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Graphic Novel as A Postmodern Genre: Robert Kirkman's "The Walking Dead"

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Abstract: Graphic novel is a recently wide- spread genre which helps readers understand the story in a very easy way. "The Walking Dead" a graphic novel in a series which was written by the American writer, Robert Kirkman. It has received the 2007 and 2010 Eisner Award. It is the award at San Diego Comic-Con International for Best Continuing Series. This paper hypothesizes that this graphic novel belongs to a postmodern genre. It aims at proving the hypothesis by following the postmodernist approach of criticism as a method for analyzing the novel. It is of great significance for it tackles a new genre that has not been well-studied yet, and because the selected novel has a great reputation and greatly-liked by the people who peruse its production as a continuous series of films. The paper begins with an introduction to highlight the subject, methodology that is followed is well identified, discussion that shows the analysis of the selected novel, then it ends with the conclusion that sums up the results of the discussion.

الخلاصة: الرواية الصورية كنوع ادبي ما بعد الحداثة: رواية " الموتى السائرون " للكاتب روبرت كيركمان الرواية الصورية هي نوع ادبي منتشر بشكل واسع، تساعد القراء على فهم

القصة بطريقة سهلة جدا". " الموتى السائرون" هي رواية صورية في سلسلة ادبية ذات اجزاء كتبت من قبل الكاتب الامريكي روبرت كيركمان حصلت الرواية على جايزتي اسينر في سنة 2007 و 2010 , وهي جائزة تم حصدها في مهرجان سانتياغو العالمي لأفضل الاعمال الادبية المستمرة . يفترض البحث الى ان هذه الرواية الصورية تعود الى النوع الادبي ما بعد الحداثة، وتهدف الى تأكيد الفرضية عن طريق اتباع طريقة ما بعد الحداثة من النقد، كطريقة لنقد الرواية. لهذه الرواية مغزى مهم جدا حيث انها تتطرق إلى نوع ادبي جديد لم تتم دراسته جيدا بعد، ولان الرواية المختارة لها سمعة كبيرة ومرغوبة من قبل الناس اللذين يلاحقون اصدارها كسلسلة مستمرة في الأفلام. يبدا البحث بمقدمة تلقي الضوء على الموضوع، طريقة البحث، النقاش الذي يبين تحليل الرواية المختارة، واخيرا الاستنتاج الذي يلخص توصل اليه النقاش.

الكلمات الدلالية: الرواية الصورية، نقد ما بعد الحداثة، روبرت كيركمان، ادب ما بعد الحداثة.

I. Introduction

A graphic novel is sometimes called a comic-book or comic book or comic- magazine, or just comic. It is a published to contain comic arts. It takes the form of chronological juxtaposed sheets that embody individual scenes. Sheets are frequently accompanied by concise colorful writing style and narration, regularly dialogue enclosed in word balloons that symbolize comics art form. Its origin belongs to the 18th century Japan, but to 1830s in Europe. While it is until 1930s that it became popular in the United States of America. *Famous Funnies*, is the first comic modern novel for it was released in the USA in 1933. It was a kind of a reprinting for an earlier newspaper which humor comic shreds, that had established numerous of the story-telling strategies which are used in comics later. It is said that the term "comic book" is derived from the first written American books that once written as a collection of comic strips with a humorous tone. Nevertheless, this kind of writing was substituted later on with the featuring stories of all genres, frequently with a tone that is not humorous.(Comic book NP)

Robert Kirkman is an American writer who was born in November 30, 1978. He wrote comic books, but he is best known for his *The Walking Dead*, and *Invincible*. They are well known as Image Comics. He wrote *Ultimate X-*

Men, and *Marvel Zombies* as well. They are known as Marvel Comics. The Image Comics, Todd McFarlane has collaborated with him on the series *Haunt* (WonderCon 19)

With art done by Moore, *The Walking Dead* was first issued in 2003. The publisher was Image Comics. (issues No. 1–6) But with Charlie Adlard (issue No. 7 onward). The covers were continuously done by Moore through issue No. 24. The AMC television series has adapted *The Walking Dead*. It was premiered in 2010. The television program loosely follows the storyline of the comic book.

The Walking Dead is very famous for it isn't just a comic book; but it is a long-running series. It has more than one hundred issues. It is spanning over a decade. It has been very outstandingly prosperous existence among the people who were very keen to watch its series. It produced not just as a hit TV show, but also as a hit video game which has the same name. The powerfully visually dependence- graphic novel genre is wonderful to tell the stories of the zombie—these sheets are so vividly tense that they express the very emotional side of human being in the story. Moreover, the brutal zombie side is well identified as well.

In fact, everyone is trying to live to tell the tale of something that deserves telling. There's been a ton of assumptions that are put by psychologists about why people are all so preoccupied with zombies. One theory is that zombies embody humans' primordial fear of predators, zombies being the eventual terrifying predators. Another theory is that zombies symbolize emotional emptiness and world-weariness, and that all people fear the idea of living a "lifeless life," walking around in a bored, dead, lonely daze (Ibid.).

Finally, there's the idea that all these zombie disaster stories that keep the readers attached to the screen they watch or pages they read are in actual fact about the collapse of the society as people know it, a premonition about what might happen in a world where war, natural disasters, terrorism, epidemic, disease, as well as financial collapse are all factual terrorization. People read every day where something truly atrocious is essentially happening in some place of the globe— terrorist attacks, Ebola, earthquakes— thus the idea of Zombies is always in the mind of the people as a suggestive coming danger

Now maybe a lot of people are just zombie activists because they love to see and participate in bloody actions and wars. But really, these stories give a glimpse of all the possible ways you could act in response to a disaster of epic scope.

The Walking Dead gives a chance for thinking about how one might touch the impossible. But if he/she is just in the mood for blood-and-gore amusement, it's an overwhelming example of that, too. And Kirkman and the artists manage to do it without extraordinary effects. They do not use CGI, or a makeup team. They depend only on the authority of the pen and a creative mind's eye. Graphic storytelling at its best is what one may see in *The Walking Dead*

In this novel, Officer Rick Grimes who is injured in a shoot-out, ends up in a month-long coma. He wakes up in a vacant hospital, then drifts the halls searching for a nurse, a doctor, or anyone. But, he finds zombie hordes—rotting corpses shocking around dreadfully in the hunt for living humans to munch on.

Rick has to escape from the walking dead to finds his way back to his home. However, he does not find his wife and son there. Roving the neighborhood, Rick gets exhausted in the head with a shovel wielded by Little Duane, Morgan Jones's son. Little Duane considered Rick as a zombie. Better safe than sorry was his favorite proverb.

Feeding the dinner to Rick, Morgan explains the condition in few words such as: zombies, death, panic. Just your typical zombie destruction. Morgan says many survivors. Hearing these frightening words, Rick decides to make out whether his wife, Lori and son, Carl, are still there. All of them are heading to the police station where guns are gathered by Rick before that. He heads for Atlanta. His car runs out of gas, then he uses a horse and a shelter and a flat in Hotlanta.

Everyone, in Atlanta, are zombies. Rick's horse is eaten greedily by zombies. Rick almost gets eaten too unless he meets a baseball cap-wearing gentleman who is named Glenn. He finds Rick and helps him be out of that city.

Glenn Rick go to a campsite, to behold, Lori and Carl are there, alongside with Shane, Rick's partner. Shane and Rick leave for hunting, laundry is done by the women, and people normally exist a relaxed survival waiting for this entire zombie catastrophe to rage over. In spite

of Rick suggestion of moving the camp, Shane says no, so that Rick goes back into

Atlanta to obtain guns for everybody. With zombies' blood and gore, Rick and

Glenn are stroking themselves down in order to cover their own smell, and go right into the gun-shop in Atlanta without harass. unluckily, starts raining when they leave causes washing their smell came off, and they have to escape for the sake of their lives.

For the time being, back at camp, Lori slept with Shane because she thought that Rick was dead. Knowing that he is still alive, she informs Shane that currently Rick is back, their issue is ended. Glenn and Rick return safe and sound, and Rick coaches everyone, together with his seven-year-old son, to shoot a gun. Despite Lori's objection, Rick believes that it's vital for Carl to have a gun. This is the zombie disaster. When zombies do violence to the camp residents and eat Amy who was one of the campers, it's a fine thing that Carl is packing heat.

Without squeezing off a sole try, Lorie has dropped her gun. Carl saves her. A man named Jim who is also bitten, wants to be a zombie in order to be able to reunite with his family's member who became zombies. They put him down near Atlanta to "change."

The harass reignites Rick's anxiety to move the camp. Shane's enraged at Rick for being alive. They have a huge quarrel in the forest. Shane, then, pulls his gun on Rick, and says that he is not worthy of living. Carl who follows them, shoots Shane before the readers can discover whether he would have pulled the trigger to kill his partner or not. The boy's distressed because of the person-killing deed. It is different from killing a zombie. Rick tries to relieve his son at the end of the chapter.

2. Discussion

Some of the postmodern features and themes found in Robert Kirkman's, *The Walking Dead* are including irony, black humor, intertextuality, pastiche, paranoia, hyper-reality, and post-World War II. This genre as has been mentioned above emerged after the World War II. It can be regarded as a creative and critical response towards what is going on in the world in a form of literature, which makes it easy to develop graphic images that represent ideas of an author. The indulgence of the reader's mind towards the content allows one to form mental images as

the description is detailed and allows an individual follow the ideas presented (Hattner 370).

The graphic novel, in this sense, helps connect fiction and reality by the presentation of ideas from different cultures. The adoption of meta-fiction allows the reader take control as opposed to the author's authenticity. The creativity and inclusion of different approaches in postmodern literature allow authors to experiment with subjects that were previously not accepted. *The Walking Dead* is a fictional but graphic novel with a comical touch, allowing the author to present their ideas in images that tell a complete story (Reed and Ruth 124). There are different pieces of stories contained therein and related to each other, even though each of them is independent.

2.1. The Irony in the novel:-

The irony is one of the themes in *The Walking Dead* and is represented in many instances (Hassler-Forest 339). For instance, the audience is aware that Rick's reunion with his family would spark off negative feelings and complications. Shane and Lori were lovers and had been together in the camp which sheltered the people from the zombie attacks. The audience is aware that Rick, Carl, Lori, and Shane are alive, even though the characters do not know whether each of them managed to get to the haven. The irony comes in when the tension created in the audience is different when they all unite, had the readers learned the background story from either of the four characters. This is because they would have influenced, positively or negatively, the perception of the audience (Demson 155). Another scene representing irony is the suspense created by the mystery of activities. For instance, Rick was not aware that Shane was a walking dead even though they had interacted for a long period while in the camp. The audience is aware and Carl as well. It comes as a surprise to the audience that despite the close relationship between Carl and Shane, Carl would be the one to kill her, even though he does not inform Rick, who remains in darkness about the whole issue. Black humor is also represented in the ironic scenes when a killer laughs at their actions, despite the pain and agony they cause on their victim (Sartain 249). For instance, Carl continues his normal life despite killing Shane, who had been a close confidant in the recent past.

2.2. The postmodern theme of inter-textuality

in *The Walking Dead* is evident from the relationships that exist between different scenes and texts in Kirman's novel. There are many approaches the author has used to highlight the relationship between the texts including repetitive quotes, parody, and direct references. For instance, it is common in the novel to have one of the characters repeat words another person had said in the beginning, which helps bring emphasis and rhythm (Smith 9). *The Walking Dead* represents reactions that people would have in case there was an invasion of aliens, and their ability to work together, despite the differences that exist among the leaders in the society. The disaster in *The Walking Dead* are the zombies, who want to feed on the survivors, who must also partner with each other so that they can fight off the predators. The aspect of inter-textuality comes into play when the survivors must work together to wade off the tragedy that has befallen them as a team. Working in a team means that despite the conflicts and perceptions towards solution-finding approaches, the people must find common ground and solve the internal issues (Baetens and Hugo 56).

2.3. The postmodern theme of pastiche

The postmodern theme of pastiche involves the creation of ideas from a list of ideologies /that have been inexistent. It imitates other genres, however, it maintains originality. In this sense, it avoids copying and pasting the idea borrowed. The modifications allow the development of other forms of genres in literature. Robert Kirkman, the author of *The Walking Dead*, mixes drama, fiction, and fairy tales to display his ideas in the novel. Fiction is evident from the presence of zombies in a nation that wants to rebuild itself. In real life, zombies do not exist as they are an imagination of the mind of the author, who uses graphical description to create a mental image in the minds of the readers (Weiner and Will 2). Hence, he uses fictional characters and gives them names and certain positions in the society so that he can pass his message. The fairy tale in *The Walking Dead* is the love story between different characters in the novel, like Carl and Shane. Kirman's use of more than one genre helps develop the plot of the story, as well as create a transition from one chapter to another. Coming up with a unique genre makes it interesting for the reader to enjoy the plot since it does not follow the rules of literature.

2.4. The postmodern meta-fiction theme

The postmodern meta-fiction theme helps presenting *The Walking Dead* as a graphic novel since it represents the actualization of fiction into reality, making it possible to create a suspension. This suspension comes from the disbelief that things taking place in the novel are real or could be transformed into reality (Paffenroth and John 78). The application of meta-fiction reduces the authority and influence of an author, since they separate their emotions with the plot of the story, allowing the reader take over and create vivid images in their mind (Hattner 370).

In *The Walking Dead*, Kirkman's talks with the main actor, Lily Caul as she tries to rebuild a city that had previously been destroyed under the leadership of the Governor. Moreover, this technique is achieved by additional approach. There is the approach of having a story within a story in the novel. For instance, the special attraction between some of the actors draws the attention from the main story-line, which is restructuring the city. This technique attracts the attention of readers by creating suspense and anticipation, to understand the development of the relationship between lovers. In other instances, Lily, the main actor faces challenges like attempted rapes which allows the readers to sympathize with her despite her inability to make serious decisions in a city that has some conflicts inter-twined amongst each other.

2.5. The Post-World War II theme

The Post-World War II theme is a postmodern literature genre that allows authors to shift the ideology of narratives. It allows the authors to address different issues facing the community birthed from war activities. In *The Walking Dead*, Kirkman uses the characters to portray the effects of mismanagement on a society, where war breaks. A town is facing challenges since the leader, Philip who had occupied the Governor's position had misused the resources of the town, making it impossible for the residents to depend on their economic activities to support their lives. Despite the traumatic experience, the survivors have gone through in the past, they are determined to rebuild the town, even though the zombies limit them from reaching their full potential. The survivors partner with the religious sects who make the burden of rebuilding the city easier as they come up with ideas and suggestions that help keep the zombies at bay. Destabilizing the literature rules in *The Walking Dead* has allowed the author comically present his ideas, despite using a horrific description of the characters, and engaging fiction characters. The zombies represent

the challenges that individuals face when engaging in nation-building activities, but learn to overcome them (Knickerbocker 345).

2.6. The Gender Theme:-

The walking Dead is a postmodern graphic novel for it tackles the issue of gender in a very outstanding style. Who would you rely on if zombies showed aggression? This is a very vital question for those who think about the differences between male and female. The readers 'd find the person who's been hoarding guns... and hope they don't shoot them as an alternative. But the readers don't think they 'd care if they were male, female, or gender neutral since they have fine endurance skills.

This is very obvious in the lately written parts of the series. In this regard, the characters in *The Walking Dead* are a slight dissimilar. The men have the power and income and they're in charge. When it comes to survival, the women are totally ineffective, falling guns and getting in the way. All that they can do is the home-works such as laundry, cooking, and so on. "Scrub 'em really good... they're a bit funky." (315) as if all that Rick cares about is finding his wife and son fine and he has nothing to say but "I'm so glad you're okay. Now do my laundry, woman."(315)

But, it is worth saying that, some more powerful female characters come into view later on in the series, but in this part of the series it's the 1950s with all its negative view towards women.

Using Pictures instead of words:-

In many positions in the novel, *The Walking Dead*, the writer uses pictures instead of words. It is a technique used efficiently to tell a fact or something in the novel. For instance, "A picture of Rick, Lori, and Carl on the wall." (75) In this situation, the writer in a very subtle and graphic style gives the readers the back-story of Rick and telling the readers about all his family members without any word. This technique achieved economy in the novel as well as creating an image of the family in the readers' mind.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, From the very beginning in the novel, *The Walking Dead*. one can be pretty sure that it's going to be a text that is full of aggression. Zombies are not keen on peacekeeping. They don't want to sit down to a peace talk or hug it out. If a zombie hugs it out with somebody, he/she is coming out of the hug with one or two fewer limbs. About the only thing zombies respond to is a gunshot, machete blade, chainsaw, or

other deadly implement of choice right to the head. *The Walking Dead* puts the graphic in "graphic novel" with its graphic representation of zombie-related bloodshed and chaos.

It is worthy to say that *The Walking Dead* has represented the postmodern themes. It demonstrates that different techniques can be used interchangeably and bring out the unique features and ideas of the author. Since the postmodernist approach follows no strict rules, an author manages to mix the themes, allowing the reader to engage their critical and creative thinking when reading a novel. For instance, for a reader to understand the irony in *The Walking Dead*, they must know how the themes of pastiche or meta-fiction replace or enhance the former, without changing the original meaning. This allows the reader engage their mind and concentrate on more than one story in one novel.

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