus. The time sweepers want to kill Ned, Mark interrupts them saying; "What if we let him stay? ... he's not hurting anyone" (Whitehead, 2011, p. 102). Mark feels humanity in those creatures more than some sweepers; like No Mas and Gary, who are involved in selling drugs while on duty.

Instead of victimizing human, the novel presents a different view, it is victimizing zombies. Symbolically, killing stragglers represent lack of morality, where man kills everything that stands against his will. Accordingly, humanity deserves the consequences, “...we brought it on ourselves for poisoning the planet, for the Death of God, the calculated brutalities of the global economic system, for driving primordial species to extinction” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 153). The quote shows how man’s catastrophe is going to last, not because of a virus only, but because they lack spirituality with God by being brutal and forget how to be a human.

Pushing individuals to their limits, leads man to take difficult choices which are against moral values. The line between what is right or wrong will be blurred, morality breaks down, leads man to betray or kill to live. Whether the action is heroic or vicious things start to be confused with the new rules of the society.

As a fiction, the author is fictionalizing a story to deliver an implied message. The plague stands for the sickness of human soul that leads to the break of moral values. No one can actually feel safe in such unhealthy circumstances, “No one used the word "cure" anymore. The plague so transformed the human body that no one still believed they could be restored” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 33). As if we are looking at Darwin’s theory ‘Survival for the fittest’; who is wealthy and powerful, has the superior hand (Kutschera, 2023, p. 122).

Instead of seeing cruel zombies, we are faced with cruel humanity. For Mark, he believes that zombies still have human qualities, they usually recap of individuals that he used to know. Yet Whitehead justifies killing them as the mercy built to end their suffering, “Pain could be killed. Sadness

could not, but the drugs did shut its mouth for a time.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 87). May be who is actually sick are not the zombies but the human’s mindset. Mark in many incidents presents lack of empathy with the infected people, he even feels it is alright to kill them, "He was a firm believer, in the absence of any traditionally recognized faith, or even nontraditional and gaining traction in these murderous days, in the reserve tank. It was important to maintain a reserve tank of feeling topped off in case of emergency.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 51). The novel has an open ending, Whitehead leaves it without a reasonable closure, he pushes his readers to predict the end.

The Role of Symbolism in the novel:

The symbols in post-apocalyptic novels are significant since they help unfolding the themes and create an atmosphere of horror. They give and carry multiple meanings. The city of New York in *Zone One*, changes its meaning throughout the story. Mark visualizes New York in one of his flashbacks as “magnificent contraption...[made] bigger, better, story by glorious story and idea by unlikely idea” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 5). The image contradicts completely after the plagues attack; it became a city of ghosts; empty of its people. New York used to be a symbol of glory then it became a symbol of revival (Heneks, 2018). In a conversation with Mark, the Lieutenant says, "if you can bring back New York City, you can bring back the world" (Whitehead, 2011, p. 121). A sentence that clarifies that the Humanity’s future is ambiguous since New York never returns the same.

The wall in *Zone One* symbolizes the division between humans and zombies. Inside the walls of the city, Whitehead presents it as civilized and full with order while outside the walls there is chaos and plague, the author says “That wall out there has to work. The barricade is the only metaphor left in this mess. The last one standing. Keep chaos out, order in” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 121). It is an implied critical analysis to the unequal capitalist system that believes in barriers and hierarchical social categories; the working class that do all the jobs to serve the capitalist. In a conversation between Mark, Gary and Kaitlyn, while doing the hard and dangerous job, which is cleaning places and offices from zombies, Gary asserts; "You think we're going to end up here? We ain't special. They're going to put the rich people here. Politicians and pro athletes. Those chefs from cooking shows" (Whitehead, 2011, p. 89).

Actually, the wall between humans and zombies, is not firm, crossing the barriers are easy, as it signs that in reality the distance between them is really thin. Man always create barriers and decides who outcaste from the city, victimizing others and acting as they are the victims. Everything is clarified when the wall around Zone One breaks down.

The Casino symbol resembles the capitalist society’s greed in *Zone One*. Mark and his companion Kyle used to gamble and spent their time there where "the machine trilled and dinged and whooped in a regional dialect of money" (Whitehead, 2011, pp. 81-82). The people are obsessed and their “brains fogged over as possibility and failure enthralled them in a perpetual and tantalizing loop. (Whitehead, 2011, p. 82). This chaotic life leads to the collapse of that society, for they are “poisoning the planet” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 153). Clearly, the author is criticizing the global cruelty of the economic system. Just like Whitehead’s world is infected by zombies, the whole world is polluted with discrimination and race practices. Gary is a black character, after Gary’s infection, Mark Spits tells him how he earned his nickname, saying “Plus the black-people-can’t swim thing” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 62), sharing the African- American Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz the same story. Mark is intending to offer humour in Gary’s last minutes after being bitten by a zombie. This connection has a hidden message, that even after the pandemic, mistaken racial assumptions can spread much like virus. Though this novel does not deal mainly with racism. Mark declares at the end “if they could bring back paperwork... they could certainly reanimate prejudice, parking tickets, and reruns.” (Whitehead, 2011, p. 288).

Zombies have been seen as a metaphor for the apocalypse, or simply for “the anxiety of the day”, class, race, gender, sexuality, consumer capitalism, uncontrolled immigration, war, famine, climate change (Boluk & Lenz, 2011). Whitehead indicates that after the plague there is no hope for a better change, since capitalism and materialism remain.

5.2. Jonathan Maberry's *Rot & Ruin*:

Another science fiction novel is *Rot & Ruin* (2010) by the American author Jonathan Maberry. Grounded on a short story carrying the same name. The fiction novel is narrated by a third-person, through a post-apocalyptic view. Benny Imura the protagonist and his friend Louis Chong, became fifteen years old and they should look for a job as they are no longer considered kids. Chong finds a job in a local watch as a spotter, while Benny struggles for not finding a suitable job, unwillingly, he decides to work with his brother Tom as a Zombie hunter trainer. What separates the boy's community and zombies place is a wire fence. The first time Benny travels with his brother beyond the fence, he was astonished to discover that the zombies are victims and should be respected.

Rot and Ruin, as an apocalyptic fiction, creates a gloomy atmosphere and a setting that indicates ruin because of a disaster. The set 'Rot and Ruin' was once a familiar place, but now it is a dangerous one located in the mountains called Sierra. The catastrophe is usually caused by man, and it leads to unbearable life. Just like the setting of *Zero One*, man causes the pandemic then lives intolerable consequences.

In *Rot & Ruin*, the zombie virus became pandemic due to the creation of bio weapon called 'Reaper'. The Reaper is a combination of two separated bio weapons; Lucifer 113 and Seif al Din. Because of the ill use of evolution, the deadly mix of parasites, viruses and bacteria, spread like wildfire causing worldly pandemic. "No one knows where it started. Or how, or why. It spread fast, though. By time people realized that there was a problem, the problem was biting them. then everything went crazy" (Maberry, 2010, p. 22).

The infected people resurrect after death as zombies, turning into flesh eaters, and spreading the virus through bites. People withdraw in isolated communities, depending on wire fences and few resources to survive. The actual catastrophe is not turning to zombie, but it is the loss of characters' humanity and the savage treatment of Man to zombies (Perry, 2011).

When Benny starts his training with his brother Tom, Benny wanders, "It's just that I'm fifteen, and I have this crazy idea I might actually have a life in front of me. I don't see how it's going to do me much good to believe that the world is over and this is just an epilogue." (Maberry, 2010, p. 14). Tom warns his brother, "You have to keep your mind as wide-open as your eyes, because almost nothing is what it seems." (Maberry, 2010, p. 29). Benny faces the idea of zombies that he used to hear about. They are not only mindless creatures, but they are revived corps of people they used to live;

He knew that these creatures were dead, that they were reanimated echoes who wore the disguise of the people they had once been, but Tom's words rang in his mind. They used to be people. How could he strike them? How could he hurt them? Children, women, old people. Lost souls (Maberry, 2010, p. 37).

As he is hunting with Tom, Benny realizes there are many survivors, each has his own unique story of loss and survival. He struggles;

... to choose between equally undesirable options; the presence of other groups; and the absence of law and order. These context features contribute to intra- and inter group conflict through a combination of fear and anxiety, competition for resources (food and shelter), mistrust of others, disagreements over critical decisions, and insecurity (Buchanan, David and Hällgren, Markus, 2020, p. 9).

Benny learns that life has moral complexities in the post-apocalyptic world, in which the living can be more destructive and monsters than the dead.

The novel is a series, that has a post – apocalyptic theme, where zombies are causing threat to the community. Morality is the central theme in this fiction. How man should behave in such critical situations. To be human is questionable in such conditions, but the novel explores the brutality of the modern world where the lines between good and evil is fading (Carbone, 2011).

Tom is Benny's big brother, he works as a zombie hunter, Benny believes that zombies (Zoms) are mindless creatures and he somehow feels sorry for them. Turning fifteen, Benny should seek a job. The last thing he wants to do is to hunt zombies, he does not want to be part of this legacy, like his brother Tom, yet he takes that job. "There are moments that define a person's whole life. MOMENTS in which everything they are and everything they may possibly become hinge on a single decision." (Maberry, 2010, p. 56). Hunting Zombies is now a kind of sports. Actually, the living humans are victimizing them by hunting them as a kind of sport. The hunters immorally injure those zombies and catch them as a reward. In an apocalyptic context writer often ground the problem by "... facing our survivors, and how these features may encourage "dark-side" behaviors." (Buchanan, David & Hällgren, Markus, 2020, p. 8).

Benny feels sorry for them; he tries to quieting the zombies as a sign for rejecting inhumane treatment for the sake of a reward. Tom decides to take Benny in an abandoned residential community called Sunset Hollow. It seems that it is Tom and Benny's family residence where they used to live in before their parents turned to zombies. Tom tells his brother the reality, that since the infection of his parents he used to take care of them, "Everyone carries around his own monsters..." (Maberry, 2010, p. 90). He entraps them in their house to keep them quiet and a way from hunters till his brother Benny becomes old enough to help him with that responsibility, for "Suffering is easier to endure when shared." (Maberry, 2010, p. 73). Tom proves to be a courageous person not only for taking care of his beloved ones but for rescuing Benny from his infected parents when the virus started to spread. we have nothing to fear but fear itself." That was never truer than during First Night. It was fear that caused people to panic and abandon defenses. It was fear that made them squabble instead of working together. It was fear that inspired them to take actions they would never have taken if they'd given it a minute's cooler thought (Maberry, 2010, p. 34).

Hunting Zombies have become a cultural celebration, the reward is to have a trading card figures. A Zombie card is a figure of a myth girl well-known as 'The Lost Girl', is a teenage girl, survived by her self in the Rot and Ruin, an idea that interests Benny. Some zombie hunters wanted to steel that figure from Benny but his brother helped him again.

Charlie Pink Eye and his crew, are nasty zombie hunters, they kidnap kids and force them to fight zoms in 'Gameland' just for entrainment. It is practically a suicide mission. The "Point is; people lie a lot. Sometimes out of habit. Not many people are good at telling the truth." (Maberry, 2010, p. 44). They describe it as enjoyable game. Curiously, Benny and his friend Chong, Morgie and others start to search for The Lost Girl (Asaad, 2025). But they were horrified the time they discover 'Gameland' and find The Lost Girl, "They won the war but lost the peace," (Maberry, 2010, p. 62). It seems that The Lost Girl is real; a young girl named Lilah who went into a severe trauma in living in the Rot and Ruin and has turned to a savage. The lost girl is no more a kid, she turned into a powerful character known as the "Queen of the Dean", now she knows how to control zombies. She makes Tom and Benny provoking their past and taking decisions for their future. "We let fear rule us and guide us, and that's never the way to win..." (Maberry, 2010, p. 80). As a result, Lilah, Tom, Nix and others decided to defeat Charlie to end this cruel game of Gameland forever. They "... don't ever want to live in a world where something like mercy...or maybe it's compassion...is the wrong choice." (Maberry, 2010, p. 89).

The narrative highlights the importance of human life, both the infected and the survived. It illustrates the moral dilemmas of killing zombies; a choice people take that shapes their humanity, this might lead to the question who are the true monsters?

Rot and Ruin, explores the dark side of some characters, and illustrates the brutality and evil that exist in human nature which is considered the real threat for humanity. Some symbols carry implied meanings that strengthens the story.

The significance of symbolism in the novel:

In Zombie fictions, usually there are wire fences to divide the area between the survivors and zombies. They represent separation as well as boundaries for protection. These edges are usually fragile just like

moral ethics, and the lines can be blurred (Carbone, 2011).

The wire fence in *Rot and Ruin*, just like the wall in *Zone One*, a barrier between the living and the dead. Fencing the survivors can be seen as a cage that imprisons man. "You see the fence as something keeping the zoms out. I don't. I see it as the thing that pens us in. We're trapped here. Trapped isn't "alive." Trapped isn't "safe." And it isn't "free." (Maberry, 2010, p. 11). Man creates technology to be free but actually they imprisoning themselves. "The truth is the truth. What changes is what we know about it and what we're willing to believe." (Maberry, 2010, p. 54) The fences can imply the barriers that societies construct and that does not hold up, maybe the real horror is not outside the fence but it is inside ourselves (Bacon, 2024). In a quote by Tom to his brother, everything seems clear; ... , there are people who conquered half the world, slaughtered whole populations, wiped cultures off the face of the planet, and you know what history calls them? Heroes! Kings, presidents, champions, explorers. You think America was settled by white men because the Indians invited us her? No, we took this land because we were stronger, and that's how every page of human history is written. It's just our nature. We're a predator species, top of the food chain. Survival of the fittest is written in our blood, it's stenciled on every gene of our DNA. The strong take and the strong make, and the weak are there only to help them do it. End of story (Maberry, 2010, p. 121).

Another symbol used by Maberry that has a meaning, is The Phoenix. The name of Benny's best friend. "My name Phoenix Riley, my friends call me Nix. Six months after I was born, the world died. A plague turned everything into zombies. Actually living dead" (Maberry, 2010, p. 13). Mythically, the Phoenix; is a mythical bird that rejuvenates from ashes.

Nix is skilled with using sword and writing in her journal. This young girl with red-gold curly hair and freckles, used to be lean and kind. She writes in her own words that she "used to have a dad, and brothers. I never knew them, I was little, and when my mom ran...she was running from them. or from what they had become.", all that at the first day of zombie pandemic. Charlie Pink Eye, killed her mother, accordingly, "Revenge is an infection of the spirit." (Maberry, 2010, p. 74), an incident impact her personality, she turned to be tough and harsh.

In her journal she records what she acknowledges about zombies, turning her information to encyclopedia. The death of her family, destroyed the old, weak, lean Nix, showing the impact of her name (phoenix), turning to a new strong sword woman, and had a crucial role in the Gameland. She helps Lilah and kills Charlie and his crew.

The novel is about personal growth at the critical situations. Whether Benny, Tom and even Nix, they went through a difficult journey, new personalities are created to forgive, love and survive by being simply true human being.

Conclusion:

Zombie fiction novels usually explore themes of end of civilization and the trauma caused by the disaster. They may give a suggestion, how humans survive at the time of catastrophes. This is usually seen through post-apocalyptic lens.

The setting is important in an apocalyptic fiction. It creates a gothic atmosphere and prepares the reader for unbearable environment that leads man to question himself, where is civilization leading them to! There is a clear feeling of nostalgia to the old days. The main concern of the fictions is not during the time of apocalyptic but after the spread of the disease for a certain time. With the passage of time, man gets more stressed in taking crucial decisions about his life.

Accordingly, the post-apocalyptic view, intends to present a view of a collapse of a disaster, an environmental decline or biological weapons. In Colson's *Zero One*, the story starts after the virus became pandemic, spreading throughout the whole world starts from China, reaching America while they were busy with building their civilization. In Whitehead's *Rot and Ruin*, the story starts after fourteen years from the spread of the virus. writers intend to warn readers of the near future due to the misuse of technology and lack of morality in modern age.

Zero One by Colson Whitehead and *Rot and Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry, are two zombie fictions which illustrate the true meaning of what it means to be human. They prove that zombies are living dead, and there are individuals who are really dead in live.

Usually, zombies are flesh eaters figures that are considered threat to human being, yet these novels present a positive image for those zombies. Those zombies are harmless and attached to their past lives, they do not attend to hunt or hurt anyone, they are only loitered to their past memory.

In *Zero One*, Whitehead, the virus spread in America while they were busy building civilization. The virus attack cause three types of people; the 'stragglers'; who turned to zombies, the 'skels' who have less percentage of the virus, and they are harmless, wandering zoms , and the sweepers who are the survivors, and intend to clean the environment from zoms. The sweepers do not distinguish between what is harm and harmless, cleaning Manhattan from zoms is their mission. They humiliate, abuse and playgames for entertainment in a sadistic way before killing them.

What it seems a threat is not the actual threat, what is really brutal is human nature. The fiction presents the actual meaning of life and death, both the zombies and humans are struggling to survive. It is important to keep human nature inside man, that is the only way one can survive in such severe conditions.

Rot and Ruin, is a journey for personal evolution, especially during the disastrous circumstances. Some individuals hunt zombies and fixing a celebrating day for that, showing how brutal man can be sometimes. Most of the characters suffered during their journey to be in their new shape of personalities. They learned how to be true humans; to love, and forgive in treating the weak and the sick, because simply that is the real message behind such fictions.

In both novels, the major theme is morality versus human nature. The actual monsters are the human being themselves, they miss used technology, they are materialistic, destroy their environment causing viruses and diseases to spread. The true plague is not the virus as much as the loss of humanity.

Finally, it is recommended to write about zombies from a post-colonial perspective since some of the black writers invested this genre to explore the themes of racism, slavery and social injustice.

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