

The Walking Dead and the Coronavirus: A Critical Study
of Selected Zombie Fiction in relation to the Pandemic

الأحياء الأموات وفيروس كورونا:
دراسة تحليلية لمختارات من أدب الزومبي وعلاقتها بالجائحة

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Abstract:

Since their appearances in literature and cinema, the infected walking dead masses present an implied fear of a future without a future: of humans being controlled by death and being deprived of their reasoning capacities; and of a modern world being paused by a state of dehumanization and cultural breakdown. Such fear flags in real life by the emergence of coronavirus that has taken the world by surprise. This paper discusses that, in the age of coronavirus, the fictional zombie figure, particularly in Isaac Marion's *Warm Bodies* (2010) and M. R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014), is no longer read as a delineated monstrous 'Other' but has become a figurative image which serves to question our humanity tested by a viral pandemic resulting in a profound alienation from ordinary daily life, human relationships and moral senses with the trauma theory at the heart of the discussion.

Keywords: zombie fiction, trauma theory, Covid-19 pandemic, self-annihilation, apocalypse, *Warm Bodies*, Isaac Marion, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, M. R. Carey

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الملخص:

لقد جسدت الصورة الخيالية للزومبي في مجالي الأدب والسينما الخوف من مستقبل مظلم يسيطر فيه الموت على البشرية والذي قد يؤدي إلى عدم تحكم البشر في السيطرة على قدرتهم النفسية والعقلانية مما قد يتسبب في انهيار الحضارة والمبادئ الإنسانية. وبالفعل بدأت تتحقق هذه المخاوف في العالم الآن منذ ظهور جائحة كورونا وسلالاتها المتعددة. يناقش هذا البحث أنه بسبب ظهور جائحة كورونا، نستطيع الآن قراءة وتحليل الصورة الخيالية للزومبي لفهم الحالة الإنسانية في مواجهة وباء فيروسي مثل ما يحدث الآن واحتمالية الإنسلاخ التام للفرد من الحياة اليومية المألوفة وعلاقاته الإنسانية والاجتماعية. يقوم البحث بتحليل روايتين من أدب الزومبي المعاصر وهما رواية *أجساد دافنة* للكاتب إسحاق ماريون (٢٠١٠) ورواية *الفتاة مع كل الهدايا* للكاتب م. ر. كاري (٢٠١٤). كما يعتمد البحث في مناقشته على نظرية الصدمة (التروما).
الكلمات المفتاحية: أدب الزومبي، نظرية الصدمة، جائحة كوفيد ١٩، انمحاق الذات، فناء العالم، *أجساد دافنة*، إسحاق ماريون، *الفتاة مع كل الهدايا*، م. ر. كاري

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Introduction:

The Covid-19 pandemic is a new reality that has affected almost every aspect of our lives. Yet, most studies about Covid-19 pandemic have so far prioritized scientific and economic issues, leaving aside topics that scholars of art and literature believe should occupy centerstage: the role of art and literature in addressing our existence, our psyche, self-representation and social relations in this reality-changing experience. In Covid-19 aftermath, people suddenly face very basic questions about themselves and the quotidian reality, but with death at the heart as an unrelenting force just like the unstoppable zombie masses. For more than 50 years, “[t]he zombie image [...] simplify and clarify actual mass emergencies” (McFarland, 2015, p. 41). To clarify, the zombies have been used as a metaphor for deep fears: racial sublimation, atomic destruction, commodity consumption, urban alienation, and more than anything, people’s fear of mass contagion, pandemics and viral infection that can wipe out humanity.

Although *Warm Bodies* (2010) by Isaac Marion and *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) by M. R. Carey, were written years before the current pandemic, they successfully mirror the present Covid-19 psychological trauma into which humanity is threatened to fall in a life drained of its meaning in the midst of prevailing death. The literary works and movies of the zombie apocalypse have this tendency to suddenly transform the familiar and the ordinary world into a landscape of unrelenting horror. The real horror of the zombie genre “lies rather in its refusal to resolve those fears in any way” (Dillard, 1987, p. 27). Both *Warm Bodies* and *The Girl with All the Gifts* address such fears amid unexpected violence and futility through portraying not grotesque groaning single-minded corpses, as in their early incarnations, but more human-like zombie protagonists: “[i]n recent years [...] these lumbering creatures have become increasingly complex characters” (Bishop, 2010, p. 189). That makes those fears more plausible and thus scarier for the readers.

The aim of the research is to discuss how the fictional zombie image in the selected novels prophetically marks the profound crisis in human self-representation and the fragment of the real in the traumatic age of corona. The uncanny vacancy of the zombie figure as a version of human self-annihilation, its troubling fusion of life and death, aggression and vulnerability, violence and decomposition called into question the basic social comprehension we thought we have gone far beyond. For long, humans believe that they are shielded by technology and civilization, but to our surprise we found ourselves paralyzed by a microscopic contagious Covid-19 virus, discovering that we should learn in the first place how to wash our hands. The zombie figure expresses this state of human smallness and ineffectuality and perfectly reflects the current covid psychological trauma of futility, panic, meaninglessness and mutilation of life.

The zombie's origin lies in Haitian folklore. The Afro-Caribbean scholar McAlister (2012) notes, the first uses of the word 'zonbi' trace as far back as 1797 and explained the natives' belief in a returned soul. This developed in the 20th century in literature and cinema to be "not a returned soul, but a returned body" (McAlister, 2012, p. 459). Yet, the return of the dead concept was prominent in many ancient cultures. The Pharaohs, for example, had their Osiris and the Phoenix myth. They mummified their dead for the after-death return journey. Similarly, the ancient Greeks had the Dionysus myth, and they put coins on the eyes and in the mouth of the dead to pay for the ferryman in the underworld. Return of the dead theme finds its way in literature mainly in the form of ghosts. To exemplify, there is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and W. W. Jacob's *The Monkey's Paw*, which carries a hint of a zombie character, till we reach the known zombie fiction. The walking dead corpses in the zombie narratives are commonly founded, in the first glance, for horror and fantasy genre. Yet, the researcher believes that a re-reading of the selected works during the trauma of the corona age carries deeper and down-to-earth perspectives.

The present known zombie figure emerged in popular culture by George A. Romero's movie *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). It was a

striking film, and its huge success contributed to the popularity of the zombie image till the present time. Besides, the zombie figure becomes the setting for many novels and most of which were adapted into films. The zombie figure becomes also everywhere in comic books, video games, and even in real popular events known as the “zombie crawls” where people dress up as zombies and act as part of the walking dead horde in big malls. The popularity of the “zombie crawls” launches the question of why thousands of ordinary people act out the very antithesis of humans. do Vale notes that zombies represent cultural fears of the end of the civilized world, mass alienation and the loss of self-identity, so embracing these fears through embodying the zombie monsters could act “as a carnivalization of fear” (do Vale, 2010, p. 199). The blurred division between the zombies and the humans, the fictional and the real in the “zombie crawls” also refers to the paper’s argument: Is there a shift in the earlier antagonistic dichotomy between humans and zombies in zombie narratives?

The zombie apocalypse in recent zombie narratives and movies is caused by a kind of an unknown and incurable virus. By transforming the fictional zombie pandemic from the previously supernatural origins to a scientific and thus a seemingly more believable background makes it more plausible and, thus, scarier to the audience. “[M]any new millennial zombies [...] fall into the category of the ‘bio zombie’ [...] who turn into zombies through some biological agent” (Schmeink, 2016, p. 207). Real-life viral pandemics, such as the current one, cause havoc on our populations, as the “end of the world is the ultimate societal fear” (Bishop, 2009, p. 22). By describing the modern zombie as “bio zombie”, the zombie genre can be acknowledged as the expression of such present covid concerns, and the traumatic consequences that follow.

Covid-19 has produced in people an increasing feeling that they are losing their individual selves through losing their social network and their daily routine, says De Neve, head of the Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford University (2020). In the zombie narratives, zombies are mindless monsters who are different from their prior selves before the zombie pandemic, and they are made even scarier through the act of eating their victims’ brains. The act of eating brains symbolizes the

ultimate loss of the self, because memories and experiences are housed in the brain. In *Warm Bodies*, the zombie protagonist, R, describes his feeling after eating his victims' brains: "I go straight for the good part, the part that makes my head light up like a picture tube. I eat the brain and, for about thirty seconds, I have memories [of the victims]" (Marion, 2010, p. 7). What can be figured out is that both the zombies and their victims lose their selves.

During the coronavirus lockdown, many people become afraid of going through a traumatic psychological breakdown. Traumatization occurs when it becomes inadequate to cope with external threat and this has its long-term effect on the psychological well-being of the trauma victim. Traumatic events during the coronavirus have already led to various mental health problems, including depression, PTSD, and other stress-related disorders resulting from stressors like immobility, isolation, prolonged sedation, anxiety, and the horrifying increase of the corona death toll that exceeded 2 million in a year. To explain, people are in a pause state during the lockdown. They are alive, but haunted by the specter of death and decay in every second leaving them in a condition of futility, discontinuity, panic, consumerism, gloominess and aggression.

During Covid-19 pandemic, different forms of violence: domestic, interpersonal and suicidal rose worldwide. Domestic violence against women, explains Mlambo-Ngcuka, the UN under Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director (2020), rises sharply when people are under the stress of confined living conditions, and worry about their security, health and money: "the problematic position of sex, and particularly of women's sexuality, is an enduring feature of apocalyptic discourse" (Berger, 1999, p. 11). The zombie apocalypse "occurs in tandem with themes of societal collapse. Specifically, societal collapse often marks a return to patriarchal paradigms" (Heim, 2018, p. 87). Cases of bullying have also been accentuated during the pandemic against the infected, as if a dichotomy between the infected 'Other' and the uninfected 'us' appeared. Bullying takes different shapes and within various settings: "During the COVID-19 pandemic there may be less monitoring and identification of these harmful behaviors and reduced opportunity for victims to access necessary support" (Yahya et al. 2020).

Many people find it harder to be positive about the future compared with how they felt before the outbreak. Not since the World Wars have so many people in so many places been traumatized at once.

Methodology:

I selected *Warm Bodies* (2010) by Isaac Marion and *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) by M. R. Carey because they deviate from other zombie-apocalypse novels by presenting non-stereotypical and more-human-like zombie protagonists. I discussed how R in *Warm Bodies* and Melanie in *The Girl with All the Gifts* are no more portrayed as the marginalized monstrous zombie figures with grotesque appearances and horrific behavior, and this makes them more plausible to the readers. Hence, I examined in this paper how in the contemporary covid trauma, these re-animated corpses in both novels can be re-read with the focus shifted from the typical paradigm of ‘us’ (humans) versus ‘them’ (the zombies) toward a zombie-centered perspective as death is increasingly subjected on a global scale. To achieve this, I first analyzed the main characters, and compared the zombie protagonists and their relation with the humans in both novels. Then, I discussed the theme of apocalypse and humanity crisis in both selected novels. Despite being written many years before Covid-19, these two zombie-apocalypse novels are enlightening the present corona predicament, and thus, in this paper, I equated them with the related crisis of human self-annihilation in the aftermath of the pandemic: “I want to crawl out of my skin, escape my ugly, awkward flesh, and be a skeleton, naked and anonymous” (Marion, 2010, p. 45). The zombie apocalypse perfectly reflects the current covid psychological trauma of futility, panic, meaninglessness, dissolution and mutilation of life.

After the End: Representation of Post-Apocalypse (1999) by James Berger is an essential reference for the study. In this book, Berger discusses both literature of apocalypse and psychoanalysis. He claims that reading apocalyptic literature is a kind of a traumatized pattern, as people are obsessed with the idea of apocalypse resulting from the traumas of various historical apocalyptic events like wars, natural disasters and pandemics, Covid-19 pandemic in our case. In his study of trauma in apocalyptic literature, Berger analyzes that in apocalyptic literature, the

symbolic order in all the civilized societies suddenly collapse by catastrophic changes in the environment: a “destabilizing intrusion [...] into a symbolic order” (Berger, 1999, p. 25), leaving the world and humanity in a state of trauma. The book also highlights, as I examined in the two selected novels, how apocalyptic literature rarely offers any clear end. It only gives the readers catastrophic events that pave the way for a different form of the familiar life and the known civilization.

Trauma Fiction (2004) by Anne Whitehead is another important reference. Anne Whitehead observes in the book that there is a mutual influence between trauma theory and fiction “in which each speaks to and addresses the other” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 4). Whitehead has found that many “contemporary novelists [...] base their writing on extensive research in the field of trauma”. She also suggests that “it is not necessarily that novelists are reading trauma theory [...] but rather that the rethinking of trauma has been absorbed into the current ideologies of history and memory” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 161). Writing about a trauma presents to the readers a translation of non-verbal intense emotions into verbal communicable language. Catharsis of psychological pain happens by giving words to the deepest fears. Thus, trauma fiction offers a living laboratory for the readers through “Narrative empathy [which] means feeling with fiction” (Keen, 2011, p. 296). In the case of *Warm Bodies* and *The Girl with All the Gifts*, I concluded that the aim of reading them is not presenting a mere exaggerated fantasy but a warning to avoid the addressed trauma of a possible apocalyptic threat by motivating change in how people view the world and others: “I hope [...] not only to describe the overwhelming, often denied traumatic presence [...] that characterize our [...] ‘postmodern’ present but also to suggest ways [...] for moving toward a future with moderate hopefulness” (Berger, 1999, p. xx). It is not the trauma of the apocalyptic event that forms its dilemma but the way people deal with that trauma and treat one another. So, the lessons people should learn from the selected novels are empathy and understanding not fear and anger.

Discussion:

Warm Bodies uses a zombie as a protagonist which is a radical storytelling move. A teenaged boy called “R”, the protagonist of *Warm*

Bodies, becomes zombified lumbering around an abandoned airport with other zombie fellows called “the Fleshies”, and searching for human flesh. *Warm Bodies* not only questions the point of the zombie, but it also successfully questions humanity. In *Land of the Dead* directed by George A. Romero, the protagonist’s opinion of the walking dead is similar to standard imperialist perceptions of colonized peoples. The humans in *Warm Bodies* share a similar outlook. When the readers are introduced to Julie, R’s human girlfriend, and her fellow humans, they find Julie’s father Grigio providing an instructional video on what to do to survive outside of the human compound. The video includes language such as “they are uncaring, unfeeling, incapable of remorse,” and “they do not think, they do not bleed” (Levine, 2013) accompanied by shots of the walking dead shambling towards the camera.

At first, this may suggest that there is no way in which the ‘Other’ can be accepted or incorporated by the humans, as R himself expresses: “There’s a chasm between me and the world outside of me. A gap so wide my feelings can’t cross it. By the time my screams reach the other side, they have dwindled into groans” (Marion, 2010, p. 8). This establishes the ‘them versus us’ mentality that the humans in *Warm Bodies* adopt. Yet a deep reading of the novel can deconstruct this perspective. There is no true distinction between zombies and humans, as “the Fleshies” in *Warm Bodies* were once humans and in the world of *Warm Bodies*, they can be humans again (Hoedt, 2015, p. 12).

In *Warm Bodies*, R starts to regain his humanity through his love for Julie. Similarly, his zombie fellows transform back into humans due to regaining their human memories, heartbeat, and speech functions. Even the novel concludes with the integration of the more human-like Fleshies with the human’s lives, even the wall that the humans built for protection from “the Fleshies” is destroyed. *Warm Bodies* simply answers the question that there is no longer an ‘Other’. As the novel gives the audience the perspective of one of the undead, R, it creates an intimacy with the zombie figure. That it is where the zombie figure stands today, as Sills concludes (2014), in a condition of inbetweenness. *Warm Bodies*, like *The Girl with All the Gifts* and other recent zombie works, tend to complicate the typical distinctions between humans and zombies with

focus on characters. The novel challenges the prioritization of the humanity of only the human survivors. It suggests the blurred distinction between humans and zombies: rather than read the zombie as an ‘Other’, we “see something of ourselves in them that we don’t see in other monsters. It also suggests that they capture who we are” (Olney, 2017, p. 5). They have become so much like us that they could almost be us.

Warm Bodies “domesticate[s] the monster by endowing a rotting corpse with human reasoning skills and rendering it more familiar” (Derrida, 1995, p. 386). The text focuses on zombie consciousness and complex inner monologue. R’s voice over narration and his point-of-view marks *Warm Bodies* as an incredibly unique zombie novel. *Warm Bodies* shows that both zombies and humans can talk and understand each other. *The Girl with All the Gifts* goes even further in this theme by providing its main zombie character a rational behavior, reason skills, and the means to narratively express thoughts and feelings.

Smart and polite twelve-year-old Melanie in *The Girl with All the Gifts* lives alone in a windowless narrow room in a base. Her world is a base and a classroom that she only sees when fastened into a wheelchair with wrist, ankle, and head straps. She is wheeled in a line with other wheeled children into a poorly-lit classroom, where their chairs are secured in rows and their handlers deal with them as beasts. The narrative reveals gradually layers of violent strangeness in Melanie’s and the other children’s world. A rampant infection has transformed most of humans into savage ‘hungries’ who seek human flesh. Melanie is one “of a second-generation zombie offspring [hungries] who somehow retain their human personalities, capacity for interaction and cognitive abilities despite their cravings for human flesh” (Gibson, 2017, p. 188). Melanie and the other children become the subject to research by Dr. Caldwell. She believes that their hybrid nature makes them a probable source for a cure which is reflected on their treatment as things. The violence against Melanie and the other children, and their acceptance of it as normal enable the text to question the traumatic degradation of humanity in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Carey's intentional representation of children in the novel aims at heightening fear in the readers' minds. Witnessing the cruelty these children are exposed to by both humanity and the disease itself is brutal to a child's vulnerability. Despite this, Melanie's purity, morals and understanding are uncorrupted by the cruelty she is exposed to. She also shows eagerness to know about the history of a world that no longer exists. Melanie's kind human teacher, Miss Justineau, teaches the children the myth of Pandora, or, the girl with all the gifts. She reads the students how the gods create a curious woman who opens the box that releases all the evils and pains that humankind endures. At the same time Pandora also releases hope which is the ability to persist in the face of annihilation.

"All the gods had blessed her and given her gifts. That's what her name means—'the girl with all the gifts'. So, she was clever, and brave, and beautiful... But she just had the one tiny fault, which was that she was very- and I mean *very*-curious" (Carey, 2014, p. 12). Melanie expresses great interest in Pandora's myth and in her box of hidden evils. This draws a significant connection between Pandora's curiosity and the protagonist's love for knowledge. Besides, as Melanie experiences an external appearance concealing her infection within, Pandora's Box conceals the evil within. In Carey's novel, this also refers to the deceptive nature of Melanie's disease. Although Melanie is biologically monstrous, she is kind and emotional.

Melanie is a zombie, a 'hungry', though she was not aware of her nature at first, struggling to contain her flesh-seeking nature, and learning how to be a cognizant in a world of animosity and distrust. In such world, Melanie trusts only one adult, her teacher Miss Justineau. As the novel progresses, a maternal bond develops between Justineau and Melanie with Justineau protecting Melanie's emotional well-being and keeping her safe: "It was test subject number one... that tripped Justineau up... Those big, trusting eyes, in that bone-white face. Death and the maiden, all wrapped up in one tiny package" (Carey, 2014, p. 30). By describing Melanie as "death and the maiden" with "big trusting eyes", Justineau admits that despite Melanie's monstrous biological condition, she remains naïve, pure and vulnerable.

Traditionally, in literature and popular culture, monstrous figures are grotesque in appearance and horrific in behavior. Yet, the importance of the human-like and innocent narrative voice in the development of Carey's 'hungry' protagonist evokes sympathy in the readers, builds a relationship with them, and questions the flaws in humanity during and in the aftermath of the pandemic as witnessed through the eyes of the child. So, Justineau referring to Melanie as "death and the maiden" merges the contrasting natures of innocence and death to create one being. Besides, this opposing combination acts as an example of the psychological turmoil Melanie is experiencing between her purity and her ordinary appearance on one hand and her biological infection on the other. Besides, Melanie's ordinary appearance, innocence and her love for knowledge cause the anxiety of the human adult characters in the novel. They know her infection labelling her as an 'Other': "She's not a little girl. She's a hungry... the hungries smell you, and then they chase you until they eat you... Melanie knows exactly how that feels. Which means she's a monster" (Carey, 2014, pp. 220-221). However, she and her classmates are similar to uninfected children to be recognized as an 'Other'.

For Dr. Caldwell, those children are not people but just parasites who are capable of "exquisite mimicry of observed behaviors" (Osmond, 2019, p. 68). Yet, she does not know if Melanie and her classmates mark the decline of humanity or its transformation, and, thus, she is not sure if killing them for research is a murder or for the benefit of humanity. The adults in Melanie's and her classmates' world ironically present the monstrous qualities in humanity. Instead of being the source of safety and trust for those children, the human adults are selfish and deceptive figures. Eventually, the brutal treatment that the 'hungries' children are subjected to alerts Melanie to the fact that adults cannot be trusted. Melanie's intelligence supports her with a detailed account of her surroundings, as her peers are selected individually and killed for the purpose of Dr. Caldwell's exploration. In both *Warm Bodies* and *The Girl with All the Gifts*, the zombie protagonist, R and Melanie, unlike the previous zombie works are the ones who surprisingly experience brutality from the human survivors due to their infection.

Most of the zombie apocalypse narratives conclude with the end of the world as we know it and the beginning of a transformed world: “The only alternative is a fade-to-black nihilism, where everything is presumed lost” (Osmond, 2019, p. 66). This end is mentioned in connection to nature in *The Girl with All the Gifts*: “It’s more than twenty years on, and still nothing grows here, not even the hardest [...] weeds. Nature’s way of saying she’s not stupid enough to be caught like that twice over” (Carey, 2014, pp. 239-240). The previous extract delineates the abolition of both humanity and nature as connected entities. Thus, “zombie texts provide insight into what the prospect of survival means” (Hubner, 2017, p. 40). They end up seeming like something completely different. *Warm Bodies* ends with a world where the division between the zombie and the human is blurred, and *The Girl with All the Gifts* ends with a world where the humans have no place.

The end of *Warm Bodies* spent so much energy on the horror of realization that former life is over and detailing the gory forms that the transformation assumes. R and his zombie peers become the representation of “an emergent shift in the zombie metaphor: from abject monster caught between life and death to evolutionary life form armed with the skills to survive the post-apocalyptic landscape” (Carrington, 2016, pp. 32-33). He is the zombie youth who becomes the seeds of an ambiguous future, and hence many questions are launched about his evolution.

As for Melanie, she was deprived of a normal childhood. So, at the end of the novel, she deprives humanity of its future. To destroy mankind, she set fire releasing the spores causing the zombie pandemic into the atmosphere. This introduces a new world of second and third generation infected children. For her, she has sacrificed the current generation of humanity for the next generation of the intelligent hungries. She justifies this, yet ironically and paradoxically, as the only way to save humanity.:

If you keep shooting [the hungries] and cutting them up into pieces and throwing them into pits, nobody will be left to make a new world. Your people and the junker people will keep

killing each other [...] and in the end the world will be empty. This way is better . . . the children will grow up, and they won't be the old kind of people but they won't be hungries . . . They'll be the next people. The ones who make everything okay again. (Carey, 2014, p. 399)

The second-generation hungries will take the place of humanity, but the question is: what will the nature of this continuation be? If these hungries reproduce, what they will eat especially that there are no more humans. Melanie eats wild animal flesh, but will there be enough animal flesh to eat? That future is scarring and suspicious about Melanie's and her peers' ability and evolution to meet the rapidly changing world that humans have left for them. While Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* seems at first to present a more promising post-apocalypse, the experiment suggests a rumination on whether or not such a post-apocalyptic transformation could potentially continue. Hence, both novels serve as a startling wake-up call for the humanity's potential future world.

Conclusion

Warm Bodies (2010) by Isaac Marion and *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) by M. R. Carey as zombie-apocalypse novels strikingly prophesize the trauma of reactive violence, the desolation of human existence and future, and the panic in relation to death during pandemics. Both selected novels raised the same questions popped-up many years later during Covid-19 pandemic: "Can people go through infection with their humanity intact? Can people survive a universal contagion without being unchanged?" Human nature and values undergo change and this launches deeper questions concerning the unexpected transformation of the human as such. The zombie pandemic fiction successfully represents the dissolve of the self well-being when entire societies crumble by waves of zombies (Osmond, 2017, p. 165). Just when the way in which people treat each other and the sense of an interhuman relationship are broken, when our mourning, our care and our former passions no longer exist, at that moment we lose our prior selves.

Warm Bodies and *The Girl with All the Gifts* are original thrillers for introducing more human-like zombie protagonists. They mark a

change in perspective by focusing on the zombies themselves. This shift is an important factor as zombies are no more used as a form of ‘Other’ but can be seen as a representation of the self-crisis. In other words, *Warm Bodies* and *The Girl with All the Gifts* conclude that there is no line between the living and the living dead, and as part of the zombie apocalypse, they certainly fit the model of a traumatic world state regarding the extent of the infection when humans realize their lilliputian capacities, vulnerability and helplessness in the face of the might and magnitude of the universe.

The zombie apocalypse novelty shows how people often act on subconscious drives rather than on the civilized and humanist rationality during pandemics. During the traumatic Covid-19 pandemic, people go through a process of mental breakdowns, self-annihilation, and dehumanization, where rational thinking and reasoning capacity is collapsed. Interestingly, the zombie virus acts as a terrifying reminder of the self driven to violence when reason and order is abandoned or is temporarily eclipsed. As humanist philosophy has always admitted that what separates humans from animals is reason, thus, in this philosophical view, a loss of reason would lead to a dehumanized condition which is similar to what can be described as a psychological zombification.

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