Terror in Horror Genres: The Global Media and the Millennial Zombie Analysis

On any given Sunday night, there is a high probability that one would find me curled up in a chair with my eyes glued to the television set. This is because Sunday nights are my time to relax, unwind, and watch some glorious zombie-slaying action via AMC’s The Walking Dead. Maybe it’s because society has historically been fascinated with the reanimation of the deceased, or that The Walking Dead is simply the greatest post zombie-apocalyptic aftermath show on television today, but whatever the reason is, I along with 12 million other viewers around the world have become utterly obsessed with the undead and how to survive in the wake of a zombie outbreak.

Nicole Birch-Bayley attempts to explain in her article, Terror in Horror Genres: The Global Media and the Millennial Zombie, that the way society interprets zombies and zombie behavior has considerably changed since the dawn of the new millennium. Analyzing four zombie films produced over the modern era, including Danny Boyle’s 28 Weeks Later, Zack Snyder’s remake of the classic Dawn of the Dead, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo’s 28 Weeks Later, and George Romero’s lesser known Diary of the Dead, Birch-Bayley explains that the stylistic changes from zombies as sluggish, slow-moving, and almost comical movie monsters to the ferociously aggressive, highly active, and incessantly blood-thirsty fiends of today is representational of society’s fears and anxieties about surviving global disasters. Birch-Bayley ultimately reveals that the arrival of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which rattled the core foundations of the American belief in a seemingly indestructible United States, brought new global concerns of how to cope with a coming human crisis. Global media’s exploitation of rising social and political tensions, often feeding viewers exaggerations of hyper-violence and urgent international threats, carried over into the zombie-horror genre. Films began to mimic similar global concerns and the pervading sense of urgency,
The intentions of Birch-Bayley’s article to discuss that the zombies of today are no longer the hokey, voodoo-made, mildly racist zombies from the days of Night of the Living Dead are made clearly, and her point is backed up with sufficiently compelling evidence. However, the author focuses primarily on film texts for her analyses of changing cultural perceptions of the undead, which limits the strength of the overall argument. Taking a look at the stylization of zombies in other growing, popular mediums, such as video games (i.e. Resident Evil) or graphic novels (i.e. Robert Kirkman’s The Walking Dead), would provide an even greater indication for the shift in society’s growing concern of how to deal with globalized tensions. Another limitation of the article is that Birch-Bayley focuses solely on American cinema and American perceptions, restricting her claim that the societal fears depicted in zombies’ characterizations are truly representative of “global” apprehensions. Nonetheless, with zombie-mania on the rise, as the recent film release of World War Z and AMC’s The Walking Dead continue to garner a bastion of fans, Birch-Bayley’s article may be a first step to understanding exactly why zombie popularity has reached an all-time high in the new millennium.

Citations
