



Engl. 170—Literature of Minds and Selves ZOMBIES

Fall 2021

Prof. Gwen Bergner

T/Th 11:30-12:45

If every age embraces the monster it needs, the 21st century apparently needed zombies. Zombies invaded television (“American Horror Story: Coven,” “The Walking Dead”), movies (*World War Z*, *Warm Bodies*), books (*The Zombie Survival Guide*, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*), and kitsch (crawling zombie door stop, zombie brain gelatin mold). The insurgence even spread to academic discourses of law, public health, epidemiology, psychology, and philosophy. Consider the Centers for Disease Control blog post [“Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse”](#) or the law review article [“Death and Taxes and Zombies.”](#) From [mathematical modeling of a zombie invasion](#) to [philosophical speculations on zombie consciousness](#), the mindless monsters reveal the fears and anxieties, pleasures and dangers, of our inner selves and our cultural moment.

This course undertakes a cultural history of zombies in literature and film to ask what they tell us about the nature of existence and category of the human. Both alive and dead, human and nonhuman, consumer and consumed, these walking contradictions trouble our categories of meaning and experience. We’ll trace the zombie from its origin in Haiti as a corpse raised from the dead to perform slave labor through its migration to the US, where it became a voracious, cannibalistic horde-being, exploring its relation to histories of colonial slavery and US imperialism, hysteria over “white slavery” and interracial sex, and the rise of suburban shopping malls.



Primary Texts

William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (1929)
White Zombie, dir. Victor Halperin (1932)
Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (1938)
Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954)
Night of the Living Dead, dir. George Romero (1968)
Dawn of the Dead, dir. George Romero (1978)
Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985)
28 Days Later, dir. Danny Boyle (2002)
Shaun of the Dead (2004)
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (2010)

