

ZOMBIFIED AND TRAUMATIZED:
HEALING IN BLACK WOMEN'S ZOMBIE LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

Black women writers construct literary experiences that reflect the systems of oppression that define their American experience within the horror genre. Through their explorations of race relations in an imaginative and boundless sphere, they provide a portrayal of reality that transcends time. Yet, scholars have overlooked horror by Black women writers and failed to bring them into critical conversations about speculative fiction. This thesis aims to address this neglect by employing a multi-ideological approach to analyze African American women's zombie literature. I situate "Cue: Change" (2011) by Chesya Burke, *Dread Nation* (2018) by Justina Ireland, and "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting" (2020) by Tish Jackson as *sankofa* projects that reimagine the struggles and trauma African Americans experience within the systems of racism and other oppressions. The texts offer race-based cultural criticism through Afrofuturistic elements and engagements with themes of Haunting and Community. These three components support the deconstruction and reimagining of harmful Western ideologies. The ensuing reconstruction is performed by invoking Africanist philosophies to encourage identity building and racial remembering. In their literary depictions, the writers construct zombie fictions to reinterpret African American trauma. I argue that these works offer imagined pathways and possibilities for healing intergenerational trauma.

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DISCLAIMER

My thesis explores the potential of literature to reimagine lived realities. This project is not an idealization of zombies as aspirational political figures but as embodiments of a cultural duality that Black people experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* (2019), a novella that focuses on the aquatic descendants of pregnant women who were thrown from slave ships during the Middle Passage, offers a reimagining of Black realities that allows healing through retelling and revising history and literature. Solomon poses a question in *The Deep*: "What does it mean to be born of the dead? What does it mean to begin?" (42). These questions serve as the points of departure for this project regarding the survivors of the Atlantic Slave Trade and their American descendants. What does it mean to be born from the dehumanized? Can justice be found within the systemic racism that was born from chattel slavery and Jim Crow, or is this injustice destined to birth a continuous cycle of oppression through decades of dehumanization? As far back as the 18th century African American literature has sought to answer these questions as writers recount the atrocities committed against Black people. These works critiqued racist ideology that spawned years of oppression and movements for change. Here in the 21st century, the emergence of a subgenre of African American literature, zombie literature, has continued depicting racial injustice and providing hopeful imaginings of an alternate world. Zombie literature, associated with White, male novels and film, is being reappropriated by Black authors to provide a rendition of lived horror as they explore continued injustice and freedom. While these works are fictional and often end on an ambiguous note, they detail real traumatic experiences with which the reader and writer must contend. In the process, the question

arises: How can African American people revisit cycles of systemic suffering without succumbing to retraumatization?

From Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) and Tananarive Due's *The Between* (1995) to Dia Reeves' *Slice of Cherry* (2011) and Tiffany Jackson's *White Smoke* (2021), horror has been an established tradition in African American literature and depicts real life horrors experienced by and inflicted on the Black community from a racially unjust society. Yet, despite the manner in which these works offered explored imagined entities and worlds, they were rarely recognized as texts worthy of scholarship. With the exception of Octavia Butler, scholars ignored speculative works by Black writers in the American literary canon. Literary scholars particularly disregarded Black women writers in the literary canon in ways that parallel the misogynoir¹ that they encounter in their lives. The literature emerging from those experiences has often been consigned by academics to spaces outside of the canon. Influenced by their "lived realities," Black women constructed a literary experience that reflected the systems of oppression that defined their American experience. They provided an innovative portrayal of a reality that transcended time and engaged in explorations of race relations in an imaginative and boundless sphere, but scholars gave Black women little to no academic acknowledgment as creators of speculative fiction. Scholars dismissed speculative fiction, itself, as a genre and deemed it lacking the literary merit necessary for scholarly consideration. Therefore, when scholars turned toward Black women's literary works as a subject of critical analysis, the speculative texts were overlooked as lowbrow

¹ Misogynoir is a term coined by Moya Bailey that defines the intersecting oppressions of racism and sexism that Black women experience.

(Brooks 43-44, 51, 2018). Even scholars of zombie literature, including Tim Lazendörfer and Christopher M. Moreman, have overlooked African American horror by Black women writers and failed to bring them into critical conversations. My project builds upon the growing body of horror scholarship by using ideas related to race and systemic injustice as critical points of departure. I delve into the rich social and political landscape of speculative fiction to explore Black women writers' construction of horror as it relates to Blackness and resistance to provide "race-conscious cultural criticism."²

"Speculative Sankoffarration: Haunting Black Women in Contemporary Horror Fiction" (2016) by Kinitra D. Brooks, Alexis McGee, and Stephanie Schoellman explores literary horror as a form of resistance through literal and figurative haunting narratives. Their analysis centers the concept of sankoffarration, a term coined by John Jennings from the root word Sankofa. Sankofa is a Ghanaian term that, loosely translated, means to look to the past to learn and build towards the present and future. Originally "a small part of the Akan philosophical tradition," African American literary scholars understand Sankofa as a tradition and a method of literary investigation (Brooks et al. 238, Temple 127). With the recent emergence of Afrofuturism, Jennings expands upon the concept of Sankofa, proposing a concept of time as "cyclical" and reflective of a narrative's past and future occurrences within a nonlinear framework.

Brooks, McGee, and Schoellman build on Jennings' concept of sankoffarration by asserting that, "A Black women's horror discourse grounded in sankoffarration effectively liberates Black horror from necessitating its need to derive mainly from the trauma of enslavement, allowing the concept of horror to move toward a more creative

² See Carrington for more on "race-conscious cultural criticism" (3).

and artistic construction” (238, 2016). Speculative fiction allows for various avenues of literary and cultural exploration through sci-fi and horror. By applying sankoffarration to speculative fiction, Black women writers can expand on reoccurring oppressions to further express and explore nuances of trauma. Generations of African American literature imaginatively explored the history of slavery through ghosts and hauntings,³ but with futuristic concepts and otherworldly beings, Black women writers of speculative fiction can deconstruct misogynistic and racist notions that coincide with Black women’s own oppressions to build toward a better future. By incorporating past and present traumas, Black women writers are creatively constructing a brighter tomorrow (240, 2016).

The zombie is a culturally Black phenomenon because it is an entity originating in the African Diaspora. The zombie entity has historically been appropriated by a White, Western society to promote the erasure and oppression of marginalized groups. The society does this by taking a culturally Black legend and reconstructing it to justify colonialist and racist ideologies. By reconstituting traditional zombie narratives to address Blackness, Black women writers provide literature that inspires positive societal change beyond their literary works. By employing sankoffarration as a literary technique for addressing temporal events with the historical zombie legend and ever-present oppressions the Black community experience, Black women writers are constructing a site for communal expression and healing. I examine the reappropriation of the zombie narrative by analyzing “Cue: Change” (2011) by Chesya Burke, a short story that

³ Examples of those literary ghosts and hauntings include but are not limited to *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison and *Ghost Summer: Stories* (2015) by Tananarive Due.

explores the morality of zombie collectivism and human individualism; *Dread Nation* (2018) by Justina Ireland, a novel that takes place in an alternative post-Civil War America plagued by zombies and racial injustice; and “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” (2020) by Tish Jackson, a short love story that parallels real life social change movements that focus on marginalized groups and advocate for equity in response to the societal impact of zombie neglect. I argue that these works, which explore racial trauma in the United States, offer imagined pathways and possibilities for healing African American intergenerational trauma.

What Does It Mean To Be A Zombie?

While the zombie of African tradition holds multiple connotations, the term that serves as the point of departure for my analysis is *zombi astral*. This term refers to a disembodied spirit that has been risen for labor purposes.⁴ It is this imagining of the zombie that has evolved into what we now understand as the Western zombie. The origin of the *zombi astral* has been traced to West Central Africa. Residing along the Congo River are the Bantu and Bakongo tribes. The tribes believe in a deity known as Nzambi who presides over the people in the Zombo region. The Congolese residents possess a process of creating “bottle fetishes” known as zumbi. This practice entails a form of soul enslavement. A sorcerer or “dark priest” entraps a person’s soul in a bottle thus leaving a shell of the person the enslaved was before. This soulless entity is devoid of all agency and forced to serve the sorcerer (Lauro 37-38, Moreman and Rushton 3). While these human husks are far from the flesh consuming zombie we see in popular culture today,

⁴ The term zombie is often used to describe ill-mannered children, mythical creatures or to inspire good behavior (Moreman and Rushton 3).

they introduce the foundation of entrapped servitude that parallels the physical bodied zombie.

During the Middle Passage, as Black people were taken and enslaved, the captives retained beliefs of the zumbi practice. “Slavery and Slave Rebellion: The (Pre)History of the Zombie” (2015) by Sarah Juliet Lauro introduces the zombie narrative by recounting the Haitian Independence in which the enslaved had become the zombie. A religious ceremony employing a blood oath with a black pig and the enslaved was first recorded in *Histoire de la Revolution de Saint-Dominique* (1814) by Bois Caiman Vaudou. The black pig was sacrificed as the enslaved Haitians drank the pig’s blood and took the bristles for strength and unity in the wake of slave rebellion. It was a rebellion that was undoubtedly destructive as most reckonings are. In reading about a large group of people covered in blood and attacking their Spanish captors without context, it is not difficult to invoke the Hollywood images of inhuman monsters wreaking havoc among the “civilized” worlds. This was not the reality of the enslaved Haitian who enacted a rebellion against their oppressors, but this was not considered in the White-centric accounts of the Haitian Revolution that constructed the image of how “the dehumanized slave becomes the inhuman rebel” (Lauro 28).

Lauro builds on the complexity of the Haitian zombie as a demoralized and dehumanized being. She proposes that there are two concepts coexisting within the zombie causing a hybridity of being. Like the zumbi of the Congo, the Haitian enslaved were trapped in servitude that encouraged their dehumanization and thus soullessness. Through revolution the enslaved rebellion shifted the concept of the zombie to both confinement and liberation (28-29). I will use the duality that Lauro presents to

demonstrate Burke's, Ireland's, and Jackson's use of the zombie narrative as a form of literary liberation. The authors incorporate the ideas of entrapment, freedom, and the revolution that accompanies it.

Welcome To America

From 1791 to 1804 enslaved people of African descendants rebelled against the French colony of Saint-Dominique, now known as Haiti. The enslaved Haitians attacked French colonizers and slavers in their revolution. Some of the French planters escaped to the former French colony, New Orleans, and settled with their enslaved.

Despite the many folktales and beliefs that enslaved Haitians brought, the idea of the zombie did not surface in the United States until the 1830s. The idea of the zombie was well received as a reflection of the times:

In many ways zombies were the perfect laborers. Although zombies were capable of performing physical labor, they lacked all traces of intellect, volition, or self-awareness. They could not think or speak, and they felt no pain. Completely lacking in emotion, they felt no anger or resentment and had no desires of their own. The person who unearthed a corpse and made it into a zombie had complete control over the reanimated body and could order it to perform any task that he or she wished. Zombies had no desire or ability to resist. They had no memories of their former lives. (Kordas 19-20)

An anonymous short story titled "The Unknown Painter" appeared in a newspaper named *The Alton Telegraph* in 1838 as a reprint from a magazine called *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*. This is the first known fictional zombie text that appeared in the United States. It would go through several reprints through the nineteenth century and

later be renamed “A Story of Murillo’s Pupil” in 1879. This short story is about a “spirit” who assists Murillo’s, the artist’s, apprentices at night. Upon inquiring about how the work has been altered, a young enslaved African informs the Spanish painters of the entity. His explanation is dismissed as “the Zombi of the negroes.” “A Story of Murillo’s Pupil” was well received by the American audience. Some American readers became fans of zombie lore as it mimicked the slaveholding society. The idea of a Black figure serving white people appealed to a nation that was built on a system of Black suppression and labor (Kordas 16-18, 22). Similar to the Haitian zombie, the enslaved Black Americans were forced to work in service of others. They were perceived as work animals devoid of human characteristics and emotions. The act of enslavement became the creation of the zombie. In that creation was metaphorically lifeless entities incapable of physical and mental resistance to the arduous life of labor they led. Blackness became synonymous with zombie.

Other written accounts of the zombie followed “A Story of Murillo’s Pupil” in a similar fashion. The zombie took on a spectral servant position that was reminiscent of *zombi astral* until the publications of *The Magic Island* (1929) by William Seabrook and *Tell My Horse* (1938) by Zora Neale Hurston. Through Seabrook’s and Hurston’s personal accounts of experiences in Haiti, we see the emergence of a walking corpse born of Haitian Vodou. The Haitian zombie, in ethnographic texts, are absent of agency and forced to do the bidding of the sorcerer. Its function was much like *zombi astral*. Unlike the Haitian zombie, the newly minted White American zombie lacked intelligence and drive beyond the basic animal instincts of consumption and destruction. The zombie born of African legend and Haitian liberation was reduced to a dehumanized being with no

recollection of the duality that was found in the zombies of the Haitian Revolution. A culturally rich entity that was a symbol of death and renewal was deconstructed. This deconstruction assembled a creature that alternated between being bodiless and serving; rotten and meaninglessly chaotic; or some combination of the four descriptors. From then the zombie became representative of “docile workers,” who if ever inspired to revolt, would be easily defeated or overcome by White protagonists. It was both a warning to be wary of the Othered and a reassurance that White America, unlike Haiti, would win any civil dispute (Kordas18, 30).

Along its journey to the United States and popular culture, White Westerners appropriated the duality and Blackness of the zombie concept for a White gaze. Instead of the racial revolution brought about by the need for freedom and empathy, the zombie narrative, a predominantly White apocalypse, is fraught with rotting corpses only driven to consume. As I examine Black women’s zombie literature, I will explore a reclamation of the zombie narrative. By situating the zombie as a Black and communal tale, I examine how “Cue: Change,” *Dread Nation*, and “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” provide a form of ancestral expression and promotion of trauma healing for a collective Black psyche.

Lawful Liberation

Vodou is a religious practice that has been demonized, along with the zombie. In keeping with the ways that difference is historically deemed unacceptable at best and grounds for vilification at worst, vodou has and continues to be villainized as a “devil worshipping, black magic wielding and uncivilized tradition.” While the process of making a zumbi is morally incomprehensible, it is an act of imperialism to condemn a

religion and a race of people because of it. The ignorance and bigotry surrounding this practice are born from fears of the racially Othered. It establishes the zombie as “primitive” entities void of intellectual and emotional depth (Moreman, Rushton 1-2, Allkins 114). By belittling the religious practice of a race of people, colonizers dismantle the heritage of African societies and deny them their cultural identity.

The negative perception of Vodouism and the violence of the Haitian Revolution has influenced White, Western perception of the zombie. The zombie itself, like the practice from which it is born, is villainized. The zombie is not considered a being worthy of pity and understanding. In literature and media, in which zombies appear, only animosity is directed toward the zombie. Consumers of zombie media blame the zombies for the chaos and not the people who caused the zombification. Why is the sorcerer’s morality not brought into question? It is the sorcerer that creates the zombies that then terrorize the living. That is how many Haitians perceive the literal and metaphorical zombification process. Sorcerers taking souls and using the animated bodies for “nefarious use” is a belief in Haiti. Therefore, there are laws prohibiting zombification (Moreman, Rushton 3). How can Haitian understanding of the dynamics of social oppression contribute to the prevention of further subjugation? How does prohibiting possible causes of oppression encourage possibilities for liberation?

Intergenerational Trauma and Literature

Intergenerational trauma acts as a multidimensional “wound” caused by societal actions (Marder 1-2). Trauma obstructs and hinders reality because it halts the continuity of perception. African American descendants continuously suffer from intergenerational trauma because of familial issues and racially targeted regulations that cause trauma. The

concept of intergenerational trauma first appeared in a psychiatric study involving the unhealthy behavior among descendants of Holocaust survivors. The term refers to the manner in which the psychic, emotional, and social effects of horrific events like the Holocaust, natural disasters, war, and slavery are inherited by descendants of the survivors.

Gilda Graff introduces slavery as a form of intergenerational trauma amidst the lack of psychoanalytical conversation about the effects of the institution and its impact on descendants of enslaved people. She details how it affects African Americans in “The Intergenerational Trauma of Slavery and its Aftermath” (2014). Graff asserts that the “Refusal to remember, denial, disassociation, and disavowal are all echoed in the absence of slavery from the trauma literature and, until recently, from psychoanalytic literature. Trauma literature gives attention to the Holocaust, floods, and earthquakes, sexual abuse, rape, etc. but not to slavery” (183). There were many Black authors that wrote of the initial infliction of trauma caused by the effects of slavery and the intergenerational trauma that followed their emancipation. A societal refusal to remember, empathize, and understand the cruelty of the slave trade is demonstrative of the disregard for Black trauma that Graff is attempting to combat.

Literary studies have made a significant academic impact with trauma narratives. Groundbreaking trauma scholar Cathy Caruth calls for a reconsideration of prevailing ideas of trauma. Caruth promotes “finding new ways to recognize the impact of events that can be known belatedly and of listening to the power of experiences that can only be expressed indirectly” (Marder 1-2). Literature encourages the bearer of trauma and the observer to strive for alternative modes of seeing the trauma. Literature offers multiple

methods for conveying horrors and learning from them. How can society respond with empathy, not disassociation and with action, not passivity?

The constant stream of traumatic events on social media and news outlets has pushed witnesses into apathetic onlookers or victimized consumers. The coverage of events has caused acknowledgement without emotional reckoning or victims without the will or skill to heal. How can African American literature, that's riddled with autobiographical and fictional trauma, look differently at the painful recollections that invade their existence? The world becomes a spectator to the pain of others because of the continuous trauma content. Like the victims, the observers often respond through desensitization or retraumatization (Hwangbo 1-3). How does a trauma victim and observer process pain and work toward healing the wounds? Can literature act as a balm to soothe the abrasions from trauma, or can it only bear witness?

Kyeong Hwangbo's *Trauma, Narrative, and the Marginal Self In Selected Contemporary American Novels* (2004) details the effects of "secondhand victimization or traumatization" through the consumption of literature. Hwangbo writes about the circulation and literary hauntings of trauma survivors and the intergenerational trauma that can follow. While she acknowledges literary works about trauma as conduits of expression, Hwangbo also examines themes, like prejudice and self-loathing, that are often found in trauma literature. In this project, I locate and explore not only instances of intergenerational trauma but of healing. Hwangbo argues that there is a "symbolic tear" in the marginalized subjects' narrative. Trauma tears the illusion of normality and allows for a questioning of wholeness (Hwangbo 7-8, 12). By producing trauma literature, Black writers are reconstructing a collective African American perspective to understand and

document communally devastating experiences. By revisiting traumatic events through literature and assessing the “tear,” the traumatized can begin to mend their damaged psyche.

Afrofuturism, Haunting, and Community: Fictional Representation of Zombies and
Trauma in African American Women’s Speculative Fiction

Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction (2016) by Andre M. Carrington argues for racial recognition within speculative fiction. Canonical speculative fiction has failed to fully explore Black identity in the speculative realm. While Carrington aimed to explore both Blackness and Whiteness equally as important realms for critical inquiry, my research addresses and redresses Blackness in the speculative. Utilizing Carrington’s analysis of Black representation in speculative fiction as a point of departure, I address the underrepresentation of Black women writers and argue against the erasure of Black women’s zombie literature from critical conversations. I am not arguing that speculative fiction should be included in the Canon because it currently is. I campaign for the recognition of Black women’s speculative fiction within the Canon and its importance to race-conscious cultural criticism (Carrington 3).

Afrofuturistic elements and themes of Haunting and Community are focus points that reveal the presence of Blackness in Black women’s zombie literature. In locating and exploring these identifiers, I demonstrate the ways in which zombie narratives serve as rich ground for Black women writers to explore themes of oppression as they correlate to Black identity and the prospect of healing. I focus my attention on the zombies, the survivors of the zombie apocalypse, and the relationship between the two groups. In

doing so, I not only illuminate how the contemporary zombie is demonstrative of Blackness but also how dynamics between survivors and zombies mirror race relations.

In my project, I utilize Afrofuturistic elements that employ science fiction in relation to Blackness. In “Afrofuturism and the Potential for Hope” (2020), Crystal Rudds states, “In a science fiction, imaginary, just as in real life, catastrophic events happen. Things break. Divides are revealed. But to reflect on time is to move towards change, and with change comes the potential for hope.” In most texts the Black experience is filled with a history of suffering, not a future of extreme prosperity. Afrofuturism incorporates both. Black history and culture are imbued with elements of science fiction that demonstrate future possibilities in consideration of the past. Moor Mother Goddess, an Afrofuturism theorist, argues that the aspirations of Black ancestors equip their descendants with the ability to uncover present knowledge. Rudds utilizes Moor Mother Goddess’ understanding of adopting non-Western ideals and experiences to form a movement of strength and enlightenment. This way of thinking about the past in relation to the present correlates with sankoffarration. The inspiration and lesson garnered from the Haitian zombies’ abhorrence to injustice serve as a base for Burke’s, Ireland’s, and Jackson’s zombies. The writers ask what caused and continues the subjugation of Black people and how can the Afrofuturistic elements create spaces for liberation and possibilities for hope.

I utilize the term Haunting to communicate how historical systems of oppression and manifestations of trauma continuously resurface. Haunting involves a visitation from the past that is difficult to forget or disregard. The dead usually manifest themselves as reoccurring memories, spectral apparitions, or hallucinations as seen in Toni Morrison’s

Beloved (1987) or Dia Reeves' *Bleeding Violet* (2010). Hauntings are narratives that imbue death and its aftermath with themes of Blackness (Carrington 28). Burke, Ireland, and Jackson employ haunting through the zombies' hunting. Zombies are physically bodied; their spiritual origin and historical significance are reminiscent of a haunting. The zombies are undead, reminders of the past and of a fight for freedom that continues into present day. The zombies' presence is impossible to ignore given their persistence and mission. The physical zombie, like the spiritual zombie, assists and guides additional characters to move toward justice.

I explore communal spaces and dynamics as they relate to African American life and experiences in relation to zombie and human societal dynamics. Community lies in the heart of Afrofuturism and Hauntings. Dismantling and abandonment of community is synonymous with the destruction of the individual. In intergenerational trauma, it is the community as a whole that suffers. Therefore, writers stress the health of the group in literature to allow a fully functional unit. During the Haitian Revolution, the ritual for strength and unity was enacted as a community. By taking equal part in the uprising, the enslaved strengthen their community and the prospect for collective healing. We see various dynamics of community in the fictional works. Each work considers what community means for the past, present, and future of humanity.

To understand Black women's zombie literature as race-conscious cultural criticism, the reader must understand the critical categories of Black women's zombie literature and how the authors reimagine the zombie legend within Western narratives. Although I established Afrofuturism, Haunting, and Community as the leading identifiers of Blackness in speculative fiction, there are characteristics that reveal Black women's

zombie literature in relation to the Haitian zombie's duality and American oppressions.

Using sankoffarration, works by Burke, Ireland, and Jackson demonstrate:

- The deconstruction and replacement of harmful Western ideologies by invoking Africanist religion, traditions, and historical moments of liberation through revolution
- A reimagining of structures and concepts that portray systemic oppressions to encourage racial remembering
- The reconstruction of African American lived realities, especially those of women and children and how they function within their community

These are not the only elements of Black women's zombie literature, but they are potential focus points for analyzing Black women's zombie literature as race-conscious cultural criticism. "Cue: Change" by Chesya Burke, *Dread Nation* by Justina Ireland, and "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting" by Tish Jackson offer literary representations of the Haitian zombie in African American literature. These works offer empathetic representations of the Othered. By locating the utilization of sankoffarration, the zombie texts serve as cultural critiques that illuminate intergenerational trauma and healing that African Americans experience by identifying sites of Afrofuturism, Haunting, and Community.

Black women writers use their construction of the zombie narrative to demonstrate possibilities for societal growth. Current scholarship analyzes the cultural and systemic oppression of Black people, as it appears in nonblack and cinematic content. Haitian zombies' duality of entrapment and liberation and Black women's zombie literature's utilization of intergenerational trauma situates the zombie in a more

nuanced discussion about the disparities that the African American community experiences and literature's ability to process these realities.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

“Cue: Change” by Chesya Burke

Let's Play White (2011) by Chesya Burke is a collection of short horror stories that detail the complexity and brutality of being human. Burke presents the short zombie story, “Cue: Change,” as a challenge to ideas of morality, race, class, and gender. “Cue: Change” is narrated through a series of “cues” that, like stage directions, change the settings and scenes throughout the story. By retelling the zombie narrative in a nonlinear framework of “cues,” Burke is mimicking memory. She arranges the story to reconstruct a reality capable of processing the extent of intergenerational trauma. The narrator, who is referred to as “Kid” by other characters, gives the cues. They recount the outbreak of the zombie virus, the quarantine with the residents of their apartment complex, and the search for supplies. But within this seemingly simple zombie apocalypse story is a cultural critique of the deconstruction of individualism in favor of collectivism to encourage justice in society.

Like the enslaved Haitian’s invocation of unity and strength through ritual practices, nicknaming is a practice in the Black community that establishes identity and belonging. Referring to Kid by their nickname is participating in an intimate familiarity. This familiarity deepens feelings of empathy. Compassion is instrumental in the retelling of communal tales and healing through cultural and emotional understanding. Kid’s nickname signifies a communal experience that accompanies Blackness. Kid becomes a vessel to convey issues Black Americans encounter and to process their lived realities.

Nicknaming is a communal practice that strengthens identity and kinship. Nicknames demonstrate solidarity. Members of an existing group bestow a name on a new member. The naming bonds the group together as likeminded in their approach to identity and community building (Holland 258). In the Black community, nicknames are often attributed to a person's physical characteristics, personality, or positionality in their family. This gives the named a hyper sense of awareness about themselves and how they function within their community. By being nicknamed "Kid," the narrator's identity is positioned in a place of youthfulness. The name exists in a space of continuous beginnings and innocence. They quickly learn about the new dangers that invade their existence. Kid is prematurely knowing of the world by their mistrust of privileged groups. While their positionality requires them to be knowledgeable of societal dynamics their place of youth still affords them with opportunities for change and impact.⁵ Possibilities for growth and healing are often parallel to youth. Their actions are symbolic of the change and progression that accompanies each new generation. Kid's actions and nicknaming embody a communal practice and uphold ideas of improvement throughout the text.

As mentioned earlier in my thesis, zombie outbreaks are characteristic of revolts with themes of panic and violence. During the beginning of the zombie outbreak, the homeless,⁶ who are the first afflicted, began to eat each other before feasting on the white-collar workers. When one of the homeless eats a businessman on the news, it triggers a crisis. The news outlets flock to report the attacks and "looting." The analogue,

⁵ Flemming-Hunter provides offers an examination of Black children in relation to racial discrimination and involvement in racial movements.

⁶ For information about the history of Black homelessness in America see Johnson.

with contemporary American culture, is clear that the Othered's suffering is a source of perverse fascination. The suffering of the lower class is consumed by reporters, so the disenfranchised consume the reporters in return as the news crews on the scene are soon overwhelmed by the zombies. Military and other local law enforcement are deployed to restore blind obedience to civilians, an order predicated upon the subjugation of those who are now the dominant force, but the soldiers and civil servants soon fall prey to the undead. Scientists and pundits rally to try to understand why "the dead didn't stay dead," but their reasoning becomes insignificant as the zombie population grows (Burke 90).

Through the exploration of human and zombie morality, Burke offers a creative critique of race and class dynamics. Like Black and poor people in American culture, the zombies are Othered. Privileged groups unjustly discriminate against the minoritized through systemic exploitation that denies adequate assistance to move beyond their station. While some African Americans are able to achieve upward mobility, others continue to struggle to function in a society that discriminates against them with racially targeted laws and everyday interactions with people and media. Burke demonstrates the discrimination in her zombie text:

Large, dark gangs of the homeless and street people began looting and attacking. The media dubbed it 'crime sprees typical of the demographic'—as if random homeless people across the nation had the means and funding to revolt on their own...No one knew how to contain them, at first they were simply out of control—marching for some form of civil rights that they had long since gotten...Finally, the news called them an 'unstable horde,' which sought to undermine the very idea of our society. (Burke 90)

In the opening lines of the story Kid explains, “I never believed white folks until I saw evidence for myself. Call it a survival mechanism” (Burke 89). Kid reiterates the news reports while remaining skeptical of the information. From Kid’s perspective the news media has become synonymous with whiteness because of the suspicion they hold for both. Distrust of the mainstream media originates from its history of depicting African Americans negatively or not at all. Since the 1950s news coverage of Black Americans predominantly center “on conflict, overemphasize official sources, and use of racial stereotypes” (Brewer, Vercellotti 238). The news media has historically criminalized and dehumanized Black people. The effects of the media’s actions are prevalent through lasting suspicion from Black viewership that is recreated through Kid’s distrust.

The destruction from the Haitian Revolution and meaning of the zombie have been misconstrued to criminalize the Othered. Burke reimagines this harmful narrative that continues in American. Burke’s references are clear as the media describes the zombies and their expressions of civil unrest as “crime sprees typical of the demographic.” By employing sankoffarration signifying practices, Burke illuminates dismissive rhetoric that obscures oppressive systems through the zombies’ silencing and discontent. Instead of exploring the story fully, reporters give offhanded remarks that denigrate the struggle of the Othered. Negatively charged rhetoric, like “dark gangs of the homeless,” assign blame. The coverage also offers no in-depth exploration of the continuous oppression that would cause civil dispute. The media attempts to distort the nation’s perception and participates in the Othering of a disenfranchised group of people. It does this by normalizing violence and discontent surrounding specific groups of people. In doing so, news outlets are participating in the continued discrimination against

Black people. The news outlets travel toward the “inner cities” to report their version of events. Kid emphasizes this by asserting that “no one could have a filling meal from the bastards” (Burke 90). Their lack of three-dimensional reporting is reflected in the dissatisfaction their existence brought their audience and the zombies. The reporters who were once the consumers of misfortune were consumed by the undead and misfortunate.

The violence in “Cue: Change,” as reported by the media, originates in impoverished communities. The text describes the poorest of the community as spreaders that infect the news media personalities and military through riots and marches said to mimic that of civil rights movements. What appears to be a riot is the accumulation of injustice that has been inflicted upon “the demographic.” Health inequalities are common in minority communities because of racial discrimination that neglects and dismisses their health and wellbeing. Underprivileged groups, like Burke’s homeless characters, are more likely to live in areas that have a higher concentration of environmental hazards that prove to be detrimental to the residents’ health. They are also more likely to not have financial stability or reliable transportation to medical facilities (Reyes 301-303). This abhorrent injustice is a catalyst for revolution and demand for reform. The centuries of medical misconduct, intentional segregation, and a host of other oppressive practices have been met with resistance that cannot be ignored.

African American literature utilizes the Haitian zombie’s representation of injustice and revolution in textual imagined zombies. The literary reconstruction of societal issues depicts the emergence of the zombie as a form of haunting through hunting. Burke’s portrayal of an underrepresented group who were “marching for some form of civil rights that they had long since gotten” is demonstrative of the dismissal of

racial injustice and the refusal to acknowledge societal issues that allow oppression. Oppressive dismissal and refusal are why people rebel and march to demonstrate their own refusal to comply with their Othering. The zombies had a “social agenda—they spoke of evolution and social change. No one listened” (Burke 91). In response to the blatant disregard for their concerns, the Othered displayed acts of “aggression” as an expression of their discontent and as a method to meet their denied needs. Their revolution was said to have “undermined the very idea of our society” and caused further demonization of the disenfranchised. In many ways, “Cue: Change” serves of as a reminder of the discontent among a large group of Americans, and the ways disregard for their welfare only nurture disaster.

“Cue: Change” narrates the first zombie interaction in a Walmart located in an upper-class neighborhood. Kid works as a sales associate at the Walmart when they first encounter the zombies amid reports of violent attacks occurring in the city. Kid’s presence at work, despite the reported violence, is a testament to the desensitization to violence in their everyday life. Kid is scanning a woman’s items at the register when the woman attempts to “touch” and “taste” them. Upon shifting away from the woman, Kid recoils at the unfamiliarity of the woman’s actions. Well off patrons that treat both money and workers as disposable frequent the Walmart. When the woman shows a specific interest in Kid, they reject the woman’s advances. In that moment Kid revolts against the idea of the “docile worker,” an action reminiscent of the Haitian zombie, when Kid rejects the consumption of their body. This act of individual resistance and agency will eventually propel them towards a greater sense of community as their focus shifts

homeward. Kid looks around to see the other patrons looking at them with the same desire as the woman. Kid grabs a roll of salami as a weapon and flees the store.

Kid observes the undead's dealings from the safety of their apartment. Hollywood Hills, the apartment complex, is a community of low-income residents, but what they lack in money, they make up for in fellowship. The residents assist and depend on one another to protect each other and build a safe environment. This sense of unity continues into the zombie outbreak as they establish a barricade around the complex. They ration food and create jobs to ensure the functionality of their compound. The Haitian zombies' characteristics of unity and resilience are represented through Black women writer's use of buildings and geographical locations in zombie literature.

Burke creates a space for the Black and disenfranchised that has often been referred to as the ghetto. *A Haven and a Hell: The Ghetto and Black America* (2019) by Lance Freeman explains that a Black ghetto, a largely segregated or living community, was seen as a beacon of prosperity for Black people. He refers to the initial ideology of the ghetto as "a spatial manifestation of race itself." While ghettos weren't the creation of African Americans, the occupants attempted to transform the allocated spaces into something they could take pride in. The ghetto became a physical site that represented Black people, and whatever good was done to the space would reflect positively on the residents. Although segregated, the ghetto was envisioned as a possible hub for Black success. The ghetto became an area dedicated to the communion of Black people, and it served as a site for communal improvement through racial unity.

Burke depicts the ghetto as a special manifestation of Black communal expression, but the Great Depression and subsequently the end of the Harlem

Renaissance diminished this idea of the ghetto. The actions that the Hollywood Hills' residents have taken before and after the zombie apocalypse to ensure the safety and stability of their compound would prove faulty. These locations began to represent "confinement, marginalization, and stigmatization." The public housing program was meant to sooth the aggression homelessness and poverty caused (71-72, 87-91). Initially this would seem like a sign of progression or change, but it is later revealed to be a reinforcement of segregation.⁷ The new housing was to be built in existing, segregated neighborhoods to prevent racial integration and backlash from the real estate market. Therefore, the housing program was a hinderance in the fight towards racial justice, but this was overlooked by the need for decent living accommodations. The complications of housing and how apartment complexes function in America for Black people continue to haunt present reality as the zombies haunt the living in the text. Is Hollywood Hills the haven sought in the ghettos of the early 1900s? Could such a thing even exist with America's history of racial injustice? Are the residents of Hollywood Hills existing under a false sense of security? Will the haunting of segregated housing in Burke's text provide shelter against the undead or a solution that only generates future destruction? Will the undead's own method of haunting work in tandem with Hollywood Hills' haunting oppression?

Hollywood Hills' post-apocalyptic community is seemingly functioning well until the complex's electricity fails and plunges the buildings into darkness. The assumption is that the zombies caused the power outage to coerce the survivors from the apartment

⁷ See Massey, especially pages 581-585, for more insights on continued housing segregation.

complex. In acknowledging the difficulties of living without electricity in a zombie apocalypse, residents volunteer and choose who will venture away from the safety of Hollywood Hills to obtain supplies. Five residents assemble to form the search party: Kid, a salami slinging cashier; Allen, an out of work electrician; Simms, a drug supplier; Slow Walker, a drug user; and Tiny, a man named in opposition to his size. The residents decide that Allen will go because he can restore power to Hollywood Hills. The apartment community choose Simms and Tiny for their strength. The two residents have the best chance of survival against the zombies. Kid joins because they volunteer to go. Kid unselfishly decides to put their safety behind their community's wellbeing, and as we learn in Walmart, they can defend themselves against attacks and escape capture. Kid's decision is in complete opposition to Walker being chosen to go. Walker is an expendable body suffering from withdrawal and unable to adequately assist the community, and because of this, he is abandoned. Walker's abandonment serves to signal the way that the community will fracture and succumb to the undead. The only way for Burke's society to progress with the Othered is to join the zombie collective.

Upon reaching the store, the group splits up to gather goods. They encounter a pedophile named Samuel Picket who used to prey on the girls of Hollywood Hills. Tiny and Simms quickly subdue Picket. Allen pleads with Simms to not kill Picket and reveals himself as a zombie. Allen assures Simms that Picket will not possess ill will after he transitions into a member of the undead. The human residents of Hollywood Hills are overcome with feelings of confusion and betrayal as Allen regales the store's occupants with the nature of the zombie. He explains how the zombies are the evolved and they seek to connect with others to foster a world absent of suffering. Allen informs the group

that Walker was changed in the car and is now traveling to Hollywood Hills to transition its residents. They also learn that Allen has infected them all at some point during their journey. Simms and Kid says that what zombies are doing is wrong and that the world should be marred with mistakes and choices. Faced with their inevitable transformation, Simms and Kid are forced to decide how they will approach their zombification. Simms chooses to kill Picket, Allen, and then herself. Tiny screams in pain as he lays shaking and transitioning on the floor. Kid opens the door to the store to let the zombies in to support them through the change as they evolve into something more or less human.

“Cue: Change” does not contain the typical futuristic or technological imagery found in Afrofuturism. There are no grand mechanical developments or off world explorations. Burke’s zombie narrative is absent of whimsicality but is classified as Afrofuturism by its engagement with science to explore Haitian inspired zombies and the incorporation of past and current instances of racial dynamics. Moments before his death, Allen provides an explanation of zombies’ forced biological transference:

It’s hard to evolve. You need the comfort, the connection to others to come into second being. That’s what it is, you know. A second state of mind—one different from your own. They’ll touch you, take just a bit of flesh, but it’s simply to become one with you. Your flesh nourishes them, and in return, someone else’s flesh will nourish you, and in this way everyone will be connected to everyone else on the planet. (Burke 103-104)

The story evokes Afrofuturism in the scientific exploration of evolution through infection. The zombies transfer their biological make up through a scratch or bite. A wound is inflicted, and taste is taken to form a mental connection between the zombie

collective and individual human. The consumption of flesh becomes a continuous cycle with each zombie addition. In return for their individuality the newly zombified are granted an unyielding community that favors the betterment of the majority over the retention of individuality. How does adopting collectivist practices contribute to societal success for all Americans and not just a select few?

The zombie becomes symbolic of morality and progression. Throughout the text the zombie has maintained an unwavering sense of community. In order to fully evolve a zombie must find kinship with the collective with a ritual involving bodily fluids and appendages like the Haitian Revolution ritual. Zombies make a physical touch and consume flesh to form this connection. By taking the person onto and into the body, they are enveloped by a community with various perspectives. This union instills an unwavering morality centered on serving the group. This evolutionary morality allows for the progression of human rights where the potential for equality becomes a real and approaching possibility. The only hinderance to the supposed evolution of mankind is mankind. The zombie revolution is morally skewed by their refusal to give the unevolved the option to choose to change. It is generally considered morally correct to offer people a choice in how they live their lives. Their choices are not always the best ones, but it is what Kid defines as a fundamental part of being human. However, is it not morally correct to want to be a better person? If people had the option to change to become more empathetic and provide a positive impact on each other, would they choose to evolve?

Kid's description of the zombie is not that the undead are rabid creatures pursuing human prey. They are instead portrayed as passive, emotionless beings who speak of evolutionary reform. The zombies first appeared aggressive through their approach,

forcefully transforming the city dwellers. The zombies bite people to start an inevitable change for the survival of a species. Through the bite the zombified becomes intertwined with one another through an emotional and mental network that favors the collective over the individual. Duty bound by the union, the undead are unable to act selfishly, but is this reprehensible if their actions are for the greater good? Is world peace worth the erasure of a fundamental part of humanity?

The symbiotic harmony causes the zombies to “shake.” Burke writes, “We have to do it. We need to do it. It’s why we shake... You must understand this. But it’s better this way. Safer. No more pain or suffering. Because if one person suffers, then all people suffer. No more people dying in the streets for seemingly no reason at all” (Burke 103-104). Allen explains it as a symptom of their need to connect and infect. The zombies convulse because of their inclination to tether onto each other. The mental and emotional binding is considered the better option as it shields people from the dangers of one another. The shaking ripples through society and prompts a need for change with each addition to the zombie collective. Although change is desired and needed it can still be frightening and opposed. Kid explains this best when they say, “No one likes change. It scares people” (Burke 91). Change terrifies everyone including the zombies that are enforcing it, but it is necessary to experience a deeper empathy to trigger the need for reform. In addition to the fear of change, their trembling is the result of the intertwining emotions rippling through the zombies. Their symbiotic relationship situates one another’s pain as their own. It enforces the need for unity and shared ideals among them to experience peace. While the morality of the undead’s actions is questionable, does the

end result justify how they reach their goal? “Cue: Change” forces the reader to contend with these opposing and complex ideologies.

Simms objects to the zombie’s radical revolution by saying, “This is not okay just because you think your own version of good is best. That’s not what it means to be people. This is not choice” (Burke 104). Simms makes valid points on the imperfection of humankind, but it is this imperfection that allows for harm to come to others. While the zombies are stripping away their freedom of choice, it is done with the need to instill societal harmony. By changing everyone, the zombies are limiting the chances for harm to occur. No one will have the choice to be selfish and harmful or giving and compassionate. All actions are done with the neutral need to thrive in shared peace, but in changing the noninfected, the zombies could be viewed as enacting the behavior they are trying to eradicate. The evolutionists were imposing their wills onto a group of beings unlike themselves. The contrast between ideals and actions is reminiscent of the Haitian zombie. That is to say that the zombie that has symbolized the dialectic of entrapment and freedom is also being used to portray individuality and unity. “Cue: Change’s” zombie revolution situates individualism as confinement in a society that abuses the majority, and it positions collectivism as liberation as it considers each member of society as valuable and deserving of peace.

Burke’s zombies, like African Americans, desire a change in how laws are structured and how people treat each other. In this comparison between fictional and lived Othered groups, Burke reconstructs a previously appropriated, culturally Black figure to better align with the economic and social disparities that Black people face today. Burke develops two opposing sides, zombies and humans, to demonstrate the

effects of community and lack thereof. When the humans of Hollywood Hills close themselves off from the world and select Walker to salvage for supplies it demonstrates a lack of unity. It was a disregard for his life in favor of the success of their self-imposed, segregated community. Unlike the humans, the zombies' unity does not falter. During the group's journey, Simms and Kid witness a horde of zombies attempting to change two women. No one person is chosen over the other as some members of the zombie horde perish in the undead's pursuit to transform the two women. Zombies voluntarily approach the women until their goal is achieved. Everyone takes equal part in the decision and promotion of communal healing.

“Cue: Change” by Chesya Burke is a masterfully crafted tribute to the Haitian zombie. Burke invokes moments of racial injustice and presents zombies as a catalyst for discrimination disruption and the prospect for justice. The people, who are Othered, express critical ideals of equality and justice. Motivated by their circumstances, they influence others to join them in revolution to change the system and how people interact. Burke accounts for the lived realities and racial traumas, like societal discrimination, segregated housing, and forced servitude, that African Americans experience. She positions the experiences in a speculative work that incorporates lessons from the past and potential for the future. Black readers of “Cue: Change” can access the mythical mirror that Burke holds to better understand, cope, and change themselves as well as influence others for the better.

Dread Nation by Justina Ireland

Dread Nation by Justina Ireland takes place in an alternate America, one in which the Civil War was interrupted by the zombie apocalypse. The novel follows Jane

McKeene, who is the daughter of Major McKeene, Rose Hill Plantation owner, and Ophelia, former slave. Prior to arriving in Rose Hill, Jane's mother, Ophelia, assumes the identity of her former owner, Ophelia, who died on route to meet and marry Major McKeene. Jane's mother marries the Major instead and stays at Rose Hill as the mistress of the plantation. Shortly after Jane is conceived, Major McKeene leaves to fight in the Civil War or the "War Between the States" with the Confederate army (246). Jane is born two days before the undead rise from the battlefield in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The revival of the dead abruptly ends the Civil War and chattel slavery as Black and White people join forces to beat back the horde of zombies. Upon returning to Rose Hill, Major McKeene remains ignorant to Ophelia's identity and Jane's parentage as he reignites pre-Civil War terror and violence on his estate. Jane, fearful for the safety of her community, stands over her father's drunken body in the night. She shoots and kills him with her mother's handgun. Her explanation for killing him is that he was infected and became a member of the undead. With his death, Jane restores peace to Rose Hill Plantation.

In Major McKeene's absence, Ophelia manages the estate's tobacco and liquor business and treats the former slaves with generosity and kindness as she pays wages and values their contributions to Rose Hill. Jane is free to roam the plantation as her mother's daughter. The business and community flourish as the neighboring estates who clung to confederate ideologies succumb to the undead. Unlike Hollywood Hills, Rose Hill does not close its doors to outsiders during the zombie apocalypse. Ophelia does not entertain racist ideologies and keeps her space free of harmful rhetoric. The unyielding love for one another on the plantation aids in the continuous prosperity of Rose Hill, something that Hollywood Hills is not privy to because of its segregation from the rest of the city.

Despite Jane bringing temporary harmony, community proves to be a fickle thing in *Dread Nation*. Community alliances are constantly tested, fleeting, and false. Jane's community at Rose Hill introduces her to the meaning of fellowship. Her mother works alongside her employees to establish a supportive and safe community despite the occasional ill doer who resents the end of slavery. Jane is denied her Rose Hill community with the "Negro and Native Reeducation Act," a law that relocated her to Miss Preston's School of Combat, and in her absence, Rose Hill's community fractures and falls. Ophelia invites someone into her community that betrays her and dismantles the haven that she has built. However, was a home built on the dehumanization of others ever capable of sustaining something more? Like Burke, Ireland, with the fall of Rose Hill, proposes dismantling systems that allow or represent exclusion and injustice. Jane never regains that sense of community while away from Rose Hill. She gains allies that will prove to be false and some that will prove to be true as she works to upend the system that takes her from Rose Hill and allows the degradation of her people.

The War Between States is temporarily replaced with the battle between living and dead until the walking dead's population is under some semblance of control. Racism resurfaces with the "Negro and Native Reeducation Act." Under the guise of assisting minoritized people in finding employment, the government issues a mandate ordering Black and Native Americans to attend programs that train minorities, often poorly, to combat the dead for White Americans. Being Ophelia's child affords Jane some privileges in Rose Hill, but she is not above the law. When Jane comes of age, she leaves Rose Hill in Kentucky and attends Miss Preston's School of Combat in Baltimore. She excels in her classes. However, because of her tendency to question authority, she is

labeled a delinquent. As punishment, Jane is forced to attend a lecture on the zombie plague. At the lecture Jane saves the mayor's wife from a mishap during an on-stage zombie presentation. Jane earns herself and her colleague, Katherine, an invite to serve as an Attendant⁸ at Mayor Carr's dinner party. Their elevated social status is short lived. Jane and Jackson Keat, Jane's ex-boyfriend, are caught searching for information on missing families in Baltimore. As punishment the three are imprisoned in a town called Summerland.

Dread Nation exemplifies Afrofuturism through its alternative history, but it also introduces the sort of advanced technology that's often characteristic of the genre. The War Between States led to the development of advanced vehicle and modified weaponry. On the evening of the lecture, the Attendants in training pile into vehicles known as ponies. Ponies are tiny, trackless trains. These mechanical movers are the result of the zombies eating the horses that pulled the carriages. They are named in remembrance of the horses. In addition to vehicles, weapon design and functionality have changed to best combat the zombie uprising. Modified sickles are Jane's preferred weapon. Sickle handles are shortened. Both sides of the blade are sharpened to no longer harvest crops but to harvest the undead. Repurposing slave tools was a tactic used to form weapons for slave rebellions like the Haitian Revolution. Alterations to slave tools, like sickles, demonstrate the melding of Blackness and technological advancement that correspond with the Afrofuturistic themes of the novel.

⁸ Attendants are charged with protecting her employer from the undead and unwelcomed suitors (Burke 10).

In addition to the advanced technology, *Dread Nation*'s utilization of alternative history allows the writer and reader to explore historical reimagining. Ireland addresses the progression of race relations following the abolishment of chattel slavery and the beginning of the undead plague:

They got loopholes in that there Thirteenth Amendment. If you've been bitten by a shambler,⁹ the amendment says you're no longer human, even if you haven't turned yet, which means you don't have rights as a person anymore...those Negroes get sold off by the compound. Same if you're a criminal—and you can guess how that goes, when white folk are the ones who write the laws. (Ireland 243)

Southern states use Black people who are accused of being bitten and being criminal to build structures, work land, and patrol on chain gangs in various locations throughout the South and Summerland. In *Dread Nation*, the South is greatly affected by the undead plague because of the warmer weather. Ireland's zombies hibernate during colder weather. Therefore, the Northern states are able to rebuild during the winter months. The Southern states, however, are ravaged by the zombies and are long considered lost by the remaining states. The South does not have the opportunity to rebuild and strengthen its infrastructure like the North, so the South reverts to an alternate form of slavery known as chain gangs, composed of Black people, to build fortified compounds and guard White Americans. The White southerners fill their need for working bodies by falsely identifying Black people as members of the walking dead. The

⁹ Shambler is a synonym for zombie.

undead have no rights and are subjected to be used as cattle. This also applies to the criminal population that is mostly comprised of Black people.

Burke's chain gangs are, of course, referencing historical ones. American chain gangs originated from a Southern infrastructure project in the 1890s. It consisted largely of criminalized Black people chained together and forced to work in inhumane conditions while building infrastructures for various Southern states. Approximately twelve prisoners were chained together and kept in a mobile cage that was rarely cleaned or maintained. It allowed for the easy transport of Black people who were shuttled and loaned for various labor projects. Prisoners worked at gunpoint under the constant threat of an immediate, violent death. Due to the brutality of the work and the cruelty of their treatment, most prisoners died within five years on the chain gang (Browne 79-80, Childs 271-275). The system of chain gangs serves as a form of haunting from slavery that is seen in not only Morrison's *Beloved* but also in Ireland's *Dread Nation*. The presence of chain gangs is a reconstruction of Black terrors that haunt present day reality with the prison system.¹⁰ The nonfictional Thirteenth Amendment is used to justify the continuing servitude of Black people. The amendment states that, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." The Thirteenth Amendment is used to support a system of forced labor. African Americans were criminalized through a set of racially unjust laws called "Black Codes" that sentenced Black people to prison for minor infractions like "breaking curfew" or

¹⁰ Gilmore and Blackmon provide additional information on the evolution of American slavery to today's mass imprisonment.

“loitering.” Public servants imprisoned and ordered them to work without being properly compensated. If the prisoners are paid, they are paid poorly and are made to use their earnings or labor to afford necessities like hygiene products and housing (Browne 79, Halladay 937-938). Ireland’s incorporation and alteration of this law is meant to bring attention to corruption in the justice system. Laws that are designed to supply justice to all Americans are distorted and utilized to favor White Americans. Similar to Burke’s zombie, Ireland’s zombies are attracted to areas where injustice appears to be most prominent: Southern states, Summerland, and Baltimore. The fictional zombies are determined to uproot Western systems of racial oppression like the Haitian zombies who sought to end the injustice of slavery.

Dread Nation reimagines the Thirteenth Amendment with the inclusion of zombies that will act to dismantle Summerland’s chain gang. Summerland is a town in the West. It serves as a restorative settlement that further Mayor Carr’s political aims of reinstating Black servitude to White Americans by utilizing chain gangs. Despite there being Black male prisoners, Ireland focuses her narrative on Jane’s and other female characters’ experiences in the chain gang. In Summerland, Black female prisoners are forced in a locked, pest-ridden room to sleep head to toe with other women and girls. Many are often unable to eat because they receive little food. Sheriff Snyder and his deputies, who sit armed on horses, herd prisoners around town. They sing while they are led like livestock before they are stationed along the town’s wall to guard against the undead. Their work is made more treacherous by the prisoners being forbidden to kill zombies unless the undead climb the town’s wall barrier. Only then are the patrollers allowed to dispose of the zombies with poorly maintained gardening tools that the

prisoners use as weapons. Sherriff Snyder does not allow them to use the bladed weapons and guns that he keeps hidden and unused. Their job is made unnecessarily difficult and increases the patroller casualties while servicing the people that imprisoned them. As reimagined in Ireland's work, slavery did not cease with the thirteenth amendment. White southerners in Burke's fiction, as in American history, simply altered how it functioned with laws designed to supposedly assist minoritized people, define who was human, and form new methods of enslavement.

Additional reimagining of historical oppression is demonstrated as the Duchess leads Jane to where she and other prisoners sleep. Her sleeping quarters are a small room past the areas where the Duchess' employees entertain costumers. The room contains a half full shelf to hold flea infested blankets that prisoners use to form makeshift beds. At night, Jane and the other patrollers sleep on the floor and blankets while "squished in tight as sardines" (Ireland 249). Their living arrangements are reminiscent of the conditions of the enslaved during the Middle Passage. Enslaved Africans were chained and positioned closely together in the bowels of the slave ships. They endured unsanitary living conditions as well as sexual assaults and other forms of abuse. Many did not survive the journey to America (Battle). Ireland employs haunting as she demonstrates the parallels between the enslavement of Black people during the slave trade and the imprisonment of Black people on chain gangs. Ireland revisits sites of entrapment to explore the constant dehumanization of the Black body. She allows for a retelling of lived horror that is upended by fictional terrors for the prevalence of the racially Othered.

Jane and the other prisoners were paid two dollars a week plus room and board. The prisoners were allotted one bath a week and meager rations of food. Like the

housing projects of “Cue: Change,” Ireland constructs sites of locational haunting through prison housing. During her imprisonment at Summerland, Jane resides in a brothel. The Duchess manages the establishment. She employs several other White women and one Black woman named Nessie. While the other Black people are forced to patrol Summerland, Nessie is allowed to work in the brothel because Sheriff Snyder likes her. In Summerland’s past the prisoners, who were meant to patrol, were sexually exploited by the brothel’s patrons. Already victims of America’s racism, the prisoners had to endure further trauma by servicing Summerland citizens protectively and sexually. They are made to assume the role of Mammy and Jezebel. The duality of their oppression is representative of the misogynoir Black women experience as they are essentialized because of race and gender.¹¹ This demonstrates the multilayered cycle of oppression that invades America’s fictional and literal prison systems.

As Ireland’s zombies haunt the living, so does the Haitian zombie’s duality of entrapment and freedom. *Dread Nation’s* zombies haunt the living by disrupting systems of oppression. The undead act as reminders of the unnatural and horrific nature of systemic oppression. The zombies’ haunting by hunting is present throughout the chain gang song that the Black Summerland prisoners sing as they are herded. Work songs, like the system of chattel slavery, transferred into a new system of imprisonment. Bound together in forced servitude, the prisoners found a sense of community through call and response work songs that reflect the dangers of living and the need for preservation.

¹¹ See Dirks for more information about the psychological factors of imprisoning women of various intersections.

Call and response is a part of the African American oral tradition that functions on a communal level through joint participation. The shambler shanty employs call and response. Maggie Sale asserts that, “Call-and-response patterns provide a basic model that depends and thrives upon audience performance and improvisation, which work together to ensure that the art will be meaningful or functional to the community” (41). Call and response employ two different phrases that vary in purpose. The first phrase is the call. The second phrase is the response that reacts to the call. The technique enhances storytelling and group bonding as participants work together to construct the musical narrative. Ireland’s lyrical composition provides an instructional and communal demonstration of slavery’s haunting and the community support it took to persevere.

When those shamblers gather round,

Honey! Honey!

When those shamblers gather round,

Babe! Babe!

When those shamblers gather round, swing your scythe and bring them down,

Honey, oh baby mine! (Ireland 253)

Ireland’s inclusion of this lyrical lament is evidence of the elements of Afrofuturism, Haunting, and Community that she explores in *Dread Nation*. The song begins with a call that brings the listener’s attention to the dangerous nature of the patroller’s work. The call begins, “When those shamblers gather round.” The undead surrounds the caller. The haunting and hunting nature of the zombies pursue the caller as the responder answers with words of endearment: “Honey!...Babe!...Honey, oh baby mine!” The words of affection portray the familiarity between the caller and responder.

The loving words are demonstrative of the importance of communal ties. As the caller directs, “swing your scythe and bring them down” all participants are engaging in learning how to kill the dead. The tool and act of harvesting is comparable to the agricultural work of those enslaved pre-Civil War. The song itself then becomes a response to the past and a reflection of historical subjugation. Some chain gang songs are revised slave songs that offer prisoners a way to lament and connect through a shared experience (Franklin 6). While the singers are learning how to kill the undead, they are also learning of a common narrative of tragedy that continues to befall them.

Like the chain gang song the zombies, themselves, represent Afrofuturist elements. The zombies’ biological changes specifically deliver them into the realm of speculative fiction. Scientists in *Dread Nation* believe that zombies are the result of pathogens that transmit a virus that renders the victim undead. The zombies then learn to communicate across vast distances through an “undetectable scent or signaling compound” that is similar to that of insects (Ireland 66, 407). Similarly to Burke’s zombies, Ireland’s zombies have made strides in developing a community that values supporting one another. Ireland’s undead travel in packs to increase their chances of obtaining sustenance. Often the younger zombies lead the group. The newly turned zombies are quicker and stronger, so they are better able to subdue prey. The older zombies move slower and are further along in the decaying process. Their inefficiency leads them to the back of the group to ensure their survival. This approach values each zombie as they seek to best provide for each other. The undead also developed a method of communicating to one another to signal where food can be found. The zombies

maintain a supportive rapport despite being spatially removed from each other. Every move the zombies make is an effort to build and sustain their community.

In significant ways Ireland's zombies mirror not only the zombies in "Cue: Change" but also narrator Kid. Kid's function in their community is to provide selfless acts of support. They volunteer for food salvaging, offer companionship to members of the community, and choose to accept change for the possibility of betterment. Throughout the text, Kid acted only in consideration for their community. Jane provides a similar function in *Dread Nation*. She, too, was prematurely knowing of the dangers of mankind. She kills for peace in Rose Hill, searches for missing acquaintances in Baltimore, and rebels against her people's imprisonment in Summerland. Both protagonists, Kid and Jane, appear to adopt characteristics of the undead in their respective texts. Kid's approach to living in the zombie apocalypse was passive and thoughtful like Burke's zombies. Jane's approach was reactive and dramatic like Ireland's zombies. Their characterization and community situate them as being representative of the Haitian zombie because of their imprisonment and search for liberation.

Dread Nation also utilizes a nonlinear narrative. Jane narrates the novel from her time at Miss Preston's to her rebellion in Summerland. She occasionally retells moments in her past that provide a better understanding of her own character and the Rose Hill community. The first half of the novel contains letters to Ophelia from Jane. Jane's letters are an attempt to comfort her mother and to protect her from information that might cause Ophelia harm. Jane writes to Ophelia about excelling academically and socially inside the safety of Baltimore. The reader knows from the narrative outside of the letters that most

of what Jane writes is not true. The second half of novel incorporates letters from Ophelia to Jane. Ophelia offers motherly advice and updates about what has been occurring in Kentucky. Despite not receiving Jane's letters she continues to let Jane know that she has a home at Rose Hill, and when Rose Hill fell, Ophelia writes, "Find me, Jane" (Ireland 439). This continues Jane's function as a character in pursuit of justice and community.

Ophelia attempts to reestablish her community despite deciding to pass as White and attempting to kill Jane to protect her secret. The letters portray Ophelia as a loving mother and community member despite Jane portraying Ophelia as an inattentive mother who attempted to drown her. Jane's and Ophelia's letters work together to form multidimensional understanding of their characters and the life events that inform their decisions. Will Jane reuniting with Ophelia and reestablishing their community bring about peace, or is she moving in sync with the zombies that will follow her and dismantle her communal efforts? Will the zombies continue to pursue the living if everyone manages a harmonious coexistence with each other, or will they remain on the fringes of society as guards against resurfacing prejudice? Will the undead continue to pursue the living until every reminder of America, a nation built on the subjugation of others, has fallen under their moaning mouths?

Ireland's creatures, like Burke's zombies, possess a hive or symbiotic mentality as the humans learn to dispose of them, but that is where the similarities end. While "Cue: Change" has intelligent and capable zombies. *Dread Nation* is populated with the groaning, rotting terrors born of White, Western imagination and the Othered's defiance. The undead rise from the Gettysburg battlefield. The zombies' presence causes an abrupt end to the Civil War. Momentarily Black and White bodies are united against the walking

dead, but once the zombie attacks are managed, racism reemerges through the Negro and Native Reeducation Act. This law allows for the reestablishment of slavery until the dead gather to form large hordes that overrun the cities and settlements that were once thought to be safe. Like Burke, Ireland uses land, buildings, and forced servitude, as depicted on Rose Hill Plantation, Summerland's slave quarters, and chain gangs, to demonstrate reoccurring sites of trauma that are made unsustainable by the undead. Ireland's zombies become a disruption to racial oppression, entrapment, and servitude. By dismantling these sites of trauma, Ireland's zombies join Burke's zombies to become symbolic of the Haitian zombies' duality and a freedom demanded and obtained. The disruption of lived oppressions present a space for hope amid the lived horrors that appear relentless.

“The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” by Tish Jackson

Tish Jackson's *Catharsis: An Anthology of Horror* (2020) is a tribute to literary horror as a therapeutic outlet. Jackson explains in the forward that horror provided a method to cope and express her discontent with life's hardships. Her collection of short stories is a dedication to the solace that she found in the genre. “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” provides hope for healing by portraying zombies, often depicted as senseless monsters, as receptive and capable of the kind of understanding and love that Jackson was denied. Much like the Haitian zombies, her zombies are the product of human cruelty. The short story is told by a nameless, love scorned narrator. Through a personal account of the zombie apocalypse and her own zombification, the narrator reveals that it is only through compassion can Jackson's zombies' destruction be quelled.

In “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting,” zombies are Othered by governmental neglect and social bigotry. The narrator reveals that “those who died and weren't laid to

rest but used as test subjects came back as ferocious as the killing machines they were intended to be” (Ch. 6). The infected are subjected to experimentation before being neglected in their final moments. They are left untethered and uncared for by loved ones and by the scientists that used them for research. The neglect results in several non-territorial zombies attacking people because they cannot obtain food or other forms of assistance. These attacks caused others to believe that zombies are savages who lack emotional depth, but these beliefs are unfounded and based on the general villainization of the Othered. The zombie becomes synonymous with the underprivileged in this literary space. Jackson recounts the lived realities of many Black Americans who are unable to thrive in a system that works against them. She gives insight to the often harmful choices that people make because of a lack of resources. Jackson’s reconstruction of the Haitian zombies’ duality of entrapment and liberation presents a contemporary account of the generational and far-reaching destruction that continues under oppression.

Like “Cue: Change” and *Dread Nation*, the zombies in “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” provide Afrofuturistic elements that explore themes of Blackness through oppression and revolution. The story’s narrator begins by explaining the creation and existence of the zombie. Jackson’s zombies are the result of a “biological agent escaped from a weapon’s lab” that causes “Sudden Irritable Digestion Syndrome or SIDS” (Ch. 6). The afflicted expel all bodily fluids and nutritional substances aside from flesh and blood. Although the consumption of meat alleviates some symptoms of zombification, it also accelerates the process. Once the virus has transformed the infected, the freshly turned zombies become territorial of their graves; buried bodies resurface and the undead

imprint on their gravesites. In contrast, the infected used for experimentation in SIDS research are able to roam freely as zombies. Untethered, they often wreak havoc among the living. However, Jackson's zombies do possess the ability to become functioning members of society. If the infected are tethered to a location and treated with compassion during and after the transformation, they are able to retain most of their bodily functions. They may experience minor loss in cognitive abilities when hungry or enraged, but their potential to thrive in life after death is possible. While Burke's and Ireland's zombies were the result of natural causes, Jackson's zombies are the result of human beings' quest for power as they seek to destroy each other with weaponized biological agents. This information actionably pinpoints the zombie's creation as directly the fault of human conflict. The zombies in Burke's and Ireland's texts have been seen as an unfortunate but natural occurrence that radically alters society. Jackson's zombies are a product of humanity's attempt to control and destroy. "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting" presents the zombie apocalypse as a karmic societal reckoning.

Jackson's text talks about the zombies suffering from food insecurity and how a lack of substance influences their behavior. Christopher B. Barrett's "Measuring Food Insecurity" (2010) asserts, "Food security is commonly conceptualized as resting on three pillars: availability, access, and utilization" (825). The agricultural development of the 18th century and onward has allowed many countries to escape dietary poverty. By improving food availability people were able to obtain an appropriate amount of nutrition and calories. Food availability works to combat food insecurity, but availability does not promise adequate sustenance for all and neither does access to food. Access is a "multidimensional concept" that considers the individual and collective in relation to

employment and price gouging. The concept asks: How much food is needed, and is the food financially obtainable? Utilization recognizes the functionality of the food. It considers whether the food is used for primarily nutrition or solely pleasure. Does the individual or community biologically process food in a way that poses a challenge to food security? Barrett proposes employment creation and increased food development with a concentration in poverty-stricken communities. By improving access and availability, food security can greatly increase and limit the harmful mental and physical effects of prolonged hunger and malnutrition (825-828). If the zombies suffer from food insecurity, how will they react in response to continued governmental neglect? Will they suffer in silence, or will they rebel like the Haitian zombies and “eat the rich?”¹²

“The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting,” in keeping with Afrofuturist texts, portrays alternate imagined elements. In this text, those elements are scientific inventions through the creation of alternative zombie nutrition. Meatco produces recycled flesh for zombie consumption to decrease zombie attacks. The severity of the virus’ individual and collective impact is reliant on the availability, access, and utilization of the substitute meat. Meatco is the only alternative meat producer in the text. This situates Meatco as the sole contributor to alternative meat solutions. The company holds the monopoly over zombie nutrition. Given the continuous rise of zombie infections, there would need to be an increase in alternative meat production. If the zombies’ substitute food availability is hindered by an inadequate supply of nutrition, then the undead experience food insecurity. If they cannot find the food in the marketplace they must hunt and affect the

¹² The phrase “eat the rich” is often attributed to philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who was claimed to have said, “When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will eat the rich.” I am employing it to refer to the literal consumption of the more food fortunate.

collective. Procuring food is made more difficult by the undead's cognitive disabilities as zombies experience difficulty performing certain tasks. There is no record of the zombies' employment within the text. If the undead are unable to work, how can they be expected to afford the meat substitute? Concerning food utilization, the Meatco products provide zombies with nutrition, but the speaker remarks that fresh, human meat tastes better. Would the enjoyability of eating be a hinderance to food security? Although natural and substitute meat both provide nourishment, the zombies favor the tastier option of natural flesh. Jackson's zombies lack availability, access, and utilization. How does food insecurity contribute to discontent among the zombie population? If the newly turned are unable to obtain the Meatco product, they are forced to eat and infect others.

Jackson is advocating for food security by paralleling fictional zombies' and real Black people's ability to obtain food. She is supporting the right of everyone being able to obtain nutritional and compatible dietary food. "Food Insecurity During COVID-19 in Households with Children: Results by Racial and Ethnic Groups" (2020) by Diane Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts offers data on the measurement of food insecurity among Black, White, and Hispanic households in response to COVID-19. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Black households with children have experienced increased food insecurity. While the anxiety around being able to obtain food reached every ethnic/race group, there have been reports of significant improvement in White households. Minority groups have high instances of food insecurity before COVID-19, and the pandemic has only shined light on the racial disparities that were already a national issue. Black households experience higher food insecurity than their White counterparts. This sharper increase coupled with slower improvements are an indicator for the present biases that provide

additional financial and social difficulties. The Othered are strongly impacted by the virus because of exclusionary ideas on the rights to food. Health inequalities continue to be a prominent theme when discussing harmful systemic impacts on Black people. Systemic racism has historically impacted Black people during epidemics especially as it concerns necessities like food and ethical medical treatments.

Jackson reimagines experimentation on African Americans for medical advancement that has been a normalized practice in American history. She presents zombies as victims of unethical medical research. From James Marion Sims' torturous, surgical experimentations on enslaved Black women in the 1840s to the Tuskegee Syphilis Study that left hundreds of Black men untreated for syphilis to examine the progression of the disease,¹³ Black people have been subjected to countless cruelties in the name of science. Many Black volunteers for medical institutions believed that they were receiving ethical treatment for their illness, but in reality, they were being studied and reduced to cadavers. They were treated as breathing dead bodies to be used for research. The research subjects in "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting" likely believe that they are being treated for SIDS and not being used as research subjects. The infected provide scientists with a better understanding of the virus. Who could expect the scientists to watch them die and let them suffer even after death? *Dread Nation* also incorporates scientific discrimination. Ireland's scientists experimented on Black people because of their supposed natural resistance against the zombie virus. Ireland and Jackson are retelling African American experience through their reimagining of historical medical

¹³ Elshabazz-Palmer, Aqilah and Owens, Deirdre Cooper give detailed accounts of scientific racism in relation to African Americans.

discrimination against African Americans. Jackson situates a zombie epidemic amidst haunting economic injustice.

The zombie that attacks the narrator is “a non-territorial zombie.” While the speaker manages to subdue the zombie, she is bitten and infected with SIDS. The speaker gives a firsthand account on the depth of a zombie’s humanity. She says, “It was known by then that zombies could function in society if routed through the death process correctly but were still considered beyond the normal range of emotions. Which I can personally tell you is not true!” The narrator is proof that the undead are capable of emotional depth by giving a comprehensive tale of her zombification. During the narration, the reader can deduce that zombies are emotionally intelligent and capable of being active members of society. The infected can thrive in their next life if they are cared for by being tethered to a location, provided meat substitute, and given emotional support. Aren’t housing, food, and companionship the rights of everyone? What does it mean to deny others of these rights? The stigmatization that zombies face situates them as a minority on the cusps of a civil rights movement. The narrator sees herself and Ralan, her ex-fiancé, as part of this movement as she lay sick in her home that will become her final resting place and tethering location:

The thoughts I’d had of the two of us making civil rights history, proving that zombies can be loving and productive members of society and don’t have to eat their loved ones were very hard to let go of. I wondered if I would have the strength to do those things without Ralan by my side and I shuddered. Would I let the loss of love turn me into a monster? (Jackson Ch. 6)

Jackson explores revolution in relation to love. There are movies, songs, and poems declaring that love is revolutionary, but can revolution be an act of love? What do we make of a love story born from the act of revolution? How can love cause revolution? Revolution is born from the oppression of the Othered. It is the love for self and community, as demonstrated in the Haitian Revolution, that inspires a demand for justice.

¹⁴ Ralan Johnson functions as her community, but he decides to abandon her after she becomes infected. She desires for the two of them to engage in a movement for the betterment of everyone because of an expected shared belief that zombies are worthy members of society deserving of inalienable rights. The narration envisions a revolutionary romance that would serve as a representation of the emotional depths that zombies possess. Her romantic love would be the bedrock for the affection she holds for her zombie community. This love is unshakable. She “shuddered” at the thought of undertaking a challenge without Ralan, and her doubt and lack of support threaten to bring further ruin to her world. The need for kinship will follow her into death as she seeks to reunite with Ralan after her transformation.

After the narrator is infected with SIDS, Ralan nurses her through her transformation. As a Meatco employee, he provides her with Meatco products to ease her transition. Ralan gives her the apartment to tether to. This is all done to make the process as comfortable and non-traumatic as possible with the hopes of giving the narrator a chance to function well in society. Ralan refusing to engage in any kind of relationship with her post transition and allowing his parents to impose further distress during their

¹⁴ Watson creatively considers the dynamics between different forms of love and revolution.

visits diminishes his efforts in the eyes of the narrator. She receives visits from Ralan's parents where they no longer treat her as a welcomed addition to their family. The narrator recounts that "Ralan's family encouraged him to place me into the Revitalize Museum, a kind of apartment complex for zombies, two weeks before my scheduled demise to 'help start the grieving process'" (Ch. 6). Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's view of the narrator finds its real-world analogue in the function of museums. When people fail to adhere to societal standards of success and acceptability they are pushed toward the margins and forgotten. The speaker was objectified, and her value was determined. They decided she should be in a space reserved for relics. She was to be encapsulated and isolated as a thing of the past. In Jackson's text, the term "revitalize" is the politically correct term to refer to the undead. It was meant to epitomize the new life that the infected will be reborn into, but its meaning is skewed by the latter half of the apartment's name. Museums are sites where objects and their meanings are reconstructed to convey a given function in service of an exhibit or gallery. The objects are often repurposed or removed from their original context for museum viewership.¹⁵ Like Burke's Hollywood Hills and Ireland's Summerland prison housing, the Revitalize Museum serves as a physical site of haunting through the demoralization and locational binding of the undead. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson proposed that the speaker, at her weakest, be placed in an unfamiliar place to be tethered to for the rest of her afterlife. Their discrimination is prevalent through their failure to consider how it would affect her transitioning process. The name of the apartment complex suggests that the narrator would be a source of study or entertainment. This subjects her to unnecessary stress that

¹⁵ Petrov provides more information about the internal utility of museums.

will possibly hinder her ability to transition properly. Additionally, placing her before her transformation is accelerating her dehumanization by reducing her to an object to be controlled and contained. Like health discrimination, the need to consign the tethered to a physical site of oppression is a prominent theme among Black women's zombie literature. The zombies appear to disparately attempt to usurp this geological imprisonment of the Othered. Jackson's zombies revolt not from within physical sites of haunting like Burke's and Ireland's zombies, but by dismantling and disrupting the lives of the living, like Haitian zombies, in their search to satisfy their hunger.

Following her revitalization, the speaker drives to Ralan at his parents' house with a packed bag of alternative meat. She waits for Mr. and Mrs. Johnson to vacate their estate before venturing into their home. Upon walking through the door, she finds Ralan among boxes filled with his possessions. In her newly zombified and muddled brain, the speaker believes that Ralan is moving away and refusing to honor an agreement that they had made. She thinks that Ralan had approved of her visiting him one more time, but in actuality he agreed that he would come meet her. Upon seeing the boxes and believing the nonexistent agreement had been broken, the speaker feels slighted, and a craving overcomes her. She hungers for justice in response to the betrayal that has supposedly befallen her. She attempts to reach the alternative meat that she packed as a precaution, but Mr. and Mrs. Johnson walk in. While never supportive of the speaker and their son's union after death, Ralan's parents recoil upon seeing the speaker. This sends the narrator into a blind rage, and she begins to enact vengeance through consumption.

Burke's zombies apply a gentle tear to the skin, and Ireland's zombie prefer a mindless ripping into flesh. Jackson's zombie narrator bites with vengeful intention

similar to the attack from Haitian zombies. The narrator begins her meal with Mrs. Johnson and “chomped on her nose.” As the narrator lay transitioning in bed, Mrs. Johnson’s face held contempt. She raised her nose and turned her face away from the narrator when she was at her most vulnerable. Mrs. Johnson’s face becomes a site of denied connection. By destroying the nose, the point of disdain and withholding, the narrator attempts to rectify a wrong that was committed and continues into her zombified life. The narrator ends her meal “chewing on Mr. Johnson’s testicles.” Mr. Johnson’s personality in “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” can be described as docile. Before her transition, the narrator remarks that “Ralan Sr. didn’t have any problems disparaging me face to face, which was about the only time he stood up to his wife in any regard.” His decision to reject his son’s relationship stems from not only his wife’s opinion but also from public belief. He believes that a human and zombie are incapable of an everlasting love (Ch. 6). The speaker’s impression of Mr. Johnson persists as she removes what symbolically represents masculinity and dominance within a patriarchal society. The support that Ralan’s parents denied her is compensated by the feast she makes of them. What are the effects of targeting individual people as opposed to physical sites that exhibit corruption? Does a more personal and specific point of attack contribute to lasting change?

The speaker is determined to mend her relationship and community even in death. All that oppose her will meet a literal hunger for righteousness. After the narrator finishes eating, she kidnaps and accidentally infects Ralan. She is a victim of a series of unfortunate events. The speaker continues a cycle of hardship in her attempt to obtain what was and is denied to her through no fault of her own. However, her own misfortune

does not excuse her actions and the pain it causes. With Burke's zombies and Jackson's narrator, both "Cue: Change" and "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting" depict morally complicated characters that present compelling arguments toward liberation and progression. Are Burke and Jackson conveying that the right thing is rarely easy or obvious? The Haitian Revolution was destructive, yet it freed a group of enslaved people. This moment of liberation was made largely possible through violence and bloodshed. Have people grown tired of the peaceful protest? Is an outward expression of systemic destruction needed?

The community-driven characteristics of the Haitian zombie are recognizable in love stories like "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting." Jackson's text portrays a connection that transcends the respective realms of the living and dead. The romance narrates a love so fleeting it gives rise to a death defying need to be with the loved one. Jackson's text doesn't include a larger community, like Hollywood Hills and Rose Hill, but even in the absence of neighborly or familial connections for her narrator, she stresses the importance of community through her narrator's and zombies' determination to seek and obtain connection. The narrator's functionality does not feature a blending of individualist and collectivist ideas that are present in Kid's and Jane's characterization. Jackson's narrator is the complete embodiment of the Haitian zombies' duality because of her zombification that signals oppression and the single-minded objective to foster community and thus liberation through infection. The reader remains unsure about the state of her relationship with Ralan, but it can be inferred that the speaker will remain relentless in her pursuit of liberation in the midst of oppression.

Jackson reimagines lived traumas through her incorporation of food insecurity, unethical medical practices, and segregated housing; these are three forms of trauma that were also present in “Cue: Change” and *Dread Nation*. Like Burke and Ireland, she constructs zombies that seek to illuminate the injustices of these traumas through the undead’s destruction and presence in the text. In employing sankoffarration through the Haitian zombies’ duality, Jackson is constructing a possible literary pathway to healing. While detailing different issues related to Blackness and racial oppression to illuminate a politically driven narrative, “The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting” demonstrates the extent of the Haitian zombie’s influence in African American literature.

CONCLUSION

Often in zombie scholarship, zombification is interpreted as the metaphorical deadening of a person by dehumanization and situates the modern zombie as “rootless” because today’s Western zombie is no longer a product of Vodou (Venables 208). The undead are now the result of natural disasters and human cruelty. Pop cultural zombies are not soulless entities that exist to serve a sorcerer, and this removal from the undead’s origin leaves the typical Americanized zombie rootless. While White Western zombies merely exist in their reanimated state, Black women zombies move towards a shared purpose and goal. Black women’s zombie literature reestablishes roots for today’s zombie by grounding the undead in a critical discussion on systemic oppressions. Black women writers’ zombie fictions give rise to contemporary zombie creation myths while also evoking the Haitian zombies’ representation of oppression and liberation. Burke, Ireland, and Jackson utilize contagion, a pop cultural cause of the zombie virus, to position the legend in a Western space. Oppression is exemplified by a disease that invades and infects everyone, so in the contemporizing of zombie creation, they reroot the legend by invoking the Haitian zombie. Their literary zombies dismantle the systems and society that allow for the virus to occur. Unlike White zombie texts, the fictional zombies of Black women’s zombie literature not only show Black oppression in zombification but also the liberation found in revolution. The authors provide a reappropriation of the zombie legend as they fulfill sankofa projects.

Zombies are steeped in African Diasporic tradition. From its roots in West Africa to its reinvention in Haiti and the United States, the zombie has been symbolic of resistance and resilience. By utilizing the zombie, Black women horror writers are engaging in sankoffarration, a mode of storytelling that is at once reflecting on past lessons and building a better future. Brooks, McGee, and Schoellman assert that “These entities become signifiers of oppressions and/or repressions, of ‘abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impact felt in everyday life’ as well as other lost or forgotten components of identity” (239, 2016). In utilizing the zombie legend, Black women writers are employing moments in history as part of Black identity. While John Jennings only recently coined the term sankoffarration, African American literature has long served as a site in which to explore “natural horror” that parallels the speculative in reality. Historically a symbol of resistance, the zombie becomes a signifier for oppressions like “race, gender, class, and sexuality—that haunt Black women’s own identities” (240, 2016). By reappropriating a legend from the African Diaspora, Black women writers are reclaiming a dynamic and culturally rich entity. Their act of reclamation is instrumental towards healing intergenerational trauma.

Literature’s potential to connect on an emotional plane with trauma victims is necessary for acknowledging and understanding atrocities. By constructing trauma narratives, Burke, Ireland, and Jackson encourage empathy for marginalized individuals. The authors also avoid secondhand victimization or retraumatization that often accompanies trauma narratives by providing vaguely optimistic endings inspired by a successful uprising from African Diasporic history. The texts depict the effects of intergenerational trauma and offer a literary transition to move the conversation from the

infliction of trauma to the potential of healing. The authors assess the tear in America's psyche by reimagining moments of racism that offers the victim support by providing a space to address race and incorporates the consequences of further societal negligence. Through zombie literature, healing can be made by understanding self and others. Burke, Ireland, and Jackson are acting in tandem with Moor Mother Goddess who believes that employing non-Western ideas can offer healing. By utilizing Afrofuturist elements, Burke, Ireland, and Jackson are building an alternative world where justice appears more attainable. The writers are constructing and revealing the potential for hope as they allude to African American current lived horrors and the past that haunts them in present day.

Works like "Cue: Change," *Dread Nation*, and "The Love of a Zombie is Everlasting" represent only one expression of engagement with the zombie legend. The critical lens that I employ to engage Black women's zombie literature expands beyond gender, nationality, or literary medium. In music, Jade Novah's "Zombie" is an R&B track from her debut album *All Blue* (2018). The cascading piano accompanies her breathy, haunting vocals as the beat drops and bounces through the song. Novah delivers a lyrical love song full of yearning for connection. Black comic book writers, like Vita Ayala and Victor LaValle, are employing zombies in their exploration of race and environmental issues. Ayala's *The Wilds* (2019) and LaValle's *Eve* (2021) are comics that feature diverse characters as they live in a post-apocalyptic world inhabited by zombies. The textual and visual nature of comics offers multiple avenues of analysis with its heavy social commentary. Junie Désil is a Haitian writer whose collection of poems, *eat salt | gaze at the ocean* (2020), centers on Black and Haitian power and realities. "transatlantic | zombie | passages" displays a multi stylistic creative project that presents

literary representations of the zombie. The works that I analyze extend the project of Black sankoffarration zombie literature in significant ways that intersect with the works of Butler, Morrison, and others whose works are better known in speculative fiction. All Black zombie literature is rich in race-based cultural criticism, and I hope that my project contributes to scholarly conversations about African American speculative fiction by bringing zombie literature by Black women writers into the discussion.

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