



























































































































































While the skels do seem to take on these hyper-aggressive traits at the very end of the novel, they relate more similarly to the pre-9/11 zombie for most of the book: stumbling targets for civilians with rifles. For Wetmore, as well as other scholars, the post-9/11 zombie is metaphor for terrorism and terrorist attacks (160). Given the time of its publication—2011—and the city in which it is set—New York—it is easy to make claims about the skels being terrorists. However, upon reading, what is more obvious is commentary on a variety of capitalist subjects.

Further, Whitehead seems to be drawing influence from another pre-9/11 zombie narratives that act as social commentary on consumerism: George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, a film in which survivors and dead alike return to a place of comfort for them: a shopping mall. Perhaps not quite so heavy handed, Whitehead does away with shopping malls, choosing instead to focus on the consumerism of advertisements, furniture and domestic space within a post-apocalyptic setting that relies on a working-class group of people. Still, not even Romero's film offers a clear parallel to the skels. While *Dawn of the Dead* takes place during a zombie-heavy post-apocalypse, *Zone One* takes place one stage further, during a time in which most skels have been killed en masse by marines, and the few that remain are cleaned up by Sweepers like Mark Spitz. In fact, over the three days in which the novel takes place, there are only three attacks that pose any real threat to Mark and his crew. While there are also flashbacks of skel violence, the narrator spends far more time looking into Mark's interiority, and into the economics of a post-apocalyptic New York. This suggests, then, that Whitehead doesn't really want readers to focus on the zombie.

So what is it that Whitehead *does* want us to focus on? Given the themes of his previous books, and based on various reviews of *Zone One*, one might think that Whitehead is returning to the theme of race. However, a much more powerful point in this novel is that even after the apocalypse, Americans live in a capitalist consumer-based society. While certainly dangers exist within this type of society and the upper-class remain privileged, maintaining a sense of capitalism and consumerism seems to comfort those surviving, seems to offer an orderliness that the skels threatened.

In addition to the filmic zombie, I think it appropriate to very briefly note that in folklore, the Haitian zombie is often used as a slave laborer. In her folkloric text, *Tell My Horse*, Zora Neale Hurston tells of a fear among both upper and lower class Haitians in which their “resurrected bod[ies] [were] being dragged from the vault . . . and set to toiling ceaselessly in the banana fields, working like a beast, unclothed like a beast, and like a brute crouching in some foul den in the few hours allowed for rest and food” (Hurston 181). Applied to the novel, it’s seemingly not the skels who are zombies in this case, but the proletariat of Zone One, the Sweepers and so on that mindlessly clear buildings day in and day out, only returning to some resemblance of a place of rest—not a foul den but a repurposed Chinese restaurant—on Sunday evenings. Taking this into consideration, we must then identify the controller of the Zone One “zombie,” and time and time again we are pointed to Buffalo, a safe-haven that houses the 1% of the survivors—the wealthy, the scientists and politicians, the businessmen and women. When, near the end of the novel, we learn that Zone One is nothing more than “a public relations stunt” (Whitehead 311), we see how truly manipulative this overseer is. While

the wealthy are (seemingly) safe and in a place of privilege, the rest of the 99% are set to work in dangerous conditions, simply to boost morale.

Like *Oryx and Crake* and *Last Days*, Whitehead's novel breaks conventions of the horror genre, and what little critical discussion on the novel exists does not recognize the book's innovation. Though it uses some, *Zone One* is also breaking a variety of traditional tropes within the zombie apocalypse subgenre. Typically, the zombie itself has been used as a labor slave. They are blood hungry but can either be quick and intelligent or slow and mindless. As well, zombie narratives are traditionally set during the most climactic points of an apocalypse, that is, the zombie uprising. Instead, Whitehead primarily uses the living to comment on commodity fetish and capitalism. He employs usage of both slow and quick zombies, and even creates his own take on the monster—a zombie unable to move at all. He sets the narrative after the climax of the zombie apocalypse has come and gone, and we are led to believe that the machine guns and gore that we have come to expect from the genre happened before the narrative begins. Most importantly, though, Whitehead makes the zombie itself, and thus these tropes, secondary, instead focusing on how his living protagonist finds nostalgic comfort in the capitalist totems of a pre-skel world.

Now that conventions of the zombie apocalypse have been discussed briefly, and evidence that we as readers are not meant to focus on the skels but rather on the presence of consumerism and capitalism in a skel-ridden world, it can be established just how widespread capitalism and consumerism has become in *Zone One*. As I mentioned previously, the novel takes place during a stage of reconstruction. The streets and buildings of Zone One—one section of New York City—have been, for the most part,



cleared of skulls. Mark Spitz works as a Sweeper, a new-to-the-apocalypse profession in which teams sweep the city, building by building, block by block, eliminating hidden or missed skulls. This stage suggests some kind of calm instead of the chaos that surely came before it, and thus a return to the nine-to-five workweek.

In addition to the undead, the apocalypse has spawned a variety of new jobs: Sweepers, Wreckers, and Disposal teams. Spitz, who once worked in “Customer Relationship Management, New Media Department, of a coffee multinational,” has a drastic change in professions after the apocalypse, working as both a Sweeper and a Wrecker (184). Besides these new lines of work, we see plenty of returning professions: entrepreneurs, scientists, generals and lieutenants, not to mention the unmentioned but necessary service workers to keep Zone One clean, fed, and running smoothly. It is clear, then, that in its first steps towards normalcy, society has once again reinstated economic roles. As a Sweeper, Mark has lunch breaks and weekends off (partially), as well as coworkers. Despite his duties being far from normal, the specifics of the job don’t seem far off from the jobs of a pre-infected world. What is so odd about the post-infection jobs is that there is no talk of pay. It can be inferred, however, that there is some form of payment as the ambiguously named Lieutenant announces the availability of sponsor clothing “with a retail price of under thirty dollars” (Whitehead 47). Whether this means the workers of Zone One are paid in currency or in sponsor goods is left unstated, but it suggests that there is some form of compensation.

The return to a capitalist society does not stop at new and pre-existing jobs for the survivors of *Zone One*. We also see a return to consumerism, especially in the form of sponsor goods. As will be discussed later, the wealthy had the means to survive. Among

this number are upper-level business men and women who, once arrived at a settlement, were moved to Buffalo with the rest of the wealthy where they resumed their respective businesses and produced sponsor goods. Included in these businesses are the aforementioned “juggernaut clothing empire,” which produced four product lines, including an upscale boutique and plus-size lingerie—absurd as it is familiar, sponsor cigarettes, sponsor sneakers, sponsor chewing gum and, perhaps more absurd than a post-apocalyptic lingerie business, the parent company of a children’s cartoon character sponsoring band-aids, notebooks and, later, combat helmets (Whitehead 38, 46). Though the sponsor goods are, in part, used to curb looting outside of the settlement, one cannot help but notice the spirit of capitalism. Too, the government-sanctioned monopolies reek of a familiar corruption:

Buffalo created an entire division dedicated to pursuing official sponsors whenever a representative turned up, in exchange for tax breaks once the reaper laid down his scythe and things were up and running again. (Additional goodies the public would never find out about weevilled the fine print.) (Whitehead 49)

In addition to being potentially unethical in government sponsorship, the official sponsors returned to business as usual—make as much money as possible. The sponsors “put a price cap on their goods or specified a particular product in their brand family, one not too dear.” Though the products might be of low quality (“they were expired anyways”) or not, interpellation would ensure the continued purchase of said sponsor goods.

Whitehead acknowledges as much in a brief passage: “The civilians out in the wild, unaware of the regulations, would be welcomed into the system in time, and they would

obey” (49). In a time when generosity of such companies seems necessary for the survival of mankind, we return to the questionable ethics of big business.

Though the return of a job-based economy and a return of big business most prominently show the post-apocalyptic capitalism in *Zone One*, less pervasive evidence also exists: the importance of the child, and the return to a class based system. Never present in the narrative but always talked about by the characters of *Zone One*, are The Tromanhauser Triplets, freshly released from the ICU as the novel begins. An “irritating number” of survivors were hopeful for the triplets, for the children were “[N]ew life in the midst of devastation . . . Word of the Tromanhausers spread through the Northeast settlements quicker than any uplifting news of this or that reconstruction effort” (Whitehead 49-51). We can also see evidence of the value in a pre-infected world, especially in working class families in which children meant more labor and financial support. In his ethnographic study, *Deep Down in the Jungle*, Roger D. Abrahams notes that “[H]aving children . . . is considered the highest good,” and, “As in rural society, children in the city are looked upon as possible economic assets” (27). While this particular study is on poverty stricken families, I would suggest it works in a similar if not the same way in a post-apocalyptic world. Besides symbolizing new life in a dead world, the Tromanhausers offer six additional hands to work and help with the reconstruction efforts. The Tromanhausers are to *Zone One* as the Crakers are to *Oryx and Crake*; that is, they are hope for a future after an apocalyptic pandemic.

Finally, the clear division in class suggests that capitalism is returning to a post-infected world. The world of *Zone One* is split into three classes, not dissimilar to the pre-infected world: wanderers, the working class, and the bourgeoisie 1% of Buffalo. As

previously mentioned, the Buffalo settlement housed “[A]ll the best and brightest . . . where they got the best grub, reveled in 24-7 generators, and uncurtailed hot showers on command” (Whitehead 43). Not only this, but supplies were handed out on a priority basis, Buffalo, of course, being the first priority. Though Buffalo’s population included scientists and other individuals that might provide actual solutions or help, it also included sponsor businessmen and, very likely, those wealthy enough to buy their way in. The privilege of the wealthy is evident, for even as the plague began, it was the rich who “tended to escape” (162).

Before moving on to more specific examples of commodity fetishism in Whitehead’s novel, I think it appropriate to quickly note that capitalism in science fiction is not a new topic, but less so in horror. What’s interesting is that capitalism is used in dystopian fiction much more frequently than in utopian fiction, a genre which predominantly features socialist societies (Sargent 202). This brings up a new question: is *Zone One* utopic or dystopic? I’d argue that, like most dystopic fiction, the government in the novel believes it to be the former, whereas it’s truly the latter. Halfway through the novel, our narrator tells us this: “The dead came to scrub the Earth of capitalism and the vast bourgeois superstructure . . . return us to nature and wholesome communal living” (153). This seems to suggest a dangerous cycle in which the plague (“the dead”) was a response to capitalist society of the pre-infected world, and as the reconstruction begins we see a return to the dangerous capitalistic society rather than a rethinking of economic systems. The novel is a dystopic commentary on the pitfalls of capitalism. Dystopic as it is, however, capitalism does offer some comfort in such a world.

This brings me to my claim: In the post-infected world, capitalism and consumerism offer a return to normalcy for survivors, a nostalgia for the ad-ridden world of before. This is especially evident in the book's protagonist, Mark Spitz, who fetishizes various capitalistic totems—and I use this word loosely—as a means of comfort, and to spark memories of his past. Karl Marx shares the anthropological definition of fetishism, referring to “the primitive belief that godly powers can inhere in inanimate things (e.g., in totems)” (Felluga). It is this definition that I'm using, and the godly power these totems inhere is the power to provide comfort in an extremely uncomfortable setting—a post-infected New York City. The three totems Mark fetishizes are as follows: advertisements, living and working spaces and furniture, and the jobs themselves, that is, the former and current occupations of both the living as well as the dead.

Before getting into Mark's totems of nostalgia, I would like to establish that even before the plague Mark had a commodity fetish. *Zone One* opens with a memory. Mark recalls a childhood visits to Uncle Lloyd's apartment—a building that will later become totemic. While the adults talked, the narrator tells us:

[T]he boy was down the hall, giddy and squeaking on the leather of the cappuccino sectional and marveling over the latest permutations in home entertainment. He searched for the fresh arrival first thing. This visit it was the wireless speakers haunting the corners like spindly wraiths. (Whitehead 4)

At such a young age it's not possible for Mark to fetishize technology for the same reason he will fetishize it later—nostalgia. Rather he fetishizes these objects because of his parents' unwillingness to participate “in an age of digital multiplicity.” Where his parents had “a coffee machine that didn't tell time, dictionaries made out of paper,” and,

“a camera that only took pictures,” Uncle Lloyd had the newest, biggest televisions, speakers, and furniture. (3-5). Later, we see more examples of pre-infection commodity fetish in Mark: as a teenager, taking the subway to parts “of the city he’d never been before . . . in search of imported sneakers or limited-edition hoodies” (256-7); in the days leading up to Last Night, Mark is gambling “at one of the new boutique casinos . . . [T]he banks of machines trilled and dinged and whooped in a regional dialect of money” (81); as an adult in California, hoping to prove himself as a person successful enough to move to and live in Manhattan. The narrator dwells on and criticizes this past: “To think that there had been a time when such a thing meant something: the signifiers of one’s position in the world. Today a rusty machete and a bag of almonds made you a person of substance” (161). Thus, the fetishization of money and commodity has always been a means for Mark to live with his societal anxieties but provides a slightly different meaning in the post-infected world.

Advertisements, whether real or imagined, appear frequently throughout *Zone One*. First, the reconstruction effort has a theme song and a slogan; later, Mark creates imaginary commercials for the post-infected world: “When You Need to Burn the Dead in a Hurry!; Four Out of Five Uninfected Doctors Agree: Still the Only Antibiotic That Matters!” (157). Even in Mark’s dreams he sees “advertisements lodged just above eye level, airbrushed heads of the dead hawked trade schools and remedies” (133). Thus, even if he is not physically around or seeing actual advertisements, he is thinking about them, even going so far as to create his own. So it is not a stretch, I would argue, that these advertisements are totemic for Mark. While the aforementioned advertisements and slogans are selling the present and future, there are two scenes in the novel that feature

advertisements of the past—these are Mark’s totems and what bring him a nostalgic comfort. In keeping theme with horror conventions, I would also go as far as to say that these advertisements haunt Mark.

The first of these scenes takes place about three-quarters into the novel. To put my discussion into context, the ambiguous leader of the Zone One settlement, the Lieutenant, has committed suicide. Mark and his team of sweepers is holed up with another team inside of a Brazilian restaurant, mourning the Lieutenant’s death. The teams get drunk and, in the background, a radio plays. Our first hint that the radio is symbolic of the past is when Mark realizes that “it was a recording of a radio block from some random afternoon before the disaster” (Whitehead 252). The narrator then describes the radio broadcast as follows: “a ghost transmission of yesterday’s deals on teeth bleaching, ads for movies playing in dead theaters, and last-minute invitations to join class-action suits” (252). Thus, in the wake of the Lieutenant’s suicide, an action that seems to symbolize the growing instability of the post-infected world, Mark is reminded, or more so, literally haunted by a simpler time. Before the plague, one dealt with anxieties like the color of their teeth, what movie he should see, and whether he had been wronged by one company or another, all of these decisions being much more lighthearted than deciding whether to live or die in a post-infected world. These broadcasts, I would argue, are meant to be read as a form of haunting because of two choice words, “ghost” and “dead,” both of which invoke nostalgia in a ghastly manner.

The second advertisement scene appears some forty pages later, even closer to, as Sorenson puts it, “the end of all stories” (562), and likewise haunts Mark. As Mark walks back to the Zone One settlement, Wonton, for the last time, what he notices is:

[T]he dead bargains: the handwritten EVERYTHING MUST GO sign in the second-floor window of a shop of no decipherable purpose, a banner proclaiming the specialty sandwich at the fast-food chain. (Whitehead 298)

Similar to the radio advertisements, Mark sees these advertisements in the wake of his teammate having his finger bit off by one of the infected and, as he'll soon find out, just prior to the siege of Wonton. The narrator notes that, in the distance, "[T]he machine guns fired without cessation," and that Mark had "become so accustomed to the gunfire . . . that he hadn't considered how many men and women such an onslaught entailed" (Whitehead 298-9). Thus, once again, the lighthearted time of liquidation sales and fast-food is haunting Mark by "dead" bargains while, in the meantime, his team member is potentially moments away from becoming infected and the settlement moments away from being overrun. For Mark, at a hugely uncomfortable time, focusing on advertisements of the pre-infected world offers some comfort, as well as pessimistic foreshadowing: *everything* must go.

The second totem, or, totems, that Mark finds comfort in are the living and working spaces he "sweeps" and the furniture within them. The way each of these spaces is furnished represents a hierarchy of social class. That is, prior to the apocalypse, wealth and class could be identified by how a work or living space looked. A law firm whose main demographic is wealthy businessmen, for example, would want potential customers to see that the firm values class and prestige and so would likely outfit its work space with furniture that gave off that notion. On the other hand, those in the working class do not always have the financial means to display their wealth, and their living spaces reflect that: apartments are run down, architecturally bland, and outfitted with cheap furniture.



Thus, social class is tied to how a living or work space looks, from the outside and within. Though there is one particular building that acts as a fetishistic totem for Mark—Uncle Lloyd’s—much more often Mark is thinking about specific rooms. While Whitehead’s language doesn’t evoke haunting in these totems the same way it does in advertisements, it is something that Mark frequently thinks about throughout the novel. Mark is consistently considering the places he’s sweeping: how they are decorated, who might have lived or worked there, and how successful these people were—all nostalgic glimpses into a pre-infected world. Because living and working spaces are littered throughout the novel, I’m choosing to focus on three specific moments: the lawyers’ suite, the big apartment complexes of Battery Park, and the starter-apartment. Each of these spaces reminds Mark of a time when social class—the wealthy, the middle-class, and the working-class respectively—could be identified by where they lived and what kinds of furniture they sat on.

After Mark’s memory of his childhood visits to Uncle Lloyd’s, the lawyers’ suite is where *Zone One* truly begins. Mark’s first thought upon entering the building is as follows: “[T]he attorneys had leased four floors, a sleek warren, and hadn’t been doing too bad for themselves from the extent of their renovation” (12). And then, inside the suite itself:

[T]hey stumbled into a sophisticated grotto, as if the floors had been dealt into the building from some more upscale deck. In the waiting room, their helmet lights roved over the perplexing geometric forms in the carpet that they sullied with their combat boots, the broad panels of the dark zebra wood covering the walls with elegant surety, and the low, sleek furniture that promised bruises yet, when

tested, compressed one's body according to newly discovered principles of somatic harmony. (Whitehead 13)

Mark, who had plans of lawyering before the plague, is not concerned about the dangers that may lie ahead, but rather the flooring, the carpet, the exoticized wood paneling, and the ergonomic furniture. In fact, the only concern about the present that Mark has is the damage their combat boots are causing the carpet. Thus, Mark is not thinking about the present, but rather is nostalgic about the past, and, in this case specifically, about the comforts and conveniences that the upper-class once had and to which Mark once aspired. This style of life, of course, no longer exists in the unstable post-infected world.

The second living space, the apartment complex, reminds Mark of a different but majority class of society—the middle class. Mark's memory of the apartment complex is brought about by a skel who seems to epitomize the middle-class. Mark's description of the complex, of the "identical layouts of the apartments," (71) is as follows:

Windowless office nook or nursery, bathroom on the right, second bedroom at the end of the hall with a coffin-size closet. He recognized the area rugs and sconces and accent tables, for the residents had all shopped at the same popular furniture emporiums the rest of the country shopped at . . . In the D-line apartment on the sixth floor he discovered the plaid ottoman he came across in the A-line apartment on the fourteenth floor, an identical distance from the flat-screen television. (Whitehead 71-2)

Like in the lawyers' suites, it's not the recent skel attack that's on Mark's mind, but rather the living spaces in which the skels might have lived pre-infection. In this case, however, Mark is not thinking of the upper-echelon furnishings of the bourgeoisie

lawyers, but rather the cookie-cutter apartments of the middle-class consumer. These are consumers who follow capitalist trends. They are consumers who “tested the same sofas” and “clicked through the drop-down menus of the same online purveyors” (72). Mark is finding comfort in the absolute architectural conformity of the middle-class.

Finally, the third example of furniture as a nostalgic and comforting totem can be found in what Mark describes as a “starter-apartment rental tower” (253). Mark describes these living spaces as follows: “floor after floor of beige carpet, noise-permeable walls, and fingerprint-smudged doorways” (253-4). He goes on to think that “[H]is friends in the city lived in buildings like that, and the hallways reeked of the dead ambitions decomposing behind the doors. They’d had hopes” (254). The nostalgia and comfort here is evident. For one, given his occupation, had Mark lived in the city and not his parent’s home, he too would have very likely lived in an apartment complex like this. More obviously, though, the apartments remind Mark of a time when people could have hopes, even if those hopes were never fulfilled. This is a stark difference from apartments which, post-infection, “signified the complete eradication of aspiration, all luminous motions” (254). Mark is using a working-class apartment complex to find comfort. He is thinking about hope in a world that has become hopeless.

Finally, we come to the last of the totems that Mark fetishizes: the past and future occupations of people and skulls that he meets. Like the previous totems, thinking and talking about occupations is a way for Mark to return mentally to the comforts of a structured nine-to-five workweek. Though it is not stated explicitly, it seems that the routine of working is what Mark finds most nostalgic, but also perhaps comfort in the familiarity of non-military, non-apocalypse created occupations. That is, though Mark

has been a Wrecker and a Sweeper, though there does exist a multitude of new and exciting occupations in the post-infected world, it is not these that Mark fetishizes, but rather the more mundane occupations. Like living and working spaces, Mark thinks about jobs frequently throughout *Zone One* so, again, I am going to pick a few specific examples: Mark's first office job, Mark's Customer Relationship Manager position, and discussing post-plague plans with Tad, Jerry and Margie.

Mark remembers a comforting memory of his first office job while being attacked in the lawyers' suites. Mark's memories include: "rattling a mail cart down the corridors of a payroll company," his coworkers who "were his age and when his boss shut the door to his office they got a splendid doofus chorus going," and finally, "the ogre head of Human Resources, who'd been relentless about Mark Spitz's paperwork, downright insidious about his W-this, W-that, the proper credentials" (Whitehead 20-1). In the present, Mark has been tackled and pinned by the skels, he has dropped his pistol, and he's alone. But this is not what he thinks about. Instead, Mark finds comfort in these nostalgic memories of his first office job—both the good and the bad—and thus the job becomes a fetishistic totem for Mark.

Mark's Customer Relationship Management job is not the first, but the most recent pre-apocalyptic occupation that Mark held, and it, too, is nostalgic. Also similarly, this memory is prompted while Mark is alone and vulnerable to attack, a time in which he should really be thinking about the present. Mark has this memory en route to Wonton about halfway through the novel. He's left his team with the Bravo team of Sweepers, and passes a lounge where he once met a girl at after work. It is this that prompts the memory of not the girl or the lounge but his job. Mark recalls that "[H]is job hadn't been

unduly bothersome; mostly he hated the commute from the Island and the sense of being becalmed,” and that “[I]t was his job to monitor the web in search of opportunities to sow product mindshare and nurture feelings of brand intimacy . . . This meant, he soon learned, scouting websites and social-media apparatus for mentions of the brand family, and saying hello” (Whitehead 184-5). Like his first office job, Mark’s memories of this job are mostly positive. He recalls entering “into artifice easily . . . a natural at ersatz human connection and the postures of counterfeit empathy,” and that, “[T]wo months after he started, there was a five percent uptick in the corporate site’s traffic” (186). In the present, Mark is more vulnerable while inside his own head, especially after just having seen a stray skel walking the streets. It is an uncomfortable and tense time, and so Mark finds comfort in thinking about the mundanity of his pre-apocalyptic life. So, once again, one of Mark’s past jobs is a totem, a way for him to dwell on a time in which the biggest annoyance was commuting.

Finally, Mark finds comfort, albeit a pessimistic comfort, in the future jobs of wanderers he has met. Though these are totems that allude to a future, they are all a return to the pre-apocalyptic occupations of Tad, Jerry, and Margie. It should be noted that, while these jobs are just as totemic and nostalgic as the previous two I have discussed, Mark is very pessimistic about the future, noting that the act of discussing post-plague plans in their present situation was “[M]ore than a jinx on deliverance, this was straddling reality with a pillow while it was sleeping and pressing down while it bucked and kicked” (Whitehead 222). Mark will go on to tell himself that “[H]ope is a gateway drug” (222). Still, Mark participates. Tad begins, telling the others that before the plague he had been working on a new video game that he plans to resume working

on, noting that “It’ll move a million copies” (222). Jerry goes next, and likewise says “he’d resume selling real estate. Surplus inventory will be a tough nut in every market, but once rightful owners and heirs are sorted out, business will start up again” (223). Margie is last to speak, in response to Tad’s asking if she will continue to make pickles. Referring to the business she had once worked for, Margie says, “[I]f they make it through,” and then, “[M]aybe I’ll start it up again myself” (223). When asked about his own post-plague plan, Mark says: “move to the city” (224). Based on Tad, Jerry, and Margie, though, one wonders if this means that Mark will also return to his former job in the city. But it’s the first three occupations that truly act as totems. These are not newly invented occupations, nor are they new occupations for the characters. Instead, Tad, Jerry, and Margie are planning a return to the comforts and normalcy of the pre-infected world. Though they have the opportunity to potentially reinvent themselves, what they seek instead is a nostalgic familiarity.

And so we come to a conclusion: though he exists in the uncomfortable present, a skel-ridden, post-apocalyptic world, the protagonist of *Zone One*, Mark Spitz, finds comfort in the nostalgia triggered by a variety of fetishistic totems. Each of these totems, whether living and working spaces, whether advertisements, or whether jobs, remind Mark of the capitalistic, consumer-driven society of before the plague. The nostalgia, and social commentary are what make this novel so interesting, especially because Whitehead is subverting a genre he clearly is working within by making more traditional conventions secondary. This isn’t the average zombie apocalypse novel. Whitehead’s social commentary is an innovation on the genre, and once recognized as such, could lead to more experimentation within the genre. A result of this is more complex, allegorically

powerful horror fiction, forced to be taken seriously by literary and genre critics alike. To be sure, zombie apocalypses are flooding the horror market—*World War Z*; *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*; *The Walking Dead*—but none of these texts are taking the risks that Whitehead is and actively unsettling the subgenre. Likewise, Whitehead is not the only author subverting the subgenre—Bennett Sims’ *A Questionable Shape* is another example. This, however, is not the right space for discussion of these other texts. It is simply an example and discussion of a uniquely innovative piece of fiction that subverts the conventions of the genre from which it derives, and that has gone unnoticed by critics of that genre. Instead, we will end as the novel does, and as we began the chapter—with the zombie. Mark may find comfort through nostalgia, but comfort will not help him as he walks out “into the sea of the dead” (322).

## Bibliography

- Abrahams, Roger D. "Neighbors and Relations." *Deep down in the Jungle...: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia*. Chicago: Aldine Pub., 1970. 27. Print.
- Ben-Tov, Sharona. *The Artificial Paradise: Science Fiction and American Reality*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1995. Print.
- Biddle, Sam. "The Secret Online Weapons Store That'll Sell Anyone Anything." *Gizmodo*. N.p., 2012. Web. 19 June 2016.
- Bishop, Kyle William. "The Idle Proletariat: Dawn of the Dead, Consumer Ideology, and the Loss of Productive Labor." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43.2 (2010): 234-48. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. *Margaret Atwood*. Ipswich: Salem, 2013. Print.
- Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, the Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*. London: Continuum, 2010. Print.
- Canavan, Gerry. "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and the Year of the Flood." *Literature Interpretation Therapy* 23 (2012): 138-59. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- "We Are the Walking Dead": Race, Time, and Survival in Zombie Narrative." *Extrapolation* 51.3 (2010): 431-53. Web. 15 Dec. 2015.
- Carroll, Noel. "The Paradox of Junk Fiction." *Beyond Aesthetics Philosophical Essays* 18.2 (1994): 335-47. Web.



Chandler, Raymond. *Stories and Early Novels*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1995. Print.

Cusack, Carole M. "Scarlet and Black: Non-Mainstream Religion as 'Other' in Detective Fiction." *The Buddha of Suburbia: Proceedings of the Eighth Australian and International Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference 2004* (2005): 159-74. Web.

"Edgar Award Category Information." *Mystery Writers of America*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2016.

Ellis, Jennifer. "Genre vs. Literary Fiction." *Jennifer Ellis*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2016.

Evans, Mary. *The Imagination of Evil: Detective Fiction and the Modern World*. London: Continuum, 2009. Print.

Evenson, Brian. *Last Days: A Novel*. Minneapolis: Coffee House, 2016. Print.

Farnsworth, Regan. "Essay: On the Intellectual Merits of Genre Fiction." *Berkeley Fiction Review*. N.p., 2015. Web. 18 June 2016.

Felluga, Dino. "Introduction to Karl Marx, Module on Fetishism." Introduction to Karl Marx, Module on Fetishism. Purdue University, 31 Jan. 2011. Web. 14 Dec. 2015.

Forsberg, Soren. "'Don't Believe Your Eyes': A Review of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011)." *Transition* (2012): 131-43. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.

Hammett, Dashiell. *Hammett*. New York: Library of America, 1999. Print.

Harold, James. "Literature, Genre Fiction, and Standards of Criticism." *Nonsiteorg RSS*. N.p., 2011. Web. 19 June 2016.

Herman, David, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Hoberek, Andrew. "Living with PASD." *Contemporary Literature* 53.2 (2012): 406-13. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Zombies." *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. New York: Perennial Library, 1990. Print.

Klosowski, Thorin. "What Is Tor and Should I Use It?" *Lifehacker*. N.p., 2014. Web. 19 June 2016.

Lake, Christina Bieber. *Prophets of the Posthuman: American Fiction, Biotechnology, and the Ethics of Personhood*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame, 2013. Print.

Lai, Selina. "CJAS." *Lowbrow, Highbrow, and the Categorization of Art*. Columbia University in the City of New York, n.d. Web. 19 June 2016.

"The Last Dispensation of Time." *Mormon Beliefs*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2016.

Lau, Kimberly J. *New Age Capitalism: Making Money East of Eden*. Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania, 2000. Print.

Mallory, Jeff. "Dystopia." *ENGLISH 1102 SPRING SEMESTER 2009*. Gordon State College, n.d. Web. 19 June 2016.

Mariani, Mike. "The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombies." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 28 Oct. 2015. Web. 19 June 2016.

Martin, Rebecca. *Critical Insights: Crime & Detective Fiction*. Ipswich: Salem., n.d. Print.

- Mraović-O'hare, Damjana. "The Beautiful, Horrifying Past: Nostalgia and Apocalypse in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*." *Criticism* 53.2 (2011): 213-39. Web. 14 Dec. 2015.
- Muehling, Darrel D., and David E. Sprott. "The Power of Reflection: An Empirical Examination of Nostalgia Advertising Effects." *Journal of Advertising* 33.3 (2004): 25-35. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- Newman, Judie. *Utopia and Terror in Contemporary American Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- Norman, Will. "Killing the Crime Novel: Martin Amis's *Night Train* , Genre and Literary Fiction." *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.1 (2011): 37-59. *Project Muse*. Web. 8 Feb. 2016.
- O'connell, Sanijda, Dr. "What Is a Literary Novel?" *Jane Friedman*. N.p., 2012. Web. 19 June 2016.
- Oster, Grant. "The History of Human Trafficking." *Hankering for History*. N.p., 3 Oct. 2015. Web.
- Phillips, Bill. "6124 Religious Belief in Recent Detective Fiction." *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 36.1 (2014): 139-51. *Project Muse*. Web. 19 June 2016.
- Pinedo, Isabel Cristina, and Steven Jay Shneider. "Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film;" and "Towards an Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror." *The Horror Film*. Ed. Stephen Prince. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.

- Sargent, Lyman T. "Capitalist Eutopias in America." *America as Utopia*. Ed. Kenneth M. Roemer. New York: B. Franklin, 1981. Print.
- Shaviro, Steve. "Capitalist Monsters." *Historical Materialism* 10.4 (2002): 281-90. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.
- "The Shirley Jackson Awards." *The Shirley Jackson Awards*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2016.
- Sorensen, Leif. "Against the Post-Apocalyptic: Narrative Closure in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*." *Contemporary Literature* 55.3 (2014): 559-92. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.
- Swanson, C. J. "'The Only Metaphor Left': Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* and Zombie Narrative Form." *Genre* (2014): 379-405. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.
- Tobias, T.N. "REVIEW: *Zone One* by Colson Whitehead." *SF Signal*. N.p., 2012. Web. 19 June 2016.
- Van Young, Adrian. "THE DARK FICTION OF AN EX-MORMON WRITER." *The New Yorker*. Conde Nast, 10 Feb. 2016. Web. 19 June 2016.
- Wetmore, Kevin J. "They Won't Stay Dead: The Ghosts, Zombies, and Vampires of 9/11;" and "Manufacturing Fear." *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*. New York: Continuum, 2012. Print.
- Whitehead, Colson. *Zone One*. New York: Anchor, 2012. Print.
- Worthington, Heather. *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.