

**ALL THOSE
TERRIFYING HISTORIES SERIES**

Kenneth Cavalcanti (ed.)

**Nights (and Days) of
the Living Dead.
Trips to the Old and
Contemporary Zombie**

feat. Frankenstein, Mary W. Shelley, H.P. Lovecraft, Ambrose
Bierce, George A. Romero, Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff

Horror Stories

You Don't Want to Read About

INTEGRAL

Nights (and Days) of the Living Dead. Trips to the Old and Contemporary Zombie Land

Kenneth Cavalcanti (ed.)

ALL THOSE TERRIFYING HISTORIES

#6

**Nights (and Days) of the Living Dead.
Trips to the Old and Contemporary Zombie
Land**

feat. Frankenstein, Mary W. Shelley, H.P. Lovecraft, Ambrose
Bierce, George A. Romero, Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff

Kenneth Cavalcanti (Ed.)

INTEGRAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The (Not Always) Dark Chronicles of the Living Dead

**The Multiple Faces of Frankenstein: from Mary W. Shelley and H.P. Lovecraft
to Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff and George A. Romero**

Zombie Apocalypse and *Preparedness 101*

Zombie Walk and Zombie Squad

Some Cases of Zombies in Real Life

Notes on the Edition

The (Not Always) Dark Chronicles of the Living Dead

"If I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear!"

...When we hear about *zombies* our first thought is "Frankenstein!". But this outstanding phenomenon of the popular culture is much more complex than the plot of the novel written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, the famous wife of the Romantic poet Percy Bisshe Shelley.

A zombie (Haitian French: *zombi*, Haitian Creole: *zonbi*) is a fictional undead being created through the reanimation of a corpse. Zombies are most commonly found in horror and fantasy genre works. The term comes from Haitian folklore, in which a *zombie* is a dead body reanimated through various methods, most commonly magic. Modern depictions of the reanimation of the dead do not necessarily involve magic but often invoke science fictional methods such as carriers, radiation, mental diseases, vectors, pathogens, parasites, scientific accidents etc.

In the original script for 1968's *Night of the Living Dead*, the director George A. Romero refers to his flesh-eating antagonists as "ghouls". Although the film is widely credited with launching zombies into the cultural zeitgeist, it wasn't until its follow-up ten years later, the consumerist nightmare *Dawn of the Dead*, that Romero would actually use the term. While making the first film, Romero understood zombies instead to be the undead Haitian slaves depicted in the 1932 Bela Lugosi horror film *White Zombie*.

But the zombie myth is far older and more rooted in history than the blinkered arc of American pop culture suggests. It first appeared in Haiti in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the country was known as Saint-Domingue and ruled by France, which hauled in African slaves to work on sugar plantations. Slavery in Saint-Domingue under the French was extremely brutal: half of the slaves brought in from Africa were worked to death within a few years, which only led to the capture and import of more. In the hundreds of years since, the zombie myth has been widely appropriated by American pop culture in a way that whitewashes its origins—and turns the undead into a platform for escapist fantasy. The original brains-eating fiend was a slave not to the flesh of others but to his own. The zombie archetype, as it appeared in Haiti and mirrored the inhumanity that existed there from 1625 to around 1800, was a projection of the African slaves' relentless misery and subjugation. Haitian slaves believed that dying would release them back to *lan guinée*, literally Guinea, or Africa in general, a kind of afterlife where they could be free. Though suicide was common among slaves, those who took their own lives wouldn't be allowed to return to *lan guinée*. Instead, they'd be condemned to skulk the Hispaniola plantations for eternity, an undead slave at once denied their own bodies and yet trapped inside them—a soulless zombie.

After the Haitian Revolution in 1804 and the end of French colonialism, the zombie became a part of Haiti's folklore. The myth evolved slightly and was folded into the Voodoo religion, with Haitians believing zombies were corpses reanimated by shamans and voodoo priests. Sorcerers, known as *bokor*, used their bewitched undead as free labor or to carry out nefarious tasks. This was the post-colonialism zombie, the emblem of a nation haunted by the legacy of slavery and ever wary of its reinstatement. As the UC Irvine professor Amy Wilentz has pointed out in her writing on zombies, on several occasions after the revolution Haiti teetered on the brink of reinstating slavery. The zombies of the Haitian Voodoo religion were a more fractured representation of the anxieties of slavery, mixed as they were with occult trappings of sorcerers and necromancy. Even then, the zombie's roots in the horrors of slavery were already facing dilution.

It was in this form—Voodoo *bokor* and black magic—that the Haitian myth first crossed paths with American culture, in the aforementioned *White Zombie*, says Mike Mariani. Although the film doesn't begin to transform the undead in the way that Romero's films and the subsequent zombie industrial complex would, it's notable for its introduction of white people as interlopers in the zombie legend. It would take another few decades or so, but eventually the memory of Haiti's colonialist history and the suffering it wrought—millions of Africans worked into the grave—would be excised from the zombie myth for good.

The English word "zombie" was first recorded in 1819, in a history of Brazil by the poet Robert Southey, in the form of "zombi". The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the word's origin as West African and compares it to the Kongo words *nzambi* (God) and *zumbi* (fetish). A Kimbundu-to-Portuguese dictionary from 1903 defines the related word *nzumbi* as soul, while a later Kimbundu-Portuguese dictionary defines it as being a "spirit that is supposed to wander the earth to torment the living".

One of the first books to expose Western culture to the concept of the voodoo zombie was *The Magic Island* (1929) by W. B. Seabrook. This is the sensationalized account of a narrator who encounters voodoo cults in Haiti and their resurrected thralls. *Time* commented that the book "introduced 'zombi' into U.S. speech". Zombies have a complex literary heritage, with antecedents ranging from Richard Matheson and H. P. Lovecraft to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* drawing on European folklore of the undead. Victor Halperin directed *White Zombie* (1932), a horror film starring Bela Lugosi. Here zombies are depicted as mindless, unthinking henchmen under the spell of an evil magician. Zombies, often still using this voodoo-inspired rationale, were initially uncommon in cinema, but their appearances continued sporadically through the 1930s to the 1960s, with films including *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959).

A new version of the zombie, inspired by, but distinct from, that described in Haitian folklore, emerged in popular culture during the latter half of the 20th century. This interpretation of the zombie is drawn largely from George A. Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which was partly inspired by Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* (1954). The word *zombie* is not used in *Night of the Living Dead*, but was applied later by fans. The monsters in the film and its sequels, such as *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) and *Day of the Dead* (1985), as well as its many inspired works, such as *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) and *Zombi 2* (1979), are usually hungry for human flesh, although *Return of the Living Dead* introduced the popular concept of zombies eating brains. The "zombie apocalypse" concept, in which the civilized world is brought low by a global zombie infestation, has since become a staple of modern popular art. After zombie films such as *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and Michael Jackson's music video *Thriller* (1983), the genre waned for some years.

In the Far East during the late 1990s, the Japanese zombie video games *Resident Evil* and *The House of the Dead* led to a resurgence of zombies in popular culture. Additionally, *The House of the Dead* introduced a new type of zombie distinct from Romero's slow zombies: the fast-running zombie. These games were followed by a wave of low-budget Asian zombie films such as the zombie comedy *Bio Zombie* (1998) and action film *Versus* (2000), and then a new wave of Western zombie films in the early 2000s, including films featuring fast-running zombies such as *28 Days Later* (2002), the *Resident Evil* and *House of the Dead* films, and the 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* remake, while the British film *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) was in the zombie comedy subgenre.

The late 2000s and 2010s saw the humanization and romanticization of the zombie archetype, with the zombies increasingly portrayed as friends and love interests for humans. Notable examples of the latter include movies *Warm Bodies* and *Zombies*, novels *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman, *Generation Dead* by Daniel Waters, and *Bone Song* by John Meaney, animated movie *Corpse Bride*, TV series *Pushing Daisies* and *iZombie*, and manga/novel/anime series *Sankarea: Undying Love* and *Is This a Zombie?* In this context, zombies are often seen as stand-ins for discriminated groups struggling for equality, and the human-zombie romantic relationship is interpreted as a metaphor for sexual

liberation and taboo breaking (given that zombies are subject to wild desires and free from social conventions)

In Haitian folklore, a *zombie* is an animated corpse raised by magical means, such as witchcraft. The concept has been popularly associated with the religion of voodoo, but it plays no part in that faith's formal practices.

How the creatures in contemporary zombie films came to be called “zombies” is not fully clear. The film *Night of the Living Dead* made no spoken reference to its undead antagonists as “zombies”, describing them instead as “ghouls” (though ghouls, which derive from Arabic folklore, are demons, not undead). Although George Romero used the term “ghoul” in his original scripts, in later interviews he used the term “zombie”. The word “zombie” is used exclusively by Romero in his script for his sequel *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), including once in dialog. According to George Romero, film critics were influential in associating the term “zombie” to his creatures and especially the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*. He eventually accepted this linkage, even though he remained convinced at the time that “zombies” corresponded to the undead slaves of Haitian voodoo as depicted in *White Zombie* with Bela Lugosi.

Zombies are featured widely in Haitian rural folklore as dead persons physically revived by the act of necromancy of a *bokor*, a sorcerer or witch. The *bokor* is opposed by the *houngan* (priest) and the *mambo* (priestess) of the formal voodoo religion. A zombie remains under the control of the *bokor* as a personal slave, having no will of its own.

The Haitian tradition also includes an incorporeal type of zombie, the “zombie astral”, which is a part of the human soul. A *bokor* can capture a zombie astral to enhance his spiritual power. A zombie astral can also be sealed inside a specially decorated bottle by a *bokor* and sold to a client to bring luck, healing, or business success. It is believed that God eventually will reclaim the zombie's soul, so the zombie is a temporary spiritual entity.

The two types of zombie reflect soul dualism, a belief of Haitian voodoo. Each type of legendary zombie is therefore missing one half of its soul (the flesh or the spirit).

The zombie belief has its roots in traditions brought to Haiti by enslaved Africans and their subsequent experiences in the New World. It was thought that the voodoo deity Baron Samedi would gather them from their grave to bring them to a heavenly afterlife in Africa (“Guinea”), unless they had offended him in some way, in which case they would be forever a slave after death, as a zombie. A zombie could also be saved by feeding them salt. English professor Amy Wilentz has written that the modern concept of Zombies was strongly influenced by Haitian slavery. Slave drivers on the plantations, who were usually slaves themselves and sometimes voodoo priests, used the fear of zombification to discourage slaves from committing suicide.

While most scholars have associated the Haitian zombie with African cultures, a connection has also been suggested to the island's indigenous Taíno people, partly based on an early account of native shamanist practices written by the Hieronymite monk Ramón Pané, a companion of Christopher Columbus.

The Haitian zombie phenomenon first attracted widespread international attention during the United States occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), when a number of case histories of purported “zombies” began to emerge. The first popular book covering the topic was William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929). Seabrooke cited Article 246 of the Haitian criminal code, which was passed in 1864, asserting that it was an official recognition of zombies. This passage was later used in promotional materials for the 1932 film *White Zombie*.

“Also shall be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made by any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the administering of such substances, the person has been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows.”—*Code pénal*

In 1937, while researching folklore in Haiti, Zora Neale Hurston encountered the case of a woman who appeared in a village. A family claimed that she was Felicia Felix-Mentor, a relative, who had died and been buried in 1907 at the age of 29. The woman was examined by a doctor; X-rays indicated that she did not have a leg fracture that Felix-Mentor was known to have had. Hurston pursued rumors that affected persons were given a powerful psychoactive drug, but she was unable to locate individuals willing to offer much information. She wrote: "What is more, if science ever gets to the bottom of Vodou in Haiti and Africa, it will be found that some important medical secrets, still unknown to medical science, give it its power, rather than gestures of ceremony".

A Central or West African origin for the Haitian zombie has been postulated based on two etymologies in the Kongo language, *nzambi* ("God") and *zumbi* ("fetish"). This root helps form the names of several deities, including the Kongo creator deity Nzambi a Mpungu and the Louisiana serpent deity Li Grand Zombi (a local version of the Haitian Damballa), but it is in fact a generic word for a divine spirit. The common African conception of beings under these names is more similar to the incorporeal "zombie astral", as in the Kongo Nkisi spirits.

A related, but also often incorporeal, undead being is the jumbie of the English-speaking Caribbean, considered to be of the same etymology; in the French West Indies also, local "zombies" are recognized, but these are of a more general spirit nature.

The idea of physical zombie-like creatures is often present in some South African cultures, where they are called *xidachane* in Sotho/Tsonga and *maduxwane* in Venda. In some communities, it is believed that a dead person can be zombified by a small child. It is said that the spell can be broken by a powerful enough *sangoma*. It is also believed in some areas of South Africa that witches can zombify a person by killing and possessing the victim's body in order to force it into slave labor. After rail lines were built to transport migrant workers, stories emerged about "witch trains". These trains appeared ordinary, but were staffed by zombified workers controlled by a witch. The trains would abduct a person boarding at night, and the person would then either be zombified or beaten and thrown from the train a distance away from the original location.

Several decades after Hurston's work, Wade Davis, a Harvard ethnobotanist, presented a pharmacological case for zombies in a 1983 article in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, and later in two popular books: *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985) and *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie* (1988).

Davis traveled to Haiti in 1982 and, as a result of his investigations, claimed that a living person can be turned into a zombie by two special powders being introduced into the blood stream (usually through a wound). The first, French: *coup de poudre* ("powder strike"), includes tetrodotoxin (TTX), a powerful and frequently fatal neurotoxin found in the flesh of the pufferfish (family Tetraodontidae). The second powder consists of deliriant drugs such as *datura*. Together these powders were said to induce a deathlike state, in which the will of the victim would be entirely subjected to that of the *bokor*. Davis also popularized the story of Clairvius Narcisse, who was claimed to have succumbed to this practice. The most ethically questioned and least scientifically explored ingredient of the powders is part of a recently buried child's brain.

The process described by Davis was an initial state of deathlike suspended animation, followed by re-awakening—typically *after* being buried—into a psychotic state. The psychosis induced by the drug and psychological trauma was hypothesized by Davis to reinforce culturally learned beliefs and to cause the individual to reconstruct their identity as that of a zombie, since they "knew" that they were dead and had no other role to play in the Haitian society. Societal reinforcement of the belief was hypothesized by Davis to confirm for the zombie individual the zombie state, and such individuals were known to hang around in graveyards, exhibiting attitudes of low affect.

Davis's claim has been criticized, particularly the suggestion that Haitian witch doctors can keep "zombies" in a state of pharmacologically induced trance for many years. Symptoms of TTX poisoning range from numbness and nausea to paralysis—particularly of the muscles of the

diaphragm—unconsciousness, and death, but do not include a stiffened gait or a deathlike trance. According to psychologist Terence Hines, the scientific community dismisses tetrodotoxin as the cause of this state, and Davis' assessment of the nature of the reports of Haitian zombies is viewed as overly credulous.

Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing highlighted the link between social and cultural expectations and compulsion, in the context of schizophrenia and other mental illness, suggesting that schizogenesis may account for some of the psychological aspects of zombification. Particularly, this suggests cases where schizophrenia manifests a state of catatonia.

Roland Littlewood, professor of anthropology and psychiatry, published a study supporting a social explanation of the zombie phenomenon in the medical journal *The Lancet* in 1997. The social explanation sees observed cases of people identified as zombies as a culture-bound syndrome, with a particular cultural form of adoption practiced in Haiti that unites the homeless and mentally ill with grieving families who see them as their “returned” lost loved ones, as Littlewood summarizes his findings in an article in *Times Higher Education*: “I came to the conclusion that although it is unlikely that there is a single explanation for all cases where zombies are recognised by locals in Haiti, the mistaken identification of a wandering mentally ill stranger by bereaved relatives is the most likely explanation in many cases. People with a chronic schizophrenic illness, brain damage or learning disability are not uncommon in rural Haiti, and they would be particularly likely to be identified as zombies”.

Researchers like Pulliam and Fonseca (2014) and Walz (2006) trace the zombie lineage back to ancient Mesopotamia. In the *Descent of Ishtar*, the goddess Ishtar threatens:

“If you do not open the gate for me to come in,
I shall smash the door and shatter the bolt,
I shall smash the doorpost and overturn the doors,
I shall raise up the dead and they shall eat the living:
And the dead shall outnumber the living!”

She repeats this same threat in a slightly modified form in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, while not a zombie novel in particular, prefigures many 20th-century ideas about zombies in that the resurrection of the dead is portrayed as a scientific process rather than a mystical one, and that the resurrected dead are degraded and more violent than their living selves. *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, has its roots in European folklore, whose tales of vengeful dead also informed the evolution of the modern conception of the vampire. Later notable 19th-century stories about the avenging undead included Ambrose Bierce's *The Death of Halpin Frayser* and various Gothic Romanticism tales by Edgar Allan Poe. Though their works could not be properly considered zombie fiction, the supernatural tales of Bierce and Poe would prove influential on later writers such as H. P. Lovecraft, by Lovecraft's own admission.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the American horror author H. P. Lovecraft wrote several novellae that explored the undead theme. “Cool Air”, “In the Vault” and “The Outsider” all deal with the undead, but Lovecraft's *Herbert West—Reanimator* (1921) “helped define zombies in popular culture”. This series of short stories featured Herbert West, a mad scientist who attempts to revive human corpses with mixed results. Notably, the resurrected dead are uncontrollable, mostly mute, primitive and extremely violent; though they are not referred to as zombies, their portrayal was prescient, anticipating the modern conception of zombies by several decades. Edgar Rice Burroughs similarly depicted animated corpses in the second book of his Venus series, again without ever using the terms “zombie” or “undead”.

Avenging zombies would feature prominently in the early 1950s EC Comics, which George A. Romero would later claim as an influence. The comics, including *Tales from the Crypt*, *Vault of Horror* and *Weird Science*, featured avenging undead in the Gothic tradition quite regularly, including

adaptations of Lovecraft's stories, which included "In the Vault", "Cool Air" and *Herbert West—Reanimator*.

Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend*, although classified as a vampire story, would nonetheless have a definitive impact on the zombie genre by way of George A. Romero. The novel and its 1964 film adaptation, *The Last Man on Earth*, which concern a lone human survivor waging war against a world of vampires, would by Romero's own admission greatly influence his 1968 low-budget film *Night of the Living Dead*, a work that would prove to be more influential on the concept of zombies than any literary or cinematic work before it.

A popular evolution of the zombie is the "fast zombie" or running zombie. In contrast to Romero's classic slow zombies, "fast zombies" can run, are more aggressive, and often more intelligent. This type of zombie has origins in 1990s Japanese horror video games. In 1996, Capcom's survival horror video game *Resident Evil* featured zombie dogs that run towards the player. Later the same year, Sega's arcade shooter *The House of the Dead* introduced running human zombies, who run towards the player. The running human zombies introduced in *The House of the Dead* video games became the basis for the "fast zombies" that became popular in zombie films during the early 21st century, starting with *28 Days Later* (2002), the *Resident Evil* and *House of the Dead* films, and the 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* remake.

Films featuring zombies have been a part of cinema since the 1930s, with *White Zombie* (directed by Victor Halperin in 1932) being one of the earliest examples. With George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the zombie trope began to be increasingly linked to consumerism and consumer culture. Today, zombie films are released with such regularity (at least 55 films were released in 2014 alone) that they constitute a separate subgenre of horror film.

Voodoo-related zombie themes have also appeared in espionage or adventure-themed works outside the horror genre. For example, the original "Jonny Quest" series (1964) and the James Bond novel and movie *Live and Let Die* both feature Caribbean villains who falsely claim the voodoo power of zombification in order to keep others in fear of them.

Above all other examples, the modern conception of the zombie owes itself almost entirely to George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*. In his films, Romero "bred the zombie with the vampire, and what he got was the hybrid vigour of a ghoulish plague monster". This entailed an apocalyptic vision of monsters that have come to be known as Romero zombies.

Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* chided theater owners and parents who allowed children access to the film. "I don't think the younger kids really knew what hit them", complained Ebert, "They were used to going to movies, sure, and they'd seen some horror movies before, sure, but this was something else." According to Ebert, the film affected the audience immediately: "The kids in the audience were stunned. There was almost complete silence. The movie had stopped being delightfully scary about halfway through, and had become unexpectedly terrifying. There was a little girl across the aisle from me, maybe nine years old, who was sitting very still in her seat and crying".

Romero's reinvention of zombies is notable in terms of its thematics; he used zombies not just for their own sake, but as a vehicle "to criticize real-world social ills—such as government ineptitude, bioengineering, slavery, greed and exploitation—while indulging our post-apocalyptic fantasies". *Night* was the first of six films in Romero's *Living Dead* series. Its first sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*, was released in 1978.

Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* was released just months after *Dawn of the Dead* as an ersatz sequel (*Dawn of the Dead* was released in several other countries as *Zombi* or *Zombie*). *Dawn of the Dead* was the most commercially successful zombie film for decades, up until the zombie revival of the 2000s.^[64] The 1981 film *Hell of the Living Dead* referenced a mutagenic gas as a source of zombie contagion: an idea also used in Dan O'Bannon's 1985 film *Return of the Living Dead*. *Return of the Living Dead* featured zombies that hungered specifically for brains.