Blondes have Less Fun, Actually: Depictions of Traditional Femininity in the Post-Zombie
Apocalypse Metropolis

by

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Introduction

Rarely in our world, in what we believe to be “modern,” “civilized” society, is chaos considered desirable. Order is what we strive for instead: it gives us our government, the social systems upon which we rely, and shapes the structure of our daily lives. While in the abstract, chaos can seem like an exciting, even desirable departure from the status quo, in the context of a global pandemic (like the one through which we are currently living), disorder and uncertainty often prove more terrifying than the virus itself. Which stores will close, and for how long? Who exactly is at risk of infection? When will we be allowed to see our friends again? Chaos, in this context, becomes the enemy of societal survival, threatening humanity’s civilized self-image and testing communal ideals. Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* and M.R. Carey’s *The Girl with All the Gifts* both use the pandemic setting to investigate ideas about chaos and its relationship to civilization, but their pathogen of choice is no ordinary infective. In both books, a zombie crisis is responsible for the destruction of humanity as we know it, making tangible anxieties about how we define ourselves in opposition to one another, and what it really means to be “civilized.”

Feminist critiques of zombie media have explored the possibility that the destruction and chaos created by zombies might be a metaphor for patriarchal oppression. Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry have used Julia Kisteva’s discussion of “the waste body” to cast women as the zombie itself, and femaleness within a patriarchal society as a state of living death. Others, like Tim Lanzendörfer, see women represented in the plague’s survivors — battle hardened, emboldened, and ready to create a new (more equitable) world from the ashes of the old order.¹ The prominent female characters in Carey and Whitehead’s stories (unique and well-rounded though they are) have something in common: they are all symbolically linked to order. Though

¹ See Lauro, S.J. and Embry, K., “A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism”

on the surface their very survival would seem to indicate that they have embraced the new, chaotic, post-plague lifestyle, the women of *Zone* and *Girl* are continually associated with pre-apocalypse traditions, roles, and hierarchies. Whether they have a personal affinity for organization, their job requires discipline, or they are bound up somehow in the bureaucracy of the post-apocalyptic government, each woman attempts to impose order on the disorder of post-plague life. Though they faced oppression under the patriarchal system that was in place before the collapse, they continue to support and sustain the old order throughout their respective texts, and seem unable and unwilling to embrace a chaos that could liberate them.

Whitehead's novel is set in post-apocalyptic Manhattan, when most fast, deadly zombies have been subdued and only “stragglers” — non-threatening statue-like zombies who seem stuck in place — remain. The narrative follows Mark Spitz, a man whose job is to find and kill stragglers for the nascent American government (called Buffalo) in order to make Manhattan ready for human reoccupation. Carey's novel is set in post-apocalyptic England, where a near-defeated humanity has discovered what they believe to be the key to a cure for the “hungry” plague. Sentient child-zombies exist, by way of procreation between two adult zombies, among the hordes of the mindless living dead. Both novels end with the death of all remaining humans — a complete extinction event — by way of zombie infection.

In *The Girl with all the Gifts*, the chaos of the zombies is initially celebrated as a necessary departure from humanity: people are depicted as mostly unempathetic and cruel, blindly dogmatic and self-serving, while the zombie children are basically innocence personified. Later, however, the children must be tamed, even “civilized” by the novel's female protagonists in order to be considered properly human. The next iteration of people (the zombie children) are called “different,” yet through the pedagogy of their female teachers they retain the cultural

myths (ergo the ideologies) of a deeply flawed humanity. *Zone One*, on the other hand, follows through with the idea of chaos as an integral part of the new, posthuman form of life. It embraces the fact that disorder is what makes the zombies different from the stultified and repressed version of humanity that life in capitalist pre-apocalypse NYC created. In contrast to Carey's, there is no clear evidence that any women survive Whitehead's extinction event, and all symbols of the old order are completely destroyed. Using Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles to provide a posthumanist foundation for my analysis, I will use female characters' relationships with chaos and order in both novels to interrogate what each text is trying to communicate about humanity's path forward. I will also examine these female characters' connections to traditional gender expression and gender roles to understand how these texts imagine femininity's place in the apocalyptic landscape. Though in both novels it seems as though the female characters are harbingers of a new world, symbolic of progress and rebellion against old ideals and constraints, they are actually relics of the old order and (often intentionally) impede the creation of a better world with their strict adherence to rules, and respect for traditional categories.

Apocalypse, Extinction Event, and a Zombie Fungus: a Few Explanatory Notes

It is important to note a few plot details of both novels before delving into analysis. In the context of this paper, apocalypse (defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, esp. on a global scale”) will be used to refer to the initial societal breakdown event in the world of the text. In other words, “apocalypse” denotes the initial cataclysm caused by the zombie infective, during which the vast majority of human beings living on the Earth perished, and after which those survivors still living can be said to exist in a “post-apocalyptic” world. Though their world is still

in the middle of collapse, the characters in *Zone One* and *The Girl with All the Gifts* are living after the apocalypse, for the purposes of this paper. All the action of both novels, excluding things that happen during flashbacks, takes place “post-apocalypse.” Zombies still exist, a small number of uninfected people are still fighting to stay alive, and a new government is being constructed in an attempt to reinstate the rules of pre-apocalypse human society.

“Extinction” on the other hand, or “extinction event,” refers to the final disaster that kills all remaining survivors of the apocalypse, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as an event that eliminates “all chance” of the continuation of the species. In *Girl with All the Gifts*, the zombie-child protagonist Melanie intentionally starts a fire which releases millions of zombie-causing fungal spores (*ophiocordyceps*, an organism that actually turns ants into brain-dead hosts in the real world)² into the atmosphere, turning all remaining humans into undead “hungries.” The only sentient beings who survive this event are zombie-children (of which Carey’s protagonist is one) spawned by non-sentient, fungus-controlled adult zombies whose brain function is limited to the instinct to consume uninfected flesh. In Whitehead’s novel, the new government’s complacency, coupled with the sudden reanimation of the “straggler” zombies causes survivors to lose control of “Zone One,” a safe, nearly zombie-free Manhattan. The extinction event occurs when the undead pour in over Zone One’s heretofore impenetrable walls to devour New York’s remaining live residents.

Pre-Zombie Zombies: Boredom and Trauma in Pre-Apocalypse Society

In both *Zone One* and *The Girl with All the Gifts*, capitalist society is depicted as a stifling environment for the human spirit. The pre-apocalypse world, the books’ characters argue, was neither significantly different or meaningfully better than its post-crisis mirror image.

² See BBC’s *Planet Earth*, Season 1, Episode 8 “Jungles,” for further information.

Inequality and violence were rampant, trauma remained undealt with, and tourists, mindless consumers, and dead-eyed Starbucks customers played the role of the walking dead. Whitehead's text takes place after the zombies have destroyed most of the world's population, in a version of Manhattan where (though it is not the all-powerful, well-oiled machine it once was) the capitalist system is successfully rebuilding itself ("if they can bring back paperwork" our protagonist thinks, "they could certainly bring back parking tickets and prejudice"). Though much of the survivors' despondency seems to come from the world-wide calamity which they have just witnessed, flashbacks indicate they felt similarly wretched about their "pre-apocalypse" lives. Whitehead's protagonist, Mark Spitz, constantly describes himself as "utterly unremarkable" (Whitehead 68), someone for whom "all the parts were there. Extra screws, even. There was just something wrong in the execution" (70). He never has any big dreams, or recognizable high or low points in his life, or deep relationships. His parents are barely background figures, no significant others are mentioned, and he got his job because a so-called "college buddy" recommended him for it, telling him, "you'll be perfect. It doesn't require any skills" (184). The job in question, working for a suspiciously Starbucks-like coffee company replying to internet comments about the brand, dehumanizes Mark completely, nearly making him into a robot himself, a "binary vulture" "perched on the high-tension wires," "ancient pixelated eyes peeled for scraps" (185).

Mark's connection with other people, and (it is implied) other peoples' connections with each other, are constantly severed during the zombie apocalypse by way of sudden, gruesome deaths. Through descriptions like the one of Mark's job, however, Whitehead implies that interpersonal relationships were already in disrepair pre-apocalypse, because of capitalism. After

he is rescued from zombie-ridden Connecticut and taken by helicopter to Zone One, Mark looks at Manhattan from above for the first time since the dead invaded.

“No picnickers idled on their blankets, no one goldbricked on the benches, and nary a frisbee arched through the sky, but the park was at first-spring day capacity. They didn’t stop to appreciate the scenery, these dead visitors; they ranged on the grass and walkways without purpose or sense, moving first this way and then strolling in another direction until, distracted by nothing in particular, they readjusted their idiot course. It was Mark Spitz’s first glimpse of Manhattan since the coming of the plague, and he thought to himself, My God, it’s been taken over by tourists” (92).

This image is one of many that directly compare New York’s citizenry to the walking dead. At the beginning of the novel, also pre-plague, when Mark poses for a picture with his parents and enlists help from passersby to take it, people are described as “lurching specimen[s]” whose possession of “cow-eyed vacancy” or a “local wretchedness inverting their spines” marks them as either tourists or native New Yorkers (4). Though the city and its inanimate capitalist elements always seem so alive (the poster behind Mark’s family as they have their picture taken is “screaming over their left shoulders” and the coffee brand he embodies is by turns “helpful” and “passive aggressive”), its human residents seem increasingly defunct (while the poster is “screaming,” his parents’ hands are “dead on his shoulders, year after year,” and when his social media persona is “gossiping” and “hitting send,” Mark himself is “a natural at ersatz human connection,” and an expert of “counterfeit empathy.”) This creates a dismal picture of life under capitalism, pre-zombies. Whitehead implies that the system makes boring, myopic, empty shells of people and that (as Heather Hicks argues in her essay about the novel), “the only threat to the sublime grandeur of New York is modern New Yorkers, with their tendency to spoil the romantic dream by congregating among what they perceive to be their ‘tasteful and affirming catalog furniture’” (Hicks 116). Post-apocalypse, survivors are rendered similarly stultified and lifeless, but by the trauma of the plague instead of the trauma of capitalist society. They retell

their “last night [before the zombies came]” stories like automatons, and wander around in a city covered in grey dust that makes life look and feel monochromatic.

The Girl with All the Gifts spends significantly less time on the “before” part of the apocalypse than its American counterpart (it is far too concerned with the way people accustomed to the horrors of the end times react to the existence of thinking, feeling zombie children for that), but the few glimpses of pre-crisis life it presents bear a striking resemblance to *Zone One*’s. Like Whitehead, Carey uses the recollections of zombie-plague survivors to imply that the apathy, lack of connection, and trauma created by capitalism was making zombies out of people long before the actual zombie virus took over. Perhaps the most significant remembrance of this kind comes in the form of a story told by Miss. Helen Justineau, zombie-child Melanie’s favourite teacher and employee at the army base run jointly by Dr. Caroline Caldwell (a scientist conducting experiments on the zombie-children) and Sgt. Eddie Parks (a veteran soldier keeping the occupants of the camp safe from the “hungries” outside). “You ever kill a kid?... I mean, before the breakdown...” Justineau asks Parks (Carey 218). When the soldier answers, “I never killed a kid who you could really say was still alive,” the teacher goes on to recount the story of a hit-and-run during which she attempted to drive home drunk, accidentally killed a child who ran out into the road, decided not to call emergency services, and then slept through the night without issue. Of the many traumatic aspects of the narrative, the lack of disruption in her sleep is what Justineau is disturbed by most. “I even slept, Parks,” she says, “can you believe that?” (221). Justineau’s story, like Mark Spitz’s flashbacks, is full of shock and pain but bereft of the human connection that is supposed to come with it. No other people come into Justineau’s account of the incident: not the people at the “party” from which she was travelling, nor the family of the boy she killed. The tale features her mulling over whether she should tell the

authorities (“turn herself in”), but not whether she should confide in someone close to her, or seek advice from a person she trusts. Even the child she kills seems more like an object than a human being, “just there, suddenly” and bouncing off the car “like a ball.” When the teacher kneels down next to him to assess the damage, the boy has no distinguishing features, and she describes him as though he is a doll, “broken in pieces,” “so his arms and legs didn’t even bend the right way” (221).

The dissociation between people inside Justineau’s story is mirrored by her inability to connect with Parks during the telling of the tale. Though this moment constitutes the most emotional intimacy readers have yet seen between these two characters, the soldier and the teacher remain physically quite separate (standing at opposite ends of a rooftop) and only feel comfortable sharing their thoughts because they are inebriated. The way this scene is set mimics the symbolic detachment present in the story, a figurative reminder that the interpersonal connection and support that is so hard to come by after the apocalypse was also exceedingly difficult to find before. Justineau tells Parks the story “without ever making eye contact with him,” and the words “come out of [her] in a flat monotone” (220). The two speak outside, at night, without so much as seeing each other’s faces. The dynamic is likened to that of a priest hearing confession from his parishioner, with the physical barrier of the confessional screen between them.

Though Justineau’s story unfolds in the suburbs and the first several chapters of the larger narrative are set at the army base, away from any large population centre, the metropolis of London plays a significant role in the novel’s conception of pre and post-apocalypse life. Like the city of New York in Whitehead’s text, the large metropolis is often analogous to the figure of the zombie: merciless, mindless, and hungry for fresh meat. In *Zone One*, this is a recurring

metaphor. Like a zombie hoard, the city is overwhelming and traumatic: people are out of breath after running from the undead in the same way that they are breathless after pushing through rush hour subway traffic. One example of this characterization comes when Mark and his team are passing through Chinatown en route to their new assignment. Here, army personnel and clean-up crews joke around and barter with one another: “They were doing what people did in a city” thinks Mark, “catching their breath between errands. And that was life” (Whitehead 55). This analogy also appears in pre-apocalypse accounts of the city. In Mark’s musings about a harmless straggler zombie he calls “the Marge” (because her haircut is modeled after that of a character on a sitcom, a veiled jab at the popularization of “the Rachel” from the T.V. series *Friends*) for example, this idea of the city as a place that traumatizes, that demands more than its citizens can give is reiterated. “They [the Marges] had been reeled in by the old lie of making a name for oneself in the city” thinks Mark. “Now they had to figure out how to survive. Hunt-and-gather rent money, forage ramen... loose flocks of Marges were invariably underfoot, sipping cinnamon-rimmed novelty cocktails and laughing too eagerly” (17).

In Carey’s novel, this symbolic link between the zombie and the city can be seen most clearly when Parks, Justineau and company travel through London on their way to Beacon, the seat of British post-apocalypse civilization. Just as it does for *Zone One*’s characters both pre- and post-plague, the city makes *Girl*’s survivors feel apathetic, overwhelmed, and awed all at once. They are both enamoured and endangered. As the characters make their way through the metropolis, “time elongates, fractures, rewinds and replays in stuttering moments that — while they have no coherent internal logic — all seem dreadfully familiar and inevitable,” and “they are barely able to process what they’re seeing” (Carey 260). When they are not being used to represent the city itself, the zombies often symbolize the citizens of the metropolis. The

characters in Carey's novel, like Mark Spitz in *Zone One*, place zombies in the role of citizens and vice versa. Parks notes that a few hungries are "loitering at the corners like streetwalkers" for example, and even Melanie (who has no experience with cities pre-apocalypse) unknowingly describes the hordes of undead like crowds in a city street as she "push[es] between packed together bodies" to reach her destination. When she sets a fox loose for the hungries to chase, her observations read like a sinister Black Friday caricature: "there are so many of them, crowded in so tightly together, that some of them get knocked down and trampled on" (416). Just like it would have before the plague, the post-zombie city "swallows them very slowly, a piece at a time" (246) as "they walk on endlessly...drifting, dreamlike" consumed and zombified simultaneously.

How The Female Characters are Linked to Order, Tradition, and the Old World

Early in *The Girl with All the Gifts*, soon after our band of survivors has escaped the breached army base, Helen Justineau threatens to leave the group with Melanie in tow. "You think we're all your soldiers now, Sergeant Parks?" she says, "we're not. None of us are under your command ... so that 'come with me if you want to live' bullshit doesn't wash. I'd rather take my chances outside than fall in and trust my life to two hard-wired little soldier boys" (Carey 284). This incident is not the only one designed to cast Justineau as a rebel and a nonconformist, but it uses the most explicitly anti-establishment language. Before this point, the novel has pitted Parks and Caldwell — an army man and a doctor, pillars of the establishment and veritable posterchildren of pre-apocalypse order — squarely against Melanie and Justineau. Melanie is after all (in Parks' words) a "frigging little abortion" (22), occupying a liminal space between "child" and "fungus." In the eyes of most of the human beings around her, she is an anomaly, inherently disobedient and ungovernable simply by virtue of her existence. Justineau,

on the other hand, is a human who has taken the zombie's side: her advocacy for the fungus-infected children places her in an even less populous category than Melanie and her peers. This is mutiny on a scale heretofore inconceivable. Not only has Justineau turned on her fellow human being in favour of the enemy, but the foe she has chosen to side with is an unthinking virus which does not have the capacity to understand that it is being sided with in the first place.

Melanie and Justineau's rebelliousness, however, is not what it seems. Throughout the novel, Carey seems eager to remind his audience that the two have been forced into mutiny by unfeeling systems that seek to quash individuality, and outmoded traditions that discourage acceptance of the new and unfamiliar. Despite these near constant implicit and explicit markers of their radicalism, the teacher-student duo become gradually less revolutionary as the narrative moves forward. The book encourages readers to believe they are watching their protagonists grow more resolved to fight against conservative antagonists (both individual and systemic), yet Melanie and Justineau manage to end the novel as enforcer and instructor (respectively) of the old way of doing things — the only remaining champions of the would-be extinct human tradition.

Though Melanie's very existence as a part-human, part-zombie child challenges the status quo and marks her as an outsider, her path over the course of the narrative is not one that leads her toward self-acceptance. Instead of forcing existing conditions to change for her, Melanie conforms to the expectations of those around her. One of her dearest wishes is to be accepted and treated with respect by authority figures like Dr. Caldwell, Sergeant Parks, and especially Miss. Justineau. When the former two adults swear at her, condescend to her, and abuse her, Melanie only tries harder to make her way into their good graces. After Parks calls Melanie and the other children "little bastards" and "little abortions," for example, Melanie tries

to soften his mood by joking around with him, saying “I won’t bite” (164). Parks’ caustic reply, “like we’d ever give you the chance, sugar plum” does not stop her from being unfailingly polite during later conversations, always using “please” and “thank you,” and meticulously following each rule he sets out for her (165). In a later scene, Melanie even goes so far as to call Parks by his first name instead of his official title, in an attempt to encourage intimacy and avoid his ire. Even though this plan backfires and the interaction ends with Parks’ hand around the zombie-girl’s throat, she is no less kind and deferential to him the next time they see each other. This pattern is mirrored in Melanie’s interactions with Dr. Caldwell. Though she is suspicious about the fact that children who visit Caldwell’s lab seem to disappear forever, she respects the doctor’s position of authority at the camp. Melanie does not press Caldwell for answers or argue with her, though when the doctor treats her concerns with condescension or ignores her altogether. Even when Melanie is taken to the lab herself, and Caldwell is covering her in blue disinfectant, shaving her head, and brandishing a scalpel, Melanie’s trust in the doctor remains unbroken until the last moment. Though she is fairly certain Caldwell means her harm, Melanie is conditioned to view figures of authority as decent and trustworthy, and politeness and reasonableness on her part as a guarantee of a positive outcome. When Caldwell approaches her with the blade, Melanie pushes past her fear and distrust and says politely, “I don’t like learning about science. I want to go back to the classroom, please” (182).

Melanie’s penchant for normativity also extends to her appearance: or rather, thanks to Eurocentric beauty standards, her blonde hair, pale skin, and blue eyes allow her to be categorized as a member of the “imagined norm,” and afford her the privileges that come with this identification. As Kathryn Maria Semcow notes in her essay “Blonde Moments: Women’s experiences with their hair,”

“Because bloneness has stood as a symbol of both whiteness and femininity for centuries, blonde women often experience the privileges associated with whiteness, for example being labelled more ‘beautiful’ than other women, and the disadvantages of being female, for example sexual harassment and the ‘dumb blonde’ stereotype” (Semcow 6).

Melanie’s bloneness and blue eyes unnerve those around her who wish to see her, in all her zombie-human hybrid glory, as dangerous or strange. Sergeant Parks is particularly affected by Melanie’s appearance: the parts of the story he narrates often feature physical descriptions of Melanie, especially of her eyes and hair. When he is preparing her for vivisection by Dr. Caldwell near the beginning of the novel, he describes her, “staring at him with those big, almost lidless eyes — flecks of grey in the baby blue reminding him of what she is, in case he was ever disposed to let that slip his mind” (Carey 182). This ties in neatly with Melanie’s fondness for rules and deferential behaviour toward authority figures, but it also helps to explain her extreme nostalgia for the pre-zombie age. If traditional hierarchies of species, gender, and race are shifting in the new, post-apocalypse landscape, whatever power and privilege Melanie’s whiteness and bloneness affords her will be lost along with everything else in the coming extinction. Melanie peppers her older teachers with questions about what things were like “before,” and expresses her desire to be part of Greek mythology. She describes herself as having skin “like a princess in a fairy tale; skin as white as snow. So she knows that when she grows up she’ll be beautiful, with princes falling all over themselves to climb her tower and rescue her” (17). This kind of nostalgic, backward-looking idealism precludes Melanie from engaging fully in any kind of rebellion, no matter how much a changed status-quo might benefit her, and other children like her, long term. It also encourages her to engage in perpetuating “traditional” stories and modes of thinking when it falls to her and Miss Justineau to “educate” children at the end of the novel. Melanie’s appearance and her overly polite, shy way of

interacting with others feed on and exaggerate each other, and reinforce her connection to (and dependence on) traditional Western gender and racial hierarchies.

Zone One has its own “blonde” in Kaitlyn, another youthful, bubbly, and ultra-feminine character, also suffused with nostalgia for an idealized pre-apocalypse world she barely lived in. The symbolic connotations of her traditional femininity are more overt than Melanie’s, however. Like many of the themes explored by both novels, Whitehead’s interrogation of the power dynamics inherent in white womanhood is more overt, more caustic, and more knowingly critical than Carey’s. The dots between Kaitlyn’s stereotypically feminine persona, order, and reverence for the pre-apocalypse world are therefore more easily connectable. Though the reader is not told explicitly that Kaitlyn is actually blonde, she embodies many of the characteristics Semcow identifies as commonly associated with “blonde” femininity, and ergo “normative,” girlish, and white femininity. Semcow writes,

“I have had many people assume my hair is naturally very blonde... this illusion is partly because of my talented stylist, but also, I believe because the blonde identity has been ingrained in me long enough to develop a blonde personality...rather than sultry like Catherine Zeta-Jones, broody like Helena Bonham-Carter, or sassy like Debbi Mazar, I can be bubbly like Cameron Diaz, cool like Grace Kelly, and controlling like Madonna. While my blonde hair may not be “natural,” I am naturally, a “blonde” (4).

Whitehead’s Kaitlyn is bubbly, cool, and controlling in the extreme, while at the same time distinctly lacking in sassiness and broodiness. She is the kind of feminine, in other words, that is almost exclusively accessible to white, blonde women. When she is introduced to the reader, Kaitlyn is “ration[ing]” her fellow sweeper, Gary, “one unnecessary act of carnage” per floor of the building the team is ridding of stragglers. Mark goes on to observe that his teammate is “a stickler,” “a grade-grubber before the disaster, and... maintain[ing] a grade-grubbing continuum in the throes of reconstruction... applying a yellow highlighter to the typo-ridden manuals from Buffalo” (Whitehead 28). Kaitlyn’s femininity is constructed as a kind of throwback to a type of

woman who could only exist in the pre-apocalypse world, before killing a zombie or bagging up a corpse for burning was a necessary daily chore. She is a hybrid of the girl-next-door and uptight female overachiever archetypes. She is book smart but not real-world smart, peppy and preppy, optimistic, neat, rule-obsessed, and born into wealth and privilege. Kaitlyn's femininity is described as the kind that would have her "braiding the hair of one of her fellow sorority pledges in her favourite pad-around-the-dorm sweatpants" in a pre-zombie world, and is often played for laughs, juxtaposed against a backdrop of blood, guts, and ash. In this apocalypse scenario, however, the traits that made her a Betty (of Archie Comics fame) or a Cameron Diaz pastiche have been translated into characteristics that can be put to use for the benefit of the new government as it attempts to rebuild the old systems. "Here she was," says Mark, just after he imagines her braiding hair in a sorority, "long curls peeking out of her helmet, head cocked as she double-checked orders over the comm and absentmindedly wiped gore from her knife" (57). In moments like these, Whitehead seems to ask his reader whether much translation was really necessary, or whether Kaitlyn, with her white, blonde, upper-class privilege, would always have been a cheerful accessory to racial, economic, and gender inequality, zombie crisis or no zombie crisis.

Relatedly, Kaitlyn has a habit of blinding herself to the more monstrous aspects of post-zombie life, hoping that people can one day "unsee the monsters" that they used to be blissfully able to "overlook everyday" in pre-apocalypse life (297). Her obsession with order and rule-following helps in this endeavour: Kaitlyn is rarely upset by the violence she is forced to administer. She uses memories of the past to insulate herself against the horrors of the present, and so becomes unable to fully accept or adapt to the chaos inherent in the apocalyptic landscape. She thrives under the strict orders of the new government, Buffalo, and fears losing

the “traditional” way of life the organization represents. In one scene, Whitehead shows us that Kaitlyn is more distraught about breaking rules than breaking zombies’ skulls, as she “grimace[s] at the bodies,” distressed mostly “by the reminder that she’d let her unit stray from procedure” (29).

If the lighter, more amusing aspects of Kaitlyn’s bond with traditional femininity are more obvious than Melanie’s, so too are its darker sides. Her brand of gender performance disturbs both superficially, as when she reminisces about her student council successes or recounts her many “perfect” birthday parties while cleaning up pulverised brains, and in deeper, more complicated ways. As Mark Spitz watches her kill hordes of the undead, for example, we hear that Kaitlyn imagines the zombies she cuts down as,

“the rabble who nibbled at the edge of her dream: the weak-willed smokers, deadbeat dads and welfare cheats, single moms incessantly breeding, the flouters of speed laws, and those who only had themselves to blame for their ridiculous credit-card debt... her assembled underclass who simultaneously undermined and justified her lifestyle choices. They needed to be terminated” (266).

In this passage, we see that Kaitlyn’s tendency to cling to the past is motivated by something more sinister than simple sentimental nostalgia. Just as they would have done for Melanie, pre-apocalypse power structures like white privilege and patriarchy both supported and oppressed Kaitlyn during the short time she lived inside of them. Unlike Mark Spitz, a young black man whose post-apocalypse life is steeped in the same racism he endured in pre-zombie society, Kaitlyn (despite the sarcastic comments Mark and his friends make about her exaggerated femininity) undoubtedly enjoys an elevated position in the hierarchy of the post-zombie government. The only name by which we know the novel’s main character is a nickname born of a racist joke (he is dubbed “Mark Spitz,” the name of an Olympic swimmer, after proving wrong a colleague who suggests he cannot swim because he is black). Kaitlyn, on the other hand, is the

person the Lieutenant puts “in charge of Omega Unit” without a second thought because of “her constancy” and her “stickler,” “hall-monitor” characterization (28). She is afforded a modicum of power over others by the apocalypse government, and so she adheres more closely to their rules (though she chafes under them at times), which in turn affords her greater power. As Semcow writes of blonde women, “[they] can benefit as symbols of white privilege, but can also lose as symbols of female sexuality and femininity,” as they exist in “a system of white dominance, as well as in a system of male dominance” (Semcow 10). When the opportunity for reinvention comes along, then, in the form of the zombie plague, Kaitlyn fears losing the power the old world always afforded her, and that “justified her lifestyle choices” (Whitehead 266). Instead of taking the chance to outgrow the limited definition of femaleness to which she was confined in pre-apocalypse America, Kaitlyn leans into her own stereotype, taking every opportunity to push government-sponsored products, enforce rules, and “divert her companions down her nostalgia’s alley” (56).

One of the few other female characters featured in *Zone One* is Ms. Macy, a marketing specialist from Buffalo who visits the Zone periodically to inspect the sweepers’ progress. Macy is career and organization-oriented, like Kaitlyn, but while the younger woman is concerned with following the rules, Macy is one of the people responsible for making them. Also like Kaitlyn, the marketing specialist performs her femininity in a way that seems outdated and absurd in the eyes of those around her, and in the face of the atrocities of the apocalypse. Macy wears high heels, bright blue nailpolish, and lipstick, accessories that seem incongruous against the backdrop of a jeep ride down Broadway during which the driver is continually forced to swerve to avoid “scorched patches of asphalt where the marines roasted dead skels” (203). A description of her walking up some stairs, “tentative in her pumps and frowning and making clucking

sounds” (206) sends a similar message: this kind of femininity, disapproving and conservative and obsessed with appearances, is uncomfortable in this new world. The last time we see Ms. Macy, before the extinction event occurs, she is “walk[ing] backward, pinning the details [of a renovation] into her mind’s scrapbook” (208). Like Kaitlyn and Melanie, Macy wants so badly to see her idealized version the past restored that she cannot bring herself to look toward the future.

Carey’s Dr. Caroline Caldwell is a consummate professional, just like Ms. Macy. Instead of being the darkly amusing personification of a diseased and ineffectual system like her *Zone One* counterpart, Caldwell is a strong, fearsome presence for most of the novel. The doctor is the scientist in charge of the civilian part of the army base where the first part of the book takes place. The station functions as home and school for the zombie children, military outpost for the nascent plague-survivor government, and (most importantly in Caldwell’s eyes) a laboratory that hosts her search for a cure to the zombie disease. Caldwell is first mentioned in passing, from Melanie’s perspective: “Melanie hopes she’ll go to Beacon some day, when the mission is complete and when (Dr. Caldwell said this once) everything gets folded up and put away” (Carey 4). Though we know nothing about her at this point in the story, this line from Melanie gives us immediate insight into the nature of Dr. Caldwell’s character, and what she might represent for femininity more generally. For Caldwell, everything must be done in service of “the mission,” and everything can be destroyed, forgotten about, or folded away the minute said mission is accomplished. To her, the base is not a school or a home or one of humanity’s final outposts, but a stage upon which she can act out her dreams, win accolades, and earn her “rightful” place in the annals of history.

On the surface, Caldwell constitutes the kind of scientist-villain often seen in pop culture media like the *Indiana Jones* films of the 1980s and 90s. She is the selfish, clichéd “I want to

know!” to Indy’s staunch “that [artifact] belongs in a museum!” Dr. Caldwell’s crusade for knowledge does not define her completely though, as it does for her Jonsian predecessors: her quest for order amidst the chaos of the apocalypse is equally integral to her character. When her physical appearance is first described in the novel, it is by Sargeant Parks. “And in due course,” he says, “Dr. Caldwell came along with her white coat and her bright red lipstick and her microscope, and a letter from Beacon with a whole lot of signatures and authorizations on it” (133). This passage is the first of many to depict Caldwell dressed in a white lab coat which, despite the dirtiness of her surroundings and what she terms the “inadequate[ly] antiseptic environment” of her laboratory, seems to remain spotless the entire duration of her stay on the base. This bright, unchanging uniform helps to associate Dr. Caldwell with cleanliness and sterility, and the reference to the “letter from Beacon” with “a whole lot of signatures” connects her to the bureaucracy of the plague survivors’ government. It is not only by way of her government involvement that Caldwell is connected to the pre-apocalypse world, however: in the above passage, she is described as wearing “bright red lipstick,” and in another Melanie can hear her “high heeled shoes” “clacking” on the floor outside her bedroom-cell. These reminders of past conventions are especially interesting because of their uniqueness: it is no accident that Caldwell is the only person who wears makeup or heels throughout the novel. These are items associated with gender roles and traditions that have no place in a new world, which seem frivolous and extraneous when compared to food, water, and other bare necessities of life. Caldwell’s connection to them, therefore, cements her position as a representative of an old order trying to impose itself on a newly disjointed landscape.

Dr. Caldwell’s enemy is Miss Justineau, the only person willing to break the rules in the service of the new lifeform (represented by Melanie) at the beginning of the novel. By the end of

the narrative, however, the teacher has revealed herself to be nearly as conservative as the doctor. Like Parks' and Caldwell's, Justineau's job is closely connected to organization and structure, but she is the only one of her colleagues who must count passing on a sense of order to the next generation among her duties. As a teacher, and especially a teacher of language, history, and literature (this is implied rather than directly stated: what Melanie remembers best about her favourite teacher's lessons is the Greek mythology and fairytales she reads to them), Justineau is not only in charge of passing on the customs and order of the modern classroom, but the larger cultural order as well. Justineau is supposed to be teaching the hungry children so Caldwell can measure their ability to learn, but she seemingly inadvertently also teaches them how to be people; or at least, how people see themselves, their culture, and their history. How people think people ought to be. This idea of stories imparting a kind of cultural order is explored in a scene between Justineau and Parks, when the latter walks in on one of the former's lessons and begins to berate her for her teaching methods, as Melanie looks on.

“‘I’m reading the children a story, Sergeant Parks,’ she says. ‘I can see that,’ Sergeant’s voice says. ‘I thought the idea was to put them through their paces, not give them a cabaret.’ Miss Justineau tenses... ‘It’s important to see how they process information. But there has to be input so there can be output.’ ‘Input?’ Sergeant repeats. ‘You mean facts?’ ‘No, not just facts. Ideas.’ ‘Oh yeah, plenty of world-class ideas in *Winnie the Pooh*.’

This passage seems on the surface to be a kind of back-and-forth about the value of art, and that is certainly a tempting way to read it — as a defense of the Miss. Justineau brand of pedagogy, the gentle kind that uses art and feeling and empathy to uncover the latent humanity in the infected zombie-children’s brains.

If we look at Justineau’s comments through a posthumanist lens, though, our reading changes. Posthumanism, a school of thought which rejects humanism — its focus on the liberal subject, and its belief in the inherent value of humanity — in favour of myriad new forms of life

to which the anthropocene might eventually give way, is usually used to discuss technological advancement. Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," for example, presents the cyborg (a creature born of technology) as the ideal posthuman figure because of its ability to disrupt traditional gender and species divides. More recently Lauro and Embry, in their paper "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," propose that the zombie functions as a more appropriate vision for the post-anthropocene age because of its "irreconcilable body," so different from the all-mind, almost disembodied cyborg. The figure of the undead "raises the insufficiency of the dialectical model (subject/object)," they write, "and suggests, with its own negative dialectic, that the only way to truly get posthuman is to become anti-subject" (Lauro and Embry 87).

The hungry childrens' ability to survive in the new post-apocalyptic world, coupled with their symbiotic relationship with the zombie fungus, cements their status as posthuman entities. Justineau's attempt to make their posthuman brains more closely resemble those of human children is a sort of evolutionary backtracking: the zombie-children are set to be a departure from and an improvement on humanity, but they have to learn how to be traditionally human first. In her book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Katherine Hayles argues that posthumanism has historically focussed on knowledge as the centre of humanity, and has thus often considered "the erasure of embodiment" a positive step in humanity's evolution. Some posthumanists imagine a certain freedom in disembodiment, she writes, but privileging the mind over the body as if they are separate entities is actually a humanist ideal in disguise, born of the same biases posthumanism seeks to outrun. Like Lauro and Embry, Hayles wants to look beyond the mind-centric cyborg in her search for the ideal posthuman figure. She writes,

“The erasure of embodiment is a feature common to *both* the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman. Identified with the rational mind, the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body. Only because the body is not identified with the self is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality” (Hayles 4).

Hayles argues for a posthumanism that allows for embodiment; that rejects the humanist ideal of mind as “tyrant” over the “kingdom” of the body. Though *Girl with all the Gifts* initially seems to want to do this, by presenting the zombie-children as a hopeful posthuman alternative to the flawed and corrupt survivors of the zombie apocalypse, Miss Justineau’s pedagogy belies this meaning. In the passage above, the “output” to which Miss Justineau refers is a kind of cultural reconditioning, achieved through the students’ immersion in human cultural myths. This idea of “reconditioning” plays a significant role in Kyle Bishop’s analysis of Carey’s novel in his book *The Written Dead: Essays on the Literary Zombie*. Teachers of zombies in other works, Bishop writes, often “primarily approach zombie education via conditioning, a series of repetitive acts designed to encourage cognitive development — or, at least, remembered human knowledge and behaviour” (Bishop 596). Justineau, in what Bishop calls her “remarkably normalized classroom setting” is not only normalizing the children, but normalizing for the children her idea of what constitutes the “proper” way to be a person.

“Like the growling of a promising party behind the door”: When Women Embrace Chaos

Melanie buys into the norms Justineau presents without question. As we examined earlier, she initially seems to be a paragon of order: she is the top of her class (Caldwell calls her “our little genius”), she raises her hand before answering teachers’ questions, and she accepts without so much as a word of dissent the strange routine of the base, and her poor treatment at the hands of Parks and his men. Disturbingly, it is not only acceptance of these routines that Melanie learns, but enjoyment as well. “Every once in a while in the block,” she narrates, “there

is a day that doesn't start right. A day when all the repeating patterns that Melanie uses as measuring sticks for her life fail to occur, one after another, and she feels like she's bobbing around helplessly in the air — a Melanie shaped balloon" (Carey 62). This desire for order is something that has been prescribed for Melanie and the children by the adults in charge; the scientists, soldiers, and instructors of the world. Donna Haraway argues that "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and...*responsibility* in their construction" (her emphasis) will help to create the ideal posthuman future, citing the cyborg as the figure that most readily embodies this mix of chaos and order. Unlike Haraway's cyborg, however, Melanie (Carey's posthuman figure) clings desperately to strict, sanitized boundaries. She and her fellow zombie-children cannot be classified as cyborgs, therefore, but they are not the mindless, thoroughly embodied figures imagined by Lauro, Embry, or Hayles either. In fact, much of Melanie's character arc consists of her endeavours to draw lines between the chaotic zombie part of herself and the girlish, orderly straight A student, and to cultivate within her undead brain the "rational mind" of the humanist subject. Carey constantly depicts this ostensibly posthuman figure as a creature deeply uncomfortable with her own difference.

The first time Melanie slips out of order and disrupts the clear boundaries she has set for herself, she is terrified: she nearly attacks Miss Justineau, who has foolishly entered her charge's cell without the pheromone-blocking cream Carey's humans wear to render themselves undetectable by hungries. Already in this first encounter with the chaos inside her, however, the conditioning of Melanie's traditional upbringing wins over the monstrous part of her. Before her zombie instincts take over, Melanie warns Justineau that she is going to attack her, and the teacher is able to slam the door before Melanie can reach her. Her wild instincts are described as "a man with a big dog on a leash and she's both of them," insinuating that she already has some

kind of handle on them. “The first bolt slides home exactly as she hits the door,” says Melanie in her third person narration. “Melanie claws at it, wondering at her own stupid, hopeful fingers. The door won’t open now, but some animal inside her still thinks it might” (123).

Though it is depicted negatively in this instance, when the base is overrun by zombies and Parks, Justineau, Caldwell, and Melanie are forced to escape together, we begin to see the positive side of our protagonist’s zombism. In the wild no-man’s-land of London, the human survivors become dependent on Melanie’s spontaneity and rule breaking in order to survive. The first instance of this is especially notable because it is a reversal of the scene in which Melanie tries to attack her mentor. In the midst of the chaos caused by the zombies overrunning the base, Miss Justineau is nearly killed by a few “junkers” (people living outside the regulations of the new government) who have come to scavenge in the wake of the camp’s downfall. Instead of attacking Justineau, as she did earlier, Melanie lets her wild instincts loose upon the junker.

Importantly, this is one of the novel’s most graphic scenes:

“The shock of that first taste of blood and warm flesh is so intense that it almost makes Melanie faint. Nothing in her life has ever been this good...now she bites and tears and chews and swallows...[she] likes the way his opened thigh becomes a fountain, as though raw meat was a magic garden, a hidden landscape that she never glimpsed until now” (209-210).

Critically, Melanie’s love for Justineau — her noble protective instinct — is what brought her to this point, not her bloodlust. This is one of the most dramatic depictions of violence in the entire novel, but because it is perpetrated by Melanie, and Melanie is symbolic of a new and improved version of humanity, it must be justified. Melanie is a savior, not a monster: she does not engage in chaos for the sake of chaos, but instead wields her wildness in the service of order.

Almost as soon as her chaotic side is let loose and depicted positively, the narrative begins to show how Melanie’s cultural conditioning encourages her to use her anarchic zombie

nature to uphold the rules of human society. When Melanie discovers a group of feral zombie-children (just like herself, except they have grown up without the conditioning provided by life in a government-sanctioned school/army base) living amongst the other hungries in London, she cannot use reason or language to stop them from hunting down and eating her human friends. They have not been taught to follow human order, as she has, and so they refuse to conform to it. Melanie recognizes this, and in Parks' and Justineau's hour of need, embraces her own inner chaos in order to communicate with them. As Parks tries to defend himself and Justineau from the children, "something new inserts itself. Deafeningly. Terrifyingly. Spitting fire and screaming like all the demons of hell" (681). Melanie has used "the limited materials that were available to her" to make herself look "as little like a girl and as much like a god or titan as she can" (682). She is naked, holding a screeching personal alarm of Miss. Justineau's, and covered in the blue disinfectant gel Dr. Caldwell uses for dissections. The overlap between chaos and order is important to note in this passage, especially because it is juxtaposed by a strict separation between femininity and chaos. In this moment, Melanie has worked to obscure her feminine orderliness as much as possible, covering her "girl" body with the bizarre garb of a "titan." Everything about her costume is designed to communicate that Melanie belongs to the realm of the monstrous, the unknown, and the chaotic, but she is wearing the costume to exert a kind of order over the feral children. She is laying down the law, so to speak, to protect a teacher and a soldier, who symbolize the survival of the old world order. The next time she wears this costume (at the end of the novel, post extinction event) Melanie is using it to force the feral children to sit quietly and learn from Miss Justineau as she teaches language classes.

Hayles argues that a posthuman future always "both evokes terror and excites pleasure" in the people imagining it (Hayles 283). This central tenet of her argument can be seen in almost

every modern (post-George Romero) zombie novel, including *Girl with All the Gifts* and *Zone One*. The undead in Whitehead's and Carey's texts are both terrifying and attractive to people. Melanie's wide "baby blue" eyes connote girlish innocence for Parks, and encourage his nascent affection for her by reminding him of the baby he might have raised with his wife had she not died in the apocalypse. When he notices "flecks of grey" in the blue, though, a sign of the zombie infection that "reminds him of what [Melanie] is" (Carey 161), he is repulsed by her again. Similarly, when Ms. Macy visits Zone One, Mark says that he "like[s] the sound of her heels on the floor. They echoed with enticing glamour, like the growling of a promising party behind the door at the end of the hall" (Whitehead 205). In this line, Whitehead foreshadows the imminent collapse of Buffalo's new society at the hands (and teeth) of the zombies waiting outside the city's walls, and links this collapse with the trappings of a traditional femininity that is not welcome in this new world. He uses the classic zombie movie image of danger growling behind a door to symbolize the grisly invasion that is to come, but casts it as a "promising party." The zombie crisis is at once irresistibly attractive to Mark, and dangerous for Ms. Macy — he cannot wait to join the party, while all she wants is to suppress it.

In *Zone One*, the only female character who comes close to losing control is Mark Spitz's love interest, Mim. Mark meets Mim in the midst of the breakdown, in a toy store in Connecticut, before the establishment of Buffalo or the Zone. Mim is someone who is always ready for disorder to reassert itself. She regales Mark with stories of her survival, most of which end with her ready to run before any of her companions so much as acknowledge the danger. She rarely speaks about the past, unlike Kaitlyn, and refuses to look at it as a blueprint for the future, unlike Ms. Macy. She has declined to bring any of the traditional trappings or accessories of womanhood with her into this new world. Kaitlyn is caught squirrelling away some of her

favourite face cream, and playing with her hair. Ms. Macy has her lipstick and high heels. Mim, on the other hand, eats beans from a can and declines to converse about her deceased children. For her, the past is the past, and the most important thing is to “keep moving.” Unlike Kaitlyn’s or Macy’s, Mim’s womanhood is not presented as ridiculous. Her life before the breakdown is sketched out but not filled in and subsequently made absurd and grotesque, as Kaitlyn’s is. She also avoids being an object of masculine disdain, like Cadwell with her spotless lab coat and red lipstick — Mim has lived in the trenches, so to speak. She has gotten dirt under her fingernails and (like the male characters in both novels, Mark Spitz, Sergeant Parks, and Private Gallagher) understands that true survival means rolling with the proverbial punches.

“Everything Must Go”: How These Endings are Not What They Seem

Hayles also argues that a posthuman future is not necessarily an apocalyptic one. The posthuman world, counterintuitive though it may seem, is designed to include more people, not fewer, because those who have historically been labeled “other” by the male- and Euro-centric humanist structure will no longer find themselves shut out. Though both *Zone One* and *Girl with All the Gifts* end with an extinction event, each novel also (paradoxically) offers a vision of continuance. This is easier to see in Carey’s novel. After Melanie’s fire releases the zombie spores into the atmosphere, she creates a classroom for the feral zombie-children and installs Miss Justineau (the only human she has saved, via hazmat suit and air purifier) as their teacher. This is set up as a kind of cleaning of the proverbial slate. As Melanie tells a dying Parks,

“Your people and the junker people will keep killing each other, and you’ll both kill the hungries wherever you find them, and in the end the world will be empty. This way is better...the children will grow up and they won’t be the old kind of people but they won’t be hungries either. They’ll be different. Like me, like the rest of the kids in the class...they’ll be the *next* people. The ones who make everything okay again” (696).

Here, Melanie's actions are presented as essentially noble: she is ridding the world of the scourge of humanity, but keeping the "good" things about their society, like Greek myths, fairy tales, and classroom etiquette (i.e. the "ideas" Miss Justineau refers to in her conversation with Parks). This privileging of ideas over embodiment means that *Girl with All the Gifts* fails to deliver on its posthumanist promise, and that the supposedly "different" "*next* people" who "make everything okay again" are going to carry many of the same foundational ideas, and therefore biases, into the clean new world with Justineau's lessons. The strangeness and newness of the children's hybridity, the departure from normalcy and order that their chaotic selves represent: none of it constitutes anything truly radical (i.e. different from "[the Sergeant's] people" and "the junker people," as Melanie implies in her speech to Parks) if they can be taught to subdue and control it with minds shaped by the old, pre-apocalypse order. It is here that the repressive power of traditional femininity exhibits its true power in Carey's novel, smuggling gender inequality and other social hierarchies, disguised as cultural heritage, into the post-extinction world.

Unlike *Girl with all the Gifts*, with its unusual focus on zombie consciousness and subjectivity, the undead in *Zone One* have few discernable individual character traits. They are what Bishop describes as "non-agentic" zombies, more like a force to be reckoned with than subjects to be spoken to. They are still, however, like Carey's walking dead, full of life in their own way, and in many ways more lively than the human beings who walk among them. In contrast to the lifelessness and apathy of the survivors, the zombies at the end of the novel are especially effervescent. Unlike Melanie and her kind, however, their liveliness cannot be tamed or controlled. In *Manifesto*, Haraway writes that the cyborg will be "suspicious of the reproductive matrix" and "have more to do with regeneration." While Carey's zombies are created by way of traditional reproduction, Whitehead's take after the cyborg, rejecting any

dependence on “metaphors of rebirth” in favour of regeneration, which allows for the new to be “monstrous, duplicated, potent”: choosing chaos over order. In the third act of the narrative, the city and accompanying capitalist system that Buffalo and its followers have been painstakingly rebuilding is demolished and devoured by the zombies in a matter of hours. Mark watches the scene from a rooftop.

“It was not water that flooded the grid but the dead...the most mammoth convocation of their kind Mark Spitz had ever had the misfortune to see...an abhorrent parade that writhed and palsied up Broadway until the light failed. The damned bubbled and frothed on the most famous street in the world... still proudly indicating the tribes to which they had belonged (Whitehead 303).

Unlike either the pre- or post-apocalypse human beings, the zombies of *Zone One*’s extinction event are described as moving, “frothing,” “writhing,” “palsied” entities. Gone is the shuffling and ambling of earlier pages: the dead of the end times are terrifyingly alive, and imbued with action. The zombies are not the only ones undergoing change at the end of the novel, though: Mark also becomes livelier as the extinction event begins. Just as things for Buffalo begin to go sideways, Mark finally seems to find his footing again: after one of the people in his sweeper unit is attacked, he feels “energized, a reptilian knob at the base of his skull throbbing” (288). This feeling of revitalization matches Mark’s earlier conflation of a “promising party” with a growling group of the undead, or his description of the zombies pouring into Zone One as a “convocation,” a formal celebratory gathering instead of a “mass” or a “herd.”

Order cannot be imposed on Whitehead’s undead. The bleak bureaucracy symbolized by Buffalo and the capitalism-induced malaise that the “stragglers” represent are both proven unsustainable in the new, post-apocalyptic world. Unlike Carey, who tames his pandemonium with old-order ideas and makes his “new people” nearly identical to their predecessors, Whitehead embraces the disorder the zombies produce. His posthuman world, for better and

worse, will contain none of the organizing principles, biases, or ideals that governed pre-apocalypse life. Sherryl Vint writes that the non-agentic zombie is similar to Haraway's cyborg in its disregard for clear boundaries (it "deconstruct[s] the binary of living and death") but different in that it is not a lively figure, it is "surviving, but not really alive...persist[ing] in a future without hope" (Vint 172). While Whitehead's stragglers fit perfectly with this description, his third act zombies do not. As Mark stares at the stream of zombies reclaiming New York, he seems to see this future, and is not devastated or dismayed. "These were not the Lieutenant's stragglers," he says of the dead rushing past, "transfixed by their perfect moments, clawing through to some long-gone version of themselves that existed only as its ghost. These were the angry dead, the ruthless chaos of existence made flesh. These were the ones who would resettle the broken city. No one else" (321). The mindless, embodied cruelty of zombism, for Whitehead's characters, improves upon the mindless, disembodied cruelty of capitalism. The greater tragedy for Mark and his fellow survivors would have been what Kaitlyn and Macy wanted, and what Justineau and Melanie achieved: a backward march into an old order that did and cared nothing for them.

Near the end of the novel, Mark tells a story about a survivor he met while working on Zone One's wall, a young woman who called herself "The Quiet Storm." The Quiet Storm does not adhere to any of the gender norms that hold Macy and Kaitlyn back from embracing the chaos of their new landscape. She sports a shaved head and looks like "a lean greyhound, hyperalert in the manner of those who'd suffered their refuge overrun too many times" (Whitehead 174). She possesses none of Kaitlyn's nostalgia, either, or rule-following instincts. When she is ordered by Buffalo to make an anti-zombie barricade out of abandoned cars, she uses the vehicles to create a giant mosaic instead, the full design of which can only be seen from

above. When Mark leaves the job and is taken by helicopter to begin his duties in Zone One, he sees *The Quiet Storm's* artwork spread out below him.

“He saw her mosaic, in its immense tonnage, outlasting all of Buffalo’s schemes, the operations underway and the ones yet to be articulated. What readership did she address? Gods and aliens, anyone who looked down at the right time, from the right perspective” (290).

Despite the desolation all around him, and his own disillusionment, this passage shows that Mark believes in the existence of a positive future, it is simply different than Melanie’s. This passage reminds the reader that chaos does not only denote disorder, confusion, and mayhem: it can also mean “the formless void believed to have existed before the creation of the universe” (OED). In many ways, Whitehead’s zombies come closer to embodying this definition. They constitute a kind of primordial matter which might actually be more likely than Carey’s schoolroom to contain the raw material necessary to make a new world.

When they cling to stereotypes of femininity from the pre-apocalypse world (high heels, caregiving roles, lipstick, memories of class presidencies and sorority sleepovers), the women of the apocalyptic metropolis are unable to accept the changes and trauma wrought by the zombie plague. When they let go of these totems of the old order (as Melanie does when she loses control at various intervals throughout Carey’s novel, or as *The Quiet Storm* does by simultaneously refusing to engage in both traditional gender presentation and capitalist work ethic), they are able to accept the chaos the zombies represent, and they find survival to be easier, almost second nature. If however, like the marketing executive from Buffalo, or like Miss Justineau, they continue to live in the past and thus within the confines of traditional femininity, they are doomed either to death or a kind of living death in the post-apocalypse world.

Carey and Whitehead’s novels cast traditionally feminine women as unceasingly backwards-looking, and unquestioningly loyal to the harmful power structures of their Western

worlds. This seems feminist at first glance. We are shown how these women wield the power and privilege they are unduly granted to cause harm and support old-world inequality. We are also presented with alternatives: women who do not conform to traditional gender roles, like Mim and The Quiet Storm, seem to constitute strong, powerful, more evolved versions of their ultra-feminine peers. Distaste for traditional femininity in these two zombie novels, however, just like distaste for traditional femininity in real life, reveals itself upon closer inspection to be just another, more subtle brand of sexism.

Like the effects of bloneness that Semcow mentions, ultra-feminine femininity allows certain women (often white, blonde women) access to power that women who are people of colour, or who do not appear “traditionally” feminine, are not allowed access to. As we can see when we look at Caldwell or Kaitlyn, however, traditional femininity also has its disadvantages. These characters are disproportionately condescended to, infantilized, and ridiculed, explicitly because of their ultra-feminine qualities. When Whitehead and Carey rightly point out the hypocrisies, prejudices, and privileged lives of their most feminine characters, they often simultaneously reveal a deep repulsion for traditional femininity that should not be overlooked. After the chaos of zombie-induced revolution, we get a glimpse of the post-extinction world, the “better” world that a “clean slate” has allowed these characters to have. In Carey’s novel, because traditional femininity has survived in Melanie and Justineau, the clean slate seems false, already sullied with old-world order. In Whitehead’s novel, because there is a true clean slate, no ultra-feminine women have been allowed to survive. These novels present post-extinction scenarios which encourage us to rejoice in the demise of a certain kind of woman: but should her absence in these new, more equitable worlds not make us suspicious of how equitable they really are? In the age of the zombie, traditionally feminine women are not allowed to experience the

exhilaration that comes with complete failure and total chaos. They are depicted as people who refuse to give up on the pre-zombie world they idealize. Only if they relinquish their hold on the past, only once they accept that their kind of femininity has no place in the new world, will they be allowed to participate in the creation of something truly different.

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