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The Werewolf and the Zombie: The Undead Body and the Misshapen Body in Horror

The imagination of horror, writes Jack Morgan in his book *Biology of Horror*, is somatic. The fears, their mental manifestations, are “deeply situated in the ungraspable bio-logic of hormone chemistry and nerve synapses and in the reciprocity between those and the exterior organic environment of which humans are protein variations.”¹ The human body is a complex biological machinery, the perfect harmony of cells and processes, organs and functions, responding swiftly, efficiently and without delay to all the mind’s orders. Within the Western culture defined both by its Christianity-based outlook and cherished modern science, the body occupies an important position in the process of comprehension of the concept of a human being. Regardless whether considered in the light of biology or religion, the body is an irreplaceable constituent of a human subject. It is the very premise of Western ideology, concerned with the subject as its pivotal point, that allows the body to take the role of both the object and what Julia Kristeva defines as the abject. The Euro-American subject-oriented view of the world defines the human subject in relation with its body, where the body is treated either as a flesh vessel for the soul/mind (religion), a complicated bio-mechanism ruled by the brain/mind (biology) or as a source of unruly instincts, needs and demands defining, confining and restraining the subject/mind (psychology). The body complements the mind, which is the subject, and allows it to take a physical shape in the physical world, but is never treated as the subject itself. As Richard Shusterman points out in his essay *Somaesthetics and Care of the Self: The Case of Foucault*:

long, dominant Platonist tradition, intensified by recent centuries of Cartesianism and idealism, has blinded us to a crucial fact that was evident to much ancient and non-Western thought:

¹ J. Morgan, *The Biology of Horror — Gothic Literature and Film*, Carbondale 2002, p. 6.

since we live, think, and act through our bodies, their study, care and improvement should be at the core of philosophy, especially when philosophy is conceived as [...] a critical, disciplined care of the self.²

However, what Western philosophy has always been and still is trying to achieve is the “exercise of ‘separating the soul as much as possible from the body [...] until it is completely independent,’” in this way constructing the mind (the subject) as an independent owner and ruler of the body (the object). Although “mind” is not really synonymous with “subject,” both those terms denote one signified as far as combined oppositions mind/body, subject/object are concerned. Therefore from this point on the mind that is the subject will be referred to as mind-subject.

The only place in which the body can be treated separately from the mind-subject that otherwise defines it at all times, is horror fiction. In horror fiction, there is freedom for the body; it is there where the situation changes and the body can rebel:

[O]ur neglected, marginalized organic life [...] finds symbolic expression in the atavistic, demonic images conjured by macabre literature. Body horror, pain, death, and dismemberment are facts of everyday physical life on the one hand and phantoms of our dreams and imagining at the same time.³

Even in the nightmarish scenarios of the horror fiction, the balance, or rather the imbalance between the body and the mind-subject is not, however, taken away. It cannot possibly be taken away, according to Morgan:

Ours is a psychology correlative to and defined by our biological character, but the human psyche is not comfortably at home in this biological landscape it cannot fathom, in a nature everywhere characterized by perishableness [...]. Even the new attention to embodiment and the body evident in contemporary literary criticism, psychology, and philosophy, however, have not begun to bridge the division between thought and the vital dimension of organic livingness.⁴

It would seem that breaching the chasm between the abstract mind and the material body is just not possible under any circumstances. The division is impossible to erase, and therefore what actually happens in horror fiction is the reversal of the relation between the mind-subject and the body.

To understand better the uneven subject/object relation of the body and the mind-subject and its reversal in horror fiction, it may be useful to look at the initial position of the body in that genre.⁵ Horror texts, both literary and cinematic, address

² R. Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Cambridge and New York 2008, p. 530.

³ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 2–3.

⁵ Malformed, horrifying bodies do not belong in horror fiction alone, naturally — one of the earliest famous monstrous, misshapen bodies emerges in Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (*Notre-Dame de Paris. 1482, 1831*), where it serves to draw the readers’ attention to the

“organic states of siege, whether the organic unit under siege is the cell, the house, the city, or some other expression of the human biological matrix.”⁶ There is no unit more organic and simultaneously closer to a human than the body. The very word “body” covers a wide range of meanings. It may refer to, firstly, “the physical structure” (according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, *Dictionary.com* and *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*) “including the bones, flesh, and organs, of a person or an animal” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*), or “material substance” of a person or animal (*Dictionary.com*). Other meanings include “the trunk apart from the head and the limbs,” “a corpse,” “the physical and mortal aspect of a person as opposed to the soul or spirit” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). Additionally, the word “body” may signify “the main or central part of something” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*) or “main mass” of something (*Dictionary.com*). It is important to note that all aspects of the above definitions imply something partial, never complete. The nature of the body is, therefore, never autonomous but invariably dependent and secondary, complementing the mind-subject. The body is always something that is adjusted, modified and kept in check, in this way serving to manifest the mind-subject into the world, translating its ideological and abstract existence into a concrete, physical environment. In the view of the world and in the fiction reflecting that view, the body is nothing more than a vehicle for the mind, although it may affect the mind, thus affecting the subject, both in terms of its construction and its final shape. It is also worth noting that the definitions focus on the “physical” and “material,” which, by definition, is related to that which is “carnal” or “sexual” (*Dictionary.com*), not related to the mind (*Oxford Dictionaries*) and the opposite of “spiritual” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*).

Apart from its biological and ideological status, the body performs also important social and cultural functions, among which arguably the most important was pointed out by Michel Foucault.

Michel Foucault’s seminal vision of the body as a docile, malleable site for inscribing social power reveals the crucial role somatics can play for political philosophy. It offers a way of understanding how complex hierarchies of power can be widely exercised and reproduced without any need to make them explicit in laws or to officially enforce them. Entire ideologies of domination can thus be covertly materialized and preserved by encoding them in somatic norms that, as bodily habits, typically get taken for granted and therefore escape critical consciousness. For example, the presumptions that “proper” women speak softly, stay slim, eat dainty foods, sit with their legs close together, assume the passive role or lower position in (heterosexual) copulation are embodied norms that sustain women’s social disempowerment while granting them full official liberty.⁷

mechanisms of rejecting the Other and the simultaneous rationalization of that rejection by means of attribution of negative characteristics — but it is without doubt in horror fiction where their symbolic potential is developed to the fullest.

⁶ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷ R. Shusterman, *Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal*, <http://www.artsandletters.fau.edu/humanitieschair/somaesthetics.html>, accessed: 09.2009.

However crucial such factors might be for shaping the eventual presence of the mind-subject, such acts as adjusting the body (dieting or exercising), grooming and modifying it (cutting the hair, bathing, tattooing or piercing) or clothing it are all, in the end, manifestations of the mind-subject's will — or lack thereof — to conform. Especially in Western culture, where gender is strictly associated with biological sex, conforming to or rebelling against the somatic norms, as Shusterman calls them, is a powerful statement about the mind-subject's view of its place in the world. However important the somatic norms, it is ultimately up to the mind-subject to either accept or reject them. If a woman were to apply male somatic norms to her body, it would be feasible for her to do so. The body plays a significant role in constructing the mind-subject, but it cannot and will not dominate it, nor will it even be on equal terms with it.

A curious question, completing the question “What is a body?”, is “What a body is not?”. Regardless of how we look at the body, whether it is from scientific or material point of view, “body” is certainly not synonymous with “human” — i.e. the body alone is not a human, unless in the sense of a dead body. Therefore, the proper question emerges: where does the body end and the human begin? Bodies exist in great numbers and in many ways: bodies can be perceived anatomically, as complex machinery, organic cyborgs, as perceived by medicine or described in anatomy textbooks:

[T]he multicellular state and parcelling out the body functions to different organ systems result in interdependence of all body cells. Organ systems do not work in isolation; they work cooperatively to promote the well-being of the entire body.⁸

In the social sense, bodies are tagged and registered, defined by series of numbers such as social security number. They are the source of “aesthetic potential” in at least a twofold way: “as an object grasped by our external senses, the body (of another or even one's own) can provide beautiful sensory perceptions or (in Kant's famous terminology) ‘representations’.”⁹

If there is some oppositional quality to body as “being a body and not the human,” then there must be some other quality of body “being something else than a body,” without necessarily “being human,” while still being, at least to some extent, ontologically and visually recognisable as “a body.” At what point, then, can the body cross the border of being “just a body” and begin to become “something else”?

This crossing of the frail border between “just a body” and “something else” is all the more important since the body, as a physical container for the mind, is an irreplaceable part of a human being which cannot be physically or even conceptually separated at any time or occasion. Both wrapping and making the human, the flesh has the necessary intimacy required to conduct fear, in the way metals

⁸ K. Hoehn, E. Marieb, *Human Anatomy and Physiology*, San Francisco 2007, p. 5.

⁹ R. Shusterman, *Somaesthetics*...

conduct the electric current. It is the palpable, physical threat, the ominous mass, all the more treacherous as it is turned by the authors of horror fiction and horror cinema against the human. The aforementioned intimacy is, in fact, exactly what makes the body the most perfect tool of horror. As Morgan explains, the horror text “[t]hrough its particular narrative strategies, [...] awakens thought shockingly to its intimate and inescapable connectedness to the flesh.”¹⁰ This intimate and inescapable closeness of the body to the mind-subject is what makes the horror factor of mutinous body so clear and easily noticeable. Every change of the body is an immediate threat to the mind-subject. The most recognisable and prevalent manifestations of that threat, ones that have continued to exist in legends and early fiction of both literary and cinematic sort, are the animalised body and the undead body: the zombie and the werewolf.

Although both the zombie and the werewolf are popular horror figures (or, perhaps, exactly for this reason), their proper forms and the lore associated with them vary greatly. The earliest representations of the zombie in American culture derive from Haitian folklore and voodoo practices,¹¹ yet the modern horror productions intended for mainstream entertainment depict the undead in isolation from its religious and cultural roots;¹² the most prevalent image of this horror figure is the one first introduced in George’s Romero *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which, as Colette Balmain points out, introduced one composite living corpse that combined the traits of the cannibal and zombie myths, which originally have different source stories.¹³ The zombie that this paper will concern is this specific combination of a dead body resisting peaceful rest and hungering for the flesh of the living; it is a “familiar figure of a decaying corpse,” as June Pulliam describes it, “shuffling in a somnambulistic state, eyes glazed and arms held stiffly forward, in the mindless pursuit of human flesh.”¹⁴ The undead body constructed in this manner is also, as Matthew Weise proposes in his article *The Rules of Horror: Procedural Adaptation in Clock Tower, Resident Evil, and Dead Rising*,

associated with a clear set of behaviours [...]. [A] zombie is a creature that: violently attacks any human in sight, eats human flesh, cannot move quickly, cannot use tools, possesses no

¹⁰ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 5.

¹¹ As pointed out by June Pulliam in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural: An Encyclopedia of Our Worst Nightmares*, ed. S.T. Joshi, Westport, Conn. 2007, p. 726.

¹² As pointed out by Kyle Bishop in *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (And Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*, Jefferson, N.C. 2010.

¹³ The cannibal myth is related to tribal ritualistic cannibalism, while the zombie myth denotes the soulless corpses of the living dead controlled by black voodoo magic (C. Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*, Edinburgh 2008, pp. 114–115). *Night of the Living Dead* combined those two and created an iconographic image which, as June Pulliam notes, “transformed the zombie in much the same way that James Whale’s 1931 film *Frankenstein* altered Mary Shelley’s creature or Tod Browning’s 1931 film *Dracula* changed Bram Stoker’s count” (J. Pulliam, ‘The Zombie’, [in:] *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural*, vol. 1, ed. S.T. Joshi, Westport 2007, pp. 723–724).

¹⁴ Ibid.

reason or higher intelligence, and cannot be killed except by a blow or shot to the head [...]. [A]ny human bitten by a zombie will eventually die and become one themselves.¹⁵

The werewolf, just like the zombie, also has folklore origins. However, in most cases horror films make little use of folkloric beliefs and instead tend to conjure up their own werewolf lore.¹⁶ Also, in the same way Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* produced the horror zombie, the iconographic image of the werewolf was established and introduced to the mass audience by Robert Siodmak's *The Wolfman*, one of the most famous American werewolf narratives, as Stefan Dziemianowicz argues in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural*. Although most of the werewolf lore in Siodmak's film had something in common with folktales (or at least werewolf fiction that itself was derived from folk legend), the impact of the film itself cannot be underestimated; it codified werewolf lore and created the template for werewolf fiction that would be written in its wake.¹⁷ And so, in the context of this work, the werewolf is always some variation of the Siodmak's werewolf: it is a victim bitten by a monster — another werewolf — who then changes into a wolf form of some sort. The person who becomes a werewolf is unable to resist the supernatural transformation (and often-times initially unaware of it), and, having changed, slaughters other beings, especially humans.

In the contexts of popular fiction, which horror texts belong to, both the werewolf and the zombie are, so to say, "literary orphans." Neither has a great, famous literary original (in the way most vampires can be traced back to Dracula) and they do not seem to have one original story or an original narrative that could be referred to or presented as the first werewolf narrative or zombie narrative. Furthermore, there are many kinds of undead and animalised bodies. The zombie can be depicted as either slow and shuffling (*Night of the Living Dead*, *Resident Evil* [2002]) or fast (*Dawn of the Dead* [2004]), those that are mute and those who can talk (*The Return of the Living Dead* [1985]), those that are less intelligent (*Resident Evil*, *Dawn of the Dead* [1978]) and those that are more intelligent (*Land of the Dead* [2005]). There are even "zombie movies" featuring no zombies (*28 days later* [2002]) that are still sometimes treated as zombie films due to the use of apocalyptic scenarios and the "shrinking fortress" model.¹⁸ The image of the horror fiction werewolf is as diverse as the image of the zombie — if not more. It ranges from a hairy countenance on a human being (*The Wolfman* [1941],

¹⁵ M. Weise, 'The Rules of Horror: Procedural Adaptation in Clock Tower, Resident Evil, and Dead Rising', [in:] B. Perron, *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, Jefferson, N.C. 2009, pp. 252–253.

¹⁶ P. Hutchings, *Historical Dictionary of Horror Cinema*, Lanham, Md. 2008, p. 329.

¹⁷ S. Dziemianowicz, 'The Werewolf', [in:] *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural*, p. 654.

¹⁸ "The shrinking fortress" is the model established by *Night of the Living Dead*: "a group of survivors barricade themselves in a farmhouse to escape the growing horde of walking dead, using nails and furniture to block doors and windows. As barricades are overwhelmed, survivors fall back to individual rooms, relying more on weapons. This concept of the 'shrinking fortress' is a mainstay of the subgenre, finding expression in virtually every zombie film" (M. Weise, op. cit., pp. 252–253).

Wolf [1994]) to a lycanthrope (*An American Werewolf in London* [1981], *Ginger Snaps* [2000]) to a fully-formed wolf (*The Company of Wolves* [1984]). There are significant differences in the origin of the werewolf and the lore concerning it, as well as the rules of the change — some werewolves change permanently and irreversibly (*Wolf*, *Ginger Snaps*) and some change and revert repeatedly (*An American Werewolf in London*); some change during the full moon (*Silver Bullet* [1985]) and some at will (*The Howling* [1981]). Despite their differences and the considerable diversity of the form of the animalised body and the undead body, both the zombie and the werewolf represent exceptionally primal and exceptionally unsophisticated fears — respectively the fear of dying and death and the fear of being hunted and devoured.

The motif of the monstrous body, i.e. a zombie or a werewolf, actually begins with a dead body in itself, so often used to scare both the protagonist(s) and the audience. The dead body alone is offensive in itself to the living subject, undermining and contradicting not only the subject's aliveness, but also the point of its existence. The corpse is a “decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is indistinguishable from the symbolic — the corpse represents fundamental pollution. A body without soul, a non-body, quietening matter.”¹⁹ In hands of the horror fiction creators, the dead body is always the first stage of forcing the subject to come to terms with the thought that the body, although secondary to the mind-subject, is necessary for the mind-subject to continue to exist in the same manner as before; it is a prelude to the following horror of the realisation that the body may betray the mind-subject in a way that the subject could not perceive beforehand. The confrontation between the mind-subject and the dead flesh highlights the border between the living, conscious human subject and that which is no longer alive, human or conscious. That border is there to be breached, allowing for the abject in the form of the werewolf and the zombie.

Apart from the intimidating intimacy of the body to the mind-subject and claustrophobic closeness of one to the other, the animalistic body and the undead body are exploited by the western horror authors to evoke horror due to their mutinous nature. In his book *Organs without Bodies* Slavoj Žižek addresses the matter of the body/mind relation from many viewpoints. On the one hand, the body is the object, as it exists in “the order of having” (“I am not my body, I have it”).²⁰ Suddenly rejecting this object role it has been so far obediently fulfilling, the body takes on the role of an abject. As the most immediate complement of the mind as a subject and, on the other hand, the way the mind expresses

¹⁹ J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horrors — an Essay on Abjection*, New York 1982, p. 109.

²⁰ S. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, London 2003, p. 121.

itself in the world, it offers no detachment, posing a new threat: any change of the object-body, any change at all, may now affect the mind-subject.

By default, the body is perceived in the Western culture not only as an object, but as an instrument of the mind. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes:

[T]he body [is] an object and target of power [...] [T]he body is [...] manipulated, shaped, trained, [...] obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces [...]. Even when separated from political discourse, humans tend to perceive their bodies as their property, a thing that can be handled according to one's wish.²¹

Any instrument that can be used can also be misused. A defiant body, the body that is not docile but rebels against its “owner” resident, is offensive in its very premise. For example, Carroll describes the zombie as “interstitial and/or contradictory in terms of being both living and dead.”²² Here lies the main aspect of this offensiveness: the way in which the werewolf or a zombie defy not only the human nature in its very premise, but also the laws of the world in which the mind-subject believes, the sanity and the balance of the universe as it is perceived by the mind-subject. The mutinous, monstrous body defies the humanness of the human itself. The concept of “human” is actually extremely and almost surprisingly narrow. This opposition is not a typical binary opposition, but rather one which is based on litotes: “white/not white” (which would correspond to dead/undead and human/not human). The problem, therefore, does not lie in the body being dead or belonging to an animal, of course. The problem lies in the body being not human without being an animal body, or not being dead without being alive. The difference here would be the same as in describing the opposition of light as “darkness” or “lack of light.” Darkness, in comparison to “lack of light” which contains some vagueness concerning the amount of light (or the lack thereof, depending on the approach taken), is a concept in itself. The mutinous body creates a bridge which connects the opposite values of binary oppositions by means of blending them with various intensity, thus bringing into question the orderly world we construct on the basis of those binary oppositions. Although the mutinous body exists in many an instance, its form is not, in fact, a simulacrum, but a distortion and abomination of the original object itself. To put it simple, it needs an original to exist. Without the original object there would never be a monstrous violation.

It is in that moment when the undead body and the werewolf reach their final shape as horror tools: creatures abjectful in their nature, creatures that are, to paraphrase Kristeva's definition, not human, not non-human, but something that cannot be recognised as an autonomous thing.²³ The misshapen, malformed, animalised body is a violation of its role as an object and of its role as a tool.

²¹ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York 1995, pp. 136–138.

²² N. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, Or Paradoxes of the Heart*, New York 1990, p. 32.

²³ J. Kristeva, op. cit., p. 2.

In horror fiction, the undead body, here represented by the zombie, is a mutinous body that resists death and the obedience that death enforces — before death the body, together with the mind, makes up a human. In *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* Douglas Cowan suggests that the zombie relates to one of “principal archetypes for fear of death: [...] reanimation and the need to feed.”²⁴ The undead body, therefore, encompasses two most vivid fears regarding the biological, organic nature of death, i.e. the fear of ceasing to be, but also the fear of being unable to die.²⁵ The zombie embodies all of the repulsive aspects of the undead abject. According to Kim Paffenroth, apart from being somewhere between human and non-human, the undead body tends to “violate the natural order, both of the physical world and of human society. In zombie movies, human society is in a shambles not only because there is a deadly threat, but because there is a threat of turning into something that is neither alive nor dead. Such a prospect of becoming neither alive nor dead diminishes the human characters’ ability to deal with mortality, which is already a deep enough psychological strain for most of us.”²⁶ Morgan, on the other hand, suggests that many elements of the particular imagery connected with the living-dead figure derives from “racial memory of plague and infectious disease victims — things such as their vacant demeanour, lack of facial affect, paleness, and shambling walk.”²⁷

As a monster, the zombie perfectly fits Carroll’s definition in that it is in its very nature interstitial: it is most certainly not alive, but it is also most certainly not dead. It is also simultaneously not human and, at the same time, very human; there must be a human being in the first place, a stable composition of mind-subject and body, so that it could undergo the change which lends power to the body and causes the mind-subject to fade away. The undead body evokes a complex mix of feelings that include fear, repulsion, anger and regret: the undead body is a threat, but it is also treacherous substance that betrays the mind-subject. Moreover, it desecrates what would in normal circumstances naturally become human remains. When the protagonists face the zombie, they are often-times forced to face monstrosities with the faces of their family, friends or neighbours. This is where one of the main strong points of the zombie lies: in the necessity to fight and destroy something that despite being unnatural, hostile and monstrously decomposed, still appears human. The inherently unsettling quality of that confrontation with a disintegrating, decaying monster that nonetheless looks like someone the protagonist may care about is what makes the zombie such a horrifying, abject monster.

²⁴ D. Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen*, Texas 2008, p. 126.

²⁵ As pointed out in *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* by Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, New York 1991.

²⁶ K. Paffenroth, *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero’s Visions of Hell on Earth*, Waco, Tex. 2006, p. 12.

²⁷ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 55.

Another important aspect of the zombie is its immanently apocalyptic nature, as W. Scott Poole notes in *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsessions with the Hideous and the Haunting*.²⁸ There are and always will be more of the dead than the living. Additionally, every human that falls fighting the living dead inevitably joins the ranks of the undead. Therefore, the zombies can always out-multiply the living human beings. Most importantly, the living are completely helpless in the face of the undead threat. The living person can neither hurt nor leave the dead behind; what is dead cannot be killed, even if it obstinately insists on acting as if it were alive. This obstinacy is what characterises the zombie in the most distinct manner: the dead body, refusing to stay dead, never stops. It can be damaged, but not injured. It can be destroyed, but not really killed. The slowly shuffling zombie is the anticipation of a gruesome end. And its abject, contagious nature means the zombie is never alone, but surrounded by other zombies; when the human protagonists eventually run out of ammunition, when they are tired, hungry and exhausted, and all their weapons are lost or broken, the zombie is still there, waiting, in a crowd of awkward, staggering, hungry undead. The undead body is not only a terrifying monstrosity, but a lurching horror that is impossible to escape, ignore or wait out. And although the protagonist cannot wait out the undead threat, the living dead can wait for a long time, indifferent to material adversity and mental discomfort — for there is nothing inside the mindless undead.²⁹ The undead body harbours no subject within, no sentience; just the vacant but relentless tenacity with which it pursues its victim, to which Morgan refers to as an “awful straight-ahead vector.”³⁰ Empty inside, with its insatiable hunger and just one, primitive objective, the undead body represents the overthrow of the mind-subject and everything it stands for, and succumbing to the basest of instincts.

That being said, in the context of this work the undead body not only represents the complete shattering of reason and individuality of the mind-subject, but, more importantly, the inability of the human subject to fight against the descent into blind, inhumane savagery. The futile struggle against this descent, i.e. against becoming an undead, is one of both most common and simultaneously resonant points in the majority of zombie narratives. Those who became contaminated while still alive, face, as the transformation progresses, a growing resistance of their body. As they undergo the change, their body ceases to be an obedient, supportive instrument and becomes an enemy of its own, making it difficult for them to move or even think. The body is getting ever weaker and out of control, until

²⁸ S.W. Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsessions with the Hideous and the Haunting*, Waco, Tex. 2011, p. 200.

²⁹ This and a number of other fragments, otherwise not indicated, can also be found in my book *Japanese and American Horror: A Comparative Study of Film, Fiction, Graphic Novels and Video Games* (K. Marak, *Japanese and American Horror: A Comparative Study of Film, Fiction, Graphic Novels and Video Games*, Jefferson, N.C. 2014).

³⁰ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 102.

it dies, only to promptly rise from the dead, this time released from the control exercised by the mind-subject. At the time of the confrontation with the undead, there usually tends to be a human character who will be wounded or bitten by the zombie. That human being will struggle desperately, but ultimately in vain to remain among the living, and will always inevitably succumb to the monstrous transformation. The infected body gradually overpowers the mind-subject, who is incapable of holding onto its humanity. Much attention tends to be devoted to this particular horror factor generated by the zombie; the losing fight is typically crowned by a scene which emphasises the ultimate defeat of the mind-subject. This is particularly well illustrated in *Dawn of the Dead* [1978], when one of the characters, Roger, on the verge of death, asks his companions to wait before they shoot him. “Don’t do it ’till you’re sure I’m coming back,” he says, “I’m gonna try... not to. I’m gonna try not to come back. I’m gonna try... not to.”³¹ To resist the mutinous body is, however, futile, and his undead flesh does become a threat to his former friends, who are forced to destroy the monstrosity with Roger’s face. In a similar fashion, in *Resident Evil* Alice urges Rain, the infected companion, to resist the ongoing transformation, saying “Don’t give up on me,” as if it were something that was up to Rain’s will or strength.³² The scenario is repeated time and time again in many narratives; the infected victim struggles, and eventually the rebellious body always wins.

The abject ontological nature of the undead body is not its only abject characteristic. Although the visual aspect of the zombie tends to vary from narrative to narrative (some depictions centre on the putrefaction and disintegration of the body, while others lean more towards the haggard, diseased look), it is most often concerned with the repulsive aspect of the dead, whether they are putrid, grunting monsters dropping decayed body parts or almost normal looking humans who move stiffly and awkwardly, with wide vacant eyes and slack expressions on their faces. This imagery works in a twofold way: on the one hand, the uncomfortably unsightly damaged flesh points to the inevitable fate of all organic remains once the person is dead. On the other hand, the vicious, animalistic creature that is no longer human and cannot even speak — instead it is only capable of moaning, hissing or howling — represents the immediate threat of dying. This depiction draws attention to the most basic and the most profoundly disturbing dimension of the undead body: the fact they are, in words of the nameless speaker from *Night of the Living Dead*, “just dead flesh.” The word flesh itself is an impersonal, biological term which denotes shapeless matter, a substance, and most certainly not an individual organism, let alone an individual person. This absence of individuality of the zombie reflects, as Linda Badley notes in *Writing Horror and the*

³¹ *Dawn of the Dead*, USA 1978, dir. by George Romero.

³² *Resident Evil*, Germany-UK-France 2002, dir. by Paul Anderson.

Body, dehumanisation — very often on a vast scale.³³ The undead body is motivated, as Badley states, “by visceral reflex functions;” it may eat and move but it is “cognitively and legally dead, having lost functions that traditionally designate individuality or personhood.”³⁴ Without any selfhood, the zombie pushes forward, stupidly, oblivious of adversity or any impediment, driven by one need.³⁵

The undead body in its unnatural state of being neither alive nor dead represents solely the bodily needs; reduced to moving meat, it performs only the simplest of functions, filled with instinctive aggression. It is fierce and voracious. Unable to talk or otherwise communicate any abstract ideas and share information, zombies are just an unstoppable, mindless force, most often referred to by living humans as “things,” as it can be observed in *Night of the Living Dead*, where the zombies are called “those things” by Ben — as opposed to “unidentified assassins,” as the radio announcer calls them.³⁶ The moment a person changes from a human being into a monstrous offence to reason, it is no longer referred to by the pronouns “he” or “she,” but by “it,” a pronoun which can be hardly used with reference to human persons. For the undead is not a person, but a thing; it has no name and no distinguishing features. Although formidable in a crowd, the zombies are regarded in the context of numbers, not in the context of individuals. Whether regarded philosophically or spiritually, the undead body is defined in the negative — it is a thing which is not alive, not sentient and not a person. In zombie narratives, the characters who are infected and are trying to resist the change are aware of this and they resent such fate. In *Resident Evil*, before asking Alice to kill her if she changes, Rain explains: “I don’t want to be one of those things... walking around without a soul.”³⁷

The undead body embodies the horror of experiencing the process of dying and death itself while still being alive. It horrifies the living subject and at the same time deprives the human remains of human dignity; the human corpse is replaced by “moving meat” and is treated like “moving meat”: a subject- and character-less threat that must be destroyed. The zombie symbolizes the horror of helplessness in the face of physiology; the inability to resist disease and death. And in its dreadful, sluggish “unlife,”³⁸ the zombie represents the death itself, first stopping the biological functions of the victim, and then again death, the ultimate end of the mind-subject. The undead is not a person brought back to life from the

³³ L. Badley, *Writing Horror and the Body: The Fiction of Stephen King, Clive Barker, and Anne Rice*, Westport, Conn. 1996, p. 74.

³⁴ Ibid. This feature, to which Morgan points as “absence of personality” (J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 102), seems to be universally considered one of the defining traits of the zombie.

³⁵ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁶ *Night of the Living Dead*, USA 1968, dir. by George A. Romero.

³⁷ *Resident Evil*, 2002.

³⁸ J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 176.

dead. It is the triumph of the until now docile, obedient body over the mind-subject, the ultimate rebellion of the ruled against the ruling.

The animalised body, on the other hand, here in the form of the werewolf, appears in horror fiction in a more diverse array of form but to the same end; just like the zombie is an offence to death, the werewolf is an offence towards the humanness of a human being; it is, quite literally, the “beast hidden within”:

Werewolves, for example, violate the categorical distinction between humans and wolves [...]. The animal and the wolf identities are not temporally continuous [...] at a given point in time (the rise of the full moon), the body, inhabited by the human, is turned over to the wolf. The human identity and the wolf identity are not fused, but, so to speak, they are sequenced [...]. The werewolf figure embodies a categorical contradiction between man and animal which it distributes over time.³⁹

The animalised body, i.e. the werewolf, is a very special monster. A human whose body becomes that of a beast does not necessarily acquire the features of just the wolf. The werewolf belongs to a broader family of creatures who transform into animals (which is known as therianthropy). An animalised body may in fact be a body with characteristics of almost any given animal: a cat, a wolf, a snake or a hyena.⁴⁰ The wolf, however, is the most common animal into which human beings transform, at least in Euro-American horror fiction. The majority of werewolf narratives tend to concentrate not only on the transformation from the human shape to a canine shape, but the gradual change from the human to werewolf, emphasising the horror that comes from the inside and building the atmosphere of fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable.

The werewolf, just like the zombie, also fits perfectly the definition of a monster proposed by Carroll — as something interstitial, being stuck in-between two separate species, not fully human and not fully wolf, but having the traits of both. The werewolf is also stuck between two very easily distinguishable categories of that which is human-like and is therefore safe, and that which is beast-like and is therefore dangerous. Sliding between the two and simultaneously belonging to both and neither, the werewolf is a horrifying entity. It is worth noting that in fairy tales and folklore wolves have long been associated with evil and often-times depicted as cunning villains. The human and the wolf share a long history of the hunted and the hunter in the darkness.

At the heart of the animalised, bestial body in horror fiction lies the fear of the inherent savagery of the human being. It is important to remember that just like the zombie is dead and alive at the same time, the werewolf is both human and inhuman at the same time. For this reason, as Stefan Dziemianowicz points out in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural*, the predatory activities of the werewolf

³⁹ N. Carroll, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁰ As can be seen respectively in *The Cat People* (1942), *The Wolfman*, *Hiss* (2010) and *Hyenas* (2011).

may be presented as extensions or exaggerations of ordinary human behaviour.⁴¹ When the human transforms into a werewolf, the body is free from the mind-subject's control and the inner beast is released; the animalised body gives in to instincts and urges the human subject would usually cringe away from, and commits deeds the human subject is later remorseful for. The werewolf is a hybrid of a human being and a wolf, but the wolf is a mere animal: it is amoral. Therefore, the evil, cruel deeds committed by the werewolf can be in fact viewed as the influence of its human part — as the worst characteristics of man coming to the surface.⁴² “Releasing” the “inner beast” has actually less to do with the natural viciousness of the wolf and more to do with the body breaking societal and ethical restraints the mind-subject is bound by.

In contrast to the traditional folklore manner of transforming completely into a regular wolf (or at least a creature that looks like a regular wolf), most horror narratives opt for a partial transformation. This includes anything from a regular human form with excessive hair and minor changes to the face and hands to a monstrous hybrid of the human and lupine form. All those variants have an important trait in common: the werewolf which is partly human and partly animal can convey basic emotions and reactions of the monster, reminding the audience that there is always some humanity to the monster. The fusion of the brutal, inhuman and ostentatiously carnal animal characteristics with the remnants of humanity terrifies us on a profoundly primeval, profoundly natural level, but also embodies the concept of the struggle between the human being and animal instincts within one creature. The subject not only loses humanity, they also lose control. Like it is the case with the undead, the werewolf is not the monster creeping closer from far away, but it is a monster creeping slowly out of the human being. Apart from the terror brought on by facing a savage animal-like monster, the human part of the werewolf dreads the transformation into a savage animal-like monster and whatever violent deeds they might commit at that time. In *An American Werewolf in London*, David uses exactly these words: “I will become a monster in two days,”⁴³ which obviously terrifies him. Similarly, in *Ginger Snaps*, Ginger tells her sister that she cannot find peace and that “nothing helps, except tearing live things to pieces,” after which she promptly adds: “I’m scared.”⁴⁴ At the same time, the new, wild bestial impulses have an additional, more complex influence on the human who is becoming a werewolf — while being terrified of turning into something inhuman, the character might be at the same time strangely attracted to the changes. Both those aspects of the transformation can be seen in *Ginger*

⁴¹ S. Dziemianowicz, op. cit., p. 669.

⁴² Interestingly, the werewolf does not need to eat human flesh to survive. Therefore, its behaviour has a lot in common with man, who is one of few species who kill other creatures for the sheer pleasure of killing.

⁴³ *An American Werewolf in London*, USA-UK 1981, dir. by John Landis.

⁴⁴ *Ginger Snaps*, Canada 2000, dir. by John Fawcett.

Snaps, when Ginger, ever deeper into the change, at some point leaves her fear behind and instead begins to succumb to her new nature, explaining to her sister: “It feels so... good, Brigitte.”

The lycanthrope, the horrific fusion of the human and the beast most common in horror fiction, is not only abject in nature, but naturally abject in form: a lycanthrope usually combines human and animal characteristics in a most disturbing manner. Despite having a recognisably humanoid shape, it tends to be more muscular and heavily built, with long, strong limbs of bizarre, wrong shape. In contrast to the folklore full wolf or a regular human being, the lycanthrope always seems somehow disfigured, misshapen, ugly and terrifying. The conventional werewolf in horror fiction is monstrous because its form is incomplete; it is stuck half-way between the two acceptable forms. The fact that horror fiction werewolves additionally tend to be immune to almost all kinds of weapons, are preternaturally strong and resilient, adds up to the image of a horrifying, abnormal predator.

The unique aspect of the animalised body is the way in which it balances its horror factor within the grey zone of abject, right on the line between Self and Other. In case of the werewolf, the Other both metaphorically and literally breaks out of the Self. In horror films, as Brigid Cherry points out, where humans transform into bestial creatures such as the werewolf, the scenes of transformation “tend to be elaborate special effects sequences that explicitly and graphically depict the disintegration of the body’s boundary as the animal emerges. These often depict the destruction of the [...] body”⁴⁵: the characters tear off their clothes, feel their body temperature rising, their limbs change and elongate, often-times with bone crunching sound effects; also, hair is shown sprouting from their bodies, and their faces distort into a more lupine shape.⁴⁶ The skin is not always shown to burst, but there is, as Cherry notes, “a strong sense that the animal is breaking through the surface of the body.”⁴⁷ pointing to the “abjection in the form of bodies without stable boundaries,” as those bodies “literally shift and distort before our eyes.”⁴⁸ In narratives such as *Wolf* and *Ginger Snaps*, the characters undergo transformations that are more gradual and take more time.⁴⁹ Ginger does not magically turn from a human woman to a lupine monster, but over time she too grows excess hair, the vertebrae of her spine become more prominent and “threaten to burst through the skin;” her teeth “become sharper and more protruding, and she grows talons

⁴⁵ Cherry originally points out that such sequences tend to focus on the destruction of the male body.

⁴⁶ B. Cherry, *Horror*, New York 2009, p. 113.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Incidentally, not only is Ginger’s transformation in *Ginger Snaps* (as well as in a number of other titles, such as *Wolf*) more gradual, but it is also permanent. The very principle of the change, however, remains the same; the same concept, only taking place much faster and in a repeatable manner, can be seen in almost all werewolf titles.

and a tail.”⁵⁰ On top of that, the final transformation (or the full transformation, in case of the more rapid transformations) is usually shown as a painful, brutal, unnatural process as the body, forced to assume new shape, becomes twisted and distorted against the laws of physics and biology.

The werewolf is related to many fears and misgivings: it may be associated with the nature, sexuality, or inner instincts.⁵¹ It is a composite of a variety of profound, disturbing fears and anxieties, including the fear of the wilderness, of cannibalism, and of the savagery and angry cruelty sleeping inside the human being. Most importantly, however, the animalised body represents the fear of losing control and ceasing to be human, and becoming a beast instead. A werewolf body rejects humanness and embraces the beast. It brutally lounges back at the mind it used to envelop, devouring its reason and rationality. The individual human subject is destined to disappear and be replaced by the abject, monstrous mutinous body, as they gradually lose their humanity and humanness and are quite literally “eaten up by the beast.” Again, the changes come one by one, unstoppable, stripping the instinct from the control of the reason, until finally the bodily needs and impulses eclipse the rational, human mind-subject, first repressing it and in the end eating it up completely.

An additional dimension of horror that is deeply characteristic of the undead body and the animalised body results from the fact that both are highly contagious in nature. The werewolf and the undead represent the most repulsive and horrifying form of abject, i.e. the abject that transgresses the most forbidden borders: the border between a man and a beast and the border between life and death. To make them even more fearsome and appalling, the horror fiction authors use their nature to evoke even more revulsion — not only does the werewolf or a zombie itself undergo a hideous, disgusting transformation, but that transformation can spread onto another human, thus crossing yet another border: that between one subject and another subject. According to Morgan, the werewolf genre is a version of contagion horror,⁵² just like the zombie genre. The werewolf and the zombie, as represented in both literature and film, embody a complex, terrifying form of abject in the sense that they are, for one thing, abjectful themselves and, furthermore, they c o n t a m i n a t e their victims by biting, either killing them or changing them into an instance of the abject itself. In both cases, the contamination takes place when the saliva of the monster gets in contact with the victim’s blood, i.e. when bodily fluids mix and become indistinguishable. Biting is in its very nature both objectable and abjectable. It is the most primitive, aggressive attack, a manifestation of instinct coming from the mindless body rather than the rational mind-subject over body, so valued by the Euro-American view of the world. It is also the ultimate manifestation of what is fearsome about the abject. If the abject is that which en-

⁵⁰ B. Cherry, op. cit., p. 113.

⁵¹ As can be seen respectively in *The Howling*, *Ginger Snaps* and *Wolf*.

⁵² J. Morgan, op. cit., p. 19.

dangers the firm barriers the subjects carefully build around themselves, then in this sense the bite is the ultimate breaching of the barriers. It reduces the desired distance between the subject and the attacking Other to zero and literally breaks the physical wall that skin is, which is supposed to give the embodied subject the most intimate and most basic protection from the world. According to Morgan, a bite might be perceived as “a final victory of pathology and contamination, of physical/psychic diminishment,” rendering the victim “unable to ward off that which is disgusting and heinous, [and] being subject to its embrace.”⁵³

What makes the body a tool so convenient to exploit for horror makers is that, once out of control, the body is a fear factor far more horrifying than any autonomous creature or monster might be. In case of the werewolf and the zombie it is the transformed, mutinous body, not the creature, that accounts for the horror. A werewolf, or a zombie, is nothing like a vampire or a witch or an alien. The werewolf is not a monster knocking at the door — it is a monster looking at you from the mirror, just as the zombie is a monster giving the lie to all one would think they know about life and death. An undead body or a werewolf body is a body out of control, a body by means of which the horror fiction creators scare the audience, which they unleash on the reader or viewer, making them uncomfortable, so to say, in their own skin. The undead body in horror, in its resistance to death — just like the animalised body resisting human nature — takes away the corporeal shield for the mind, the obedient complement of the subject and forces that subject to confront another, new subject, i.e. the defiant body, which continuously grows in power, which has its own new desires and instincts. The trustworthy fortress of flesh becomes now a haunted house, a ghost mansion, an unknown, hostile territory threatening the mind-subject. The mere concept of a zombie or a werewolf rips the human subject apart, dividing it into Self and the Other, with the Self forced to remain a silent witness to the newly appeared Other. As that body transgresses the borders, it becomes an instance of abject in its worst form. A body not dominated by its wearer but dominating instead, the controlling body, is the source of horror. It is the exact opposition of the meek body following every order of the mind. And although now alien and hostile, the mutinous body still retains an uncomfortably intimate connection to the mind-subject until the moment it suppresses it completely, in this way becoming a perfect instrument to be used and misused by the horror authors.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 176.

The Werewolf and the Zombie: The Undead Body and the Misshapen Body in Horror

Summary

The body, whether considered in terms of biology, sociology or religion, is an inherent constituent of that which makes a human subject, complementing the mind and being subject to it. The only space that offers the body the freedom to be treated separately from the mind-subject that otherwise defines it at all times, is horror fiction. In horror fiction the body is free to rebel; horror texts rely on narrative strategies that refer to the intimate connection between the flesh and the mind. The mutiny of the body in horror fiction takes the form of the reversal of the relation between the mind-subject and the body. The aim of this paper is to identify and discuss the two best known and most common manifestations of this motif in horror fiction — manifestations known from legends and the earliest texts of the genre, both literary and cinematic: the animalised body and the undead body, represented by the werewolf and the zombie.

Wilkołak i zombie: zniekształcone i nieumarłe ciało w horrorze

Streszczenie

Ciało, czy to rozpatrywane w kontekście biologii, socjologii czy religii, jest nieodzowną częścią składową tego, co stanowi człowieka jako podmiot, podlegającą jednocześnie zawsze i wszędzie umysłowi. Jediną przestrzenią, w jakiej ciało może być postrzegane jako niezależne od umysłu-jako-podmiotu, który zazwyczaj zawsze je definiuje, jest fantastyka grozy. W fantastyce grozy ciało znajduje wolność i może się zbuntować; teksty fantastyki grozy z założenia charakteryzują się strategiami narracyjnymi mającymi właśnie na celu nawiązanie do intymnego połączenia między ciałem a umysłem. Bunt ciała w tekstach fantastyki grozy przybiera formę odwrócenia równowagi sił między ciałem a umysłem-jako-podmiotem. Tekst ten ma na celu omówienie dwóch najbardziej znanych i powszechnych manifestacji tego motywu w fantastyce grozy, znanych z legend i najstarszych tekstów gatunku, zarówno literackich, jak i kinowych: ciała uzwierzonego i ciała nieumarłego, czyli wilkołaka i zombie.