

*“Robbed of our confidence as the planet’s dominant life-form:”  
Max Brooks’s *Zombie Wars*.*

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**Abstract:** According to *The Zombie Survival Guide*, “extensive research has yet to find an isolated example of Solanum [the virus which causes its victims to become zombies] in nature. Water, air, and soil in all ecosystems, from all parts of the world, have turned up negative, as have their accompanying flora and fauna” (ZSG 2-3). There is no evidence, then, that Nature was directly responsible for “the creatures that almost caused our extinction” (*World War Z* 1). Nevertheless, apart from the facile assertion that everything that happens in the material world may be subsumed beneath the umbrella term ‘nature’, even a cursory meditation on the significance of the *Zombie War* cannot fail to point an accusatory finger at the Earth, at Gaia, at Pacha Mama, however you wish to name her. The massive decline in human population, as well as the inevitable concomitant drop in consumption as the fabric of society collapsed, can only have brought relief to an endangered global ecosystem. But perhaps of greatest interest is the metaphorical significance of the zombies. They have an uncanny “ability to hunt, fight, and feed in total darkness” (ZSG 7). Their intelligence “ranks somewhere beneath that of an insect” (ZSG 14), they have “no language skills” (ZSG 16), while it is “instinct brought on by Solanum [which] drives the undead to kill and devour” (ZSG 18). These are the attributes — both strengths and weaknesses — that humanity habitually bestows on the natural world. This article will explore Max Brooks’s zombie fictions as ecocritical allegories of retaliatory Nature.

**Key words:** Zombies, ecocriticism, allegory

Zombies were initially associated with Voodoo which emerged in Haiti in the 1790s when African slaves struggled for, and ultimately achieved, their independence (Kee 10). Despite the common and probably justifiable assumption that many elements of Voodoo have their origin in Africa, the practice itself in its New World manifestation, and in particular the figure of the zombie is, according to Franck Degoul, “strictly of a Haitian nature” (17).

Early reports on Voodoo tended to emphasise cannibalism (Kee 12) — a common trope associated with black, aboriginal and African people by the European imagination as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* most famously demonstrates. But the zombies in early stories such as William Seabrook’s “Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields” (1929) have quite specific, non-cannibalistic characteristics: they are “a band of ragged creatures, who shuffled ..., staring dumbly, like people walking in a daze ... vacant-eyed like cattle” (Seabrook 6). This is the image of the zombie which crosses over to the United States as a “fantasy marking the entire country [of Haiti] as a nation of eternal slaves” (Kee 14). For the American public the zombie as Haitian is yet another representation of black people as the Other, incapable of thought, culture or initiative — a confirmation of their status as slaves or uncomplaining slave-like labourer and an implicit criticism of Haiti itself which had dared to establish itself as a black republic — a project which white societies portrayed as doomed to failure. It is significant that as late as 1954, when representations of Voodoo had changed markedly and its allegorical meaning had evolved along with the world’s changing power structures, Ian Fleming’s James Bond, in the exercise of his ultimately doomed mission to save the British Empire, is pitted against Baron Samedi in Jamaica. Independence for Jamaica was not completely achieved until 1962 but less than a decade earlier Fleming, in *Live and Let Die*, was far from convinced of the islanders’ capacity to govern themselves, as their weakness for Voodoo, which only a rational Englishman could withstand, amply demonstrates.

The transference of the zombie to the screen with *White Zombie* in 1932 was an open proclamation that zombies were no longer necessarily and exclusively black; American workers suddenly wondered if they, too, were being alluded to, particularly if they were caught up in the vast yet troubled American industrial machine of the Great Depression. “Thus,” suggests Chera Kee, “while zombies seem to represent a very real fear of the return of the colonial master, they also offer a critique of both slavery and the abuse of the worker under the capitalist system” (17).

The zombies in Seabrook’s “Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields” are not in themselves dangerous, rather, they are victims of the evil masters of Voodoo ritual. This changes most notably in Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel *I Am Legend* in which, as Deborah Christie points out, “[t]he living dead in question were not even zombies originally: Matheson writes of vampires ... [r]egardless, the stiff shambling and insistent hunger of altered corpses stalking humans became an iconic representation of modern zombie fiction and film” (Christie 67). Their behaviour, and the fact that many (though not all) of them are living dead, is consistent with Haitian zombies except for two crucial differences: their condition is caused by a virus rather than by Voodoo, and they are, effectively, cannibalistic. *I Am Legend* was the inspiration for the most influential zombie film of all time, George Romero’s 1968 *Night of the Living Dead* in which the characteristics of the zombie as we know it in the 21st century were largely established. Romero’s zombies are driven by instinct to seek out and consume human flesh. They

have no other criteria than their own mindless appetite, and as such the worthiness or not of their victims is irrelevant; as the virus spreads, no ‘normal’ human beings will be left. This was precisely Matheson’s point, since *I Am Legend* tells the story of the last surviving ‘normal’ human being who, realising that his very uniqueness has transformed him into the Other, commits suicide. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, despite its gore, has a particularly subtle ending. In the film, a single house is attacked overnight with only one man left alive in the morning. As the authorities arrive, desperate to contain the situation, they shoot everything that moves, including, in an extraordinarily brief and downbeat final scene, the surviving man. To add to the irony the actor playing the last man is black, while the now destroyed zombies are white. Who, here, is the Other? And more to the point, does it make any difference? Christie argues that the film resonated so powerfully with American audiences because they were no longer able to rely on the certainties of old: “humanity in *Night of the Living Dead* ultimately disappoints the audience and shrinks the ideological gap between themselves and the instinct-driven corpses that plague them” (78). This, Christie points out, is the decade when John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated, and opposition to the Vietnam War was fuelling the counter-culture. The values that America supposedly represented are thrown into doubt, the identification of the Other becomes increasingly problematic, and the traditional values of family and moral standing are trampled on by the murderous zombie who could be your parent, your lover or your child. Drew Grant, writing in *The New York Observer* argues that Romero “managed to tie [the] two opposing post-war scares — conformity in Capitalism and conformity in Collectivism — together, revealing that they are one and the same” (Grant). One of the characteristics, then, of the zombie is that it is not clear who is one, and who is not.

A recent publication, *Zombies a Cultural History*, by Roger Luckhurst, claims that “[i]t was an accident ... that the main role of Ben was played by Black postgraduate Student Duane Jones – he was simply the most accomplished actor among a bunch of mostly amateurs” (139). Yet it is neither movie directors, nor fate, which decides a text’s meaning. Luckhurst concludes that

[t]he meaning of this closing scene therefore kept changing in lock step with the bitter end of the 1960s. By the time it was a Midnight Movie in Greenwich Village, these images now evoked the mass slaughter perpetrated by American troops in Vietnam ... For every viewer since ... the last scenes of *Night* rendered explicit the explosive *allegorical* potential of the zombie trope for commentary on the contemporary world. (146)

This allegorical potential has increased extraordinarily over the intervening years. The current economic recession, which began in 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers investment bank, inspired protesters against Wall Street traders to dress up as zombies. Their reasons are various:

Either way, you are going to end up relinquishing your individual thoughts to a larger consensus mindset. Either way, you are going to end up in a shopping mall (*Dawn of the Dead*): the epicenter of suburban complacency. Whether you are the authoritarian automaton or the slogan-chanting 99 percenter, you are not *you*. You are *them*. (Grant)

The Wall Street protesters who were encouraged to “dress up as what they called corporate zombies” (Matthews) were attempting to show traders that they were mindlessly conforming to a financial model that was eating up the country’s resources without a thought for the consequences. Yet the protesters resembled zombies too, and not just because of their fancy dress. The fears that zombies inspire are based, firstly, on their numbers — there are simply too many to kill — and secondly, their intractability — they cannot be swayed by threats, or emotional pleas or bribes because they have no need or understanding of any of these things. The growing numbers of homeless, jobless and dispossessed identify, then, with the zombie just as American workers did during the Great Depression. So huge are the consequences of the current economic crisis that its victims, though individually vulnerable, may prove collectively unstoppable. A demonstrator interviewed by the *Toronto Star* explained that “I like the fact that you can take it two ways: Are we saying they are the zombies for serving corporate masters? Or are we saying the rest of us — the 99 per cent — are the zombies for putting up with this mess we’re in?” (Potter). The unusual and disproportionate response by the authorities to such demonstrations reveals how much fear the zombie-like protesters are provoking. From Barcelona, to London, to Washington, and at the 2012 Bilderberg conference in Chantilly, Virginia, police tactics and their function as a political tool have been increasingly questioned — at times even by the police themselves, as the following lines from *The Guardian* demonstrate:

I was helping a cop move a security cordon near some trees, when he lowered his voice and casually let slip: “We don’t support Bilderberg, trust me.” And there’s what a hotel employee told me as he drove through the gates of the hotel. He lowered his window and beckoned me over. “I want you to know that they call you people ‘cockroaches’. I work in the hotel and they asked me if those cockroaches were still out there. They meant you.” (Skelton)

Cockroaches, like zombies, are inferior, disgusting and easily killed, at least as individuals. But they are also a cause for fear, rather than mere distaste, to the plutocrats.

George Romero’s second zombie film, *Dawn of the Dead*, released in 1978, supports an even greater allegorical freight than *Night of the Living Dead*. It follows three men and a pregnant woman, who take refuge from the zombie plague in an abandoned shopping mall. This has two advantages: being an enclosed space it can be barricaded against the marauding zombies, and being a shopping mall it contains everything that the refugees need to survive indefinitely. The first task of the survivors is to expel the numerous zombies from the mall, but what are the zombies doing there anyway? “This was an important place in their lives” explains one of the characters, and for this reason, although virtually mindless, they have instinctively come back to the most significant location of their former existence. The suggestion that users of shopping malls are mindless consumers — Romero’s zombies are driven solely by an urge to consume human flesh — is underscored by the behaviour of the survivors once they have successfully taken over the mall. In a long sequence they are shown to open, try and discard various kinds of food and drink, clothing, cosmetics and other consumer items. Even the healthy activity of sport is portrayed as the consumption and waste of resources as one of the survivors plays tennis on the roof against a wall with boxes of tennis balls spilling open around him until one of them drops off the roof and onto the ground outside where it bounces unnoticed among the milling zombies. Once again Romero

emphasises the frightening similarity between zombies and the living. Both are driven by want, in both cases it seems to be ultimately mindless, indeed, the thoughtless consumption of material goods by the survivors is seen to be far more exaggerated than that of the zombies whose needs are confined to human flesh, and who, anyway, are driven by nothing but instinct, and have no opportunity to reflect on and modify their behaviour. Eventually the mall is attacked by lawless bikers who indulge in an even greater orgy of consumption and destruction than has yet occurred.

Romero's film has an obvious ecological message: we are simply eating up the world's resources as though we were zombies. We are the living dead. We live merely to consume, we have no other goal, no other motivation; our lives have no other meaning, and it will lead to our own destruction. *Dawn of the Dead*, unlike Romero's first zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead*, has a quintessentially urban setting. Shopping malls represent one of the greatest denials of the natural world that humanity has constructed. Everything is artificial, from the floor, to the walls and the ceiling, the light, the temperature and the filtered and conditioned air which is breathed. Jeff May argues that "[c]ontemporary zombie films mark a geographical move to large urban areas, bringing the zombie masses to the city" (285), and this is clearly the case with *Dawn of the Dead*, though not *Night of the Living Dead*, which is set in an isolated house in rural Pennsylvania. May's reading of the zombie allegory is that of "foregrounding urban fears while containing implicit messages about social difference and otherness" (285). While this is true, it ignores the metaphor of the zombie as mindless consumer so vividly portrayed by Romero. Furthermore, many zombie films and stories are evidently rural, leading to an inevitable interrogation of humanity's relationship with nature. Zombies reduce humanity to mere neediness, a state, it might be argued, that cities have evolved to satisfy as completely and efficiently as possible. But the resources to do this are provided, ultimately, by nature, and they are finite.

In her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryl Glotfelty argues that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii) before going on to ask "[i]n what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?" (xix). It is appropriate then to read Max Brooks's best-selling 2006 novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* as a fictional ecocritique of contemporary environmental issues. The novel begins in China, the country with the highest population on Earth and one of the world's fastest growing economies. Here the first reported zombies appear, living (if that is the word) somewhere in the depths of the reservoir waters of the Three Gorges Dam where they attack divers scavenging among the drowned villages. Brooks's choice of the dam region is deliberate. It is not only one of the world's largest human engineering projects dedicated to providing water and power for human use, it is also one of the most ecologically controversial projects ever constructed, as even the Chinese have come to realise. In 2008 *Scientific American* published the following:

For over three decades the Chinese government dismissed warnings from scientists and environmentalists that its Three Gorges Dam—the world's largest—had the potential of becoming one of China's biggest environmental nightmares. But last fall, denial suddenly gave way to reluctant acceptance that the naysayers were right. Chinese officials staged a sudden about-face, acknowledging for the first time that the massive hydroelectric dam,

sandwiched between breathtaking cliffs on the Yangtze River in central China, may be triggering landslides, altering entire ecosystems and causing other serious environmental problems—and, by extension, endangering the millions who live in its shadow. (Hvistendahl)

Brooks was aware of this: in the novel we learn that by the end of the zombie war the population of Greater Chongqing region had been reduced from thirty five million to “barely fifty thousand” (Brooks 2006: 4). This massive reduction is caused not through the spread of the zombie virus, but by the collapse of the dam itself:

Roughly ten trillion gallons of water, carrying debris, silt, rocks, trees, cars, houses and house-sized pieces of the dam itself! It was alive, a brown and white dragon racing to the East China Sea ... No-one knows how many people died that night. Even today they’re still finding bodies. (Brooks 2006: 261)

Having begun with the Three Gorges Dam, it is technology and the consumption of resources, rather than zombies, which are highlighted throughout the novel as vectors of death and destruction. According to *The Zombie Survival Guide*, Brooks’s spoof survival manual which was published in 2004 two years before *World War Z*, the walking dead are infected by a virus called solanum which is communicable “only through direct fluidic contact” (Brooks 2004: 3). Zombies seek out living flesh and can smell it, according to the Guide “from a distance of more than a mile” (7). They will eat any kind of flesh, as long as it is alive, though they prefer human. Only humans become zombies after being bitten — other animals simply die. Despite their predatory nature the zombie’s walk, though tireless, is shambling and slow. How then, was the virus spread so quickly? As people became aware of the disease they fled, often aided by snakeheads: “[t]hey would step off the plane at London or Rome, or even San Francisco” (Brooks 2006: 13) and thus the disease, which takes from 23 hours to an unspecified length of time to cause zombie reanimation (Brooks 2004: 3), was carried by modern technology to every corner of the world.

Not surprisingly, it is the remoter, less populated regions which often (though not always) fare best. Iran, until besieged by fleeing Pakistanis, initially does well. According to a major in the Revolutionary Guard: “Our land was very mountainous. Transportation was difficult. Our population was relatively small” (Brooks 2006: 90). More significantly, lack of technology helps. The Yanomami of the Amazon Rain Forest “weather[ed] the crisis as well, if not better, than even the most industrialized nation” (Brooks 2006: 21) while the safest areas, those to which refugees fled in their millions, were the coldest and most inhospitable parts of the world, particularly in the far north, in Canada, Alaska and Siberia since, it turned out, zombies froze solid in low temperatures (though they woke up again in the spring thaw).

The diversity of issues taken up by *World War Z* includes the illegal trafficking of organs from poorer parts of the world, a trade which contributes to the ease with which the solanum virus is transmitted. In a footnote we are informed that “[i]t has been alleged that, before the war, the sexual organs of Sudanese men convicted of adultery were severed and sold on the black market” (Brooks 2006: 22). The main example given, though, is that of a Brazilian transplant surgeon and a dextrocardiac Chinese heart:

Where else but China could we find that kind of luck? ... And “political expediency.” I told my broker what I needed, gave him the specifics, and sure enough, three weeks later I received an e-mail simply titled “we have a match.” (Brooks 2006: 23)

The combination of technology, need (in the case of the patient) and greed (in the case of the surgeon and the organ trafficker) are responsible for the spread of the virus, the heart it turns out, of course, being infected with solanum. Brooks condemns the mercenary attitude of the surgeon who, it transpires, is not only in cahoots with traffickers, but also with the police who both provide protection and “homegrown organs” presumably obtained among the favelas of São Paulo; but it is technology itself, throughout the novel, which is also constantly questioned.

This is immediately apparent when the US authorities make their first major attempt to wipe out the threat with military hardware. Unfortunately, zombies, who feel neither pain nor fear, are only terminated when their brains are destroyed, with the result that virtually all high-tech weaponry proves useless against them when they attack in large numbers. Both *The Zombie Survival Guide* and *World War Z* go to great lengths to describe the kinds of weapons which are finally discovered to be effective — hunting rifles, with their great accuracy, being probably the most efficient means of splattering a zombie’s brains out. Second only to a well-sighted rifle, however, are the kinds of weapons which would not have been out of place on a medieval battlefield — axes, swords and maces are all considered, as are the weapons used in hand to hand fighting during the First World War — the trench spike being deemed one of the most deadly weapons of all. Brooks makes two points about the military’s failure here: firstly, that “armies perfect the art of fighting the last war just in time for the next one” (Brooks 2006: 103), with the result that the overwhelming firepower brought to bear on the zombies would no doubt have stopped them in their tracks had they been freedom-hating commies, but is vastly inappropriate when dealing with the living dead. Secondly, he insists (or rather the US Infantryman who describes the first great battle against the zombies insists) that the zombies’ greatest weapon was the fear they instilled in the living. “What,” he asks, “if the enemy can’t be shocked and awed? Not just won’t, but biologically can’t!” (Brooks 2006: 104).

The point is that the zombies are no longer human. They do not experience emotion of any kind, they barely, if at all, remember anything of their previous lives and they are driven purely by the most primitive of instincts. The most successful methods of countering them are also inhuman, and this is represented by the ‘Redeker Plan’. Paul Redeker, an Afrikaner, had come up with the idea during the apartheid years in South Africa as a means of protecting a selected portion of the white population from the black. It consisted of withdrawing to safe zones — usually remote and protected by natural barriers — of eliminating all zombies (or blacks) to be found there, and living under a state of siege. This was not, however, the whole plan. The rest of the white population was also to be removed to protected, special zones but of a less isolated and less well-fortified nature. Their task was to fight the zombies (or blacks) to the end, thus reducing their numbers and diverting attention from the more important protected areas. This plan was largely adopted throughout the world and was one of the means by which the zombie plague was initially checked, though not eliminated. It required, of course, the

deliberate sacrifice of millions of uninfected human beings. In Russia, that most human of institutions, the church, was brought in to assist. It was discovered that the necessary killing by their comrades of soldiers who had become infected while fighting was bad for morale, and this task was taken on by the priesthood in recognition of their particular contiguity to matters of the afterlife. Meanwhile, back in the real world, and coinciding with the ever-growing evidence of a global ecological crisis in the form of extreme weather, rising sea levels, famine and water shortages, the distribution of the world's wealth has polarised sharply. According to Jill Treanor in *The Guardian* newspaper, “[g]lobal inequality is growing, with half the world’s wealth now in the hands of just 1% of the population.” As climate change accelerates it is safe to assume that the very rich will use their wealth to secure the safest, most productive parts of the planet for their own, exclusive use while the remaining 99% will be left to manage as best they can.

In *World War Z*, humanity, then, is forced to regress as it attempts to deal with the zombie threat, both technologically and ethically: it must sacrifice two of its most defining characteristics and in doing so become ever more indistinguishable from the enemy. This is made clear at a number of points in the novel. Commander Song, captain of a Chinese submarine, talks of “humanity’s great regression,” observing that “[w]e came from the sea ... and now we’re running back” (Brooks 2006: 242), while an American infantryman describes how their military doctrines had gone “back into the past like everything else” (Brooks 2006, 277). By the time the zombies, which number two hundred million in the USA alone at the height of the war, are slowly destroyed one by one with rifle bullets and sharpened entrenching tools, the combatants become ever more alike in their single-minded urge to kill. A South African mercenary explains how he tried to settle back in to civilian life, but, he confesses, he missed the excitement so much he no longer felt alive: “not only was I dead,” he says, “I couldn’t think about anything else but killing” (Brooks 2006: 332). A similar observation about the death of humanity is made by a German Jew:

I’ve heard it said that the Holocaust has no survivors, that even those who managed to remain technically alive were so irreparably damaged, that their spirit, their soul, the person that they were supposed to be, was gone forever. I’d like to think that’s not true. But if it is, then no-one on Earth survived this war. (Brooks 2006: 340)

This living death, this inhumanity, will be the fate of the one per cent.

What, then, caused this catastrophe to occur? In *The Zombie Survival Guide* we learn that “extensive research has yet to find an isolated example of *Solanum* in nature. Water, air, and soil in all ecosystems, from all parts of the world have turned up negative, as have their accompanying flora and fauna” (Brooks 2004: 2-3). It seems to have emerged, as we have seen, in the reservoir waters of the Three Gorges Dam, yet its origin has still to be traced. It could, indeed, be a man-made virus. But its effect on humanity is like that of any such contagious plague — highly populated areas are the most affected — human mobility provides the means for its expansion. In 1798 Malthus argued that diseases “may more justly be considered as indications that we have offended against some of the laws of nature” (152) through “filth and torpor; and as dirt, squalid poverty and indolence” (152) and that this is nature’s way of telling us “to avoid splitting on the same rock” (153). There is plenty of evidence in *World War Z* to suggest that Brooks is

largely in agreement with Malthus. In this case, the rock upon which humanity has split is not only that of over-population, but the unchecked consumption of the world's resources: "every single one of them, every second of every day, was devoted to consuming all life on Earth" (Brooks 2006: 273) observes one of the survivors in an unintentionally ironic comment which once again draws our attention to the similarity between the living and the living dead.

Another witness of the war is an astronaut, trapped on an orbital platform. From it he observes the destruction of the world:

To see the massive ecological devastation makes one understand how the modern environmental movement began with the American space program. There were so many fires, and I don't just mean the buildings, or the forests, or the oil rigs blazing out of control – bleeding Saudis actually went ahead and did it ... it was equivalent to a low-grade nuclear exchange between the United States and the former Soviet Union, and that's not including the actual nuclear exchange between Iran and Pakistan ... Nuclear autumn was already beginning to set in, the gray-brown shroud thickening each day. (Brooks 2006: 260)

Ironically, autumn and winter become the seasons of hope, and spring the season of despair. In this world turned upside down, the zombies who have frozen into immobility with the cold weather, perhaps even buried deep in the winter snows, return to life with the spring thaw. Thus, although by the novel's end the zombie war is over, the zombie menace is not. Each spring those northern territories which once provided refuge for millions of fleeing survivors, must be scoured for reanimating corpses. "Spring's like winter used to be," we're told, "nature letting us know the good life's over for now" (Brooks 2006: 320).

By the close of the novel the world's population has shrunk to a tiny fraction of what it once was. The war's devastation has virtually wiped out the whales and most other sea life (Brooks 2006: 341). Rats and cats have evolved into ferocious beasts (Brooks 2006: 318) and, above all, no-one knows when or where the next zombie outbreak will occur. Margo Collins and Elson Bond in their article "New Millennium Zombies" argue that "*World War Z*, despite its often-unsettling scenes, ultimately offers a basically hopeful worldview ... What might have appeared to be zombie-as-threat turned out to be not much threat at all" (194). One wonders what kind of threat these two critics would take seriously when two hundred million zombies in America alone — all of whom must be destroyed — is *not much threat at all*. They add that, in "Brooks's postapocalyptic world, humanity has ultimately prevailed and, in a Nietzschean twist, is all the stronger for it" (194). I think they are wrong. Although still surviving in vastly reduced numbers, humanity's continuing existence is neither guaranteed nor secure. More to the point, it has been warned by nature, by the Earth, by Gaia, to behave itself. Whether it heeds this warning is irrelevant from Gaia's point of view. If it does not, it dies. Both possibilities are left open, as Brooks's shows. Sensei Tomonaga Ijiro, a blind Japanese martial arts specialist, learns to combat the zombies in a manner that is, quite literally, respectful to the Earth. As he bashes or lures the enemy to its death he would "thank the spirit of each rock, or cliff, or waterfall that carried them over thousand-meter drops" before retrieving and beheading the corpses to avoid "desecrating the stream." Sometimes he throws them

“into the volcanic crater where Oyamatsumi’s rage could purge their stench” (Brooks 2006: 225) — Oyamatsumi being the ruler of mountains and volcanoes. This, clearly, is appropriate behaviour. In Russia, meanwhile, the country in which the priests became executioners, nothing seems to have been learnt. Having rid itself of zombies, mother Russia has now embarked on a campaign to restore its erstwhile imperial possessions such as Belarus and the Ukraine. Maria Zhuganova, a former combatant, is about to give birth to her eighth child “Our leader says that the greatest weapon a Russian woman can wield now is her uterus. If that means not knowing my children’s fathers, or... (her eyes momentarily hit the floor) ...my children, so be it. I serve the motherland and I serve with all my heart” (Brooks 2006: 330). Unlike Tomonaga Ijiro, Maria Zhuganova does not behave with respect either towards her own nature, or to the environment which she is proceeding to overpopulate with dysfunctional children as fast as she can. Moreover, her loyalty lies with the artificial, unnatural and voracious political entity known as mother Russia rather than with her true mother, the Earth .

*World War Z* is an ecological allegory in the same way that James Lovelock’s concept of the Earth as Gaia, as a living organism, is a metaphor. Lovelock defends his approach on the grounds that “metaphors are more than ever needed for a widespread comprehension of the true nature of the Earth and an understanding of the lethal dangers that lie ahead” (147). Humankind is moving, zombie-like, towards the destruction, not of the planet, or of life on Earth — for surely life will continue for many millions of years yet — but towards the destruction of human civilisation. Lovelock says:

We are tough and it would take more than the predicted climate catastrophe to eliminate all breeding pairs of humans; what is at risk is civilisation. As individual animals we are not so special, and in some ways the human species is like a planetary disease, but through civilisation we redeem ourselves and have become a precious asset for the earth. (10)

The reason that civilisation is threatened is simple: it is because we “are over six billion hungry and greedy individuals ... We are taking so much that [the Earth] is no longer able to sustain the familiar and comfortable world we have taken for granted” (7). Lovelock is quite clear of the outcome: “if we fail to take care of the Earth, it will surely take care of itself by making us no longer welcome” (2).

As temperatures rise, human (and much other) life will no longer be viable. Food will become impossible to grow and in many parts of the world it will simply be too hot for our species to survive. Lovelock predicts that the planet will become “so hot, so deadly that only a handful of the teeming billions now alive will survive” (147). There will still be a few places that humanity can cling on to: “the British Isles, with its oceanic site and high latitude” (60) might be a refuge, though much diminished in size as a result of rises in sea level. Similarly “the tundra wastelands of Siberia and northern Canada that remain above sea level will be rich with vegetation” (55). Perhaps these places will become, in Lovelock’s words, “the new Arctic centres of civilization” (159).

Lovelock’s vision of a post-apocalyptic world is identical to Brooks’s — it is merely the nature of the apocalypse that is different, but the results are the same: few human beings will survive, they will be forced to live in the higher northern latitudes and, despite the optimistic reading of *World War Z* by critics Margo Collins and Elson Bond, it will be, as

Lovelace says, “a Stone Age existence” (3): it will be, in Brooks’s words, *nature letting us know the good life’s over for now* (2006: 320). Lovelace describes the Earth as being diseased, as suffering from a “fever brought on by a plague of people” (3): Brooks narrates the history of a pandemic, a plague of the living dead. For both writers it is humanity which is the disease infecting the planet. In Malthusian terms this is the result of over-population in relation to the availability of life-sustaining resources. Ecologically it is the upsetting of the planet’s climatic equilibrium through misuse of the biosphere. Lovelock is pessimistic and believes the only thing we can do now is attempt to slow down the effects of global warming in time to adapt our civilisation to it. Even this is unlikely to occur. Human beings are zombies — mindless consumers: it is too late to preserve an eco-system that will maintain human life on Earth in the way that we enjoy it now: we are, truly, the living dead.

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