

BOOK REVIEWS

Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

(Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009)

With its revision of that famous first sentence Seth Grahame-Smith makes his intentions clear: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains.” Thus begins *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which is billed as an “expansion” of a regency classic and surely one of the most unlikely additions to the Austen-verse. A discussion of the plot would be largely redundant, as it’s basically identical to the original but with the inclusion of zombies and martial arts. England is plagued by a mysterious virus and overrun with hordes of the risen dead, known as “Unmentionables,” who overturn carriages and feast on the brains of their passengers. The Bennet sisters are a dangerous group of warriors, having learned their deadly arts under the tutelage of Master Liu in the confines of a Shaolin Temple. There, we are told, they “spent many a long day being trained to endure all manner of discomfort.” Elizabeth Bennet is now a sort of kick-ass proto-Lara Croft who is as comfortable sharpening swords as dispensing *bon mots*. Thus the verbal sparring that characterised the original text is now transformed into frequent, cartoonish bouts of combat; Darcy’s confession of love becomes a drawing-room brawl and Lady Catherine’s admonishment to Lizzy into an epic battle involving ninjas.

But all of this sounds much more exciting in summary, as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is a curiously lifeless affair to read. One of the most obvious problems of *Pride and Prejudice* acting as the book’s palimpsest is that Grahame-Smith’s passages suffer in comparison to those written by Austen. His attempts at mimicking her style are wildly uneven, with the occasional jarring use of an Americanism or an unlikely metaphor interrupting the story far more than anything involving the undead. For example, he writes that “Bodies lay everywhere: in pews; in aisles – the tops of their skulls cracked open; every last bite of their brains scraped out, like pumpkin seeds from a jack-o-lantern.” Given that Austen hardly ever used similes and Halloween, hence jack-o-lanterns, didn’t exist at the time, this comparison seems misjudged. Similarly his knowledge of Irish geography is quite shaky. Elsewhere, he refers to the “St. Lazarus Seminary for the Lame at Kilkenny” being in “Northernmost Ireland”. Three pages later it is referred to as “Kilkerry” then later on “Kilkenny” again. Although these points are minor they are still somewhat distracting when they occur and only act to undermine Grahame-Smith’s attempted mimicry. Indeed the original is still so entertaining that when one encounters another passage involving “Unmentionables” and his limp prose, one almost feels like skipping it in order to get back to the main story. Another problem is the fact that the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is so tautly constructed that he is always struggling to find ways of getting the characters outdoors and dispatching zombies or fighting each other while still adhering to the original’s basic trajectory. One gets the feeling that the book would probably have been better served had he departed more radically from Austen’s work rather than trying to find ways of shunting zombies into the story. Indeed the moments that really work best are those when there is an actual effort to compliment the original text. For example, Mr. Collins’ speech about how he and Charlotte “have but one mind and one way of thinking” is now rendered ironic by the fact that she is a drooling, brain-dead zombie. There is also admittedly a guilty joy in seeing some characters finally get their dues, such as when the smarmy Mr. Wickham is rendered limbless, incoherent, incontinent and has to be carried around in a bed by four servants.

One has to wonder then: what is the aim of this book? Is it a post-modern exercise in fusing high and low culture? The literary equivalent of a musical mash-up? A subversive scheme to smuggle a classic tale of

romance into the hands of young boys who are probably more interested in torture porn? Or a cash-in on a classic whose rights have expired? Could this thus be the beginning of new trend where we see canonical texts with genre conventions grafted on? If so, then how long before we see other works, such as “Dawn of *The Dead*” wherein Gabriel Conroy has to battle the risen corpse of Michael Furey in order to win back the heart of Gretta, on our shelves?

In a recent interview, Grahame-Smith admitted that the idea for the book came from his editor who had a list of similarly remixed titles. “I owe the title to my editor at Quirk Books. He'd been wanting to do some kind of literary remix or mash-up, and he had lists of possible books. On one side he had *Wuthering Heights* and *Sense and Sensibility* and so forth, and on the other side he had things like pirates and robots and vampires. And one day he called me excitedly and said all I have is a title: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.” And as a title it is pretty funny. But I think part of the reason it works as a title and not as a book is not only due to its poor execution but rather the discrepancy between how *Pride and Prejudice* is (unfairly) perceived as a paragon of stiff romance and its actual content. It is constantly marketed, remade and repacked as a romantic tale but a new reader must be surprised to find out how little the central love story actually occupies the text. Certainly many subsequent adaptations must be in part to blame for de-fanging what is an, at times, acidic comic vision. Is there thus an argument to be made somewhere that perhaps *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is in fact a more faithful rendering of this vision than the rather flaccid romantic versions which it has spawned? One could posit that it actualises the latent violence and danger of the original, as well as drawing attention to the Bennets’ need for protection and self-protection. And if so, one has to wonder, what would Jane Austen herself think of all this? Maybe the author of *Northanger Abbey*, not to mention an admirer of Ann Radcliffe, would perhaps find at least something amusing about a horror version rather than another adaptation featuring sumptuous scenery and pouty starlets.

At any rate this isn't the final word on the “expansion” of *Pride and Prejudice*. Elton John's production company, Rocket Pictures, recently announced that *Pride and Predator* is in the works which will see the bounty-hunting alien facing off against the residents of Longbourne. Arnie as Mr. Darcy, anyone?

BRIAN DAVEY

David Moody, *Hater*
(New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006)

An officious office manager strides down a busy London street, thinking happy thoughts. Suddenly he notices a little old lady walking past him. Something about her is different, wrong. As he stares, he feels terror rise up in him – there's something not right about her. His fear turns to panic and he lashes out, stabbing her with the umbrella in his hand, stabbing the grandmother in the stomach and screaming incoherently at her. The manager is eventually dragged away from the woman's battered corpse, his eyes filled with fear and hatred of everyone around him.

The random attacks quickly spread. All across the UK people are attacking strangers and family members for no apparent reason. The rate of murder seems to be rising exponentially and every day it gets worse.

In the midst of this Danny McCoyne is just trying to get through the day at his crappy job in the Council's car clamping section without being strangled by irate drivers and not being sacked by his harridan boss. To make matters worse, his relationship with his wife is deteriorating, he's sick of his kids and his father in law openly hates him and takes great pleasure in showing up his inability to look after his family.

Hater, by author David Moody, is a novel mired in paranoia about others, drawing its inspiration from *Night of the Living Dead*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and any film by Ken Loach.

What makes *Hater* stand out from the plethora of other similar novels is that Danny is not a member of a Special Forces team, he hasn't received training in mystical arts and he doesn't have a job directly connected with working in crisis situations. He is, in fact, slightly irritating, a bit of a loser and incredibly human. Moody draws the reader into his tale of a civilisation collapsing through his easily identifiable characters. Everyone has had that job they've hated and wanted something better in life. Danny's life hasn't turned out the way he planned it, he hates his job, he's starting to hate his wife and now mobs of people are roaming the streets killing each other.

Hater was initially vanity published by Moody, who used his website to promote the book. Moody has published several other books through his own publishing house (subsequently wound up since the success of *Hater*) which proved relatively successful in their own right. After the book developed a following, *Hater* was picked up by Orion Books in the UK and has subsequently been re-released, with a promised sequel currently being produced. It is, in fact, one of the few success stories from vanity publishing, normally the home of rambling insanity, dire poetry and the odd bout of racism (trust me, some of the books I've been asked to review by the Journal's Generalissimos have left me feeling grimy and in need of a shower...).

Hater is excellently paced, with the reader drawn into the mystery of what is causing the average citizen to turn into a violent maniac and whether or not Danny will be able to carry his family through the crisis without strangling his father in law or being subject to the brutal oppression being instigated by the government to keep control of the country.

However, despite the good pacing, the novel's ending comes a tad abruptly, with a number of plot twists arriving in swift succession and being resolved almost as quickly. Indeed, Moody's approach to plot development is reminiscent of that of Stephen King, with the majority of the book given over to it and character development. Unlike King (thankfully) Moody is actually able to deliver on his build up, with

the ending, despite the fact that it occurs remarkably quickly, being of suitable grandeur to warrant the previous couple of hundred pages spent on exploring the characters' relationships.

Hater has been described as a zombie novel and it does feature some similarities. The survivors find themselves locked away within their homes, only able to watch the world fall apart on TV without being able to do anything to stop it. Moreover, in a similar vein to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, paranoia is rife throughout the novel. Suspicions rise as to who is or isn't a Hater. In one instance, a man arrives at Danny's offices, angry at having had his car clamped, a normal enough incident a few days previously. Now, however, anyone displaying anger is considered a potential threat and he soon finds himself in a dangerous situation pleading with Danny that he is in fact not of "them".

By emphasising this aspect of the threat, Moody also does a good job in dismissing many of the problems that are part and parcel of zombie fiction. A zombie plague would in reality be easy enough to stop. It's not like a walking corpse blends into a crowd. The smell alone is enough to identify them, let alone their leaving bits of themselves behind every time they bump into something (hand-eye co-ordination wouldn't be so good either.)

I would dearly love to discuss one of the plot twists but can't, as it would ruin the book for those who have not already read it. Suffice it to say that it turns the entire novel on its head, and whilst one may eventually extrapolate it from the plot, it still comes as a surprise and is one of the more attractive aspects of the novel.

Hater is an excellent novel and one I heartedly recommend. The characters are welcomingly human, the pacing excellent and the end, if not shocking, certainly much less expected than what is normal within this type of fiction. Go buy it!

RICO RAMIREZ
Buenos Aires Correspondent

Caliban's Mirror: Brigid Cherry, *Horror*
(London: Routledge, 2009)

“Just keep repeating – it isn't only a movie ... ” These are the final words of Brigid Cherry's highly entertaining book *Horror*, the latest addition to the Routledge Film Guidebooks series (which also includes books on James Cameron and the Bollywood phenomenon). Like the book as a whole, its closing caveat elicits a grin of aesthetic pleasure from the reader (even if he or she is not already a horror fan and thus fails to recognise the province of the phrase - the tag-line for William Castle's *Strait-Jacket* (1964) which was introduced to a wider audience via a poster for the 1972 version of Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left*). This, however, is followed rapidly by a twinge of uneasy discomfort, as we realise that we have been confronted once again by the fact that the point of horror is to turn the spectacle of nasty things happening to fictional characters into entertainment – to render it, perversely, fun. Indeed, the main strength of Cherry's book is that it brings us face to face with the worrying fact that we all too frequently snicker at a wittily allusive death scene or find satisfaction in a grimly neat but thoroughly dystopian narrative *dénouement*.

Nonetheless, in keeping with the work's status as a yet another primer for the student of horror film, the tricky matter of what James B. Twitchell terms the dreadful pleasures of the cinematic horror text, is left, to all intents and purposes, as enigma for which she offers no conclusive explanation. That said, it would be doing Cherry a disservice to insist that *Horror* sits on the fence as regards the issue of why exactly horror films remain enduringly popular despite – or rather because of – the horrific images and disturbing subject matter that are their very *raison d'être*. Specifically, and very sensibly, within the parameters of its status as an unbiased overview of the genre and the critical responses to it, one which is quite explicitly aimed at third-level students new to the genre, the book does not shy away from asserting with a certain degree of conviction that the concerns and iconography of horror cannot and should not be divorced from the socio-cultural conditions in which they are produced.

This, however, is by no means all that the book is concerned with. Rather than being organised chronologically or, as has become increasingly popular in works of this nature, in terms of various motifs or image clusters (such as Tony Magistrale's *Abject Terrors* (2005) and Carole Zucker's *The Cinema of Neil Jordan* (2008), both reviewed in earlier issues of this journal), *Horror* is divided into four sections which move from the technical and the aesthetical to the cultural and the political. The book begins with the most basic issue of how we can define horror and which films can be labelled as such, before tackling the aesthetic techniques used to arouse dread or disgust in the viewer. From here, it discusses the aforementioned problem of the pleasure that viewers derive from watching horror, and concludes with an elucidation of the ways in which the genre has been associated with, springs from, or is seen as giving rise to various cultural and social ills.

While all of this is handled from a laudably open-minded viewpoint, supported by an impressively wide-ranging knowledge of the genre, I would not wish to suggest that my praise for *Horror* (or indeed for horror) is unmitigated. Apart from the uneasy sense of complicity or indeed of vulnerability which viewing the latter can often arouse, the former is quite simply badly punctuated. This minor carelessness extends to some clunky phrasing which interrupts the flow of the argument and can at times impede comprehension. In particular, the assertion that horror films articulate, among other things, anxieties “of the difference of cultural Other” (170), while far from impenetrable, made this reviewer pause, reread the

very long sentence from the beginning in order to work out what was being said, and make loud tut-tutting noises.

More importantly, the book also displays a marked tendency to skim over intriguing points which are raised by the relentless stream of explanation and exposition. One example of this comes during a discussion of the first *Saw* film, where Cherry notes that “Adam is set up as a passive observer in life (a variation on the postmodern zombie [as consumerist automaton] perhaps)” (202), a potential goldmine of an observation which she fails to tap into in the rest of her discussion of the film. Similarly, when postulating that both the form and content of *The Blair Witch Project* imply that “technology gets in the way of seeing,” in another parenthesis, she remarks that this idea “perhaps links back to theories of the gaze in horror cinema” (188), the focus of much of the previous chapter; and yet, once again, she never follows up on the implications of this link. Such speculative asides, of which there are several other examples, are, of course, more or less inevitable in a work which sets out to be “a steppingstone to deeper exploration of the ‘black lagoon’ of horror cinema” (211) rather than an aesthetics or theorisation of the genre in its own right. *Horror* discusses such works as Noel Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror* and Carol J. Clover’s *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (often at some length) – but emulating or challenging them does not appear to be part of the task it has set itself. Indeed, places where the text gestures towards but fails (or refuses) to engage with potentially fruitful overlaps between its carefully demarcated sections provide precisely these stepping-stones, gaps into which students of the genre can insert their own meanings, interpretations and knowledge.

Perhaps rather less forgivable is the tendency to give the impression (even if only for a few pages) that other critics’ arguments are being unreservedly embraced and endorsed. On a number of occasions, this reviewer found herself scribbling disapproving notes in the margins, only to find it necessary to scribble them out again several moments later when it finally became clear that Cherry was in no way advocating such an approach or reading. This occurs with particular frequency in relation to gender issues, including the assertion that the final girl is unambiguously coded as masculine; and that “the female spectator [is] forced to adopt the male gaze” (131). While these ambiguities regarding Cherry’s views are generally cleared up fairly rapidly, other less-than-unproblematic assertions are left un-critiqued, such as Freud’s association of the eyes with castration anxiety; the (again) parenthetical insistence that to see slasher films as legitimating and indeed encouraging misogynistic violence is to occupy an “aberrant reading position” (137); the declaration that the figure of the “archaic mother” in *The Brood* is “outside of the patriarchal order entirely” (116); and an almost shockingly sweeping suggestion that “ghosts and hauntings [...] are [...] frequently associated with femininity (and hence lesbianism)” (154). Admittedly (and leaving to one side questions of authorial intention), this sentence is merely an exposition of Patricia White’s critique of *The Haunting*, rather than a statement of belief or opinion that should be read as held by Cherry herself. Nonetheless, if this is indeed “meant” to be read as a way in for students new to the genre, such assertions are essentially irresponsible, as they encourage readers to collapse terms such as “femininity” and “lesbianism” together willy-nilly, and to cite theoretical and critical concepts as “truth” rather than utilising them as further text to be examined and unpicked.

What is more, in this regard, *Horror* often falls down on the very point which it establishes as its founding principle. While the plots and premises of such films as *Psycho* and *Halloween* are more or less widely known to the point of having entered the popular consciousness, lesser-known but often (though by no means always) generically important films like *Ginger Snaps*, *Slither*, *Suspiria*, *Silent Night*, *Deadly Night* and *Cat People* are mentioned with little if any explanation or indication of what their contents might be. Of course, there are plenty of other books out there where such information can very readily be obtained, not to mention the internet. Be that as it may, it’s difficult not to feel that a brief introductory

sentence here and there would help to clarify several places (especially in early chapters) where film titles are bandied about in a manner which seems to presume that the reader will already know everything there is to know about them.

That said, it is these early chapters which, in many ways, take *Horror* out of the realm of run-of-the-mill introductory guides and make it something really quite exciting to read. Chapter 2, “Horror Aesthetics and Affect,” includes some particularly clear, illuminating and often riveting sections on lighting, special effects and camera work which, for readers who have come to horror film from other disciplines (such as literary studies), or who are simply fans of the genre but neither experts nor well-versed in the grammar of shot and cut, opens up whole new levels of signification and interest within the images we see on our screens. I, for one, was delighted to learn that the kind of shot (which features prominently in *Vertigo* and *Jaws*) where a character stands still while the space around them appears to lengthen and skew vertiginously is (with misleading sweetness) called a “dolly zoom,” while the disorientating effect of films such as *Evil Dead 2* can be attributed to something known as “Dutch angles.”

When followed by some genuinely enlightening discussions of everything from lynch mobs to moral panics, from so-called “torture porn” to the allegedly more refined scares of the uncanny, this hard-headed information renders Cherry’s *Horror* something of a treat. Most valuable, perhaps, is the way in which it reminds us that moral outrage in the face of traumatising, nauseating or unsettling images may be mere conservative scare-mongering, but that it is far from reactionary or naïve to be afraid of what horror shows us. Indeed, the book insists that “The ideological subtexts of films are always about the time and place in which they were made, whatever their historical or geographical setting,” going on to note that “The fact that horror cinema deals with anxieties that are of great concern to the culture can thus explain some of the pleasures of the audience” (169). To a certain extent, Oscar Wilde’s aphorism that “the nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass” – a face that is both alienatingly monstrous and hideously familiar – is directly applicable to modern horror. At the same time, and as *Horror* makes admirably clear, this rage can transform equally into narcissistic desire, or even simply into a sense of relief that these anxieties exist and are recognised outside of the viewer’s individual consciousness. As Cherry puts it herself, when we watch a horror film, it is imperative, lest we fail to recognise its culturally relevant, subversive or even radical implications regarding race, gender, power or authority, and the realities of death, that we repeatedly remind ourselves that it is far more than “only” a movie.

DARA DOWNEY

Shaun Tan, *Tales From Outer Suburbia*
(Allen & Unwin, 2008)

Tales From Outer Suburbia is a collection of fifteen short stories written and illustrated by Shaun Tan. The collection is marketed as a children's book, but the text will appeal to adolescent and adult readers too. The stories are by turns fantastic, surreal and sinister, ranging from fond recollections of a foreign-exchange student's visit to instructions for making your own pet out of broken kitchen appliances. *Tales From Outer Suburbia* presents the familiar as something not only strange, but absolutely alien. Throughout the collection, Tan draws upon and feeds into popular and theoretical concepts of the suburbs; as homelands, as playgrounds, as places of violence and danger. The empty centres of suburban gothic are deftly evoked; there is no title story here, only a restless switching of character and focus. None of the narrators are named and few are identifiable as either male or female. Like Tan's other books, *Tales From Outer Suburbia* is beautifully, superbly illustrated with strange, delicate and stark images in pencil, oil, pastel and water-colour. The fabulous illustrations make the book an object of beauty, something to leave out on display for others to run their hands and eyes over in envy. These illustrations do not merely supplement the narrative; at times they subvert it and at other times, completely replace it. Each story is paired with a different visual medium and the images range from complete pictures to weird, pared-back graphics. Though there are threads and motifs running through the narratives, the illustrations make each story distinct. The contents page reinforces this idea, showing a battered envelope covered with stamps which bear a tiny fragment of one of the main illustrations. The stamps – and the stories they represent – are all jumbled, implying that the book is not supposed to be read in any particular order. As a result, the book seems less like a coherent work and more like a clutch of odd, mismatched stories; not so much a collection as a group of found objects.

While some of the stories like “The Water Buffalo”, “No Other Country” and “Eric” are light-hearted, many others, like “Wake”, “Stick Figures” and “Broken Toys” are far more sinister and the overall collection evokes a sense of uneasy, uncanny dread in the reader. As the collection progresses, it becomes clear that Tan's suburbia is less whimsical fantasyland than wasteland; an unknowable place of violence and uncertainty. In “Our Expedition”, Tan brings this unknowability to the fore. Two brothers, arguing over whether or not their town ends at the edge of the map, travel through the suburbs, trying to find the end of the known world. They discover that at the point where Map 268 ends, the ground falls away at a huge cliff with nothing beyond it. Tan seems to suggest that the suburbs represent the very end of civilisation. This eschatology is echoed and distorted in “Alert but not Alarmed”, where every family is required to keep a scud missile in their garden, ready for some distant war. The illustrations show garish cartoons of brightly-painted warheads sandwiched into suburban gardens. The disturbing power of this story is derived, not simply from the incongruity of the image, but from the calm acceptance of the weapons into the suburbs which pre-empt the destruction of the known world.

Violence is either anticipated or inherent in many of these stories. This violence ranges from the rows which break out between couples in “Undertow” and “Grandpa's Story” to the awful but gentle catharsis of “The Nameless Holiday” in which a reindeer comes to take gifts back, but only takes “objects [...] so loved that their loss will be felt like the snapping of a cord to the heart.” There are physical acts of violence too: although the delicate creatures in “Stick Figures” are presented as “just another part of the suburban landscape”, the narrator's benign attitude is soon undermined by violence as the elegant, delicate stick figures are beaten “with baseball bats, golf clubs, or whatever is at hand, including the victim's own snapped-off limbs.” The savage attacks on the stick figures could be seen as an elaborate metaphor for

the struggle between nature and humanity, but it seems more likely that the attacks are completely meaningless; as pointless as all suburban violence.

Probably the most potent and disturbing story in the whole collection is “Wake”. It opens with a bleak statement: “On a cold night last winter there was a fire at the house of a man who only days before had beaten his dog to death.” Inexplicably, when the man staggers out of the burning house with his possessions, he is immediately surrounded by “a hundred dogs of every shape and size [who] snapped at him viciously when he tried to hit them, but otherwise remained still, staring impassively at the flames.” The dogs' silence is eerie and the man's impotent rage is ridiculous; and the result is an unsettling story in which power is suddenly transferred from man to beast. Tan's terse, almost offhand treatment of such brutality is shocking and so it is this story more so than any other that elevates *Tales From Outer Suburbia* from simple fantasy to sure-handed suburban gothic. While “Wake” does not have the apocalyptic scale of “Alert but not Alarmed”, the story is clearly synecdochal; in having the neighbourhood dogs wreak vengeance on one man, Tan dramatises the possibility of revolution, essentially unsettling the whole balance of power in suburbia. “Wake” questions our willingness to call the suburbs home, our inability to recognise the weirdness of our environment, and interrogates the relationship between human and animal, between civilisation and primitive instinct. “Wake” succeeds in dealing with such big ideas because it is so tightly written and while it is brutal in its language and content, it never becomes grotesque. That none of the stories in the collection ever slips into pastiche or hyperbole is a mark of Tan's sure skill as a writer; in fact some of the stories are so subtle, so delicate and seemingly simple that it's not until long afterwards that their gothic significance becomes apparent.

And *Tales From Outer Suburbia* is certainly a significant gothic text. Tan's work is playful, absurd, strange and disturbing, recalling the work of writers such as Vonnegut, Palahniuk, and Dahl, artists as diverse as Hokusai and Hopper, and television shows like *Desperate Housewives* and *Twin Peaks*. In its evocation of the uncanny and in its portrayal of the apathy, uncertainty and downright strangeness of the suburban landscape, the collection breaks new ground in children's literature. All too often, children's gothic falls into parody and pastiche, borrowing plots from texts which have slipped out of memory and out of copyright but Tan's collection is strikingly original. For although the collection will be found – like Tan's other books – in the children's section, there is nothing childish about the text. What appear to be the simplest of the stories turn out to be the most sinister and those that seemed initially very frightening are often quite funny. Tan's deft juxtaposition of the strange and the familiar and the sheer scope of his imagination make this collection very accessible and very engaging. There is a power to the illustrations and a quirky, eccentric charm to the stories that will make the collection very appealing to readers of all ages. No doubt, some people will gasp in horror at the idea of handing such an exquisite and violent book over to a child, but Tan insists that *Tales From Outer Suburbia* is aimed at exactly the same audience as his earlier picture-books. I absolutely agree and I would whole-heartedly recommend this collection to any child. After all, there is no point warning our young readers about bogeymen if we refuse to show them what bogeymen are capable of.

JANE CARROLL

Jonathan Maberry, *Patient Zero*
(New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009)

Worryingly for authors, it now appears that in order to get a new horror novel published, it is first necessary to write a compendium to it. Max Brooks produced "The Zombie Survival Guide" and then the excellent *World War Z* (a book that has set the bar for zombie fiction and which is now undergoing development hell for a Brad Pitt film).

Now Jonathan Maberry – the author of *Ghost Road Blues*, the recipient of a Bram Stoker Award and author of *Zombie CSU*, a police-procedural manual on how to deal with an undead rising (no really, it's about 400 pages long and covers everything from examining the initial scene of an attack to how to clear up after the zombies have been taken out) – has added his own take on the zombie genre with *Patient Zero*.

Patient Zero is a 24-episode novel that follows a US government law enforcement branch as it tries to stop an impending zombie plague. *Patient Zero* takes a slightly different approach to its characters than that taken by *Hater* (reviewed above). Joe Ledger is a cop (with previous military training) who is part of a tri-state task force set up in the wake of 9-11 to track down potential terrorist cells and stop them from committing nefarious activities. After one mission goes wrong (don't they always?), Ledger finds himself on leave, with a partner in hospital and being escorted into unmarked vehicles by suspicious men in sunglasses. It soon becomes apparent that the evil terrorist Muslim who Ledger shot during his previous mission has gotten up off his slab in the morgue and started eating people in a hospital despite a large hole in his chest where his heart used to be.

Informed that the terrorist was infected with a new bio-weapon developed by a group of Islamic extremists linked to Al Qaeda, Ledger soon finds himself tracking down terrorist cells across the United States, all the time aware that time is running out. The action in the novel is non-stop, with the small team of combat specialists (all that's left of the DMS military forces after the rest were wiped out in the hospital outbreak) jumping from one world-ending threat to another. The relentless pace is matched by some excellently written descriptions of the fight scenes and throughout, it is apparent that Maberry is making use of his previous novel, with *Zombie CSU* seeming to act as a bible for the writing of this follow-up novel.

Patient Zero can, however, become rather ridiculous at times. At one point we discover that the wife of the Islamic fundamentalist who is trying to destroy the world with zombies is an expert in biological weapons, a nymphomaniac and wears suspenders (and nothing else) under her burqa. Nonetheless, the plot is surprisingly intricate for a zombie novel, eschewing the standard "group of survivors with disparate personalities trapped in a shopping mall/city/prison", with several double crosses occurring, an ever-increasing threat in the form of more advanced versions of the virus, and the rededication of the Liberty Bell... .

Importantly, *Patient Zero* adds a new dimension to the zombie genre. Here, the plague can be stopped before it starts, so rather than being post-apocalyptic, it is pre-apocalypse and does not carry with it the sense of impending doom that fills many similar fictional offerings. The virus used to create the zombies is also relatively believable (although if you had a degree in Molecular Biology I'm pretty sure you could identify some weak points). The virus is an engineered disease mixing parasites and prions, the proteins that cause such fun diseases as CJD and Kuru with later generations spreading faster and faster, upping

the threat. What is more, Maberry takes a somewhat more real-world approach to an outbreak than is usual in zombie novels. It's not ignored and passed off as an outbreak of African rabies or mass hysteria. Rather, the threat is met head on, resulting in an exciting read that on occasion will have you deeply embroiled in the plot. At other times, however, you will find yourself grunting in disbelief at the slight implausibility of the story – for example, Al Qaeda-linked terrorists releasing a zombie plague on Earth only to be headed off by a New York cop who also happens to be an ex-specials forces judo expert.

Characters within the novel are relatively well realised, although many of the supporting characters are two dimensional, especially those that make up Ledger's special-forces team. This makes it a bit difficult to tell them apart and we feel little or no emotional attachment to the characters, so when they (inevitably) get eaten by the undead, we just don't really care. There is also a bit of a tacked-on love story that could have you occasionally gagging, but thankfully Maberry gets to the zombie killing quickly and effectively.

Put all this aside, turn your brain off (if you can find the switch) and try not to think about the plot too much and you'll have a fun and enjoyable read. Just don't expect the book to do anything to improve American/Islamic relations...

EOIN MURPHY

Colin Haines, “Frightened by a Word”: Shirley Jackson and the Lesbian Gothic
(Uppsala: Uppsala UP, 2007)

Haines has a big task in store. He aims not only to theorise deeply but also to read closely three of Shirley Jackson’s novels, *Hangsaman* (1952), *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1963). He theorises them primarily in terms of the queer theory of Judith Butler and the psychoanalytic feminism of Julia Kristeva, especially their arguments regarding the abject. As Haines shows, Butler emphasises the abject’s origins and concreteness. The subject rejects what originates in the body, then transvalues it into the not-self, then denies its origins, and finally projects it onto the other. By contrast, Kristeva emphasises not the concrete origins in the subject, but the abstract resolution – the subject’s need to find an object that deserves to get the garbage. Haines also sagaciously theorises Sigmund Freud, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Louis Althusser.

Two critics central to his method are Terry Castle and Pauline Palmer. Drawing on Palmer, Haines addresses the sign “lesbian” as not only representation but also configuration. In other words, he elucidates the word both as an image in representation, and as a position in its discursive context – as a note in the social arrangement and literary text. For example, an important aspect of textual configuration he emphasises is focalization. If a character under the sign of “lesbian” (implicitly or explicitly) is the narrator, or even just a third-person narrator’s point-of-view character, then the signifier “lesbian” tends to move from the abject to the subject, thus enabling the reader to sympathise and identify with the abject. He elucidates the extent to which social discourse as a whole and literary discourse in particular have represented and configured lesbianism tangentially, obliquely. Discourse had to reject lesbianism in order to admit it. So traditionally, the image was usually masked – veiled not simply in gossamer but in double crepe. In literature, the taboo image escaped the prison house of language most often in the taboo form of Gothic. It was in Gothic that the vaporous “lesbian” condensed into the cloudy figure of a ghost.

In the Lacanian terms Haines uses, social and literary representations of “lesbian” as abject have tended to endorse the heterosexual Symbolic of the Law of the Father. But Haines goes beyond Castle and Palmer by demonstrating that this interplay of representation and configuration is undecidable because resignifying “lesbian” does not necessarily give that sign a positive valence. Neither the attempt to valorise “lesbian” nor the attempt to parody it is necessarily subversive. For example, a lesbian character as authorial delegate can endorse the Law. So can a parodic lesbian who attempts to flaunt the Law by exaggerating the emblems of the Law’s abject with such costumes as the Amazon, the gym teacher, the diesel dyke, or the bar dyke. The reason, Haines argues, is that it is neither the intent of the author’s nor the logic of the text’s conventions, but the audience that determines if there is a subversive effect. Resisting totalisation and closure, Haines does not try to resolve arguments over of intention, implied readers, reading communities, and pragmatism. He does not try to settle the issue by choosing one camp and then talking up his pick. The pit of contention is where he leaves it. With the sign “lesbian” theorised in terms of Butler and Kristeva on the abject, he then discusses their theorising about horror and terror as he will apply them to the Gothic. Simply put, horror both precedes and causes terror. Horror is the threatening undecidability that terror tries to dispel. And it tries to dispel the horror by making it abject, inverting it from here and now and I, to there and then and it.

In his reading of *Hangsaman*, Haines considers the extent to which this novel destabilises heterosexual literary conventions. He points out that as an image of representation, Tony is apparitional, ghostly, derealised, and in that regard, not much of a transgression against heterosexual discourse. Similarly, Mrs. Waite’s attempt to resist Mr. Waite infantilizes Natalie by putting her into the pre-Oedipal position in such

a way that Natalie is as derealised as Tony. On the other hand, *Hangsaman* does disturb the ideology of heterosexuality in two ways. In a *tour de force* recuperation of Levi Strauss, Haines discusses how gendering in kinship systems facilitates economic circulation. The exchange of women into their husbands' families arises in conjunction with economic exchange. By having no last name, Tony is thereby somewhat outside, not merely of the gender system but also the society. Thus her configuration in society presents possibilities outside of gender constructions. In addition, when Natalie abjects Tony, both the representation and configuration undermine gender constructions. On the surface, Natalie is making the lesbian abject. But under the veil of the apparitional, Natalie is rejecting the Father insofar as Tony is the last link in the metonymical chain stretching back to Natalie's molestation at the hands of Mr. Waite's friend. In addition, this development in the representational image is the plot's turning point, and as such the implicit abjecting of the Father holds an important place in the novel's configuration.

Tony's dual function as both underwriting the Law of the Father as well as erasing it is possible because the feminised, the secondary, can sometimes police discourse in service of the Law of the Father. As Haines points out, the female college students perform their interpellation through surveillance and interrogation of the new initiates. Haines reminds us that for Althusser, the machines most responsible for interpellation are the school and the family.

A similar erasure of the patronymic surname occurs in *The Haunting of Hill House*. Theo has no last name: "I'm Theodora. Just Theodora." Moreover, Theo is open and concrete, not veiled and ghostly. Haines discerns that the ghostly abject is the pre-Oedipal child that Eleanor was before her interpellation into the service of the Father, which culminated when she became her mother's servant. With the discernment of a detective working a cold case that has been gone over many times by previous investigators, Haines discovers that when Eleanor says, "I will not hurt a child," the child implicitly says that Eleanor has already hurt her. Explaining his reading in terms of Butler's revision of Althusser, Haines notes that the call to interpellation is sometimes answered imperfectly. When hailed by interpellation during her early subject formation, Eleanor misrecognised her place in ideology, and the ghostly voice of the disembodied child reminds her of that fact. Thus the archaeology of the subject in *The Haunting of Hill House* recalls the archaeology of the subject in *The Bird's Nest*, the protagonist of which is a multiple personality who has misheard the call multiple times.

Haines finds that while *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is similarly conflicted, it subverts constructions of lesbianism even more than does *The Haunting of Hill House*. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* not only represents lesbianism as a concrete image, but also configures the lesbian as both protagonist and first-person narrator. Merricat is not just the butt of irony but also creates it, for example when she offers sugar to the ladies who have come for tea. In addition, she tricks the townsfolk by maintaining the fiction that it was Constance who did the poisoning. Correcting Palmer's implication that a first-person narrator is the authorial delegate, Haines points out that a reader's identification with any narrator is partial and conflicted. With Merricat as the focaliser, the reader's position is much closer to the position of the abject. While this proximity will engage some readers, it will horrify others. In addition, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* satirises the heterosexual plot resolution with its configuration of two women as the heirs to the Father's estate. The novel further satirises the law of the Father by making comic fools of Uncle Julian and Cousin Charles.

Haines offers a perspicacious application of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" to both sisters. If melancholia is failed mourning – the inability to accept and adjust to death or other loss – then the melancholic idealises the lost object (be it person, belief, fetishized commodity, and so on). Compounding the problem, the idealised lost object reproaches the melancholic, because the melancholic cannot live up

to the lost object as perfect example. Ironically, the melancholic's self-accusations are introjections of the depressive's denials of what the lost object really was. Haines considers the possibility that Merricat is not melancholic because it is not her parents that she wants to preserve, but rather the just deserts they withheld from her. By killing them, she takes over their agency and sets the situation aright. By using their clothing, household utensils, and personal effects in her magic rituals, she makes their power work for her – she makes happen what they prevented: her coronation as princess of all that she surveyed. She acts the way they should have. In so doing, she makes them atone for mistreating her, then absolves them, and then rehabilitates them.

Constructive criticism? Well, the only thing that is definitely a fault is the lack of an index. Other than that, only quibbles. Haines has cast his net deeply and come up with an impressive catch.

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