CHAPTER I

# "They are not men . . . they are dead bodies!": From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again

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Contemporary American zombies[1] are remarkably similar: They are born of infection, are the dead returned to life, and have a taste for human flesh. But this hasn't always been the popular imagining of the zombie. When zombies were first introduced into U.S. culture, they were radically different. The earliest zombies were neither sick nor cannibalistic; they were victims of an exotic religion, used as slaves, forced to submit to the will of a zombie master. While it is widely accepted that modern zombies were born in George Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, discussion of the ties that bind modern zombies to their Haitian ancestors is sometimes forgotten. Yet this ignores the zombie's cannibalistic roots.

The zombie is one of the few popular Hollywood monsters that come from outside Europe; rather, it arises out of stories connected to Haitian Voodoo, and early zombie fiction in the United States owes much to fears of Haiti as an independent black republic. From the time of the Haitian Revolution onward, stories of Voodoo circulated throughout the Americas and Europe. Anxiety about Haiti in the United States translated into an anxiety about Voodoo, which was increasingly linked to cannibalism in the U.S. popular press to underscore supposed Haitian primitivism. Yet, after the tumultuous U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, cannibalism began to fade out of the discourse surrounding Voodoo in favor of zombies.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century cannibalistic discourse surrounding Haitian Voodoo was transformed into a racialized discourse in early zombie films, but it becomes evident that over time, as the zombie matured, the overt link to Haiti and to Voodoo dissolved so that zombies came to represent any ethnic group.[2] Zombie fiction changed to produce a more diffuse definition of the self and the Other[3] as it evolved into its modern form. Thus Hollywood's zombie films from the late 1930s to 1968, when *Night of the Living Dead* enacted its radical break in the genre, were increasingly confusing the boundaries between "us" and "them." To understand the significance of these changes to the zombie, it is important to explore the pre-zombie imaginings of Haiti and Voodoo in the United States, how the zombie entered the U.S. imaginary, and how it came to be defined in U.S. film up to 1968.[4] From its introduction into U.S. popular culture in the late 1920s to the present, the zombie has never quite managed to shake its Haitian heritage. Therefore, to understand the zombie in the United States, one must go back to Haiti.

## *They Eat Their Children*

Following a series of slave revolts in the 1790s, in 1804 Haiti became the first black-ruled independent nation in the Western Hemisphere. Voodoo gatherings were integral to the beginnings of the revolts: As C. L. R. James observes, these clandestine gatherings[5] provided the future leaders of the revolts with the opportunity to meet and gather supporters, and it was, in fact, at a Voodoo meeting that the revolution began.[6] From nearly the beginning, external commentary painted Voodoo as central to the revolts, and merely the possibility of a connection between the revolution and Voodoo presented opponents of Haitian independence with a means to disparage revolutionary ideas by linking them to a supposedly barbaric, superstitious belief system.

The heroes of Haiti's revolution were also heroes to slaves throughout the Americas, who in some areas shared Voodoo beliefs. Logically, slaveholders feared similar revolts and mistrusted slave gatherings, especially those connected to Voodoo. Most of the fears connected to Haiti centered on stories of revolutionary atrocities directed toward white peoples. As David Brion Davis reports, "In general, the Haitian Revolution reinforced the conviction that slave emancipation in any form would lead to economic ruin and to the indiscriminant massacre of white populations."[7]



There was some justification to these fears: reports indicate that Jean Jacques Dessalines, Haiti's new emperor, did order the massacre of the whites remaining in Haiti only a few months after the nation's declaration of independence.[8] Further, while in 1789 Saint-Domingue was overwhelmingly the most important French colony in terms of trade, by the time it became Haiti and was independent, the richest colony in the world had been reduced to ruins by more than a decade of fighting—and the impact on the global economy was immense.

As the hemisphere's only black-ruled republic, Haiti naturally spawned much curiosity, which was fueled by the fact that the island existed in virtual isolation: trade embargoes and the lack of international diplomatic recognition[9] effectively sealed Haiti off from the rest of the world. Thus, what little information was available about Haiti wasn't subject to much critical interrogation. Much of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century material available in English was written by those with only a passing familiarity with the nation, or by those who wanted to use Haiti to further their own ideological causes.[10] They tended to paint Haiti as either corrupt and gradually devolving or shakily trying to stand on its own.

Haiti was a pawn in battles between abolitionists and slavers, used by both to prove their respective points. In *Sketches of Hayti: From the Expulsion of the French to the Death of Christophe* (1827), W. W. Harvey, in many ways an admirer of Haiti, nevertheless remarks that the country's history since the revolution "presents to us the picture of a people newly escaped from slavery, yet still suffering and exhibiting in their character, its pernicious and demoralizing effects."[11] Harvey's views were typical of the abolitionists and missionaries writing on Haiti during the early nineteenth century. Yet those opposed to abolition were much more critical. In an 1805 letter from French Foreign Minister Charles Talleyrand to U.S. Secretary of State James Madison, for instance, Talleyrand observes, "The existence of a Negro people in arms, occupying a country it has soiled by the most criminal acts, is a horrible spectacle for all white nations. . . . There are no reasons . . . to grant support to these brigands who have declared themselves the enemies of all government."[12]

Haiti's revolution deprived white Europeans and Americans of the ability to "civilize" the black world formerly known as Saint-Domingue; therefore, Haiti had to be demonized so as to create a situation where the civilizing forces of the white world could save the nation from itself. Therefore, the revolution and the nation it produced could never be seen as successful.

Following colonialist discourse elsewhere, many writers tended to portray Haiti as a country in ruins. Unlike other colonial holdings, however, Haiti's ruins were not evidence of a once-great empire, but rather evidence of French colonialism left to waste. Voodoo was often cited as the root cause for the devolution these authors saw at play in Haiti; it was rarely viewed as anything other than malicious black magic. For example, a 1920 article on Haiti in *National Geographic* reported, "Here, in the elemental wildernesses, the natives rapidly forgot their thin veneer of Christian civilization and reverted to utter, unthinking animalism, swayed only by fear of local bandit chiefs and the black magic of voodoo witch doctors."[13]

Nineteenth-century texts on Haiti devoted many pages to descriptions of Voodoo ceremonies and beliefs. Many of these reports were fictitious, but they were repeated nonetheless. Spencer St. John, for instance, devoted a great deal of his 1884 book *Hayti, or the Black Republic* to Voodoo. Although he never actually attended a Voodoo ceremony, relying instead on gossip and newspaper articles as sources, St. John tied it to cannibalism, human sacrifice, and grave robbing in what would become one of the most-read texts on Haiti in the nineteenth century.[14]

Interestingly, St. John was careful to claim that cannibalism was not endured under the French, asserting that it was never mentioned in French colonial accounts of Haiti and that it would have been difficult to perform when colonial masters kept such a close eye on their property: one missing slave would have raised suspicions. Of course, inherent in St. John's argument was the idea that cannibalism was the result of Haitian self-rule. Writings on Haitian Voodoo continued on themes of cannibalism, often claiming that Haitians ate their children in sacrifice to Voodoo gods, as many books and articles either borrowed directly from St. John or built on his assertions.[15]

Voodoo was seen as an intrinsic part of Haitian life, something that corrupted Haiti's people because it was allowed to operate without restraint. This led outside observers to conclude that Haitians were unable to govern themselves. In his 1900 book *Where Black Rules White: A Journey across and about Hayti*, Hesketh Pritchard noted that Voodoo was a central part of every Haitian's life and that its power would remain undaunted "as long as Hayti retains an entirely negro government."[16] Voodoo corrupted Haiti, so much so that even those institutions that might grant it the appearance of civilization were tainted.

Yet there was a practical side to concerns relating to Haitian independence as well. The revolution disrupted markets and created a massive shortfall in the supply of tropical products like sugar and coffee. It also forced waves of refugees and migrants into neighboring countries.



Upon the assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessalines in late 1806, the country was divided between a kingdom in the north, ruled by Henri Christophe, and a republic in the south, run by Alexandre Pétion. By 1822, Jean-Pierre Boyer had reunified Haiti, but a series of coups and armed revolts followed his departure from office in 1843. The impoverished nation was often in a state of near rebellion.

As Haiti came to represent a sort of self-destruction that could someday spill over into the rest of the Americas, the belief that Haiti had to be saved—and in its saving, contained—was prominent. Although sentiment like this may not have been the only excuse, it did play a part in the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1915 and was most certainly an important justification for a continued presence there. The occupation is described in greater detail in Franck Degoul's chapter, "'We are the mirror of your fears': Haitian Identity and Zombification." Yet it is worth noting here that, to most Americans, the United States occupied Haiti under the pretense of civilizing it, and a negative image of Haitians and of Voodoo in particular were instrumental in gaining and keeping support for the action. Thus, as Joan Dayan notes, "it should not surprise us that during the American occupation . . . tales of cannibalism, torture, and zombies were published in [the United States]. What better way to justify the 'civilizing' presence of marines in Haiti than to project the phantasm of barbarism?"[17]

## *Enter the Zombie*

The term "zombie" was virtually unknown outside Haiti until 1929. At that time, though, zombies entered U.S. culture quite forcefully in William Seabrook's book *The Magic Island*. Seabrook lived in Haiti and had developed a close friendship with a Voodoo priestess. In *The Magic Island*, he gave detailed accounts of Voodoo rituals and folklore, and one being in particular captured his interest. He wrote, "I recalled one creature I had been hearing about in Haiti, which sounded exclusively local—the zombie."[18] Seabrook devoted a chapter of his book to the zombie. Titled ". . . Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields," the chapter described zombies in detail: "The zombie, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive."[19] Seabrook continued, explaining that zombies were

used as slaves by those who raised them; he then described the physical traits of zombies he had supposedly seen, who were "plodding like brutes, like automatons," and whose faces were "expressionless" and "vacant" with eyes "like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing."[20] Seabrook's descriptions, coupled with Alexander King's powerful accompanying illustrations, came to codify zombie behavior in U.S. imaginations for years to come.

Interestingly, just as the zombie entered the U.S. imagination, tales of cannibalism tied to Voodoo began to fade. Thus, linking the zombie to Haiti simply traded the idea of an overt threat (cannibalism) for a fantasy marking the entire country as a nation of eternal slaves. Moreover, the zombie was transplanted into the United States almost exactly as the Great Depression began. For the first time since the Civil War and emancipation, much of the United States felt dispossessed. Many Americans were made aware of just how powerless they were in the capitalist system. Identification with zombies, then, may have been particularly resonant in the 1930s United States, as zombies became an ideological critique of modernity in the form of capitalist exploitation.

Further, the depression exacerbated racial tensions, and stereotypes of peoples of color thrived in this sort of environment. In film and the other arts, such individuals were often cast as delinquents, criminals, or mentally challenged. They became the monsters, so to speak. Zombies could thus also operate within a discourse that maintained whiteness as the norm and constructed those of color as monstrous. Moreover, zombies were something created outside the experience of white, middle-class America: they literally happened "over there." And further fitting with earlier colonialist discourse that generally accorded white persons an individual identity, zombies were faceless masses: a new means of robbing the Other of its individuality in order to keep it as the Other.

One of the earliest appearances of the zombie after *The Magic Island* was Kenneth Webb's stage play *Zombie*, which opened in New York in February 1932. By all accounts, the story line of *Zombie* borrowed liberally from *The Magic Island*, and the zombies of the play were portrayed in a fashion similar to Seabrook's descriptions. With its links to people of color, the zombie was a natural emblem for the slave, easily expendable and under the control of a powerful master. Yet, as exotic as the zombie may have been, the similarities between its plight and that of of many of these "everyday" Americans were not lost on observers. As J. Brooks Atkinson wrote in his review of the play in the *New York Times*, "If zombies



are those who work without knowing why and who see without understanding, one begins to look around among one's fellow countrymen with a new apprehension. Perhaps those native drums are sounding the national anthem."[21]

*Zombie* had a very limited New York run and then played in Chicago. What impact it had on U.S. culture is hard to discern. Yet, in examining some of the ads for the play, one can begin to see a theme that will recur throughout early zombie fiction: a white woman is being threatened by a black figure with arms outstretched. The zombie threat to the white woman became an almost universal theme in early zombie fiction, and even as zombies moved out of Haiti, the image of the white woman endangered by a zombie would remain.

Examining race in early horror films, Elizabeth Young has noted, "In the racist iconography that sustained such [stereotypes], the most common cultural image was that of a black man, 'a monstrous beast, crazed with lust,' assaulting a white woman."[22] Both black men and white women were imprisoned in sexual stereotypes as a means of controlling them. Thus early zombie films used the Other as a means of knowing and defining the white self, while allowing the white female to be corrupted by that Other to show exactly what harm mixing with the Other could cause. Yet these films rarely were so overt as to cast a black man as the corrupting force and the white woman as susceptible to his advances; rather, black zombies were often background and filler, and it was the "black" magic of Haitian Voodoo, utilized by zombie masters, that openly threatened white femininity. Thus, without being explicit, these films managed to use the zombification of the white woman to speak to fears of miscegenation. But *Zombie* and the zombie fiction that would follow postulated that there was a solution to the zombie problem, that things could be returned to normal. The white male could defeat black "corruption"; the white female could be saved.

Many of the ads for the first feature-length zombie film, *White Zombie* (1932), were similar to those for *Zombie*: A white woman reclines in peril, either from zombies or the zombie master. In many of these ads, it is the zombie master's (sexual) desire that puts the woman in peril, and she is powerless against it. For instance, in one ad, under ominous eyes, text read, "With these zombie eyes he rendered her powerless . . . ," while under hands clasped together, the text warned, "With this zombie grip he made her perform his every desire!" Another ad contained the tagline "She was not ALIVE . . . nor DEAD . . . just a WHITE ZOMBIE . . . performing

his every desire!"[23] White slavery became an implicit undercurrent in the film's advertising.

As long as zombification was connected to Haiti or other foreign lands and was performed only on Haitians or other people of color, it could be dismissed as something primitive, so the implication of zombifying a white woman had several dimensions. First, it implied that a primitive nature lurked inside the civilized white person: the zombie inhabited a space in which the white person feared there was no difference between him and the Other, that he was really dark, or primitive, at heart. As previously mentioned, it also spoke to fears of miscegenation. In an era when interracial coupling was still largely prohibited, or at least strongly frowned upon, there was a sense that zombification could represent the intermingling of "black" magic and white bodies. Finally, it implicated the female: primitivism might be associated with one's gender. To borrow from Freud, women might really be "the dark continent."[24]

Here, we see that as traditional Other-ing breaks down in one sense, a new form of Other-ing takes its place. Whereas under colonialism the boundaries between self and Other, black and white, civilized person and cannibal, seemed sharply defined,[25] at this point that sharpness began to blur. In zombifying white people, in essence turning them into slaves and corrupting them with black magic, *White Zombie* begins to ask: How does one define the Other if the Other looks just like you or me? Things hadn't quite reached a point of blurring whereby the Other and the self became largely indistinguishable, but there were traces of anxiety that perhaps the self (at least in the form of the female) was not so different from the Other.

In *White Zombie*, the female succumbs to the powers of black magic, prompting the question: What does it say about the white woman, that bastion of civilization, if she can so easily be corrupted by zombification? The idea that the white female zombie somehow represents that which is both black and white implicitly spoke to fears of miscegenation that were rather explicitly dealt with in *White Zombie*: When it becomes clear that Madeline, the zombified white heroine of the film, is not in her grave as her friends thought she was, Neil, her distraught fiancé, remarks, "Surely you don't think she's alive, in the hands of natives. Oh no! Better dead than that!"[26] Thus it is better for a white woman to be destroyed than to intermix with the "natives."

Of course, zombification also created a situation in which victims of a zombie master were feminized. Typically, under patriarchal systems, the female is under the power of the male—she is supposed to be ready to serve his will. This relationship is replayed with zombie masters and their



zombies.[27] Still, this would be complicated in most zombie films, as white men also eventually fell prey to zombie masters. Yet these same white men were usually the only ones with the power to reverse the effects of zombification and defeat the zombie master.

While zombiism seemed to strip those afflicted of their humanity, white males, in being able to overcome zombification, retained their humanity, or at least regained it—and this is key. In the opening scene of *White Zombie*, a group of pale figures lumber toward the road where a coach has stopped; the coachman spies them, then spurs his horses into action, yelling "Zombies!" As he later helps his two passengers from the coach, he explains his haste in leaving the earlier scene: "They are not men, monsieur," he says. "They are dead bodies. Zombies! The living dead. Corpses taken from their graves and made to work in the sugar mills and fields at night." Here, we get to the very heart of zombies: They are not men.

In one phrase, the coachman has summarized one possible reason the zombie fascinated 1930s America: it cast an entire group of people as beings without humanity.[28] It reduced them to an animalistic state and fantasized that these beings could then be made to work endless hours, supplying the rest of the world's needs. It represented the ultimate Other-ing, casting the perceived opposite as a nonentity. Soon after this scene, the zombies are seen working in a sugar mill. Following Seabrook's descriptions, these zombies silently shuffle through the Haitian night, and in perhaps the most chilling moment of the film, one accidentally falls into the sugar grinder, eliciting no response from his fellow zombies as he is ground to death: life is cheap on the sugar plantation.

David Skal writes, "The shuffling spectacle of the walking dead in films like *White Zombie* (1932) was in many ways a nightmare vision of a breadline. . . . Millions already knew that they were no longer completely in control of their lives; the economic strings were being pulled by faceless, frightening forces."[29] Thus, while zombies seem to represent a very real fear of the return of the colonial master, they also offer a critique of both slavery and the abuse of the worker under the capitalist system. Yet, while the zombie could thus be seen as a critique of empire, zombie films also replayed a fantasy of empire. For example, zombifying white people was a very literal reenactment of what happened in Haiti during the revolution when the colonial masters were overthrown and at the mercy of their former slaves. But early zombie fiction postulated a solution to the zombie "problem." In the end, the zombie master would be defeated (and his zombies with him) and the status quo restored: black Voodoo was no

match for white reason. Thus *White Zombie* and much of the zombie fiction that would follow implicitly asserted the need to reimpose control over Haitians and the rest of the colonies.

This may have been very resonant with some audiences of the 1930s. At the turn of the twentieth century, socioeconomic changes preceding from industrialization and increasing immigration had marked a perceptible change in the face of the United States, so much so that some white peoples could have seen this change as a threat to the racial purity of the nation. By the 1920s and 1930s, African Americans had been moving to the industrialized North in large enough numbers that similar perceptions of a threat arose, which were exacerbated by the Depression. Films like *White Zombie* may have provided a fantasy of reclaiming a sense of white control over society.

This need to reclaim control was a current throughout early zombie films. For instance, the 1935 film *Ouanaga*[30] follows a Haitian Voodoo priestess in her attempt to win the love of a white man. The priestess is a mulatto, and with a tag line that claims, "Her skin is white but her heart is black," the film speaks to fears implicitly addressed in *White Zombie* related to miscegenation and the possibility of the primitive lurking within. Of course, this film is much more explicit in placing primitivism in the female body, yet here it is not the body of the white woman that is used; rather, it is the body of a mulatto woman that is inherently wicked because she has a "black" heart. This is why she uses evil spells to corrupt both a white woman and a white man. But the white man will defeat the priestess and free his (white) love. Although this film is one of only a handful to use a female zombie master, as the priestess uses two black male zombies to abduct her rival, the film falls back on a visual trope seen in much of the *Zombie* and *White Zombie* advertising: the white female in peril from the black male zombie.

The Halperin brothers, producers of *White Zombie*, returned to the genre in 1936 with *Revolt of the Zombies*. The plot of the film centers on eliminating a zombie spell so it won't fall into the wrong (nonwhite) hands. Things are fine as long as zombiism only affects the natives, but it is clearly not acceptable when the zombie master begins to zombify the white members of an archaeological expedition.[31] *Revolt of the Zombies* capitalized on the idea of a "zombie army," and the film implied that these zombie masses, if in the control of the wrong people, could present the world with a serious threat. That this film was released just prior to World War II would seem to indicate that there were certain groups (perhaps the Nazis or the Japanese?) who could use the power to zombify against white America even if they didn't succeed in zombifying white peoples.[32]



The next major American film to feature zombies was 1940's *The Ghost Breakers*, starring Paulette Goddard and Bob Hope. This film transported Voodoo and zombies to Cuba, where Goddard's character inherited a haunted castle guarded by "an old Negro woman with a zombie son."[33] When Bob Hope asks a native Cuban what zombies are, the man answers: "Yes, that's more Voodooism, and not very pleasant. When a person dies and is buried, it seems there are certain Voodoo priests who have the power to bring him back to life." This is met by the exclamation, "How horrible!," to which the man continues: "It's worse than horrible because a zombie has no will of his own. You see them sometimes, walking around blindly with dead eyes. Following orders. Not knowing what they do. Not caring."

Zombies, according to this definition, don't realize what they are doing; they are pawns in someone else's game, and this reinforces the idea of some sort of outside control over zombies. In earlier depictions of Haiti, when the Voodoo-cannibalism duality was being used to describe the nation, Voodoo was something under almost exclusive Haitian control. It didn't operate as effectively (according to outside observers) under the French, and it was hoped that it wouldn't operate as effectively under some other outside civilizing force. Here, though, with the Voodoo-zombie combination, there is the idea that a malevolent practice once used by Haitians on Haitians, then used by Haitians (or other people of color) on Haitians and white peoples, could now be used by unscrupulous groups of any race or belief system on peoples of color to work against American interests. The Other becomes split into two forms: it can be the Other who holds some form of power, or the Other who is used by that power holder.

The lone zombie seen in *The Ghost Breakers* is simply one more character haunting Goddard's castle.[34] But the film is intriguing in that it suggests that the ghosts haunting Goddard's castle and the malignant Voodoo practices associated with it have to do with a slaveholding legacy: at least one character asserts that Goddard's castle is haunted in revenge for Goddard's great-grandfather being the largest slaveholder in Cuba.[35]

## *The Zombie Codified, Then Changed*

By the early 1940s, zombies were becoming a somewhat familiar concept.[36] Conventions within the genre began to become evident. For

instance, zombies were under the control of a physically locatable outside force. In the early films, this control came via a Voodoo priest or sorcerer. During the 1950s, when fears connected to burgeoning space exploration became more prevalent, zombie control was also via mad scientists or aliens. Still, zombies never acted of their own accord: there was always some sort of zombie master pulling the strings.[37]

At a very basic level, the lure of the zombie was an idea of the exotic. Many zombie films during this period were set in foreign lands (e.g., Haiti, Cambodia, Cuba, Africa, the West Indies), and even the zombie fiction set in the United States tended to be located in exotic spaces, like carnivals or the Louisiana bayous. Joseph Maddrey, in analyzing reactions to Tod Browning's 1932 film *Freaks*, notes that the strong reactions to that film were due in part to the fact that "audiences were unable to dismiss the horrors as eccentricities of backward countries across the globe."[38] In this light, zombies of the early period could be read as "safe" monsters, fueling a fear of the Other while also implying that when compared to it, people in the United States were normal. If the cannibal had been used during much of the nineteenth century as a means of separating the world into civilized and non-civilized, the zombie was continuing this work in films of the 1930s, '40s, '50s, and '60s.

Although most of the zombie films from 1932 to 1968 share similarities, probably the most defining characteristic of the zombie genre was its mutability. Unlike other creatures of the undead, like Dracula or Frankenstein's monster, the zombie was not born of a preexisting literary tradition. As Peter Dendle notes, the zombie was "one of the few screen creatures in the Hollywood menagerie not of European origin."[39] He also observes that the zombie moved from folklore to film without much other mediation.[40] In other words, there were no strong preexisting mythologies connected to the zombie in the United States—no rules or conventions with which U.S. audiences would have been familiar. As S. S. Prawer further notes in *Caligari's Children*, "This has . . . so rapidly become a genre, has so rapidly established conventions and expectations, that gifted film makers have been able to use the conventions as a kind of grid against which to draw their own rather different pictures—as something to be at once alluded to and subverted."[41] What zombie conventions there were could be considered more like guidelines than fixed rules. Therefore, there was room to play.

For instance, whether zombies were reanimated corpses or merely hypnotized or drugged persons varied. In some films, like *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1958) or *Bowery at Midnight* (1942), having the dead return to life was crucial to the plot. In other films, like *King of the Zombies* (1941) or *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies* (1964), the zombies weren't dead but rather living people under mind control. How a person was zombified also varied: from the beginning, drugs and potions were a popular choice; hypnotism, spells, and special alien powers were also used to create zombies. Generally, however, the effects were the same: the human being lost control of his body and was directed to work for the will of another.

Yet this changed in 1968 with *Night of the Living Dead*. The established ability to play with the rules of the zombie genre may have contributed to the radical break with the Voodoo-style zombie enacted by *Night of the Living Dead*, as with it, zombies moved from being automatons used as slave labor to being mindless killers.[42] Now, rather than following the will of a specific master, zombies were following the drive to eat. They were now explicitly cannibals.



## From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again

Operating within a system that assumed a knowable world and that fed on an impulse to categorize and classify, the Other was created. At first, this Other was the primitive, the savage, or the cannibal, but over time the Other became a monster. It is no coincidence that Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and the zombie all became popular movie monsters at roughly the same time. With each variation, American audiences could say, "I am what the Other is not." Yet the zombie consistently presented the further fantasy of being tainted by the Other but then being saved. Zombiism, as it was first presented to U.S. audiences, was not a disease, nor was it irreversible; it was a state, not unlike being under hypnosis, that could be experienced and then abandoned, and most often, with the death or defeat of the zombie master, all the zombies the master controlled awoke from the spell.[43]

Whereas cannibalism was the symbol of Haitian regression to the primitive in the United States's pre-zombie imaginings of Haiti and Voodoo, it was contained and remained well within Haitian borders. Zombies hinted that Voodoo could corrupt those outside Haiti as well. And yet, while at one level the zombie represents a separation from the cannibal in regard to how people in the United States were thinking about Haiti, Voodoo, and the Other, the concept of cannibalism was still present in early zombie

films.[44] It wasn't the literal cannibalism of the earliest discourse surrounding Haitian Voodoo, but rather a cannibalism in which those notions one held to be true, the very mechanisms that one used for defining the self, were slowly eaten away: if an average, ordinary American could become a zombie, just like the Haitians did, what really differentiated "us" from "them" anyway? Further, the zombie did the same kind of ideological work as the cannibal—it was a new means of separating the world into its civilized and barbaric categories.

Early zombie fiction might also invite links to bell hooks's concept of eating the Other, the one-way consumption of other cultures. hooks states, "It is by eating the Other that one asserts power and privilege," and this sort of "cultural cannibalism" concerns power relations that grant white peoples the ability to enjoy the privilege of being able to appropriate, utilize, and borrow from other cultures without having to experience what it is actually like to be a member of another culture.[45] In a sense, it is being able to try on other cultural forms at will with no real lasting effect. This is very similar to what characters were able to do in early zombie films. Before 1968, zombiism was a reversible state that could be experienced then discarded. In a sense, zombification granted one the ability to try on the culture of the Other without any real fear that one would truly become like the Other. It allowed one to have all of the pleasures associated with being the Other without any of the frustrations. Thus it was a slice of Haitian exoticism (and later, exoticism in general) that allowed one to get rid of the veneer of white "civilization" temporarily but postulated that eventually the status quo would be restored.

But what constituted the Other became more and more confused as the zombie matured, leaving more and more room for skepticism as to what constituted the self. Zombies stopped being exclusively Haitian and became the province of any exotic group, but as time passed, the zombie's explicit ties to the exotic and the Other were also weakened. Without a clearly recognized Other against which to define the self, it became that much harder to draw the line between "us" and "them."

In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noël Carroll claims that what creates fear is evidence of "things out of place."[46] Indeed, many of the fears one could associate with zombies have to do with things being out of place in relation to the human body. With very few exceptions, in early zombie fiction, the physical body of a victim of zombification rarely showed any signs of harm; further, the physical changes engendered by zombification were usually not overly dramatic or permanent. It was rather the mind, the embodied self, that was most affected. One's free will was at stake, as it



could be devoured at any time, and in this light zombies became an allegory for the larger societal self: the Depression, the world wars, the Cold War, and the atomic age were all potent reminders that people were caught up in events essentially in someone else's control. Zombies reflected a fear of the anarchy or monster inside us all.

As zombies increasingly entered less exotic and much more mundane, white middle-class territory, their effectiveness as the new cannibals was threatened; by the time they came to reside in the rural Pennsylvania countryside with *Night of the Living Dead*, however, cannibalism was coupled with the zombie overtly. The cannibal, as an element of a strange religion called Voodoo, worked to separate the world into "us" and "them." For a time, the zombie, another fantastic element of Voodoo, ostensibly worked to do the same. But over time, the boundaries drawn by the zombie ceased to produce the meaning they once had: any "us" had the potential to become a "them," and new groups began to inhabit the world once solely the province of the racial Other. Yet while conventions became flexible and abstract enough to allow the zombie to become a sort of all-purpose form for mediating a wide range of concerns, it continued to carry its past with it, and that past caught up to the zombie in 1968. With the zombies of *Night of the Living Dead*, cannibalism reentered the picture and could once again work to divide the world into "us" and "them," but this time it would do so overtly tied to the form of the zombie. The zombie needed to become an obvious cannibal if it was going to continue to be put to the same kind of work.

In the end, both cannibalism and the zombie as channeled through Voodoo were an attempt to cast Haitians, and by extension any peoples of color, as less than human. "They are not men," the coachman in *White Zombie* had declared. Yet, over time, it became more and more apparent that the audience secretly feared he could say the same of any of them as well.

"Keep Austin Zombie-Free," *No Fear of*
blogspot.com/2009/01/keep-austin-

ıg Posthumanism," *Cultural Critique* 53

:ombie is different from the iconic model
h Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry's 2008
'on-human Condition in the Era of
:; see also Neil Badmington's *Alien Chic:*

*Dead* (2010) is called for here. The latest
ɔie epic appears to be directly concerned
ıatural world—an addition that seeks to
nans so often do. The editors can only
eems as though Mr. Romero has himself
:rs of what it is to be a zombie with the
't just for the living."

DEAD SHALL RISE
*ıction by Kevin Boon*

*mbie Movie Encyclopedia*, McFarland, 2001),
gins with the appearance of Romero's *Night*
; when Michael Jackson's "Thriller" video
n popularity" (7–8) in 1983.
spellings of the word "voodoo," which is
' or "Vodou" when discussing the Haitian
he Louisiana or Creole folk religion, which
her chapters refer to Haitian "Vaudou." In
ıat use a different orthography than they
n take on different resonances—in some
ısly using a spelling to suggest a particular
iual authors choose the spelling of the word
hy will not be consistent across the volume,
ors' note.)

n "Ontological Anxiety Made Flesh: The
Culture," published in *Monsters and the*
ince added two categories that I consider

ıese categories and where to find examples
:evin Boon's chapter (editors' note).



1. "THEY ARE NOT MEN . . . THEY ARE DEAD BODIES!": FROM CANNIBAL TO ZOMBIE AND BACK AGAIN
*Chera Kee*

1. There are two primary variations on the word: "zombi" and "zombie." For the purposes of this chapter, I will use the more popular American variation "zombie." When quoting texts and other materials, however, I will stay true to the variation used by the original authors. Likewise, there are several variations on the word "Voodoo." Again, I will use the more popular American variation of the word but will stay true to other spellings used by other authors.

2. By the second major U.S. zombie feature, *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936), zombies had been moved from Haiti to Cambodia. From that point on, zombies in U.S. film were tied to a host of exotic locales, including Cuba, Africa, and any number of unnamed West Indian islands.

3. There are many different ways to approach the concept of "the Other." It has been understood as other peoples, other cultures, those people within a culture that deviate from its ideological norms, or even other genders (typically, the female is the Other to the male). In any incarnation, though, a binary is set up contrasting the Other with an assumed norm: the Other represents that which any given group believes is its opposite (think "us" versus "them," with the Other being "them"). Thus, while on the most basic level, the Other can be understood as that which is external to the self or the group, as Robin Wood observes, "it functions not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (though never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned. . . . It is repression, in other words, that makes impossible the healthy alternative—the full recognition and acceptance of the Other's autonomy and right to exist." *Hollywood From Vietnam to Regan . . . and Beyond*. Rev. ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2003, 66. Thus, for any given group, the Other represents another group onto which the first group can project its most deep-seated fears and insecurities. The first group can then use these hated characteristics as a justification for repressing, dismissing, or destroying the second group. In referring to this understanding of the Other, it is common to use a capital "O" to distinguish it from other uses of the word. For a detailed explanation of the Other, see Robin Wood, above; Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1985; Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982; Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1978; and Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

4. For the purposes of clarity, I should explain what I consider to be a zombie. First, I separate zombies into three types. The first is what I call

Voodoo-style zombies, which are those zombies inspired by or derived from the zombies of Haitian folklore and Voodoo. I understand this type of zombie to be a human being, either living or dead, whose will is controlled by another (the "zombie master") via Voodoo, some other kind of "native" religion, or witchcraft. This type of zombiism is potentially reversible (there is a cure or a way to break the zombie spell). I see this type of zombie as predominant in U.S. film from 1932 to 1968. The second type of zombie is the Romero-style zombie. These zombies are the dead returned from the grave, are cannibalistic, and can only be destroyed; there is no cure to restore them to their former human selves. This type of zombiism is highly infectious, and this has been the predominant type of zombie on U.S. film screens since 1968. Finally, since the mid-1990s, I have noticed a change in some depictions of the zombie. What I call the video-game or post-Romero zombie tends to be faster than traditional Romero-style zombies. These zombies may or may not be strictly cannibalistic but are driven to kill humans regardless. In these narratives there is a clear-cut reason or culprit for the zombie infection, which is, in many ways, a corporate version of the zombie master. These zombie media also envision a cure for zombiism or a means of reversing its effects. Thus, my definition of the zombie is quite broad. For instance, while there are those who do not consider *28 Days Later* a zombie film, I see it as a very good example of a video-game-style zombie film.

5. By the time of the revolts these had been outlawed, but they continued to occur—mainly because soldiers didn't want to travel into the hills to oust supposed Voodoo adherents.

6. See James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

7. Davis, David Brion. "Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions." *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Ed. David P. Geggus. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 4.

8. See James. *Black Jacobins*.

9. For example, the United States didn't officially recognize Haiti until 1862.

10. See, for example, Austin, Henry. "The Worship of the Snake: Voodooism in Haiti To-day." *The New England Magazine* (Mar.–April 1912): 170–182; Candler, John. *Brief Notices of Hayti: With Its Condition, Resources, and Prospects*. London: T. Ward & Co., 1842; "Cannibals in Hayti." *Harper's Weekly* (Sept. 2, 1865): 545; Derbighy, Pierre. "Hayti: A Crumbling Republic." *Harper's Weekly* (Aug. 29, 1908): 11–13; Harvey, W. W. *Sketches of Hayti: From the Expulsion of the French to the Death of Christophe*. London: L. B. Seeley, 1827; Prichard, Hesketh. *Where Black Rules White: A Journey across and about Hayti*. Westminster: A. Constable & Co., Ltd., 1900; St. John, Spencer.



*Hayti, or the Black Republic*. 1884. Source Books on Haiti no. 9. New York: Cass, 1971; and Lawless, Robert. *Haiti's Bad Press*. Rochester, VT: Schenkma[illegible] Books, 1992.

11. Harvey. *Sketches of Hayti*, vii.

12. Lawless. *Haiti's Bad Press*, 48.

13. Quoted in ibid., 34.

14. See Rhodes, Gary D. *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001, 72.

15. Cannibalism actually has its own chapter in St. John's text, and he asserts that "every foreigner in Hayti knows that cannibalism exists." *Hayti*, 188. Thus St. John's argument suffers from a warped a priori reasoning: because he and the other foreigners know cannibalism exists, it exists. Still, from time to time, stories of cannibalism tied to Voodoo rites would surface in American and European newspapers and magazines. One such story, relate[illegible] more than a year after the fact in *Harper's Weekly* in 1865, states that upon th[illegible] ascension of Soulouque to power in Haiti, Voodoo sects ran wild, and that on[illegible] group "after having stuffed and devoured one unfortunate child, were about to gormandize upon a second victim when justice overtook them. "Cannibals in Hayti." *Harper's Weekly* (Sept. 2, 1865): 545. Using cannibalism to critique the Haitian government, the article also places Voodoo as a threat not only t[illegible] civilization but also to Haiti's future (i.e., its children). St. John refers to this same instance of supposed cannibalism in his book. See chapter 5, "Vaudoux-Worship and Cannibalism," and chapter 6, "Cannibalism."

16. Prichard. *Where Black Rules White*, 94.

17. Quoted in Trefzer, Annette. "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*." *African American Review* 34.2 (Summer 2000): 300.

18. Seabrook, W. B. *The Magic Island*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929, 93.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 101.

21. Atkinson, J. Brooks. Rev. of *Zombie*, by Kenneth Webb. *New York Times*, 11 February 1932, clipping in *White Zombie Production Code File*. The Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

22. Young, Elizabeth. "Here Comes the Bride: Wedding Gender and Race in 'Bride of Frankenstein.'" *Feminist Studies* 17.3 (Autumn 1991): 425.

23. Rhodes. *White Zombie*, 114.

24. The nineteenth-century explorer John Stanley described Africa as "the dark continent." In *The Question of Lay Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), Freud borrowed the term to describe psychology's relationship to the adult woman's sexual life. By using this particular phrase, Freud

could be implicitly linking female sexuality to Africa and the Other, while also calling attention to the lack of clinical materials available on the sexual life of women. Women's sexuality is thus both something unexplored and something that defies easy understanding.

25. The problem with the Other, of course, is that it is always defined as that which a person or group is not. Therefore, even when it seems perfectly clear who or what the Other is to the person/group doing the defining, because it is built on a negation, the definition is always tenuous at best.

26. *White Zombie*. Dir. Victor Halperin. Perf. Bela Lugosi. Halperin Productions, 1932.

27. Given the homoerotic undertones of films like *White Zombie* and its 1936 follow-up, *Revolt of the Zombies*, it might be possible to take these claims even further, as there are moments in each film when zombified men become the implicit objects of the lust of the zombie masters.

28. Of course, another way to approach this would be to say that this line also strips zombies of any claims to manhood, effectively feminizing them.

29. Skal, David J. *The Monster Show*. Rev. ed. New York: Faber and Faber, 2001, 168.

30. Also known as *Drums of the Jungle*, *Love Wanga*, and *Crime of Voodoo*.

31. In a treatment of the film given to the Hays Office for review before filming, the screenwriters Victor Halperin and Howard Higgin noted about zombies, "Should the method of making such impregnable soldiers fall into the hands of the yellow race itself, it would doubtlessly mean the annihilation of the white race." Halperin, Victor, and Howard Higgin. *Treatment for White Zombie*. 11 January 1936, in *Revolt of the Zombies Production Code File*. The Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 5. Although Halperin and Higgin were urged by the Hays Office to "drop the material . . . which reflects unfavorably upon 'yellow races'"—and they did—a very palpable fear of the nonwhite is still evident throughout in the film. Breen, Joseph I. Letter to Edward Halperin. 22 January 1936, in *Revolt of the Zombies Production Code File*. The Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

32. In fact, the 1941 release *King of the Zombies* casts its zombie master as a Nazi intelligence officer.

33. *The Ghost Breakers*. Dir. George Marshall. Perf. Bob Hope and Paulette Goddard. Paramount, 1940.

34. This zombie represents one of the first examples of a zombie whose features are deformed. Interestingly, this is not a characteristic that other early zombie films would use. Up until the radical change in zombies in 1968, zombies in Hollywood films typically did not have monstrous features. (The zombies of *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and*



*Became Mixed-Up Zombies* [1964] are deformed, but this is not a result c zombiism, but rather of abuse and acid being thrown in their faces.) In the monstrosity of early film zombies was born of their banality—an important part of early zombie discourse was the idea that "it could be or me."

35. A similar implication that zombiism is punishment for a slaveho past is made in Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943).

36. Depending on what you classify as a zombie film, there were rou thirty-five zombie films that appeared domestically between 1940 and 1

37. The 1943 film *Revenge of the Zombies* could claim to be an excep this. In the film, Lila von Altermann (played by Veda Ann Borg) has be zombified by her husband, and she eventually breaks his control and lea other zombies in killing him. For most of the film, however, her husban retain control over her, and when she does break the spell, she manages gain control over all the other zombies, so they always have a zombie m

38. Maddrey, Joseph. *Nightmares in Red, White, and Blue: The Evolut the American Horror Film*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004, 15.

39. Dendle, Peter. *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*. London: McFarla 2001, 2.

40. Ibid., 3.

41. Prawer, S. S. *Caligari's Children*. New York: Oxford UP, 1980, 6 give a sense of how rapidly zombies entered the scene, it is worth notin *Revolt of the Zombies*, besides being among the first major zombie films, highlighted the very nature of the term "zombie." When the Halperin brothers announced they were making the film, the Amusement Securit Corporation (ASC), the financers of *White Zombie*, challenged the Halp right to use the term "zombie." Previously, the Halperins had relinquis ASC all their rights connected to *White Zombie*, including the title and s and the ASC felt the Halperins were now capitalizing on the prior film's success. In a refereed settlement, it was decided that the term was, in fac trade name. The opinion by Herman Hoffman went on to state that "zo was a "word which is not in common use and is unintelligible and nond scriptive to the general public. . . . The word 'zombie' has acquired a secondary meaning, suggestive of the photoplay *White Zombie*." Hoffma in essence, suggesting two things: that the term "zombie" was populariz the ASC film, but that the concept was still not known widely enough to on its own. See Rhodes. *White Zombie*, 173. Yet by 1940, with the releas *The Ghost Breakers*, there were no such court battles over the notion of t "zombie."

42. *Night of the Living Dead* also moved zombies into the middle of r America. As R. H. W. Dillard observes, this is one element that contrib

to the shocking nature of the film: it takes place not on a foreign island or in a mad scientist's laboratory, but at a farmhouse, an "ordinary" place. This very ordinariness was what made the film so terrifying. It created what Dillard called the "fear of the ordinary." While Haiti may have been made terrifying for Americans through claims of cannibalism, it was a cannibalism that was exotic. It was the very opposite of the mundane. *Night of the Living Dead* brought cannibalism home and set it outside an idyllic Pennsylvania farm. See Dillard, R. H. W. "*Night of the Living Dead*: It's Not Like Just a Wind That's Passing Through." *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*. Ed. Gregory A. Waller. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, 17, 22.

43. It could be argued that other monster narratives allow for people to be "saved" from turning into a monster, yet this usually requires that the person in question not be turned fully or that people be saved on an individual basis. With early zombie narratives, a person can be turned fully into a zombie and still be saved, and salvation often comes to the entire group, not just the individual.

44. Further, the links to cannibalism/ghoulism can be tied to zombie fiction itself. At least one pre-1968 zombie film has hints of flesh-eating zombies. In 1941's *King of the Zombies*, a maid warns one of the protagonists, an African American man, to be in bed before midnight as "It's feedin' time—and [the zombies] likes dark meat!" Zombies, it seems, never completely shook the Voodoo-cannibalism connection of nineteenth-century discourse on Haiti. See Weaver, Tom. *Poverty Row Horrors!* London: McFarland, 1993, 38.

45. hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992, 36.

46. Quoted in Brottman, Mikita. *Offensive Films: Toward an Anthropology of Cinema Vomitif*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997, 12.

### 2. "WE ARE THE MIRROR OF YOUR FEARS": HAITIAN IDENTITY AND ZOMBIFICATION

*Franck Degoul (translated by Elisabeth M. Lore)*

1. I would like to thank Aden Atteyeh Sougal and Professor Delphine Perret from San Francisco State University for the time they spent in verifying my translation of certain passages of this article (translator's note).

2. Jardel, J-P. "Représentation des cultes afro-caribéens et des pratiques magico-religieuses aux Antilles: Une approche du préjugé racial dans la littérature para-anthropologique." p. 458, in J. Barnabe et al. (eds.), *Au visiteur lumineux: Des îles creoles aux sociétés plurielles*. Petit-Bourg, Guadeloupe, Ibis Rouge Editions. 2000.

# Better Off Dead

## The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human

*Edited by*

Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro

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