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14.15. **WILLIAM HUGHES**

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21. **‘The evil of our collective**
 22. **soul’: Zombies,**
 23. **medical capitalism and**
 24. **environmental apocalypse**

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34.35. **ABSTRACT**36.
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Though frequently comprehended as a vehicle for social satire or post-cultural speculation, zombie fictions also demonstrably mobilize the climatic unease of the current Anthropocene. Focusing in particular upon Max Brooks’s 2006 novel World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War, this article considers the complex politics which have frequently underwritten a mythical origin for pandemics in the Othered East, and their contemporary reproduction in western concerns regarding unregulated surgery and the capitalism of human tissue. The article then proposes that the deterioration of human culture consequent upon the fictional zombie pandemic interrogates the contemporary understanding of integrated nationhood and problematizes the dichotomy structured between geographically stable and refugee populations. The sudden eclipse of the competitive Anthropocene by a mindless Zombicene brings not renewal for a planet no longer supporting agriculture and industry but rather a hastening of perceived environmental collapse, where unregulated hunting and the uncontrolled burning of natural resources accelerate climatic deterioration, imperilling further the survival of residual humanity. As a type of apocalyptic fiction, the zombie narrative thus

KEYWORDS

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 ecoGothic
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 apocalyptic fiction

1. The potential of residual memory was graphically demonstrated through the actions of Stephen 'Flyboy' Andrews in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), who unknowingly leads his fellow zombies to his associates' living quarters. A more extensive retention of memory was exhibited in the figure of Bub in Romero's subsequent *Day of the Dead* (1985). The potential for collective action under zombie leadership is realized through the person of Big Daddy in Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005).
2. A rare but compelling and systematic exception to this literary convention of aggregated individualism is the unpaginated *Zombie Apocalypse!* (2010), edited by Stephen Jones, where the narrative progressively reveals that zombie culture retains much of the institutional trappings of the mortal ascendancy it has supplanted – to the extent, indeed, that in a zombie-dominated United Kingdom, a revived Queen Elizabeth II conveys (on the final two pages) a traditional Christmas message to her undead subjects.
3. The epistemological distinctions that demarcate the human and the post-human are, of course, those that may both justify and facilitate the extinction of the latter by the former without guilt or implication of murder: see, for example, Schlozman 2016: viii. As Sherryll Vint notes, though, such demarcations may also be applied to redefine those who are infected within conventional pandemic crises as ab-human,

poses questions with regard to the persistence of conventional human behaviours, even in a post-capitalist environment, where the political concepts structuring nationhood have come to function as little more than a memory.

The fin-de-siècle flesh-eater, embodied as it is in fictions of zombie apocalypse and social collapse, is a creature of rich cultural significance. Having successfully made the transition from passive agrarian slave to aggressive but mindless predator in George Romero's groundbreaking *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the zombie has progressively increased in speed and ferocity, on occasions developing also a residual memory associated with an enhanced – but still limited – intelligence and the potential for collective action.¹ Zombie narratives in both literary and cinematic incarnation have moved, likewise, from the local to the global, from the cemetery and the isolated farmhouse to the labyrinthine city and the expansiveness of the sovereign nation – those final two terms, the ascendancy implicit in sovereignty and the discrete identities encoded in nationhood being most especially threatened by the undifferentiated and mindless hordes of the revitalized dead. Zombies no longer serve but conquer, though their limited intelligence and the illusory nature of their collective drive – they are individuals seeking the same goal rather than a coherent force – characteristically preclude them knowing anything of ascendancy or conquest.² What they leave behind in their wake is the rout of civilization, the redundancy of hitherto collective or organized institutions, the end of life as we know it.

The end of life as we know it: not quite. For the literary and cinematic envisioning of zombie predation on a global scale partakes of much of the ambience once devoted to fictions of post-nuclear carnage, where populations have been more than decimated and where the survivors have been rendered rootless in truly uncanny space. Zombie fictions thus characteristically depict an undefined and mutable post-culture in which memory is engaged in constant negotiation with perception of the contemporary, and with conception of the future. This is a world in which deployable resources, variously scarce or else scattered widely across an abandoned and depopulated global landscape, constantly recall in their origins a world now accessible only through the incrementally unreliable testimony of oral history. It is a revised environment, indeed, in which the very notion of humanity has become, if not forgotten, then compromised and questionable.³ In this world of competitive rather than collective persistence, survivors from its cultural predecessor are more likely to fight and further reduce the viability of the species than cooperate in order to restore – if not improve upon – the historic and human civilization which has been lost. The zombie – far more than the vampire or the werewolf – thus arguably captures the zeitgeist of a decadent age redolent with consumerism and fearful of consequence, locally hedonistic and yet by implication guilty of a perceptible neglect of literally global proportions. The zombie is a universal monster, uncanny in the Freudian sense, abject in the Kristevan, a contemporary *memento mori*, which has the capacity to remind us that whatever 'we' (the viewer; the reader; civil society) have – be it property, identity, family, wholeness, health, life, intelligence, compassion [...] conceptual humanity, even – 'we' might easily lose.⁴

If academic criticism has dwelt quite justifiably upon the social satire and cultural critique so often embodied in zombie narratives, it has been somewhat less inclined to consider the zombie specifically from an ecocritical

1. perspective.⁵ This is, perhaps, not surprising. The institution of ecocriticism
 2. has – historically at least – appeared somewhat reluctant to contemplate the
 3. Gothic directly, preferring the rather less visceral content of Romanticism or
 4. else the emblematic and expansive wastelands of post-apocalyptic fantasy.
 5. Indeed, as the ecocritic Greg Garrard suggested as recently as 2013, '[t]
 6. he prefix “eco-” seems to repel the word “Gothic”’ (Garrard 2013: 217).
 7. Subsequent scholarship has, however, confronted what might appear to be
 8. an odd canonical conservatism within an otherwise radical critical discourse,
 9. and a valuable corrective is to be found, for example, in the research of
 10. Gothic scholars as diverse as David Del Principe (2014), Dawn Keetley (2017),
 11. Sue Edney (2020), and the ongoing editorial work undertaken by Elizabeth
 12. Parker and Michelle Poland in *Gothic Nature Journal*. The advent of a coherent
 13. ecoGothic – which acknowledges the preoccupations of established ecocriti-
 14. cism whilst asserting its own right to dissent from that critical institution’s
 15. generic orthodoxies, however, provides criticism with a vehicle through which
 16. to address the zombie as a significant and widely circulated phenomenon
 17. in contemporary literature and cinema.⁶ Indeed, the application of such an
 18. approach arguably reveals that, far from being merely a mindless and popular
 19. form of gory entertainment, zombie narratives have the capacity to acutely
 20. critique essentially the same concerns as the more reputable and elite fictions
 21. favoured by the ecocritical establishment. To acknowledge the potency of
 22. the zombie as an emblem of ecological collapse is thus, perhaps, to further
 23. democratize ecocriticism in expanding its reach into popular fictions, and to
 24. acknowledge that these supposedly ephemeral narratives may successfully
 25. convey a sense of environmental crisis to readers located in tabloid rather than
 26. broadsheet literacy.

27. Essentially, zombie fiction envisages an environmental transition from the
 28. current Anthropocene to – if the neologism may be permitted – a nascent
 29. Zombicene, where the consequences of the latter epoch can only be projected
 30. in the vaguest of terms. The Anthropocene may be defined as the current
 31. geological age, in which human activity has been the dominant influence upon
 32. climate and the environment. The impending Zombicene removes current and
 33. extensive human activity from that ecological equation, and while noting that
 34. zombies engage neither in collective agriculture or industry, retains residual
 35. human activity as a potential factor impacting upon the global environment
 36. so long as pockets of humanity resist the new world order. Indeed, these
 37. activities – even when produced by a dwindling number of active and sentient
 38. human beings – can be observed in some cases to have consequences as
 39. profound as those associated with the powers invested in the nations and
 40. corporations of the early twenty-first-century Anthropocene.

41. Generically, zombie narratives embody three central and recurrent
 42. thematic tropes ripe for interpretation through ecoGothic discourse. These are,
 43. succinctly, the progressive scripting of the zombie in medical terms as a form
 44. of plague or epidemic, albeit one often produced specifically *not* by nature but
 45. by irresponsible commercial or industrial activity; the profound effect that the
 46. rise of the zombie might have upon accustomed patterns of human culture,
 47. ethics and organization; and the consequences that these changes in human
 48. existence might have upon local and global ecology.

49. These are the concerns, in varying proportions, of a whole range of zombie
 50. fictions from Romero’s paradigm-setting movies through to Poppy Z. Brite’s
 51. insightful short story ‘Calcutta, lord of nerves’ (Brite [1994] 1995: 143–58) and
 52. Stephen Jones’s structurally innovative novel *Zombie Apocalypse!* (Jones 2010:

thereby rendering
 them liable to medical
 strategies of policing
 and containment. See
 Vint 2016: 124, 126.

4. The immanent potential of the zombie as a vehicle through which to consider the volitional and sentient definition of humanity has not been overlooked by philosophers: Botting 2011: 36–37.
5. See, for example, Schott 2010: 61–75; Payne 2017: 211–24.
6. The term ‘ecoGothic’ was coined in 2009 as the title of a panel included within the International Gothic Association’s conference at the University of Lancaster that year. It was retained – without the interpolated capital G – as the title of the first published essay collection on the subject (Smith and Hughes 2013). Subsequent publications have developed the ecoGothic to include revisionist considerations of wilderness (Parker 2020; Keetley and Tenga 2016), cultivated landscape (Edney 2020) and the collapse of corporeality (Estok 2020).

7. On the enduring function of documentation and testimony in Gothic, see Sage 1988: 127–86, *passim*.
8. Hawaii, the sole US state not located physically on the continental landmass, thus appears by implication to be still outside of organized national governance on the day that Victory in America – VA Day – is triumphantly declared.

n.pag.). They are, perhaps, most extensively explored however in Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), a substantial epic that narrates what the anonymous editor variously terms 'The Crisis', 'The Dark Years' [and] 'The Walking Plague' by way of a multitude of affected voices, elite and demotic, educated and ostensibly ignorant, military and civilian (Brooks [2006] 2010: 11). *World War Z* is an emotional and emotive chronicle that fully participates in the Gothic's historical deployment of witness statements, reports and corroborative documentation.⁷ It charts a troubled human history from the rise of 'the creatures that almost caused our extinction' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 1) to the supposed cessation of hostilities when 'VA Day was declared in the continental United States' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 2). For all this, as the novel makes repeatedly clear, even when Victory in America Day is institutionally declared and a semblance of conventional nationhood ostensibly reinstated, the zombie opposition has not yet been wholly neutralized, and human well-being has perceptibly failed to return to its pre-war level, even in the resurgent – and specifically *continental* – United States (Brooks [2006] 2010: 2).⁸ The implications and inequalities of the Anthropocene – social, economic, regional and environmental – thus persist in the contemporary Zombicene. There is seemingly no escape from the cultural and ecological traps laid by earlier, human, civilization, even in a world apparently renewed and remade.

That *World War Z* locates the origin of the zombie epidemic explicitly in the People's Republic of China is surely significant. As Linnie Blake rightly notes, this detail highlights the complex and conflicted nature of the most populous social organization on the planet, 'a nation divided between the collectivist agrarianism of the rural past and the dollar hunger of the neoliberal present' (Blake 2018: 196). If the agrarian and the industrial are imbricated in occidental conceptions of contemporary Chinese culture, so too may commercial practice be rendered intimate to the precarious human body itself when the process of Othering pushes Chinese difference to a margin against conventional western standards. The current COVID-19 crisis is a case in point. The cultural conventions of a historical institution, the wet market – be they connected with hygiene, the practicalities of slaughter or the very nature of the tissue to be consumed – are proclaimed as the source of an unprecedented epidemic, which, having first breached the boundary between species, has progressed further to leave the East and go to the West (Maron 2020; Petrikova et al. 2020). Disease, historically, has neither recognized nor respected the arbitrariness of national boundaries, nor has it acknowledged the discrete nature of the bodies, which it infects. Capitalist modernity, it might be argued, has added, further, the permeation of both commerce and its associated freighting of contamination to the progressive undermining of the cultural conceptuality of discrete selfhood. Enmeshed in globalization, the modern consumer cannot but be subject to what Roger Luckhurst terms 'the risky interconnection of the world's economy' (Luckhurst 2015: 11). In a situation where commerce in *all* of its varieties is wholly dependent upon 'the interconnectedness of global transport and communication networks' (Luckhurst 2015: 179), the rise of pandemic situations, be they viral or otherwise, is inevitable.

World War Z associates the advent of the zombie apocalypse with an essentially industrial activity, a seeming pollution of the human species that parallels China's popular reputation in the neo-liberal West as a significant contributor to environmental degradation (Anon. 2016; Albert and Xu 2016). However obscure the organic origins of the plague itself, the subsequent *spread* of zombification is fictionally advanced as a consequence of the incautious

1. and opportunistic capitalism pursued by entrepreneurial Asian businessmen,
 2. apparently undertaken with the tacit endorsement of the political state. The
 3. implicit rhetorical castigation here is, needless to say, as conventional as it is
 4. evasive. Such commercial practices represent little more than a logical extension
 5. of neo-liberal economics, and indeed express the potential which that
 6. specifically western doctrine might hold for both culture and ethics. Brooks is,
 7. in this respect, somewhat subversive. While retaining a conventional western
 8. castigation of China as both a dangerous economic rival and cultural Other,
 9. Brooks extends a censorious gaze towards the ostentatiously self-righteous
 10. political West, which consumes so much of the former's exported products.
 11. The specific nature of these products, moreover, is extended far beyond the
 12. mobile telephones and cheap non-biodegradable plastic goods, which so often
 13. punctuate the hostile political rhetoric frequently deployed by an Occident,
 14. which nominally aspires to green consumerism. In consequence, the ethical
 15. integrity of the voracious 'consumer' in the political West becomes implicitly
 16. as questionable and as compromised as that of the 'product' so enthusiastically
 17. sourced from the Occident's supposedly antithetical Other.

18. In the closing decade of the twentieth century, the People's Republic of
 19. China was the subject of a number of allegations, originating primarily in the
 20. global West, which condemned its essentially capitalistic approach to what
 21. is conventionally termed spare-part surgery. Ostensibly, this latter is a clinical
 22. specialism whose aspirations are, laudably, to enhance or else prolong
 23. life through the replacement of failing or failed organs with others sourced
 24. either from the recently dead or, on occasion, from living donors. In Britain,
 25. and in many other countries both East and West, such organs – hearts and
 26. lungs, kidneys, livers, pancreas, corneas and other tissue – have been conventionally
 27. obtained from both the living and the dead through voluntary donation.
 28. Elsewhere – and this is again a situation common to both the political
 29. East and West – the 'voluntary' nature of donation is essentially commercial,
 30. where an organ – most commonly a kidney – is sold, often to a middleman,
 31. in a financial transaction, which is frequently prompted by personal or familial
 32. economic hardship. The imputation raised against those involved in the
 33. 'harvesting' of human organs in China stems from the putatively obscure
 34. origins of at least *some* of this urgently needed tissue. Campaigning organizations
 35. in the West have suggested that many Chinese organs were obtained
 36. not from willing donors, but rather sourced involuntarily from the cadavers
 37. of recently executed prisoners or even from the bodies of the condemned on
 38. the very eve of execution (Anon. 1994: paras I and II).⁹ The transplant industry
 39. at this time was, according to the Chinese dissident Harry Wu, 'apparently
 40. a booming business', drawing income not merely from wealthy Chinese
 41. residents but also from 'desperate people' ordinarily resident in 'Hong Kong,
 42. Macao, Singapore, the nations of the Persian Gulf, Japan and America' (Wu
 43. and Vecsey 1996: 147, 148). Though global condemnation was for the most
 44. part directed towards China as the putative source of the harvested organs,
 45. it appears very clear that spare-part surgery has long been a worldwide business,
 46. transporting its perishable raw materials along conventional trade routes,
 47. selling these on through brokerage to the highest bidder and operating, on
 48. occasions, outside of the control of both statute law and conventional medical
 49. ethics in the countries of despatch and receipt. The placing of 'America' at the
 50. end of Wu's list is, without doubt, emphatic in its apportioning of international
 51. complicity, and very much in keeping with the neo-liberal world which Brooks
 52. depicts in *World War Z*.¹⁰ This element of *World War Z*, in many respects,

9. The ethical nature of non-consensual donation has, of course, been addressed in fiction (Ishiguro 2005) and, more viscerally, in cinema (Gozlan 2010).
10. Though the popular image of the organ trade is conventionally depicted, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes suggests, through an unequal transfer of body capital 'from South to North, from Third to First World, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white, and from female to male', its Asian incarnation motivates a local as well as global presence founded upon criminal enterprise as much as poverty. See Scheper-Hughes 2000: 5; Ancuta 2017: 84–85, 90, 91.

11. For the structural origins of Brooks's works, see Blake 2018: 196.
12. The terminology of transplant surgery is, in itself, a telling index of its function in a commercial market. See Wasson 2011: 76, 77.

advances an explicit critique of the globally inequitable availability of commercialized health care, rather than a narrower interrogation of the specifically US private medicine as comprehended, for example, by Kari Nixon's 2016 study of graphic zombie narratives.

Desperation is a form of need, and one that may apparently overcome the strictures of ethics in both surgeon and patient (cf. Ancuta 2017: 94). An interview with a former transplant surgeon who once operated in the shady medical underworld of Rio de Janeiro crystallizes the whole situation as it is presented in *World War Z*. The interview, which is conducted by an anonymous representative of the residual United Nations, is ostensibly undertaken in order to preserve the memory – 'An Oral History', as the novel's subtitle asserts – of the recent conflict between living and dead. It becomes rapidly clear, though, that what is being memorialized here is not so much the War itself but the economic imbalances and unethical practices, which turned human tissue into a globally tradable commodity.¹¹ The interviewer and the reader are thus forced to contemplate the salient question, '[w]hy did so many outbreaks begin in hospitals?' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 27). The Brazilian surgeon recalls – with scarce-concealed relish – how he has performed highly profitable organ transplants on 'patients from Europe, the Arab world, even the self-righteous United States' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 27), before pithily observing that

Few of you Yankees asked where your new kidney or pancreas was coming from, be it a slum kid from the City of God [Rio de Janeiro] or some unlucky student in a Chinese political prison. You didn't know, you didn't care. You just signed your traveler's checks, went under the knife, then went home to Miami or New York or wherever.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 27–28)

The surgeon's words – which specifically imply that the interviewer is an American – acknowledge the two poles of commercially driven spare-part surgery. There is no altruistic donor to bridge the ethical gap between the organ that is willingly sold or that which is harvested involuntarily by another for commercial exchange. Though the export of human organs from China to anywhere other than Hong Kong was banned in 1993, Brooks's novel fictionalizes a continuing global black export market in human flesh, where few questions are asked and only informal assurances are given regarding organic purity. The virus thus travels wherever there is a market for restorative human flesh, the poor who must sell their organs and the prisoners who unwillingly donate theirs infecting those sufficiently wealthy to purchase from this occluded marketplace in which tissue is both harvested and brokered.¹² The risks are immense, as the surgeon notes: '[w]ho knows how many infected corneas, infected pituitary glands ... Mother of God, who knows how many infected kidneys they pumped into the global market' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 27).

In the same interview, on hearing of how a rare dextrocardiac heart had been delivered to the airport at Rio somewhat casually 'packed in ice in a plastic picnic cooler', the interviewer queries, with rhetorically discernible anxiety, 'Was it tested?' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 22, original emphasis). The surgeon replies:

For what? In order to test for something, you have to know what you're looking for. We didn't know about Walking Plague then. We were concerned with conventional ailments – hepatitis or HIV/AIDS – and we didn't even have time to test for those.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 22)

1. There seems to be neither accountability nor ethical scruple in this shady
 2. world of acquisition and consumption. The healing art has been reduced to
 3. an acquisitive science; the surgeon – who 'was rich, and getting richer all the
 4. time' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 21) – rather vainly consoling himself by reminding
 5. his auditor that, at the time of the transplant, 'I was still a doctor, I was still
 6. helping people, and if it was so "immoral" to the self-righteous, hypocritical
 7. North, why did their citizens keep coming?' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 22).¹³ The
 8. surgeon does not know of the source of the flesh he will incorporate into the
 9. body of his trusting patient, nor apparently does he care. Prompted by the
 10. interviewer, the surgeon admits that the dextrocardiac heart is from 'a "donor"
 11. located in 'China, most likely. My broker operated out of Macao. We trusted
 12. him. His record was solid. When he assured us that the package was "clean",
 13. I took him at his word; I had to' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 22). It is even suggested
 14. that the heart – somewhat tellingly dehumanized as 'the package' – has been
 15. extracted to order, for the surgeon admits 'I told my broker what I needed,
 16. gave him the specifics, and sure enough, three weeks later I received an email
 17. simply titled "We have a match"' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 23). The Brazilian has,
 18. essentially, signed the death warrant of an individual elsewhere in the world
 19. by the simple expedient of sending a business-like e-mail. Zombie-like, the
 20. rich consume the poor and the powerless by buying their bodies piecemeal.
 21. However pitiable it might be in its infirmity, the recipient body is, as Sara
 22. Wasson suggests, 'monstrous in its artificially enhanced ability to assimilate
 23. the tissue of others' (Wasson 2011: 73). Its monstrosity is perhaps rendered
 24. all the more monstrous by Brooks's scripting of the organ-recipient and the
 25. zombie-consumer as consequential rather than congruent phenomena: the
 26. 'rapacious flesh' of an unethical humanity prompts an unempathetic inhu-
 27. manity: both are, to quote Wasson, 'engineered to devour' (Wasson 2011: 78).
 28. Like the unethical living consumer of human organs, a zombie recognizes no
 29. demarcation vested in wealth or property, no cultural value associated with
 30. age, gender or race, no attachment to common humanity. All living flesh is
 31. sustenance, and persists merely to be consumed.

32. The 'donated' dextrocardiac heart arrives in Rio during a fictional political
 33. crisis in which the Chinese government is ostensibly conducting a nationwide
 34. purge of dissidents. However, both the 'demonstrations and subsequent crack-
 35. downs' have ostensibly been 'engineered by the Ministry of State Security' in
 36. order 'to divert the world's eye from the real danger growing within China'
 37. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 47) – namely, the initial outbreak of the Walking Plague.
 38. The heart sent from Macao to Rio is implicitly an infected product of this
 39. purge, and its transplantation into the dextrocardiac body of the ailing Austrian
 40. patient, 'Herr Muller' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 26), precipitates his conventional
 41. death and almost immediate revival as a ravenous zombie. Muller's rapid
 42. revival is explained in blandly conventional medical terms: 'Because the infec-
 43. tion started in the heart, the virus had direct access to his circulatory system,
 44. so it probably reached his brain seconds after it was implanted' (Brooks [2006]
 45. 2010: 26). The undefined 'it' is that which reactivates the body thoughtlessly,
 46. an abdication of former humanity that itself circulates virally within the econ-
 47. omy of self, and which presumably leaks into the circulation of the bitten in
 48. the abject fluids of salivation and ingestion associated with the biter. In Rio
 49. de Janeiro, the operation was an ironic success. The patient both died and
 50. survived. Patient Zero, in Brazil at least, is literally a southern-hemisphere
 51. embodiment of the unregulated and shady neo-liberalisms that connect the
 52. political East and West. The presence of revived individuals such as Muller

13. Less equivocal statements regarding a sense of personal un-ease with regard to the harvesting of organs from brain-dead donors have been recorded on the part of medical professionals, even in the face of the restorative consequences of their actions: see Green et al. 2016: 98–100.

14. See, for example, Brooks [2006] 2010: 14, 51–52, 77–79, 150–51.
15. The neuropathology of vCJD and its association with the consumption of bovine tissue was noted as early as 1996 (Ironsides 1988: 143–49).

will, later in the novel, prompt crackdowns and isolations across the liberal West, which recall the purges of political or cultural opponents, which punctuate hostile commentaries upon Communist China and the former Junta states of South America alike.¹⁴

While it is certainly possible to discern a strident occidental political edge to this fable of infectious and mobile flesh, there is thus much in the narrative of the Walking Plague's scripted origins that arguably parallels the ecological and commercial history of the political West in the three decades preceding the coronavirus crisis. Indeed, a striking example of how an intimacy with infected flesh may silently undermine both individual and national health can be found much closer to home, and again in the closing decade of the twentieth century. It was a medical crisis generated outside of China by incautious and industrialized animal husbandry, and the neurodegenerative condition of the infected donor tissue was such as to be capable of mutating when embodied in a human host. It involved a transference of pathology across two discrete species – specifically, between animals and humans. It was invariably fatal, affected the functioning of brain tissue in animal and human alike, and was spread geographically through unchecked commercial enterprise utilizing openly accredited trade routes. It was, of course, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and its human consequent, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD).¹⁵ These two pathological disorders developed because of corporate greed at the point of production, through an ignorance of the mode of their transmission, and by way of an almost anonymous distribution of untraceable infected tissue both nationally and across international borders. One of the lasting consequences of BSE, in Europe at least, has been the development of a traceable chain of existence from birth to slaughter in stock raised for human consumption. 'Mad cow disease', as it was evocatively termed in the popular media, is a mirror of fictional zombieism, and possibly an unacknowledged context for its ongoing representation. In the subtle dissemination of vCJD, it is the ostensibly intelligent being that consumes an infected and mentally degenerating counterpart, rather than vice versa. The outcome is the same, though. The simple – unthinking, even – act of eating mobilizes change, engages a congruence of self, which equalizes consumer and consumed, reducing one to the sentient debilitation associated with the other. Once the disorder was comprehended, the mad-cow carcasses, notoriously, were to be consumed not by human mouths but in mediaeval-looking funeral pyres, a monumental and apparently unrecognized echo of the zombie bonfires, which provided the backdrop for the closing credits of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (Anon. 2001; Bunk 2004). The roads, which once carried cattle to market or to slaughterhouse, became the conduits to those places in which their decapitated and then cremated remains were released into the atmosphere, the pungent smoke penetrating houses and lungs alike – albeit with the reassurance that flesh, which had been thoroughly burned, could no longer infect.

Plagues are seldom static phenomena. They travel by way of trade routes, with travelling people and in the goods those people carry. From the destinations in which those goods are traded, plagues will again silently depart, embodied in new hosts and in new products for redistribution. Plagues are environmental, for they carry the immanent consequences of one geographical location to the latent conditions of another. Human activity in its status as the determining factor of the Anthropocene is the central agent in the impending destruction of humanity through the unending zombie consumerism, which eclipses its mortal counterpart. The issue of human mobility, of

1. course, is central to ecocritical discourse. The destructive environmental herit-
2. age of the Anthropocene has frequently been associated with the technology
3. of travel – the internal combustion and turbojet engines, most notably – and
4. the voluntary movement of peoples has its parallels likewise in those involun-
5. tary mass migrations consequent upon war, economic distress and famine. If
6. the airfreighting of body parts is suggested as one route by which the Walking
7. Plague is distributed internationally in *World War Z*, so likewise does the inter-
8. national mobility of living and infected bodies constitute a further conduit for
9. the spread of the infection.

10. If the global trade in transplantable human flesh is scripted in *World*
11. *War Z* as the initial route by which the Walking Plague progresses through
12. medical and commercial networks from East to West, immigration is repeat-
13. edly cited as the signal human activity by which the zombie disorder gains
14. global impetus. The Brazilian surgeon, again, taunts his American counter-
15. part with those convenient prejudices whose function is to protect the self by
16. demonizing the Other – particularly the Other who comes in search of politi-
17. cal asylum or economic betterment:

18.
19. You think immigration was the only way the infection swept the planet?

20. Not all of the initial outbreaks were Chinese nationals. Can you explain
21. all those stories of people suddenly dying of unexplained causes,
22. then reanimating without ever having been bitten? Why did so many
23. outbreaks begin in hospitals? Illegal Chinese immigrants weren't going
24. to hospitals?

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 27)

25.
26.
27. It is thus not the trafficked, but the traffickers, who facilitate the spread of
28. disease, who bypass regulations and quarantines in order to trade in the basic
29. desire for human betterment as much as the studied need for human mobility.
30. The burden of blame in 'the self-righteous United States' (Brooks [2006] 2010:
31. 27), inevitably, descends emphatically upon the traded not the trader, just as in
32. tabloid journalism it is the immigrant who is customarily chastised for bring-
33. ing down the rate of pay, rather than the unscrupulous employer who, like the
34. trafficker, is a trader in the mobility of human flesh (Kelly 2017; Reality Check
35. Team 2019).

36. It is in the nature of plagues, though, to *create* mass migration, to reduce
37. formerly stable populations to the status of mobile refugees forced to flee a
38. medical threat whose puissance is the equal of any political purge or pogrom.
39. Left unchecked, uninfected refugees may pose as much a threat as the zombies
40. who pursue them. In one pointed episode, for example, Brooks defamiliar-
41. izes the customarily heated debate that surrounds mass human migration by
42. relocating the desired destination away from the economic powerhouses of
43. Europe and the United States, with their ostensible commitment to liberal
44. politics, and placing it instead in Iran, where the progress of 'The infection'
45. had been inhibited because, in the words of a former airman in the Iranian
46. Revolutionary Guard, 'Our land was very mountainous. Transportation was
47. difficult. Our population was relatively small' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 90). His
48. subsequent rhetoric, though, channels the prejudices of a historical West
49. accustomed to vocally deriding those who retreat by land and sea from the
50. stern fundamentalism so often associated with Iran in the late twentieth
51. century. He notes:

52.

16. Sikhs are scripted in zombie fiction as being notably ruthless in their treatment of the living dead. See, for example, Brite [1994] 1995: 148.

The problem was refugees, millions of them from the east, millions! Streaming across Baluchistan, throwing our plans into disarray. So many areas were already infected, great swarms slouching toward our cities. Our border guards were overwhelmed, entire outposts buried under waves of ghouls. There was no way to close the border and at the same time deal with our own outbreaks.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 90)

World War Z, indeed, dwells long and hard upon the handling of refugees by sovereign governments and extra-governmental vigilantes. In one narrative sourced in India, the 'slow and deliberate' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 132) dead pursue living refugees to the bottleneck of a pass near Shimla, only for the road holding both groups to be destroyed by explosives detonated on the orders of a Sikh general (Brooks [2006] 2010: 131–36).¹⁶ Refugees consistently lead the hungry dead to centres of surviving population throughout *World War Z*, making them a threat to those already in a place of safety and rendering them liable to violent rejection by the living (Brooks [2006] 2010: 69, 93, 122, 127, 310). In Ukraine, for example, the retreating citizens of Kiev are sprayed from the air with chemical ordnance left over from the Cold War by their own national air force. The uninfected merely die; those contaminated by the mobile dead revive and are summarily despatched by the forces on the ground (Brooks [2006] 2010: 119–20). When a domestic population is transformed collectively into internal refugees, the forces of governance, be they civil or military, necessarily impose and police new borders, which are frequently intangible and inevitably mutable. The imposition of these condenses the human residue derived from the greater political or cultural state into a continually contracting centre – a new identity, even – within which former conceptions of nationhood are not merely irrelevant in the present but function as an inconvenient reminder of the past.

It is in this context of a displaced domestic population that the Brazilian surgeon's biting remarks attain a structural relevance to several later episodes in Brooks's narrative, where the uninfected population retreat to those areas of their domestic landmass, which they consider to be safe from invasion by the predatory horde. In so doing, these internal refugees fracture the already fragile and threatened concept of integrated nationhood, and render themselves foreigners in their own land, with the zombies – as invaders – becoming de facto but unknowing owners of the forfeited territory. Indeed, a later commentator describes those fleeing the United States for Canada on foot as 'looking like the way you think refugees are supposed to look' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 124). The hitherto fertile land that is left behind becomes subject to an unwitting scorched earth policy, with domestic animals left neglected and vulnerable to feral wildlife (Brooks [2006] 2010: 287, 318) – and, on occasions, to feral humans also (Brooks [2006] 2010: 155, 290) – and the commercially driven Anthropocene system of agrarian cultivation rendered redundant (Brooks [2006] 2010: 142–43).

The fragmentation of the United States is rendered in particular detail several times during Brooks's narrative. Much is made of residual attitudes to the boundaries that had been hitherto imposed and enforced through property and status. In New York, a cadre of wealthy socialites – 'actors, and singers, and rappers and pro-athletes' occupies a crafted stronghold, protected by mercenaries, on 'an island [...] a big island [...] a long island [...] right next to

1. Manhattan' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 84, original emphasis). If the irony of desir-
 2. ing to retain such a fashionable address within a city now become meaning-
 3. less in its desolation and dispossession were not sufficient, the proprietor of
 4. this extraordinary retreat has facilitated 'a simultaneous webcast that went
 5. out all over the world 24/7' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 85) from every room in the
 6. compound. Vaingloriously assuming that the world continues to be fasci-
 7. nated with their every move, the besieged celebrities watch television reports
 8. of carnage in the Upper East Side, their studied posing and gasps of horror,
 9. 'some honest, some staged' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 86), however attracting *not*
 10. the zombie hordes but rather a mass of uninfected and excluded ordinary
 11. New Yorkers who suddenly comprehend that '[t]hat's the house on the news!'
 12. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 87). Their consequent assault on the compound is moti-
 13. vated by a seemingly puissant altruism quite in contrast to the situation both
 14. outside and within the Celebrity Big-Brother House. As the former mercenary
 15. who narrates the episode reveals:

17. We'd been paid to protect rich people from zombies, not against other
 18. not-so-rich people who just wanted a safe place to hide. You could hear
 19. them shouting as they charged in through the front door. Not 'grab the
 20. booze' or 'rape the bitches'; it was 'put out the fire' and 'get the women
 21. and kids upstairs!'

22. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 88)

24. The wealthy, the established, seek to exclude those poorer or less eligible than
 25. themselves, even in the knowledge of a common humanity uninfected by
 26. the Walking Plague. Wealth and the right of possession, in *World War Z* at
 27. least, continues to define and ultimately to exclude (cf. Nixon 2016: 40, 42–43).
 28. Looters, elsewhere in *World War Z*, are just as likely to be summarily executed
 29. by the new possessors of abdicated material wealth (Brooks [2006] 2010: 155)
 30. as the zombies who have no interest in property or proprietorial rights.

31. In addition to uninfected refugees such as those depicted storming the
 32. New York compound, *World War Z* projects a further body of mobile migrants,
 33. those who are infected but not yet converted to the zombie state, and whose
 34. pointless attempts to retreat from themselves render them a potential and
 35. often unperceived risk within the host of uninfected travellers. A measure of
 36. personal safety, as well as a degree of mobility, might perhaps be achieved
 37. by duly encasing the uninfected self within the iron curtilage of a car or a
 38. ship. Should the infected though, penetrate therein in the innocuous guise of
 39. a fellow traveller, the protection afforded becomes illusory. In India, the indis-
 40. criminate packing of infected and uninfected bodies alike into retreating ships,
 41. prompted in many cases by the financial greed of their captains, turns some
 42. vessels into 'floating slaughterhouses' from the point at which 'the onboard
 43. infected refugees had begun to reanimate' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 73). Similarly,
 44. *en route* to Canada a seemingly harmless lone female traveller, altruistically
 45. picked up on the road by a retreating all-American family for no immediate
 46. reward, is quickly ejected when telling signs of a recent zombie encounter –
 47. a hand 'wrapped in a cloth' with 'a dark stain that looked like blood' (Brooks
 48. [2006] 2010: 124) – are perceived. When the rights of property have been
 49. conceded, and when the rout of civilization has pushed rich and poor alike to
 50. the highways of retreat, any sense of interpersonal value can be vested only in
 51. unequivocal uninfected status.

52.

17. The term was originated by the French anthropologist Alfred Sauvy originally to describe countries not politically or economically aligned with either NATO or Soviet Russia and the latter's satellites during the Cold War. The meaning and application of the term has changed somewhat since that time, and it is often used informally to refer to less-industrialized, rather than non-aligned, nations. Sauvy's terminology is recalled explicitly elsewhere in *World War Z* in a trenchant exchange between former imperial and postcolonial leaderships: see Brooks [2006] 2010: 266.
18. Less-intensely populated Canada, as Roger Luckhurst observes, is similarly the promised – or at least safe – land beyond the overrun United States in Romero's *Land of the Dead*: see Luckhurst 2015: 154. Domestic citizens fleeing fictional zombie outbreaks in the continental United States appear consistently reluctant to flee South to Mexico, though archipelagic Cuba is noted as a destination of choice for US residents fleeing zombie-overrun Florida: see Brooks [2006] 2010: 230, cf. Luckhurst 2015: 184–85.
19. The utopian paradigm is, it might be added, germane to politically Marxist critiques of zombie fiction: see Luckhurst 2015: 11–12.

As a result of the zombie crisis, the First World is transformed overnight into its own memory of what it once dismissed colloquially as the Third World.¹⁷ One witness, for example, recalls the exodus from Nebraska:

It stretched to the horizon: sedans, trucks, buses, RVs, anything that could drive. I saw tractors, I saw a cement mixer. Seriously, I even saw a flatbed with nothing but a giant sign on it, a billboard advertising a 'Gentlemen's Club'. People were sitting on top of it. People were riding on top of everything, on roofs, in between luggage racks. It reminded me of some old pictures of trains in India with people hanging on them like monkeys.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 68)

Notably, as well as refugees from the continental United States, those seeking sanctuary northwards in distant Canada are scripted as including some twenty-five million from Latin America (Brooks [2006] 2010: 271).¹⁸ *World War Z* in many respects expresses the same xenophobic tensions that have, in recent years, so often been condensed into the conceptual image of the ostensibly fragile border between the United States and Mexico (Brooks [2006] 2010: 324). In the *Zombicene*, the border has been pushed further North and now separates the United States from Canada: the appeal of the distant place of asylum towards which the refugees travel is, however, vested primarily in the advantages afforded by a cold climate wherein the zombies will fall into inertia, rather than economic advantage and a ready employment market.

This mass movement of people in search of safety or a better life, though, may arguably channel a version of the utopian paradigm beloved of environmental idealism, if not of ecocriticism also – a myth, as it were, of rural, communal and pre-industrial living in which the excesses of the urban present have been worked through and naturally corrected.¹⁹ Under this enduring myth, those who survive natural disasters, refugees in makeshift camps and shanty towns alike, are prototypically quick in restoring order to a shattered world, constructing new communities from boxes and salvage, opening businesses – cafés, barbershops, schools, clinics – in a new, cooperative and hopeful civilization, putatively cleansed of old jealousies and rivalries. This, certainly, is the post-apocalyptic world identified by Linnie Blake as the necessary successor to the neo-liberal system whose extremes essentially facilitated the spread of the zombie pandemic across the United States specifically, and much of the capitalist globe more broadly (Blake 2018: 195, 198). *World War Z*, however, consistently challenges the utopian myth, proclaiming residual humanity as being equal in selfish acquisitiveness to the encroaching zombie horde, both appearing to be little more than two competitive bodies, which comprised individuals moving *en masse*.

Nowhere is this demonstrated so fully as in the narrative of Jesika Hendricks, who couples her vision of the post-zombie world, littered as it is with once-treasured objects – 'hair dryers, GameCubes, laptops by the dozen', and 'a Sponge-Bob SquarePants sleeping bag' adequate only for 'a heated bedroom at a sleepover party' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 123, 126) – made redundant by the collapse of the culture that generated them, with a recollection of how, as a child, she herself fled the moving tide of dead humanity. A native of Waukesha, Wisconsin, Hendricks, when interviewed, is a resident in Manitoba as 'a now naturalized Canadian' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 123, 121): as such, she is explicitly an immigrant to her current country of residence. Notably, as a child

1. she recalled that the drive North to Canada 'was like heading to the Promised
2. Land' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 125). Indeed, for a short time, when the American
3. and Canadian refugees settle in a region where the cold climate is a deterrent
4. to the mobile dead, it *is* something akin to the Promised Land, flowing as it
5. were with the new world's abundant equivalent of Biblical milk and honey.
6. Hendricks recalls that, 'I knew once we headed far enough north, everything
7. would be all right'. Indeed,

8.
9. For a little while it was. We had this great campsite right on the shore of a
10. lake, not too many people around, but just enough to make us feel 'safe',
11. you know, if any of the dead showed up. Everyone was real friendly,
12. this big collective vibe of relief. It was kind of like a party at first. There
13. were these big cookouts every night, people all throwing in what they'd
14. hunted or fished, mostly fished [...] We all sang around the campfires at
15. night, these giant bonfires of logs stacked up on one another.
16. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 125)

17.
18. The cosiness of this revived pioneer spirit, though, has an ominous edge –
19. and it is in the campfires, and the indiscriminate fishing of the lake through
20. explosives rather than line-and-hook methods, that indicates that this refugee
21. lifestyle, though ostensibly carefree, is not ecologically sustainable. Hendricks'
22. apparently happy memory of the sound of 'the chainsaws as people cut down
23. trees' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 125) is succeeded by a bleaker recollection of a lost
24. Eden, a time before local overpopulation and dwindling resources:

25.
26. That was when we still had trees, before the second and third waves
27. starting [*sic*] showing up, when people were down to burning leaves
28. and stumps, then finally whatever they could get their hands on. The
29. smell of plastic and rubber got really bad, in your mouth, in your hair.
30. By that time the fish were all gone, and anything left for people to hunt.
31. No one seemed to worry. Everyone was counting on winter freezing the
32. dead.
33. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 126)

34.
35. The irresponsibility associated with thoughtless consumption is accentuated
36. here, as well as a lack of foresight, which is comparable to the rhetoric
37. around the burning of non-replaceable resources in contemporary culture.
38. As she suggests, 'I'm sure a lot of people didn't think about anything except
39. the day in front of them' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 126). Certainly, no one appears
40. to have husbanded their resources for the freezing winter that will inevitably
41. approach. Inevitably, the dream turns sour.

42.
43. In the beginning everyone was friendly. We cooperated. We traded or
44. even bought what we needed from other families [...] But after the first
45. month, when the food started running out, and the days got colder and
46. darker, people started getting mean. There were no more communal
47. fires, no more cookouts or singing. The camp became a mess, nobody
48. picking up their trash anymore. A couple of times I stepped in human
49. shit. Nobody was even bothering to bury it.
50. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 126–27)

51.
52.

20. Similar motifs abound, most notably, in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, published like *World War Z* in 2006. Though not a zombie narrative, McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel links darkened skies and a particle-laden atmosphere with the decline of both natural vegetation and human agriculture, the extinction of herbivorous fauna prompting a predominantly carnivorous human diet, which will lead, ultimately, to cannibalism: see McCarthy [2006] 2009: 13, 127, 138, 169, 212. As the unnamed protagonist's wife tells him, under these conditions '[w]e're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film' (McCarthy [2006] 2009: 57).

Communal action resumes only when the atomized community of the living must defend itself against the encroaching and hungry dead: 'And then, as soon as it was over, we'd all turn on each other again' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 127). 'By Christmas Day', this camp – and others, according to Hendricks – had resorted to cannibalism. Though there might be 'plenty of food', in part because so many unprepared residents have frozen to death in that year's unprecedentedly severe winter (Brooks [2006] 2010: 126, 129), the hitherto civilized have reduced themselves to the level of the zombies – albeit with the residual memory of guilt and taboo to season their yuletide feast.

It is the zombie plague, indeed, that triggers a phase of climatic change that rivals global warming in its profound effect upon air quality, seasonal variation and the restricted growth of vegetable foodstuffs. As Hendricks notes, quietly:

That was the first Gray Winter, when the filth in the sky started changing the weather. They say that a part of that filth, I don't know how much, was ash from human remains.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 129)

The 'Gray Winter' is again recalled towards the end of the novel, when a survivor of the Shoah recalls 'a little pond, in a small town in Poland, where they used to dump the ashes. The pond is still gray, even half a century later' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 339). The Polish pond, with its inerasable memory of Nazi inhumanity, has its equivalent in Canada, where the former camp's history is memorialized by 'a collection of bones, too many to count' which 'lie in a pit, half covered in ice' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 128, original emphasis). These discarded bones, which 'have all been broken, the marrow extracted' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 129), confirm Hendricks' testimony of cannibalism, the final commodification of the human body, the effective end of empathy and community amongst the living as much as the dead. They, likewise, point towards the eclipse of agrarian culture in the new human order, the hunter replacing the farmer as the source of sustenance.²⁰

Climate change is referenced frequently across *World War Z*, and the ecological impact of human activity is foregrounded most forcefully in the words of an Australian occupant of the International Space Centre, one of few individuals to have a literally global overview of the crisis as it unfolds:

To just look through the view port down on our fragile little biosphere. To see the massive ecological devastation makes one understand how the modern environmental movement began with the American space program. There were so many fires, and I don't just mean the buildings, or the forests, or even the oil rigs blazing out of control [...] I mean the campfires as well, what had to be at least a billion of them, tiny orange specks covering the earth where electric lights had once been. Every day, every night, it seemed like the whole planet was burning. We couldn't even begin to calculate the ash count but we guesstimated that it was equivalent to a low-grade nuclear exchange between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 260)

Without any hope of governmental control, the condition of the earth must inevitably worsen. There could be little hope of the threat being taken seriously, even if the rule of law were still in place. Elsewhere, as a former White

1. House chief of staff queries (ironically, while wheeling a barrow of dung to a
2. biomass converter),

3.
4. Can you imagine what America would have been like if the federal
5. government slammed on the brakes every time some paranoid crackpot
6. cried 'wolf' or 'global warming' or 'living dead'?

7. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 59)

8.
9. *World War Z*, indeed, *does* imagine what America could be like if those 'para-
10. noid' cries were ignored. As the helpless astronaut notes: 'Nuclear autumn
11. was already beginning to set in, the gray-brown shroud thickening each day'
12. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 260). This is the opacity that one former combatant
13. depicts as 'fog', noting that 'I didn't know fog could be that thick so far inland.
14. I always wanted to ask a climatologist or someone about that' (Brooks [2006]
15. 2010: 316). Elsewhere in *World War Z*, a wartime atmosphere contaminated
16. by '[a]ll the smoke, the crap that'd been filling the air all summer [...] put
17. everything in an amber red light', while in post-war Micronesia the prevail-
18. ing 'brown haze' remains sufficiently dense to obscure the rising sun each day
19. (Brooks [2006] 2010: 93, 199). Under such conditions, the winters characteris-
20. tically come later but are 'longer and colder', and in post-apocalypse Colorado
21. 'spring's like winter used to be, nature letting us know the good life's over for
22. now' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 146, 141, 320).

23. If this were not sufficiently bleak an environmental message, that most
24. emblematic of endangered species, the whale, is depicted as a specific casualty
25. of *World War Z* (Brooks [2006] 2010: 340). With unregulated hunting, dark-
26. ening skies and a polluted ocean, 'the gentle giants are gone forever' – along
27. with the altruistic and humane sentiments, formerly understood as 'part of
28. our humanity' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 341), that motivated their protection. In
29. a world without such empathy, altruism and far-sightedness, there can be no
30. green movement in the sense that such things are currently understood. What
31. does survive from the green idealism of the Anthropocene warps graphically
32. into a form of misanthropic ecoterrorism, a neo-Pagan-inflected fundamen-
33. talism inclined 'to favour flora over fauna', and determined to undermine the
34. priority customarily accorded to humanity by 'dumping herbicide in a town's
35. water supply, [and] booby-trapping trees so loggers couldn't use them for
36. war production' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 150). It is political veganism turned to
37. the systematic murder of its own species, pacifist resistance now inverted
38. into terrorism and violence. Elsewhere, other survivors – significantly termed
39. 'Quislings', in residual memory of an earlier global conflict – mimic the very
40. predator that is destroying their species: 'They started moving like zombies,
41. sounding like them, even attacking and trying to eat other people' (Brooks
42. [2006] 2010: 156). It is a world, seemingly, of inversion: the dead walk; the
43. peaceful revolt; the absence of both localized human industry and the global
44. economics of neo-liberalism herald not regeneration for the planet but an
45. even more profound deterioration of the climate.

46. In the post-apocalyptic Zombicene, human culture struggles onwards
47. chaotically with no guiding principle or far-sighted leadership to regulate
48. its extremes or its selfishness. Humanity, even where atomized into residual
49. family or other identity groups, veers close to that state of consumptive and
50. thoughtless being that typifies the new world order of zombie dominance.
51. When the Australian astronaut says of zombies that '[t]hey displayed no
52. conscious thought, just sheer biological instinct' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 260),

21. See, for example, Brooks [2006] 2010: 93, 151, 322.

he might as easily be describing the survivalist tendency of his own mortal species in the Zombicene – or even the selfishness apparently characteristic of the last generation of the Anthropocene. An Italian general, commanding what appears to be a European Union-sponsored dirigible, voices a similar sentiment regarding zombies:

It's ironic that the only way to kill a zombie is to destroy its brain, because, as a group, they have no collective brain to speak of. There was no leadership, no chain of command, no communication or cooperation on any level. There was no president to assassinate, no HQ bunker to surgically strike. Each zombie is its own, self-contained, automated unit, and this last advantage is what truly encapsulates the entire conflict.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 272)

He might as well be describing the fate of a human species disburdened of the globalization which has progressively undone the viability of the earth as much as provided its specifically modern comforts. Relieved of borderless corporate governance, and forced into a reliance upon residual governments operating within uncertain borders, or individual priorities translated into a ruthless attitude towards rival beings, human or otherwise, the Zombicene humanity of *World War Z* emblemizes both a contemporary world and its immanent breakdown into atomized individualism and mutually destructive survivalism.²¹ This is 'the evil of our collective soul' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 198), as one commentator terms it, where the ostensible relief of one individual promotes the suffering of many, and where empathy is a fragile and residual quality. If there *is* optimism for the future, based as it is upon shared experience (Brooks [2006] 2010: 148, 336) and a revived social structure that seems to suggest the apparently reassuring rise of American meritocracy (Brooks [2006] 2010: 140–41), then a note of cynicism or caution must also be detected in the novel's closing message regarding this brave new world 'because', as one survivor puts it,

I'm sure that as soon as things get back to 'normal', once our kids or grandkids grow up in a peaceful and comfortable world, they'll probably go right back to being as selfish and narrow-minded and generally shitty to one another as we were.

(Brooks [2006] 2010: 336)

'The living dead have taken more from us than land and loved ones', observes the wartime president of the United States: 'They'd robbed us of our confidence as the planet's dominant life form' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 267). The question for resurgent humanity is, as the President puts it, '[w]hat kind of world would they rebuild? Would they rebuild at all?' (Brooks [2006] 2010: 267).

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