

## 40-Adapting a post-apocalyptic world of zombies: *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016)

Olgahan BAKŞI YALÇIN<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The growing number of zombie narratives across diverse media indicate a revival of the zombie genre in the early twenty-first century, in particular in the United States. These narratives deal with not only the fight for survival but also with the consequences of the global zombie outbreak as in Seth Grahame-Smith's 2009 zombie mash-up novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Adhering closely to the plot of Austen's 1813 novel, Grahame-Smith nevertheless transforms early 19th-century England into a place menaced by a plague of the undead where the five Bennet sisters are accomplished martial arts warriors and Fitzwilliam Darcy is a monster-hunter possessing superior Oriental fighting skills. It is clear that both literary and filmic rewritings of Jane Austen's canonical work, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) still find large and enthusiastic audiences: Grahame-Smith's book immediately became a *New York Times* bestseller, with more than 700,000 copies sold worldwide while the film rights were quickly acquired by Hollywood. Director Burr Steers, who also wrote the screenplay of the post-apocalyptic *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016), inserts a prologue and a final zombie attack into the narrative and yet, as this paper argues, successfully preserves the essence of the story as well as the formal elements of theme, characterization, style, and tone from the Graham-Smith novel.

**Keywords:** *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies*, Zombie Apocalypse, Zombie Genre, Adaptation Studies, Fidelity

## Kıyamet sonrası zombiler dünyasını uyarlamak: *Aşk ve Gurur + Zombiler* (2016)

### Öz

Çeşitli medya araçlarında artan sayıdaki zombi anlatıları, yirmi birinci yüzyılın başlarında, özellikle Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde, zombie türünün yeniden canlandığını göstermektedir. Bu anlatılar sadece hayatta kalma mücadelesini değil, aynı zamanda Seth Grahame-Smith'in 2009 zombi karma romanı *Aşk ve Gurur ve Zombiler*'de olduğu gibi küresel zombi salgınının sonuçlarını da ele almaktadır. Austen'in 1813 romanının olay örgüsüne sıkı sıkıya bağlı kalarak Grahame-Smith, 19. yüzyılın başlarında beş Bennet kız kardeşin dövüş sanatlarında başarılı savaşçılar ve Fitzwilliam Darcy'nin üstün Oryantal dövüş becerilerine sahip bir zombie avcısı olduğu İngiltere'yi, ölümsüzlerin vebasının tehdit ettiği bir yere dönüştürmektedir. Jane Austen'in kanonik eseri *Aşk ve Gurur*'un (1813) hem edebi hem de film olarak yeniden yazımlarının/uyarlamalarının hâlâ geniş ve coşkulu izleyiciler bulduğu açıktır: Grahame-Smith'in kitabı, dünya çapında 700.000'den fazla kopya satarak hemen *New York Times* en çok satanlar listesine girmiş ve film hakları Hollywood

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü (İstanbul, Türkiye), olgahanbaksi@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5527-9200 [Makale kayıt tarihi: 08.09.2020-kabul tarihi: 20.11.2020; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.816998]

tarafından hızla satın alınmıştır. Kıyamet sonrası *Aşk ve Gurur + Zombiler*'in (2016) senaryosunu da yazan yönetmen Burr Steers, film uyarlamasına bir önsöz ve de son bir zombi saldırısı ekler ve yine de bu makalenin öne sürdüğü gibi, romanın tema, karakter gelişimi, üslup ve ton gibi biçimsel öğeler ile birlikte hikâyenin özünü başarıyla korumaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Aşk ve Gurur + Zombiler*, *Zombie* Kıyameti, *Zombie Türü*, Uyarlama Çalışmaları, Sadakat

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains.”

(Grahame-Smith and Austen, 2009)

## 1. Introduction

The 2000s have witnessed a growing number of zombie-related narratives across diverse media, particularly in the United States (Lanzendörfer, 2018, p. 14). While some of these narratives present the fight for human survival, others introduce the world after a zombie outbreak such as Seth Grahame-Smith's highly successful Austen mash-up, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009). Grahame-Smith combines Austen's 1813 novel with a zombified parallel version – the post-apocalyptic world of the early 19th-century England – Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters are accomplished martial arts warriors while Fitzwilliam Darcy is a zombie-hunter with superior Japanese fighting skills<sup>2</sup>. Grahame-Smith's book immediately became a *New York Times* bestseller, with more than 700,000 copies sold worldwide and Hollywood immediately bought up the film rights (Mulvey-Roberts, 2014, p. 18). The novel has also inspired a literary prequel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (2010) and a sequel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dreadfully Ever After* (2011) by Steve Hockensmith, as well as a graphic novel (2010) that stayed nine weeks on the *NYT* bestseller list for paperback graphic novels (“Paperback Graphic Books”). It is obvious that both literary and cinematic adaptations/appropriations of Jane Austen's canonical work, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) still find large and enthusiastic audiences.

Like many other directors who have been attracted to the tale of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, the writer/director Burr Steers also believed in the fundamental truth of *Pride and Prejudice*: it is a story that always works. By inserting an additional prologue and a final zombie attack into Grahame-Smith's popular literary mash-up, Steers writes the screenplay by following the elements of a zombie horror story and brings the post-apocalyptic world of Regency England to the screen in his movie. The transition from novel to film inevitably changes the medium of communication, yet this paper argues that Steers' adaptation captures the mash-up novel's essence as well as the formal elements such as the theme, characterization, style, and tone despite major changes in the narrative. By identifying and exploring a number of techniques used by Steers in his movie, this paper will also analyze the transition from literary text to an innovative, powerful film and, in doing so, shall pinpoint a number of issues central to any evaluation of zombie literature and subsequent cinematic adaptation.

Robert Stam famously notes that “An adaptation consists in an interested reading of a novel and the circumstantially shaped ‘writing’ of a film” (2005, p. 46). In adaptation studies, it is common practice

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed analysis of mash-up literature, see Amanda V. Riter's *The Evolution of Mashup Literature: Identifying the Genre through Jane Austen's Novels*, MA Thesis, De Montfort University, 2017.

to discuss and evaluate a cinematic adaptation of a literary text in terms of its fidelity to the source text.<sup>3</sup> As Stam's statement implies, the transformation from the literary to the cinematic is a reading of the literary text, in other words, one of an infinite number of possible readings. Thus, when Steers' film enters into a dialogue with the mash-up novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), it also inevitably finds itself in communication not only with other cinematic adaptations of Grahame-Smith's source text but also with adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, not to mention the classic novel itself. Steers clearly expresses his intention while adapting Grahame-Smith's novel as follows: "For me, it was reinterpreting Jane Austen" (Whittaker, 2016). The dialogic relationship in the adaptation process implies that a viewer's experience of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is affected and shaped by encounters with these other texts.

In this context, Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of *heteroglossia* and *polyphony* offer a useful framework for the study of individual texts and their potentials for a dialogic relationship. According to Bakhtin, all speech utterances are heteroglot and polyphonic in that they partake of "different-languages" and resonate with "many-voices." Heteroglossia (other-languagedness) and polyphony (many-voicedness) are the base conditions "governing the operation of meaning in any utterance."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the writings of Bakhtin assert the primacy of context to the textual meaning which indicates the significance of the social, cultural, and political nature of all texts. In other words, the meaning of every text is created by the social, historical situation in which it is produced and received. Thus, a new text/work interacts with previous texts/works of literature and other writers/directors. From this perspective, Steers' film functions as a critical reading of Grahame-Smith's mash-up novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, and exemplifies the dialogic relationship between the novel and its movie adaptation.

As many film critics would agree, effective adjustments from page to screen are never precise translations of the source text. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon argues, "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying" (2006, p. 7). Steers' interpretation of the source text brings the film into dialogue with pressing concerns of the twenty-first century – violence, war, capitalism, media consumption, consumerism, alienation, and fear of pandemics. Moving back in time, narratively to the early 1700s for a prologue, the movie provides the lens through which Steers' reading of Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is filtered. Since the elements of this prologue resonate throughout the film and in a way foreshadow the ending in which George Wickham (Jack Huston) turns out to be the leader of the zombie community, the discussion in this study focuses primarily on these two scenes.

## 2. The Prologue – an Illustrated History of Zombified Britain

While adapting Grahame-Smith's mash-up novel, Steers strives to create a convincing re-creation of Regency England in the post-apocalyptic world of zombies as clear in his own words: "Play it straight. We would create this alternate Regency world where the zombie invasion had happened" (Whittaker, 2016). To this end, in contrast to the novel's narrative, Steers inserts a prologue in which Darcy is introduced as a fearless warrior/ a military figure with a high level of combat skills dedicated to the

<sup>3</sup> For a recent discussion on the fidelity discourse, see Casie Hermansson's "Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse," 2015.

<sup>4</sup> For an elaboration of Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony, see Linda M. Park-Fuller's (1986) "VOICES: Bakhtin's Heteroglossia and Polyphony, and the Performance of Narrative Literature." *Literature in Performance* 7, pp. 1-12.

annihilation of zombies. The opening scene of the movie shows an extreme-long shot of Colonel Darcy (Sam Riley) crossing the Hingham bridge with his horse – the only bridge left intact after the zombie outbreak while the voice of Lily James (as Elizabeth Bennet) narrates the first lines of the source text: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains” (*PP+Z*, 2016). The structure of the sentence asks the audience to think about who actually acknowledges this truth and whether this truth is true or not. Thus, the zombie version of the story is also ironic and at times witty as it is in the source text. Reflecting the human’s point of view, Elizabeth’s voice-over continues to inform the audience about the recent growing zombie threat in the neighborhood 70 years after the outbreak: “Never was this truth more plain than in the recent attacks at Netherfield Park, in which an entire household was slaughtered by a horde of the living dead during a whist party” (*PP+Z*, 2016). This warning about the increase in the zombie attacks foreshadows the coming events as well as the end of the film in which Elizabeth joins Darcy in the final battle against the zombies.

In accordance with the zombie horror genre, in gloomy dark weather, Darcy reaches the entrance to the underground tunnel, providing a dark safe passage to the house of Mrs. Featherstone (Dolly Wells) in Hertfordshire: however, he has to submit to physical investigation for security reasons, standing naked in a wooden cabinet illuminated by candles while the priest in charge checks his body through a small hole for any signs of a zombie bite. After the investigation is over, Darcy tricks the priest by mentioning about a wound that has never existed in his body, which reveals the fact that the priest is not conducting the examination properly. Steers’ ridiculing of the priesthood evokes Austen’s own depiction of Mr. Collins, a caricature-figure who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet’s property and yet cannot help constantly making himself a fool in Austen’s world. Likewise, for some critics, Grahame-Smith considers Austen’s characters as ridiculous since they are disconnected from the societal problems around them. To Grahame-Smith, “no matter what’s going on around them [the characters] have a singular purpose to maintain their rank and to impress others” (Grossman, 2009). This segment also underlines the loyalty of Steers’ adaptation not only to the witty and ironic style of the source text but also to the tradition of comedy horror film, in which scary elements such as zombies attacking and eating people’s brains are not meant to terrify the reader/viewer but to make them laugh instead.

Upon arriving at Mrs. Featherstone’s manor house in Hertfordshire, Darcy observes that Mrs. Featherstone is playing cards with a group of people who seem to be indifferent to the mysterious zombie plague that terrorizes the good citizens of Hertfordshire, which also exemplifies the aforementioned attitude of the high-class people in the source text. Even when Darcy openly announces the purpose of his urgent visit, which is because of “a report that somebody here has been bitten,” Mrs. Featherstone appears unruffled, obviously relying on the precautions she has taken: “There hasn’t been a zombie incident in over two years” (*PP+Z*, 2016) she argues dismissively. However, Darcy expounds that “A newly infected zombie is almost impossible to detect, until they’ve ingested their first human brains, at which point the transformation accelerates with every subsequent kill” (*PP+Z*, 2016). Darcy’s explanation on the zombie transformation indicates engagement in a dialogic relationship with earlier traditions of the zombie genre in which “...the zombies consume brains and transfer their disease through biting, as well as follow the US director George Romero school of slow, shuffling movement” (Riter, 2017, p. 91). The modern concept of zombies originated from George A. Romero’s apocalyptic film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) in which survivors find refuge from flesh-eating zombies in a suburban shopping mall (Mulvey-Roberts, 2014, p. 25;

Lanzendörfer, 2018, p. 7).<sup>5</sup> Given this link with the critique of consumerism, it may be significant that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was published during the global financial crisis of 2007–2008.

In the light of this information, Steers' zombie adaptation manifests the specific political, social and historical context in which it was produced, and thus presents a serious social critique of a society marred with endless violence, war, media consumption, blind consumerism, consumer culture, and alienation.<sup>6</sup> Sean McKittrick, the producer of the movie, *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016) expresses a similar intention in making the film: "The zombies represent the biggest fears we have, and they're an amplification of the hierarchical themes in Austen's original story, in terms of the class system in Victorian England and the independent woman that Elizabeth Bennet is" (Production Notes, 2016). In this context, thinking of zombies as a cultural metaphor can help us understand current national, racial, and politico-economic anxieties of contemporary times. Scholar Kyle William Bishop explores the pre-history and defining characteristics of zombie films arguing that zombies are a uniquely American and unprecedentedly visual or cinematic monster (2010, p. 31). As a zombie expert, Matt Mogk defines a modern zombie as "a relentlessly aggressive, reanimated human corpse driven by a biological infection" (2011, p.6). While Kelly Baker argues that "[z]ombies become metaphors for anything from consumerism to terrorism to mindless politics/politicians to banking to epidemics to smart phone users" (2013, p. 75), for Peter Dendle, the recent resurgence in zombie movies mirrors a society "preoccupied with alienation," particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 (cited in Stratton, 2011, p. 269). More recently, Camilla Fojas has called them "a loaded cultural figure that symbolizes a number of social fears about disaster, ruin, and dehumanization" (2017, p. 80).

In the previous scene mentioned above, Colonel Darcy, one of the most skilled zombie killers in the movie, has a secret agenda when he sits at one of the tables to play cards at Mrs. Featherstone's house. Accordingly, he takes out a small vial containing a particular set of Carrion flies that can detect the undead. When the flies land on Mr. Kingston's (Angus Kennedy) face, his eyes turn red signaling his being infected by a zombie bite, which enables Darcy to exhibit his combat skills by breaking a glass and stabbing him on his head before decapitating him. The moment Darcy attacks the infected zombie that the Carrion flies identified, the camera angle changes. Instead of showing the whole action, it focuses on the zombie's point of view. At the point of decapitation, the camera fades out and a growling zombie sound is heard. Interestingly, we see a similar alteration in the camera angle later when Casandra (Hermione Corfield), one of the young girls in Mrs. Featherstone's company, heads upstairs to check on Mr. Kingston's niece, Annabelle (Jess Radomska), after Darcy's interrogation for any other possible infected zombies. Sure enough, Casandra discovers that the niece has already turned into a zombie. The zombie-Annabelle proceeds to attack with her half-decayed face, the camera switches to her point of view, fading out again at the point of attack. These two consecutive changes in the camera angle and perspective indicate an emphasis on the zombie point of view, which is usually marginalized in the zombie genre.

Analyzing the invasion of the zombies into the houses of the rich in the prologue is pivotal in terms of understanding Steers' interpretation of Grahame-Smith's mash-up. Firstly, as often mentioned by critics, Austen portrays a limited world in her fiction excluding the working class of the society. In her

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of the zombie history in literature and film, see "Twice Dead: Gender, Class, and Crisis in *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016)," by Erin Casey-Williams and Erika Cornelius Smith, 2017; also see *Books of the Dead: Reading the Zombie in Contemporary Literature* by Tim Lanzendörfer, 2018, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent detailed discussion on the political and cinematic history of zombie literature, see "Twice Dead: Gender, Class, and Crisis in *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016)" by Erin Casey-Williams and Erika Cornelius Smith, 2017; see also *The Subversive Zombie: Social Protest and Gender in Undead Cinema and Television* by Elizabeth Aioissa, 2018.

article, “Jane Austen ... Now with Ultraviolet Zombie Mayhem,” Camilla Nelson points out the lack of interest in the lives of the poor in Austen’s works, and how Grahame-Smith uses zombies in his mash-up novel to address this deficit:

Grahame-Smithe’s text could be said to engage in a radical democratization of Austen’s work, not by reducing the class dimensions of the novel ... but by exacerbating them. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, the material possession of wealth and class actually assumes an increased importance, as only the wealthy are able to build dojos, employ armies of ninjas, and devote their time training for combat (2013, p. 344).

Rather than ignore the class concerns buried in the context of Austen’s work, Grahame-Smith makes them explicit with a plague of zombies. Likewise, in Steers’ movie adaptation, we see servants and maids from the working-class even if they are zombies or attacked by zombies. For instance, in the scene when Annabelle attacks Casandra, we see a chambermaid hiding behind a chair or in the scene where Elizabeth and Mr. Bingley find the servants are being bitten by two zombies in the kitchen during the Netherfield ball. Secondly, the increase in zombie attacks, as announced in the opening lines, raises urgent questions about the security precautions indicating the military incompetence. Thirdly, the movie begins with a zombie attack rather than the Bennet family gathering of the source text. Now, Bennet, his wife and their five daughters are all introduced cleaning their weapons – a radical departure from the sewing and knitting which would be expected from ladies at that period. Thus, one cannot help noticing the film’s motif of representing the Bennet girls as warriors with combat skills in their initial on-screen appearances. In addition, this scene highlights the underlying state of preparedness and tension under which everybody exists, expecting a zombie attack at any given moment.

Immediately after the zombie attack where the camera fades to black in Mrs. Featherstone’s house, we hear Charles Dance’s voice-over as Mr. Bennet narrating the history of zombies and their attack in England while watching the cardboard illustrations in a tunnel book called “An Illustrated History of England: 1700-1800” presented in the candlelight.<sup>7</sup> The opening credits of the film are also embedded in the tunnel book history lesson, which happens to correlate with the beginning and end of the zombie invasion. The use of low-key lighting enhances the mood of the film with the use of shadows and dark notes. The ominous warnings of the voice-over narration are overlaid with the sound of zombies growling, howling, and grunting, which accentuates the film’s post-apocalyptic setting and yet at the same time creates a comic effect. The sounds of closing gates, whispers, and laughter of the upper-class people are some other features of the soundtrack that enhance the dramatic narrative in this scene. Thus, the prologue with humorous illustrations establishes the dark, horrifying yet comic tone of the movie adaptation of the mash-up novel.

As Mr. Bennet’s voice-over narrates, humans bitten by zombies – “unmentionables” – gradually turn into zombies themselves. Steers draws a parallel between historic plague-infection: “The idea is that this pandemic started in the early 1700s... I used the Black Plague as a model, and that was also how I thought of everybody moving out of London and getting this distance between themselves and the infected in the capital” (Production Notes, 2016). Because of this infection, the whole of English society and the way they live must have been changed irrevocably, which requires the fortification of London. Thus, this new environment, “...just exaggerates all the themes that were in it as far as the female/male dynamics and class dynamics, the idea that you have this one percent that’s controlling

<sup>7</sup> For the production details of the tunnel book history, see Will Perkins’ interview with executive creative director Ben Smith and visual effects supervisor Yongchan Kim and illustrator Martin Rowson, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.artofthetitle.com/title/pride-and-prejudice-and-zombies/>

everything while the rest of the country is in jeopardy” (Collinder, 2016). While Grahame-Smith’s nineteenth-century narrative encompasses the spread of a strange infection associated with the zombie’s bite, it is Steers’ prologue that relates the significance of combat skills, especially the knowledge of martial arts for survival in this post-apocalyptic world of zombies.

In this zombie outbreak, as the narration reveals, the elements of Asian cultures and especially Oriental fighting techniques acquire great significance for the uninfected in their struggle against the zombie pandemic. Thus, skilled zombie killers travel to China and Japan to receive training in martial arts: “At this time it became fashionable to study the deadly arts of the Orient. Japan for the wealthy. China for the wise” (*PP+Z*, 2016). With these lines, Steers uses the choice of Martial Arts as a metaphor underlying class struggle in English society. Mrs. Bennet’s words, right after the history of zombie attacks in England, also highlight the relationship between martial arts training and one’s social class: “You sir have already put them at a decided social disadvantage by insisting they do their combat training in China as opposed to Japan” (*PP+Z*, 2016). It is clear that in the post-apocalyptic world of zombies, characters adhere to a complicated and insufficiently explained social hierarchy. For instance, Mr. Bingley and his sisters are not trained in Asia but they are still well-regarded; while people like Darcy and Lady Catherine De Bourgh can despise those who do not have Japanese training in martial arts.

According to Mr. Bennet’s voice-over narration, when the battle against zombies is finally won, all the bridges are destroyed except Hingham Bridge, which remains the only way to cross the royal canal. Believing that the enemy, the zombie infection, is no longer a threat to their welfare, the gentry begins to leave their safe confinement for their newly fortified country estates. Yet Mr. Bennet advises his daughters to “Keep your [their] swords as sharp as your [their] wit” and gives a prophetic warning regarding the post-apocalyptic world of zombies: “For the ultimate battle between the living and the undead has yet to be staged” (*PP+Z*, 2016). The final words of Mr. Bennet’s voice-over are accompanied by the blowing out of the candles, leaving the audience in the dark, in order to prepare the audience for the coming battle with zombies. The end of this sequence, which takes the form of a bedtime story being told by Mr. Bennet over the whispers of Elizabeth and her sisters, is punctuated by the opening title of the film, *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016) as if to acknowledge the separation and difference of this prologue from the source text, Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009).

### 3. The Final Zombie Attack

As scholar Amanda V. Riter points out, “Mash-up literature is the product of numerous influences including remix culture, mash-ups in other mediums, fan culture generally, and Austen’s fan culture” (2017, p. 18). Regardless of their medium, the almost universal purpose behind mash-ups is to make some commentary on their source texts via the additions. In the case of literary mash-ups, specifically Austen’s fiction, commentary can come in the form of parody or pastiche as exemplified in Grahame-Smith’s zombie novel. As Marie Mulvey-Roberts puts it, “the zombie invasion demonstrates how a contemporary popular narrative can invade a classic, not merely in terms of genre, but also metaphorically, as well as on the level of plot” (2014, p. 22). Accordingly, in Steers’ adaptation movie, the source text has not been wiped out completely but inserted into a new contextual framework, thus capturing the essence of the source text by employing the formal elements such as the theme, motifs, characterization, style, and tone and the plotline that centers on Elizabeth and Darcy as well as on Jane and Bingley.

As Bakhtin writes in *The Dialogic Imagination* "texts continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation. . . . they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth" (1981, p. 422). Thus, the innovative reading that structures Steers' film paves the path for the change in the representation of George Wickham and the popular image of a zombie as mindless flesh-eater. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham is a handsome militia officer whose charms impress Elizabeth initially; later, however, when his true nature and past misdeeds are revealed through Darcy's letter, he loses his chances with Elizabeth. As the story proceeds, he persuades Lydia to elope with him. Eventually, he is forced by Darcy to marry her to save the name and honor of the family. In his mash-up novel, Grahame-Smith seems to take revenge on Wickham by turning him into an incontinent quadriplegic after Darcy bribes him to save Lydia's reputation through marriage. This change in the narrative can be seen as a kind of punishment not only for Lydia's foolishness and lack of manners but also for Wickham's roguishness, which deliberately undermines Austen's more conventional happy ending for the couple. Thus, the representation of Wickham's character as a simple fortune hunter in both novels remain the same.

In contrast to the source text, Steers' adaptation deploys Wickham to not only personify the point of view and discourse of the zombie community — whom Grahame-Smith denies such a voice — but as the son of a butler, Wickham also represents the working class. Acting as the spokesperson of the zombies, he strives for the independence of this outcast group while aiming to gain acceptance for them by the uninfected, who largely represent the upper echelons of society. In the scene where Wickham takes Elizabeth to the Church of the Undead, named St. Lazarus, he tries to convince her about the necessity of negotiation between the two sides, the infected — the working class — and the uninfected — the high class. To achieve this, Wickham believes in the significant role and function of St. Lazarus, which "is the key to finally ending the struggle between the living and the undead" (*PP+Z*, 2016) since the church acts like the savior of the infected people. In other words, fortified by religious piety and pig brains, "which they [zombies] receive in communion as the blood of Christ," zombies do not fully transform into the undead and even stay "civilized" (*PP+Z*, 2016). At this point, one can argue for the constructive/formative role and function of the church in the lives of working-class people, as the church sustains not only the bodies but also the souls of zombie-like people, rescuing them from pure savagery.

Wickham's explanation of the zombie transformation also indicates engagement in a dialogic relationship with the traditional zombie narrative, as in Darcy's zombie description in the prologue. Traditionally, zombies are capable of moving around and carrying out tasks, but can neither speak, defend for themselves or formulate thoughts: they do not even know their names and accordingly, the only fate available for them is enslavement. To illustrate, the original zombie-laborers of *White Zombie* (1932) were merely exaggerated versions of the existing laborers on plantations. In terms of their typical physical appearance, they are repulsive, decaying, and shuffling in slow motion. The sight of their decomposing human flesh as well as the sounds of growling, howling, and grunting accelerate and intensify the horror they arouse in the audience. As Noël Carroll also observes, ugliness, disorder, and disgust are critical to audiences' fascination with horror genres more broadly (1990, p. 41). However, in Steers' adaptation, as Wickham informs Elizabeth in the scene mentioned above, some of the zombies in the post-apocalyptic world of Regency England are not fully transformed till they consume human brains and consequently, they are considered a group in-between who "maintain more of the human intelligence are the ones that are sort of becoming the leaders amongst the zombies" as Steers puts it (Collider, 2016).



In the scene where Wickham joins Elizabeth, Mr. and Mrs. Collins (Charlotte Lucas) in their visit Lady Catherine De Bourgh (Lena Headey) for tea, Wickham elaborates on the characteristics of these new zombies who “can be reasoned with” and can follow a leader for a purpose when / if they “realize their power and to lead their hordes into battle” (*PP+Z*, 2016). Wickham further proposes that these new “civilized” zombies “who seem to possess an inherent power over the lower ranks of their kind” (*PP+Z*, 2016) can co-exist with the uninfected. Here we see that the zombie image has evolved in Steers’ adaptation movie, as also clear in his own words: “The idea is that it’s evolved, the virus or whatever you call it has evolved and the ones that are able to maintain more of the human intelligence are the ones that are sort of becoming the leaders amongst the zombies” (Collider, 2016). This innovative/creative adaptation of the zombies in the source text represents zombies as figures with human intelligence, which differs from the conventional zombie figure, as the passive victim of an exploitative class.

In this new, innovative reading of zombies, the danger unleashed by the zombie’s bite is more than that of the transformation into a shuffling member of the undead: the class conflict exists even among the undead. These new kinds of zombies can be interpreted as the director’s comment on the impossibility of eradicating class conflict even in contemporary societies. Likewise, for Camilla Nelson, the modern zombie image is “the newly globalized proletariat” and this new monster is “a symptomatic representation of a cultural and economic system” “dedicated to the production of “human waste”” (2016). As the twentieth-century monster, the zombie represents “mass phenomena: mass production, mass consumption, mass death” (Larsen, 2011). Thus, the zombie image seems to have evolved over time, from a voodoo victim on the sugar plantations of Haiti to a contemporary metaphor whose relevance is still more striking in the twenty-first century. The zombie stands for those whom capitalism excludes and victimizes. The intelligent zombies of Steers’ adaptation, capable of forethought and planning, invite us to ponder how mass consumerism and its attendant socio-economic and political problems arise. They also demonstrate the power of collective action in the struggle for survival.

Perhaps because of his past deeds, his deceitful character, or his working-class background, Wickham’s proposal of negotiation with Zombie aristocrats, a possible “treaty” is not taken seriously either by ex-zombie slayer Lady Catherine De Bourgh, or her nephew, Colonel Darcy, the zombie killer expert. It is clear that this scene is the turning point in the movie as Wickham warns them against a possible battle between the hordes of zombies and humans who would be outnumbered easily: “Please do remember this moment. And the opportunity you so glibly spurned” since “the day of the zombie is already brokered” (*PP+Z*, 2016). Here Wickham representing the zombie leader with “human intelligence” reflects the confidence in their own superior zombie physiology and dark powers as clear in the following lines: “Your ladyship the undead will always multiply faster than the living and procreate. Nine months to make a baby then 16 years to make a soldier and one raw second to make a zombie. You must realize if they were to organize we cannot defeat them” (*PP+Z*, 2016). In line with his dishonest character, Wickham fails to persuade Elizabeth to elope with him when she encounters him in the garden of the mansion, from which he has been forcibly ejected.

Steers considers his adaptation as “definitely ... a war movie” as he deliberately replaces the Napoleonic Wars, which Austen never explicitly mentions in her novel, “with the zombies infected by the Black Plague” (Collider, 2016). Accordingly, instead of Elizabeth, Wickham runs off with Lydia and commences the battle as the secret leader of the final zombie attack: “By taking London they’ve increased their ranks a hundredfold. This isn’t the random act of some mindless horde. They struck the

palace and both houses. They cut off our head before we could cut off theirs” (PP+Z, 2016) as Darcy tells Elizabeth in his letter. Hearing Darcy’s voice, the audience watches both Elizabeth crying while reading and the scenes of war as well as the map of London from the book, introduced in the prologue, “Illustrated History of Britain: 1700-1800.” When the camera zooms in on the map of London, it indicates the fall of the city, and the zombie army approaching Hingham Bridge, the last remaining link between the infected and the uninfected. Humankind’s victory over zombies, we conclude, will be harder than ever, since the enemy is no longer the mindless horde.

To change the course of the battle, Colonel Darcy plans to feed the zombies with human brains to turn them into savages and mitigate the risk of fighting with an organized zombie army. Like the first scene in the movie, in gloomy dark weather, we see him wearing the same leather jacket he has been wearing throughout the movie, riding towards the church of St. Lazarus, where Lydia is being held captive. When he arrives, he confronts the Four Horsemen of the Zombie Apocalypse outside the church – a doom’s day scenario, prophesized by Mr. Collins in the previous tea party scene. When Darcy finds Lydia chained to the bars in the church, Wickham appears and reveals his true identity as the leader and even the king of the undead with a zombie army to rule the entire country. At this point, Wickham turns out to be the villain of the movie, “but in a much bigger way, more testicularity than in the book. He’s much more dangerous,” as Steers informs the audience (Collider, 2016). While fighting, Darcy stabs Wickham’s chest, revealing the fact that has been undead all along. At this point, the camera’s perspective immediately changes and the audience starts to follow Wickham’s blurry point of view, in other words, the zombie point of view. His voice as he speaks also resembles the sounds of the zombies in the prologue as mentioned earlier, which accentuates his condition as undead. Accordingly, as Wickham admits to Darcy, he is no longer interested in worldly pleasures such as money or profession as he is not the fortune-hunter in the source text.

In contrast to the novel’s narrative, Wickham emerges in the film as the zombie king who pursues his goal, which is to rule both the living and the undead. Thus, as this fight scene exemplifies, there is more action between him and Darcy. Accordingly, Steers informs us that “one of the things I did was bolstering Wickham and I actually bolstered Darcy as well. I made Wickham more formidable and not just sort of a foil. I mean he’s a big presence, and it was one of the reasons to cast Jack Huston, and Jack up against Sam [Riley], it works because it’s almost two different sides of the same coin” (Collider, 2016). Obviously, Wickham represents the dark side of the story with super zombie powers and the Four Horsemen of the Zombie Apocalypse at his side, which enables him to grab Darcy by the neck despite his wound on his chest. When Wickham is about to kill him, surprisingly Elizabeth comes to Darcy’s rescue and cuts Wickham’s arm, which forces him to disappear into the dark bushes. As they ride across the Hingham Bridge together on the same horse, the human army demolishes the bridge to stop the zombies from crossing over from London. One can conclude here that humans could still survive by creating a vaccine or fighting the zombies even if it means to demolish the last bridge that connects them to the city of London.

One cannot help noticing the status of women as warriors/zombie killers in this Regent comedy about social classes and independent women. As Mulvey-Roberts also points out, “women in the novel not only break the bounds of traditional femininity, but actually reverse gender roles by protecting men from attack” (2014, p. 28). In the dialogic relationship between Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and Steers’ *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies*, Elizabeth Bennet wields swords and other deadly blades, fires guns and occasionally stomps on a zombie’s head but she never eats the still-beating heart of the last Lady Catherine’s ninja after strangling him with own intestines, as she does in

the mash-up novel. Accordingly, we see Elizabeth, in tears, admits her love for Darcy and kisses him when he is injured in the explosion, lying unconscious on the half-blown bridge. The camera pans from the couple gradually showing them together from a distance, which prepares the audience for the second proposal scene later on. As expected, after Darcy recovers, he proposes to Elizabeth again and this time she accepts which results in a joint wedding with Bingley and Jane. Interestingly, after the final credits, Austen's conventional happy ending is unexpectedly subverted by a shot of an approaching zombie army led by the dehumanized Wickham, the Zombie King.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the last two decades, Zombie narratives proliferate as they have increasingly been popular in fiction as well as various media tools such as video games and shows. Seth Grahame-Smith's mash-up novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), as the title implies, transforms Jane Austen's Regency romance in *Pride and Prejudice* into a zombie-slaying tale of love, class-struggle, and martial arts in zombie-infested Great Britain. Not only the mash-up novel but also Burr Steers' movie adaptation reshapes our understanding of the zombie narrative in contemporary times. Zombies can take over any background including the classics, perhaps especially the classics as familiar characters in unfamiliar circumstances resonate with so many people. And today it is not surprising at all to see guidelines on how to survive the oncoming inevitable zombie apocalypse like Lauren Wilson's *The Art of Eating through the Zombie Apocalypse: A Cookbook and Culinary Survival Guide* (2014) or Isabel Lloyd and Phil Clarke's *Gardening for the Zombie Apocalypse* (2019). This increased popularity highlights the zombie's contemporary status as the modern intelligent monster who literally invades every part of our lives.

The focus of this study often emphasizes the traditional zombie figure's symbolic or metaphoric meaning, which is built upon constant yearning to possess more and eat more, thus representing capitalism, mass consumerism and media consumption in contemporary society. Drawing upon the cinematic, class-based, and politico-economic history of zombie narrative in its portrayal of zombies, Steers' adaptation lays out not only some of the social upheavals of Austen's time period such as the Napoleonic Wars, the displacement of the working class, and rapid industrialization but also the Apocalyptic visions of the present American society – the terror and paranoia experienced by American society in the years following 9/11, the fear of the other/foreigner. Thus, Steers' innovative reading of Grahame-Smith's mash-up novel arguably is more complicated than the source text as it intensifies the theme of class conflict as well as the independent women via the change in the narrative, which results in the evolution of the intelligent zombie image. In Steers' movie adaptation, these new intelligent zombies “see themselves as a competing race” (Steers, 2016) and in this sense, they are a contemporary creation determined by the contemporary social, historical situation. Global economic issues might have triggered the evolution of intelligent zombies since higher unemployment and lower average incomes can cause people to feel like zombie-like figures under financial oppression.

Finally, Zombie related pandemic scenarios often raise questions on preparedness for biological threats, like the Covid-19 pandemic that the entire world has been experiencing for the last 9-10 months. Thus, rather than seeking to elaborate on the causes and genesis of the zombie outbreak, in his movie adaptation, Burr Steers focuses on the significance of being prepared and acquiring the necessary survival skills against a biologic threat. His film also demonstrates that a fatal catastrophe, such as a zombie creating virus, must have some social dimensions, bringing or will bring about a

social, political and economic change worldwide. In this context, the zombies in Steers' adaptation provoke a high degree of collectivism for human survival as the community as a whole matter rather than the particular members. On the other hand, in the alternate universe of *Pride and Prejudice + Zombies* (2016) despite the threat they pose to the safety and continuity of societies, zombies always leave room for humanity to hope for life and the future as they are doomed to be killed by the humans in the end even if they are evolved, which obviously sets the optimistic tone for the contemporary zombie genre.

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