2018-01-01

Fight the Dead, Fear Reality: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of The Walking Dead

Katherine Elizabeth Alanis Ramirez
University of Texas at El Paso, kataram93@gmail.com

FIGHT THE DEAD, FEAR REALITY: A FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS OF THE WALKING DEAD

KATHERINE ELIZABETH ALANIS RAMIREZ

Master's Program in Communication

APPROVED:

_____
Roberto Avant-Mier, Ph.D., Chair

_____
Carlos Tarin, Ph.D.

_____
Jeffrey Sirkin, Ph.D.

_____
Charles H. Ambler, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

This project stems from my love of television, monsters and all things spooky. It is my curiosity working hard to understand all of the things that I love. I dedicate this project to all of my monsters, be it the ones I fear, the ones I love, or the ones that make me wonder

FIGHT THE DEAD, FEAR REALITY: A FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS OF

THE WALKING DEAD

by

KATHERINE ELIZABETH ALANIS RAMIREZ, BA

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2018

Acknowledgements

If it weren't for the love of my family and friends, this project would not have been possible. It is they who fully embrace my love for all things weird and abnormal. It is they who accept that I would rather sit and watch television than be out in the world doing who knows what. It is they who understand that monsters, ghosts, witches, and zombies are not limited to the month of October, but are in fact an everyday obsession. It is they who listen to me talk about the need to be ready for the zombie apocalypse that will never come. It is they, who even when I believed that I could not do it, even when I believed that it was not good enough, or long enough, even when I wanted to give up, pushed me to keep going. So thank you to my mom and dad, my siblings…all of them, my beautiful nieces and nephews, and my two best friends, who after ten years still wont give up on me. I would save you in a zombie apocalypse no matter what.

To my professors and mentors who have helped me along the way. It means more than you would understand. To my committee, I appreciate what you have done to get me to the finish line. I know it's been a long way there. Dr. Tarin, from Speech and Debate to a master's thesis, your help was more than I could have asked for. Dr. Sirkin, your classes were my haven, a place where I could talk about all the things that I already loved and get a grade for them. I hope you inspire others like you inspired me. Dr. Avant-Mier, I have learned so much and am so grateful that you were with me every step of the way. I could not have done this without you, and I could not have picked a better person. I hope you know all of the stress I put you through was worth it.

It was important to me to write about something that I truly loved. I approached this thesis with caution, because I didn't want to end up hating something that has been a passion of mine for years. Through the completion of this thesis, I have not only found a new and different appreciation for television shows, but my love for *The Walking Dead* has grown. On top of that, I've found that the most important part of the completion of this project was that I could feel a sense of pride in myself that I had never felt before.

Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart. This thesis has been a source of stress, anxiety, love, and excitement. I'm sad that it's over, but I'm extremely happy that it's done.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Research Conceptualization and Introduction

From movies, to comic books, and television shows, the zombie apocalypse has been a staple of the horror genre. Alongside its horrific counterparts like vampires, werewolves, and other monsters, the zombie sub-genre has developed over time to become a staple in the entertainment industry and mainstream media. Since the 1968 classic horror film *Night of The Living Dead*, zombies and monstrous creatures have evolved not only cinematically, but in the world of research as well. From the likelihood of mass contagion to apocalyptic possibilities, zombies have planted their stake in the real world through fiction. This research, in particular, spotlights one of the most popular works of the zombie genre to date, the television production *The Walking Dead* (2010).

The aim of this research is not to discuss the probability of mass spread of disease. It's not a look into apocalyptic scenarios, and it is not a statistical project of how many people in the United States watch zombie based entertainment. What this project is, is a means of finding the connection between societal and political issues and fantasy themes in entertainment media that consume the people that surround us. It is the 21st century, a time when it's rare for people to not have a cell phone, a computer, or a TV screen. It is also a time when media no longer relies on printers, but can reach a consumer's hands in seconds. With access to the internet, one person can retrieve millions of files, pictures, songs, movies, and television shows at the push of a button. As the development of technology continues to grow, as do the opportunities for communication through the media that technology introduces. Movies, music, and television shows have become methods of entertainment media that allow for more in depth conversations with audiences. Movies can be inspirational; they can tell stories of people who have changed the

1

world. Music has become a method of speaking out about money, class, race. So can the same be said about television shows? Yes. Audiences have seen television shows like *Degrassi* which started in 1979 that explores topics like cheating, drugs, teen pregnancy, STIs, and school shootings. If you've watched any show created by Shonda Rimes like *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014), *Scandal* (2012), and *Grey's Anatomy* (2005), then you know the show covers topics like race, gender, female empowerment. There are shows on every network that introduce topics like sexuality, suicide, drug abuse, and immigration. Television shows have become an outlet for people to talk about, learn about, and hear about topics like race, gender, and power.

What do zombies have to do with race, gender, and power? Television shows are no longer meaningless ways to keep people entertained. The new wave of television shows in this century and even before, cover all kinds of topics that affect someone, somewhere watching. Even through fantasy based television, one can find stories of survival, danger, and hope. Television is a means of communication that not only delivers information to the watcher, it delivers meaning. Entertainment media can now be used as a tool to influence large audiences in someway or another. It's possible that forms of entertainment media can be used to promote change and influence large audiences. This research is a means to find out if it's possible to take any show and find instances of this kind of influence. It is an opportunity to discover what we can learn from shows that people might not think are meaningful. Additionally, it presents the chance to determine what kind of messages can we find in unconventional shows, in fantasy shows, in comedy shows, in shows like *The Walking Dead*.

The Walking Dead (*TWD*) has been a monumental part of U.S. television since its debut on Halloween in 2010. Based on Robert Kirkman's comic book of the same title, the show follows a group of people surviving in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse. The television

production, developed by Frank Darabont, has been running successfully for years, creating a franchise of over 100 episodes so far. Broadcast on the AMC channel and owned by the company AMC Networks Incorporated (a company that also owns channels like IFC and WE), *TWD* has been breaking viewing records for the last seven years. *Forbes* states that the season seven opener in October of 2016 debuted with a whopping 17 million viewers and a Nielsen rating of 8.4 in the 18-49 age demographic. This rating beats any other television show's ratings by far, "to put it into perspective, the broadcast show with the highest rating in the 18-49 demo, *Empire* (2015), only scored a 4.1 in its season opener," which debuted in September of 2016 (Berg, 2016, para. 5). The ratings for *TWD* have been steadily increasing throughout each year that the show remains on air. According to TV By the Numbers (2016), "Even if '*The Walking Dead*' had stayed at the level of its first two seasons, it would still be among the two or three top-rated shows on cable (excluding live sports) and AMC's top series ever" (Porter, 2016, para. 6). Now, it maintains its spot as one of the top television shows in the industry since its debut in 2010. With its widespread popularity, Porter also claims that for any other television show to beat the ratings for *TWD*, the show would have to have a drastic fall in ratings, which in looking at its current success, might not be for a long time (2016, para.11). The show has been so successful that AMC introduced a spinoff show, *Fear: The Walking Dead*, a television prequel of the channel's hit show.

While *TWD* is based on science fiction and fantasy, it has created an entire new world for its fans. From cosplayers at Comic Con events, to merchandise, themed cruises, and even a permanent attraction at Universal Hollywood theme park, the show continues to be embraced by its fans. This especially takes form on social media, where fans from across the United States and even in other countries join in on conversations about the show. In its season seven opener, the

same episode mentioned above, views of the horror drama presented a widespread presence on the social media website Twitter where, "there were a total of 3.24 million tweets about the show coming from 3.07 million people, according to data from digital analytics company ListenFirst Media" (Berg, 2016, para. 6). The television show has over five million followers on its own Twitter page.

TWD's popularity comes from its ability to convince the viewer of their alternate post apocalyptic world. The use of computer generated images, special effects makeup, and set design make for a combination that makes the show almost believable. However, what really matters is the storyline. When you put aside the personal and relationship drama, the action, and the struggle for survival, the viewers are left with the main point of the show, the idea that true danger comes not from the zombies but from the other survivors. This can be seen in the television show's slogan for the later seasons: "Fight the dead. Fear the living," which quite literally shifts the focus of battle from the actual zombies to people who are still alive. Still, *TWD's* ability to keep its viewers and continuously interest more has in and of itself proved the popularity of this show as the subject for research.

TWD however, is not the only example of popular zombie themed entertainment media that has captured the public's attention. Television shows that revolve around zombies have hit major networks like the CW, HBO and even one of the most popular entertainment companies to date, Netflix. The hit television show *Game of Thrones* (2011), based on the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996) by George R. R. Martin is another series that has captured audiences by storm. Now in its sixth season, the show has accumulated over 7.6 million viewers and the "audience has grown an astounding 226% since its first five episodes of the first season" (Nededog, *Business Insider*, 2016). With its outstanding popularity, the show has become one of

the most successful productions from HBO to date. Debuting just a year after *TWD*, in 2011, the show features similar zombie like creatures called "white walkers" that come back to life and form part of an undead army. The show, which is based on the fight for reign of the "Seven Kingdoms" shares a similar plot to that of *TWD*. It contributes to the idea that the fight for survival, power, and control of the land takes precedent over the dangers of the undead. Similar to *TWD*, the fan base for *Game of Thrones* is large, and has influenced cosplayers, action figures, merchandise, fan events and social media accounts, proving its popularity with audiences.

Other shows like the CW's *iZombie* (2015) which was recently renewed for a fifth season, have also gained major attention. The show, developed by Rob Thomas and Diane Riggiero-Wright, is loosely based on a DC comic book and revolves around a doctor whose life falls apart after being turned into a zombie. The character must then work as a medical examiner in the city morgue and eat the brains of deceased people in order to solve the mystery of their murders. Meanwhile, *Santa Clarita Diet* (2017) is a Netflix original and the most recent addition to the zombie genre. *Santa Clarita Diet* is a humorous take on zombies and murder and involves the hit actress Drew Barrymore. The series was so popular amongst Netflix users that it was quickly renewed for a second season.

The television series listed above are not alone. There are various other zombie television shows on channels like SyFy and Sundance, and the genre has even branched out to anime with shows like *High School of the Dead* (2011) and *Is this a Zombie?* (2011). The zombie's ability to reach vast amounts of people in a variety of ways from dramas, comedies, and anime prove just how much the genre has spread in entertainment media. Additionally, the zombie genre isn't just made for television shows. Zombies can be found in movies, books, comics, and especially video games.

Popular movies like *28 days later* (2002), the *Resident Evil* Series (2002-2016), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Zombieland* (2009), and Brad Pitt's famous zombie action film *World War Z* (2013) have popularized the zombie film scene from movies that range from horror, science fiction, and comedy, to action. Then, when it comes to video games, the vast amount of options only increase with each platform. PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo all have their own versions of zombie games and classic games with zombie twists, like *Call of Duty*, which has a zombie category in each of its many additions. The zombie genre has solidified its importance in all forms of entertainment media, and within a world where entertainment media reign supreme the importance of zombies only increases too.

Despite the fact that *TWD* is centered around the zombie apocalypse, there are hints of conversations about race, gender, power, inclusion, and monstrosity. The show could be meant to just be meaningless entertainment, but I find it possible to pick up on the hints of the important topics that were just mentioned. Additionally, I can see the glimpses of these topics being shown in a program that is seen by literally millions of people all around the world, so I can't possibly be the only one who notices important themes. It is imperative that important topics that need to be discussed are not kept in boundaries. Politics don't have to only be talked about in the news, in debates, by politician, or lawyers. Social topics should not just be read about in books and magazines. People should be able to use and learn from all types of media, including entertainment media. If entertainment media and fantasy can be used as a means of allowing audiences to see further into the show and develop connections to the real world that they live in, I would like to determine how we can use television shows to promote important social and political topics. It would be intriguing to find if can we learn to find these messages with the shows we watch week to week, and at the same time, see how more television shows can be

created that have meaning rather than being meaningless. If there is a connection between *TWD* and social and political topics, then I intend to find them in this research. If there is a possibility that entertainment media and fantasy themes can be used for more than just entertainment, then I aim to discover how.

The research within this project is meant to find connections between fantasy/fictional worlds and the real world. The goal is to find the possibilities for meaning and interpretation, it is meant to go beyond the show itself. I aim to find if the *TWD* goes beyond zombies. To discover if there is more to monsters than the living dead. Also, to find if there is meaning behind the power, and the actions of the characters in this show. Furthermore, to determine if it is believable that the characters in this show were at some point in their fictional lives similar to the people around us. I cannot answer each and every one of these questions, at least not yet. However, I would like to find the reflections of characters, situations, places inside this fantasy world, the world that has been created by this television show, and find their link to our real world.

This project will be divided into six chapters, this introduction being the first. Second, in an attempt to find the connection between social, political, and fantasy themes in *TWD* in this project, I will introduce an overview of framework that details the necessary information to gain understanding not only of television and entertainment, but also of the world of zombies and monstrosity. The third chapter particularizes the theoretical background that will be utilized to influence and construct the analysis in the last few chapters. The analysis will begin with a set up of *TWD* in order to gain understanding about the happenings of the show without the need for a complete summary for each episode in each season. Following the set up for the show, I will

7

attempt to conduct an analysis of *TWD* using the theory discussed in chapter three. The final

chapter in this project will discuss my findings.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The main interests in this project are the messages and meanings that can be derived from television shows and, in particular, fantasy based shows like the zombie television show *TWD*. This chapter discusses the idea of monstrosity and television, two key factors to this project, which are described below. However, there are important pieces of this puzzle that need to be addressed as well, thus this chapter will not only delve into the history of television and the idea of monstrosity, it will also touch on the history of zombies and then discuss the introduction of zombies into entertainment media. Together, each of these sections provide a key part in understanding the potential impact and the interpretation of zombies in entertainment.

Popular Culture and Television

Television has long been one of the U.S.'s favorite pastimes, from the age of black and white to the now newly advanced 8k (currently the most advanced digital television resolution) television viewing experience, television as a form of entertainment has evolved since its start in 1927. "Ever since broadcast television became popular with mass audiences in the late 1940s and 1950s, audiences have developed an affinity not only for the programs themselves but also for the ritual of watching television" (Stitt, 2012, p. 185), creating an outlet that would not only grow to become the most popular form of entertainment, but one that would go on to make billions of dollars in the entertainment industry.

Comstock and Scharrer (1997) note in their work that much of the effort of the television industry in terms of demographics and ratings, is done for the purpose of "establishing a metric for the pricing of commercials" (p. 21). This commercial pricing allows the television entertainment industry to utilize their appeal with the audience to transform into a money making machine. In other words, television companies are selling commercial time slots, and the slots

9

placed within television that attract a higher audience or a particular type of audience, allow for a higher price. Unsurprisingly, Comstock and Scharrer (1997) found that the type of television that was the most observed was violence based (p. 64). When it comes to consumption of television entertainment, the "people, violence, and the themes and values conform to the needs of the storytelling and the avoidance of the objectionable, and will change only as the norms of society change" (Comstock & Scharrer, 1997, p. 75). Television creates an industry that is made for the people and the audience. Still, with an increasing amount of new television shows being introduced each year, watching television has transformed into "an escape that audiences seek out without much forethought, only giving attention to programs that match their needs for drama, comedy, or action" (Stitt, 2012, p. 198). Now, television has become an even bigger phenomenon, as the ability to watch television outside of one's home increases. With the ability to watch television on computers, laptops, mobile phones, and tablets, television is literally in the hands of anyone with access to Wi-Fi.

The Monstrous Other/Monsters in Popular Culture

From vampires, werewolves, zombies, and creatures, the idea of the monster has been a substantial part of folklore, literature, entertainment, and even bedtime stories. Monsters create an allure within their audiences unlike other types of entertainment, "we are very much curious about the monsters we fear. We may be utterly repulsed by them, but we are also fascinated by their extraordinary nature, their perverted views, and their deviant behaviors" (Castillo, 2016, p. 41). Meaning, that unlike fairytales and stories of enchantment, monsters captivate people in a much darker way. "An intense curiosity and awe for the different, morbid, and monstrous - omnipresent in child tales throughout history - have always permeated Western culture" (do Vale, 2010, p. 194) essentially providing the most important description of monsters: different.

In *Monster Theory* (1997), Jeffrey Cohen describes the idea of the monster as a form of the Other, and as an "incorporation of the Outside, or the Beyond" (p. 7).

Monsters represent something that is outside of the normal, outside of the realms of what is known to people. According to Cohen, monsters represent:

> This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threaten to smash distinctions. (p. 28)

In other words, monsters are created to be something outside of the systematic representation of what a person, or thing should be or look like, or as Cohen (1997) refers to them, "difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" (p. 7). They represent an outsider to the types of characters that people are used to. Ultimately, there is no set standard for what a monster is, in fact, it's important to know that "the common characteristics of monsters across cultures is that they are morphologically interstitial creatures that resist classification" (Cason, 2015, p. 267).

When it comes to monstrosity, the term is not bound to the physical. Monsters, as Cohen states, are molded from representations of different social themes. In fact, Thomas Cason, in his work on monstrosity notes that the idea of a monster does not solely come from the fictional creatures one might think of when they hear the particular word monsters, "the point is that sometimes the monsters of which men should be wary do not always meet the physiological criteria of what a monster should look like" (p. 279). As some know all too well, monsters can take the physical form of a normal human being, Cason notes that "monsters do not exist outside of the spectrum of human identity but are in fact a radicalized form of human identity (p. 265). There have been examples in media for as long as movies have been in production. Audiences

have heard phrases like "you're a monster," or "what kind of monster would do such a thing?" In these cases, one isn't speaking of a hideous creature from another world, but is instead referring to the actions of another human individual. What makes a person become a monster? According to Cason:

> The monster materializes when the axis of control tips toward loss of inhibition and the plane of mastering others tips toward the side of domination. This makes sense if we think about what monsters really are. Monsters are like men in the sense that their aim is to dominate others. (p. 266)

The traits, habits, and actions of a person can lead to the label of monster. Things like "relentless hunger for hostility that distinguishes monster from man" (Cason, 2015, p. 266) and "lack of self-control through their willful violation of culturally prescribed boundaries" (p. 267) can influence the way a person is seen by the rest of the world. In other words, monstrosity can go hand in hand with the idea of humanity, and create a person who although looks perfectly normal is in fact a monster, someone who doesn't behave in a way that is normal to human behavior.

Aside from the idea of monstrous behavior in the realm of monstrosity, as mentioned above, Cohen introduces the idea of the monstrous other. Cohen continues to say that each monster tells two tales, the first is the origin of the monster, it's storyline, and the second, lies in the "cultural use the monster serves" (p. 13). When it comes to cultural use, we can refer to the prior idea of the monster serving as a representation of the Other, something outside the norm, thus "the abnormality of the monster would come to be widely interpreted in European cultures as defiance of law, be it the natural law or the established political and moral orders" (Castillo, 2016, p. 40). While monsters serve as a representation of the obstruction of order, they can also, as Cohen states, become "cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual" (Cohen, 1997, p. 7). Thus,

while monsters form part of the Other, the obscure, and the different, they still serve as a representation of the real life horrors outside of lore and storytelling. In other words, monsters can also be a representation of people outside the norm. "Difference, or otherness, gets constructed as monstrosity in a world that has become more and more conservative," notes Bernadette Calafell in her book, *Monstrosity, Performance, and Race in Contemporary Culture* (2015); "Cultural anxieties and fears around Otherness, whether they are about race, class, gender, sexuality, body size, or ability, manifest themselves in representation of bother literal and symbolic monsters" (p.4).

Zombies

While the exact origins of the zombie are not quite clear, the existence of zombie related history surfaces every now and again, and varies from culture to culture, such as the Haitian interpretation of zombies as noted by do Vale:

> In Bantu, zombie means a ghost that looms at night. Through a powerful potion, Haitian tradition holds that the sorcerer or boko is able to stir and make the dead perpetrate crimes for him. The zombie could then be defined as a body deprived of will, controlled by an invisible force, a borderline creature between human and monster, life and death. (p. 198)

However, the history of the origination of the zombie differs. As the zombie maintains such a popular hold on U.S. history, some believe that "the zombie remains a purely American monster, born from Vodoun magic and religion" (Bishop, 2006, p. 197). Another interpretation is that the idea of the zombie is derived from the inability in early history, to properly pronounce someone dead and the idea of premature burial. "The period between death being pronounced and actually occurring, the time when an apparently dead body is in fact still alive, accounts for the uncanny

phenomenon of premature burial" (Wójcicka, 2010, p. 178). Meaning that because people of the past had not yet advanced in medicine and knowledge of the body, people were oftentimes labeled as dead without actually being dead.

As we move on from the idea of the zombie's origins, we can go into how a zombie is depicted. Whether in literature, comics, film, or television, the zombie is described as something sprung from a virus or infection that is highly contagious. Zombies "do things we cannot comprehend emotionally or rationally. Their methods are rudimentary but dangerous nonetheless" (Rielly, 2016, p. 66). While the zombie generally in all cases represents danger, there are a large variety of interpretations of how a zombie should think, look, and act. The zombie varies, "slow and clumsy, but very deadly in numbers…the 'modern zombie," which is a fast-running, gun-toting zombie, and zombies with different, magical abilities and super-intelligence" (Bo, 2013, p. 16). In most modern depictions of the zombie, flesh eating, cannibalistic acts promote a huge part of the fear that they induce. However, "traditional African and Haitian zombies had no appetite for human flesh. In fact, they were often though of as 'slaves' either awakened from the dead or hypnotized into a magically induced catatonic state to carry out the will of the zombie master" (Castillo, 2016, p. 46). This shows how zombie lore has changed over time to create new types of monsters, and to evolve to fit cultures.

Still, despite the relatively innocent pieces of the true history of zombies and the living dead, there is no question that as time passed, the idea of the zombie was a threatening one. The idea of a corpse that has reanimated is still nothing short of a horror story, but shows that "a body that is alive but appears to be dead, or vice versa, is therefore both subject and object, the self and the threatening Other" (Wójcicka, 2010, p. 177). Recent examples of zombies depict a rotting corpse, a gory scene, and monsters that just won't die, are the things of nightmares.

However, zombies, can also reflect more than just a fear of the walking dead. With examples in literature about how people become zombies, or how the "virus" is passed creates another area of concern, do Vale (2015) adds:

> A representation of the fear of disintegration, contagion, the plague, and hence the trespassing of boundaries, and consequently isolation. Common fears in a society that faces dramatic shifts in social interaction, particularly due to the constant media messages featuring ubiquitous towering menaces like terrorists, ecological and economical disasters, HIV, bird flu, swine flu, and young Marilyn Manson fans going postal apparently everywhere around the globe. (p. 198)

This allows one to see that while zombies might be manmade monsters, they still represent a fear in the audiences that might reflect something more.

Zombies in Entertainment

Zombies and zombie entertainment form part of the Horror genre, a movie genre that grows from the fears of audiences and uses them to promote pleasure. According to Nickel (2010), the genre has two main components, first is "an appearance of the evil, supernatural, or of the monstrous" and following it is the "intentional elicitation of dread, visceral disgust, fear, or startlement in the spectator or reader" (p. 15). The horror genre has developed into a huge category of the industry that has a wide variety of topics and themes, "part of what makes horror programming so versatile and sought-after is the wide range of sub-categories that permeate the genre" (Neel, 2013, p. 11).

It is important to note that traits of the zombie can be seen in famous monsters like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). These classic introductions into the monster detail corpses that have died and reanimated, the essential condition of being a

zombie. However, while these monsters contribute in some ways to the zombie genre, they are not the type of reanimation that I am focusing on. The type of zombie that is the focus of this research project deals with a reanimation after death that comes at the hand of a virus. Frankenstein is a man made creation, a corpse come back to life with the help of a mad scientist. The character can speak and think. Dracula is a monster of another kind. Though vampires also feed on humans, characters like Dracula carry on like human beings. They make decisions, have feelings, they can learn and adapt. Though several types of monsters share similarities, the zombie as described in this research project is quite unique.

Zombies have been a part of this horror genre since George A. Romero's 1968 premiere of *Night of the Living Dead* and have become one of the genre's most notorious villains, the corpse reanimated. While Romero's classic film is not the first zombie movie to hit the U.S. zombie horror market (the first zombie film to premier in the U.S. was Victor Halparin's 1938 *White Zombie,* starring Béla Lugosi), it is noted as the most influential one. Peter Dendle's (2001) *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia* even goes as far as to say that Romero's film marked the beginning of the Golden Age of Zombies starting with Romero's film in 1968 up until 1983 (p. 7). Dendle (2001) notes that after the film, the zombie movie genre took off and "more than thirty zombie movies appeared between 1969 and 1977 in Spain, Mexico, Italy, England, and the States, representing the first post-Romero wave" (Dendle, 2010, p. 7).

As mentioned in the previous section, zombies had a history of being slaves that were controlled by a master, but Romero's version created a new breed of monster: "Romero liberated the zombie from the shackles of the master, and invested his zombies not with a function, but rather a drive" (Dendle, 2010, p. 6). In fact, the sequels following the original film have also hugely impacted the horror genre, "Romero has produced not only a body of interesting films but

also a provocative argument about the nature of the American dream in the postcounterculture age" (Phillips, 2005, p. 83). With blood, guts, and decay, the visual representation of the zombie has created a cult following though movies, television, and the likes creating a "new monster for a new age" (Baker, 2014, para. 6). Still, the zombie movie has lasted throughout the years, and "the sheer volume of zombie movies attests to their enduring cult popularity and contemporary relevance" (Dendle, 2010, p. 1).

While the zombie film has been around since 1938, previous examples of the living dead in U.S. media are slim as the "zombie genre does not exist prior to the film age because of its essentially visual nature" (Bishop, 2006, p. 196). However, as time has progressed, opportunities for new methods in makeup, animation, and computer-generated graphics have allowed the zombie to evolve into a modern monster, amplifying the creature from its origin. According to Katz (2015) the development of the more modern zombie franchise has developed a ridiculously large fan base that favors zombie-based entertainment:

> Millennials in particular are drawn to post-apocalyptic shows, as well as series that feature conflicted and flawed leaders and heroes. That helps to explain why *The Walking Dead* is the most watched series on cable and broadcast among persons 18-49 and millennials 18-34. (p. 12)

This has created a whole new industry in and of itself, making zombie movies one of the most profitable of the horror genre.

> Interest is growing; the growth of the zombie entertainment industry is steady and steep. This is also reflected in zombie products. Of course you can purchase t-shirts, decorations, brain-shaped gelatin molds, posters, action figures, and novelties. But are you concerned about the impending apocalypse? Then you can buy a cache of weapons

17

specifically designed to repel zombies. Or is it survival manuals and training that you

want? That, too, can be arranged. (Rielly, 2016, p. 64)

Rielly continues, stating that the industry has even taken a significant role in real life. As the

popularity of survival and apocalyptic situations rises, safety has become a concern for people

who have seen pieces of the zombie entertainment industry. He states, "emergency preparedness

consultants are using the threat of zombies to promote their communication tools and emergency

planning services. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security paid a consulting firm to train

military police through a zombie attack drill" (p. 65).

Nevertheless, while zombie films serve as a form of entertainment for people who prefer

a bit of horror, the idea of zombies in media can also be seen through deeper significance:

zombie movies represent the inescapable realities of unnatural death while presenting a

grim view of the modern apocalypse through scenes of deserted streets, piles of corpses,

and gangs of vigilantes—images that have become increasingly common and can shock

and terrify a population that has become numb to other horror subgenres. (Bishop, 2009,

p. 17)

In other words, the movies serve to amplify the already existent fears of the U.S. population. The

existence of zombies in these films and television shows are destroyed remnants of the human

civilization that the films and shows themselves are based upon, showing that "zombies then

serve as a mirror for the worst of humanity. Zombies further mirror other aspects of humanity

that are hidden and ignored" (Baker, 2014, para. 21).

As zombies provide a reflection of humanity itself, one can wonder if events that have

occurred throughout history have been an influence. Wars, for example, might attribute to the

fears of outside threats, "since the beginning of the war on terror, American popular culture has

been influenced by the fear of possible terrorist attacks and the grim realization that people are not as safe and secure as they might have once thought" (Bishop, 2009, p. 17). This idea that zombies represent fear that developed after the 9/11 terror attacks has been widely discussed. For example, zombies have oftentimes represented monsters that were outside of the realm of what people refer to as normal, allowing the zombie to be seen as the other, or an unwelcome outsider, that could pose danger to the surviving group. After the terrorist attacks in 2001, being an outsider was even more so deemed an issue in terms of U.S. citizenship, and allowed anti immigration sentiments to increase. Baker notes that the reflection of societal and cultural fears have since been projected into the zombie genre:

> Cultural anxieties have been nurtured about the rise in terrorist activity around the world, witnessed with the collapse of the World Trade Centre towers, and the threats of pandemics that might eviscerate the human race in the form of SARS. The zombie narrative then represents a logical growth in Gothic monsters that have been used to explore modern day cultural anxieties. (para. 8)

These anxieties then turn into fear, and become part of the structure of horror movies, whose only goal is to make one tremble in terror. "Because the aftereffects of war, terrorism, and natural disasters so closely resemble the scenarios of zombie cinema, such images of death and destruction have all the more power to shock and terrify" (Bishop, 2009, p. 18), and the depiction of mutilated, reanimated corpses in all zombie movies and television shows echo the horrors of death, and the need for war and survival.

However, zombies are not the only threat presented in most zombie films and television shows. In fact, it's the characters who are alive that create a significant portion of the problem. For example, *The Walking Dead* is consistently emphasizing their catch phrase "Fight the dead.

Fear the living" as an attempt to show the reader that "in the series, threat comes not just from the 'walkers' but also from the fellow survivors who no longer obey the pre-apocalypse laws and way of life" (Baker, 2014, para. 9). The ability to show fear caused by more than just monsters is a technique seen in a slew of movies in the horror genre. It allows the audience to see issues presented in the fictional world, which can also possibly be seen in the real world. "Rather than a mere interpretative model for what we fear in given times, horror movies are also a means to problematize identity, social, political, and cultural issues" (do Vale, 2010, p. 194). The horror genre's influence from real world issues shows that the horror genre contributes more than just a piece of the Hollywood entertainment industry.

The important themes and topics introduced in this review of literature have allowed me to develop a series of questions that represent what I am trying to solve for in this study. This research project allows me the opportunity to determine the possible value of television shows and entertainment media to the audiences that watch it. It allows for an open discussion and comparison of the monstrous other and other societal and political themes both in *TWD* and in real life. Thus, I pose the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways does *TWD* construct the monstrous other?

RQ2: What is to be gained from using Fantasy Theme Analysis to analyze *TWD* and its significance in contemporary popular culture?

RQ3: How can Fantasy Theme Analysis be used with analysis of current movies and television shows in the U.S. in order to asses the relationship between fantasy themes and contemporary culture, social trends, or political issues?

20

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research project will use metaphorical and fantasy theme analysis of the television show *The Walking Dead.* Analysis of *TWD* will be based upon the first five seasons of the show. The project aims to find the social and political connections from *TWD* to the real world. Thus, it is important to look at examples of race, gender, power, and monstrosity, etc. within this show. The first season of the show is made up of six episodes, the second 13 episodes, and the remainder of the seasons all have 16 episodes each, for a total of 67 episodes. Throughout each episode it is crucial that I pay attention to examples of social and political problems that are being faced currently in the United States. While the metaphorical examples might stretch over a large number of episodes, or throughout the entirety of the show, it is important to highlight the instances of the above mentioned themes in a separation of character, plot, and setting. This allows one to pinpoint exact moments that metaphorically mirror our current reality. So, I will begin with noting instances of race, gender, monstrosity, power, inclusion, and exclusion within the characters, situations, and locations within each season. Then, I will apply fantasy theme analysis to my findings in an effort to discuss how messages and examples in *TWD* can be reflected in the audience and issues occurring in the real world.

Fantasy Theme Analysis

Fantasy theme analysis is a form of rhetorical criticism that utilizes messages and ideals in dramatization and fantasy stories and connects them to the messages and ideals in the real life of the audience. In other words, these stories and dramatizations attract the audience "because it hits a common psychodynamic chord or hidden agenda item or common difficulties vis-à-vis the natural environment, the sociopolitical systems, or the economic structures" (Bormann, 1972, p.

399). The fantasy themes in this project are derived from the fictional television show, *TWD*.

Bormann (1982) notes that:

> fantasies are shared in all communication contexts, that there is a connection between rhetorical visions and community consciousness, that sharing fantasies is closely connected with motivation, and is an important means for people to create their social realities." (p. 289)

Audiences of *TWD* create a create a connection to the themes in the show that as mentioned above, influence their social realities. Borman continues the idea of mass connection, stating:

> "the dramatizations which catch on and chain out in small groups are worked into public speeches and into the mass media and, in turn, spread out across larger publics, serve to sustain the members' sense of community, to impel them strongly to action and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes." (p. 398)

The choice to use fantasy theme analysis in this research is made clear by Bormann's idea that:

> "A viable rhetorical vision must accommodate the community to the changes that accompany its unfolding history. The rhetoric must deal with the anxieties aroused by times of trouble, by the evil defined within the social reality. The rhetoric must deal with changing circumstances and social conflict." (p. 292)

When placing *TWD* at the center of fantasy theme analysis, the metaphors and messages within the show can reflect upon the above mentioned factors that mesh the fictional and the reality.

However, the use of fantasy theme analysis has declined since the mid 2000s. While it was a popular method of analysis after 1972 when Bormann introduced it, less and less research has been conducted with fantasy theme analysis at the forefront. One possibility for the decline

22

in use of fantasy theme analysis could be attributed to Bormann himself, with the creation of symbolic convergence theory. This theory "explains the creation and development of special communication theories and of a more specific group culture…that evolving culture interacts with the task dimension to shape the communication process of decision making" (Bormann, 1996, p. 81). Symbolic convergence theory is essentially the sister of fantasy theme analysis, and while it too addresses the idea of fantasy themes, symbolic convergence theory places a large focus on group decision making. The difference is that fantasy theme analysis is the idea that audiences create connections from fantasy themes to their real life. Symbolic convergence theory takes it further and incudes the decision making process. Bormann states that one of the most important aspects about symbolic convergence theory is indeed, "the way it explains how individuals come to share enough symbolic ground to take part in logical negotiation processes, problem solving procedures, and decision making" (1996, p. 90).

It makes sense why people use symbolic convergence theory; it allows for a deeper understanding of large groups of people through a communication perspective. However, fantasy theme analysis should still be used as a means of analysis in interpreting messages in fantasy themes in today's most popular television shows and movies. The idea of group decision making is several steps past audience interpretation and connections. Fantasy theme analysis allows researchers to pay more attention to the message at hand before deciding what the audience will do with it. With the large amounts of entertainment media reaching people all over the United States and the world, there has been little to no research in recent years that uses fantasy theme analysis to interpret meaningful symbolism in current popular television shows and movies. According to the Nielsen Media Ratings Company, "the average American watches more than five hours of live television every day" (Hinckley, 2014, para. 1). With so many people watching

so much entertainment media, it is valuable then, to revisit fantasy theme analysis as the viewers

of *TWD* consume media that are used as a means of escapism to leave behind current realities for

alternate ones, and to reflect upon current realities through fiction.

As the process of analysis on *TWD* begins, the categories used in fantasy theme analysis

will become crucial in the interpretation and understanding of the show. According to Shields

and Preston's work using this method of study:

> "In the case of fantasy theme analysis, the schemata is used to describe, interpret, and
> evaluate the rhetorical materials (persuasive postures, specific movements, campaigns,
> speeches, and conversations) that comprise the symbolic reality of groups of people, be
> they small groups, organizational work units, political parties, or other rhetorical
> communities." (p. 102)

Fantasy themes, the basis of this analysis, "are the unit of analysis that depicts the structural

elements of rhetorical visions, i.e., the dramatis personae, plotlines, scenes, and sanctioning

agents" (Shields & Preston, 1985 p. 105). These elements of rhetorical vision help in condensing

the analysis into categories, allowing for a more in-depth look at the fantasy themes that are

being focused on. One of the most important categories of analysis mentioned by Shields and

Preston that will be used is the dramatis personae, looking at the characters in *TWD*:

> "The dramatis personae are the characters that are given life within the drama (vision).
> These characters are attributed certain qualities, depicted as taking certain actions,
> represented as appearing within a certain scene, and their actions are motivated or
> justified by the sanctioning of a certain agent. Depending upon the complexity of the
> vision, the characters identifiable within a vision may include both heroic and villainous
> personae." (p. 106)

Also, it is important to look at what is actually happening within the storyline itself, Shields and Preston note this as the plotline:

> **"**Plotline is a concept within the method that refers to the action of the drama or vision. Action simply means who is doing what, to whom, and how? Often called "scenarios," plotlines can be identified as those fantasy themes that depict the action of the drama: "good versus evil," "underdog versus colossus," "acceptance of what fate brings," "pull yourself up by the bootstraps," "business as usual," "conspiracy," etc." (p. 107)

Lastly, it is vital to look at the scene and the setting in which this show takes place. Shields and Preston state it perfectly: "sometimes, in some dramas, the scene becomes so important that it appears to influence both the qualities attributed to the actors or characters and the plotlines within the vision" (p. 107). Using these categories to analyze *TWD* will aid in the understanding of the underlying messages and reflections within the show. I can use the categories to determine instances of race, gender, monstrosity, power, etc., as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. By using metaphorical and fantasy theme analysis, *TWD* can function symbolically as an escape of the current complex social and political reality into a fantasy that mirrors it. Additionally, while it is possible to find the metaphorical similarities between this reality and that of *TWD*, it is important to note that the fictional reality allows for solutions and outcomes that our reality does/has not.

Research Goals and Questions

Through this research, I aim to investigate the metaphorical messages and meanings in the fictional world of television, and to relate them to real world examples that deal with social and political issues in the Unites States. The themes that can be found in a connection between

fiction and reality are, race, gender, walls, otherness, monstrosity, external threats, and internal issues.

TWD and other post apocalyptic zombie films introduce the need for walls, an idea that the current U.S. population knows all too well. These television walls hold symbolic meaning and perpetuate and/or reinforce the idea of keeping people out (zombies and even people) and the idea that the wall serves as protection from outsider threats. Though the walls in these fictional worlds serve to keep out the undead, we can see that the idea is to keep out anything that is unlike the characters that these shows revolve around. Those on the other side of the wall pose a threat of changing the dynamic of the people living on the "right" side of it. While these zombies pose actual danger, the idea that people on the other side of the proposed border wall in our current world are also dangerous is not far fetched. Can then, the idea of keeping out the undead and behind the wall be compared to the border wall as proposed by President Donald Trump?

When it comes to the idea of fear for the structures that are already in place, like *TWD's* "Fight the dead. Fear the living" slogan, could the current political climate in United States find another similarity to these television shows and films. *TWD* depicts within its show thus far, that the problem is not what or who lies beyond the wall, but the issues that take place inside of it. Half of the problems that the characters in *TWD* face are fighting each other for survival. The show portrays most of their issues coming from a fight for power and an inability to accept different points of view.

As mentioned previously at the beginning of this chapter, the use of fantasy theme analysis has been used minimally recently, if at all, to find the connection between fiction and reality in recent popular forms of entertainment media. With a slew of movies and television

shows that have obvious significance for their audiences, entertainment media beg to be analyzed through the fantasy theme methodology. Through this methodology, it is possible to explore and examine the messages and fantasy themes present in this television show and determine if and how they imitate happenings in real life and vice versa.

Chapter 4: Setting up *TWD*

This research delves into *The Walking Dead* and the application of fantasy theme analysis. Dramatis personae, plotline, and scene, are going to be the major categories of analysis as mentioned in the previous chapter. Using those themes, this research will focus on issues of monstrosity and otherness, while looking at the underlying messages shown in the first six seasons. Examples of monstrosity can be seen in various main and supporting characters, both in their actions and in their dialogue, from each season. Situations and settings within the series can also be very telling. Thus, in this chapter, I will include characters, situations, and locations that emphasize the things in this television show that can be understood by the audience seem echoed by reality. The analysis will be broken down by season, allowing for the opportunity to see not only the themes within each season, but the progression and differences between seasons, and to focus from the very beginning to recent seasons. This chapter is not meant to recap every season. I will not be analyzing this content until the next chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight characters and situations relevant to fantasy theme analysis.

Dramatis Personae

Season 1

Merle Dixon.

Merle Dixon, who is introduced in the second episode of the series, has no hidden personality traits or small glimpses of monstrous behavior. Using fantasy theme analysis, we can compare Dixon's character to instances of racism in reality. Merle Dixon is plain out bad. The audience only gets to see one side of Merle in his short-lived run during this first season, and it's not a good one. Merle is a flagrant racist who believes he should be in charge. He is unashamed of his behavior towards others and directs most, if not all, of his comments to women and people

of color. In this season, there is no better example of monstrosity within living humans than him. In the second episode we see Merle call Latino character Morales, whose first name is unknown, a "taco bender." He then moves on to calling T-Dog, the group's only African American male, a "nigger" and physically assaults him. Only minutes later, in all of his charm, he asks Andrea, a character who we see throughout the next few seasons, if she would like to "bump uglies" with him as he calls her things like "honeybunch" and "sugartits." The show creators were obviously not afraid to create a character that would garner immediate hatred. Still, his unapologetic behavior and brazen racism are clouded by the need for his help to survive through this zombie apocalypse. How are the characters within this show still so much more afraid of the dangers of the dead, when there is a living monster sitting right next to them? Merle's most monstrous and scandalous behavior of the season occurs when he cuts off his own hand after being handcuffed to a pipe on the roof of a building. When the rest of the group, including his brother Daryl, return to free him they find the only thing he left behind, his severed hand. Merle represents a character whose attitude and personality see no change when faced with the end of the world. His character is one whose opinions and beliefs probably reflect those of people living here and now in a world where zombies have not yet invaded. Merle is a character who, despite the horrors of the outside world, remains a horrible person, and a monster himself.

Shane Walsh.

The character of Shane Walsh is an example of fantasy themes that can be related to violence. We are introduced to Shane Walsh in the very first episode of the series. He is Rick's best friend and partner as King County sheriff deputy. At first glance, Shane is dedicated and loyal to Rick, and yet as the series progresses, we see Shane go from right hand man to villain. As Lori Grimes suggests putting up signs to warn people about the horrors ahead in the city of

Atlanta, Shane replies with, "it's a luxury we can't afford," showing how Shane doesn't care about warning and possibly saving the lives of others because he has to care for his own. His selfishness is only further shown in the following episodes. For example, in episode three, Lori Grimes, Rick's wife, tells the audience that Shane lied to her about Rick's death. At this point it has been established that Lori and Shane have started a relationship shortly after leaving King County. One could say that Shane's "monstrous" tendencies first come to light when the audience finds out about him and Lori. Sleeping with your best friend's wife and acting as a father figure to his child immediately after his death might not look too good to some. However, Shane begins to reveal his ill will the second that Rick, who is presumed dead, walks right into camp. He seems unhappy that Rick is alive, is angry that he can no longer be with Lori and exhibits his jealousy with bouts of anger and an instant that sets him up as not such a good guy for this season and the next. In a moment of jealousy and brash decisions, Shane points his gun at Rick from a distance as they walk through the woods and is only stopped by the entrance of Dale, an older member of the group, who catches him in the act. Shane is willing to kill his best friend who only just returned, in order to be with Lori. For Shane, the bigger threat is no longer the zombies, but Rick, someone who he used to be close with and who has everything that Shane wants.

Ed Peletier.

Ed Peletier is a good example to use for the comparison of fantasy themes to that of gender issues. He is a character that we see for an extremely short amount of time in season one. He is married to Carol Peletier and father to Sophia Peletier. Like Merle, this character is meant to be hated. Ed's character shows the audience that even in times of peril and apocalypse, there are still men who beat their wives and see women as inferior. Despite the group living out in the

30

middle of the woods, Ed still ensures that Carol is cooking his food, washing and ironing his clothes, and caring for their daughter as he sits back and does nothing. When shown, Ed does not seem like a valuable member of the group. He isn't helping the group, and is literally as useless as he makes Carol feel. In his brief appearance, before his death, he degrades and assaults Carol while she sits with the other ladies in the group and washes clothes. The women are unable to help get his hands off of Carol's neck, and it is ultimately Shane who comes in and stops the situation. When the time comes after Ed's death to destroy the brain, Carol ensures that she's the one to handle it. As she so passionately bashes his brains in, she seemingly discharges years of hatred and is free of the monster that was her husband. The first season, through riddled with new and important characters, highlights behaviors and actions of characters like Ed. By doing this, the show allows an introduction into monstrous behavior of real people, that will continue in season two.

Season 2

Shane Walsh.

The only character of note in this season is one that has already been discussed. In Season Two, Shane seems to be spiraling out of control. Consumed by his jealously, he has decided to either leave the group and survive on his own, or see if he can tolerate his frustrations with Rick as the leader and Lori no longer by his side. As the season progresses, Shane's emotions and paranoia continue to escalate out of control and amplifies the themes of monstrosity. In a trip to gather much needed medical supplies to save one of the group members, Shane kills a member of the Greene family. He shoots him and uses him as a distraction with the zombies, giving Shane a chance to escape and be the hero. When Shane finds out that the Greene family is holding zombies trapped in the barn, he sets out to kill them all. The Greene family at this point

still hope for a cure, so the zombies trapped in the barn mean a great deal to them, despite their pleads to leave them be, Shane executes them all, including members of the Greene family who have become zombies. Still, this is not his worst behavior of the season. Towards the end of Season Two, Shane develops a plot to get Rick alone in order to kill him. In the first season the thought of killing his best friend was a possibility, now it's a full force necessity. Shane manages to attack Rick, but ultimately ends up losing, dying, and turning into a zombie. Though the season had plenty of interesting and important characters, Shane was the only character to blatantly portray the fantasy themes discussed. As we go into season three, we see an increase in characters who exhibit the fantasy themes that are being observed.

Season 3

Michonne.

As a character that inspires ideas of gender and race in fantasy themes, Michonne is extremely important. While we see a pretty intense glimpse of Michonne in all her glory at the end of season two, it's not until season three that we really get to know her. Michonne is first seen with two pet zombies on chains, their mouths and hands have been removed, and they serve as a camouflage against other walkers. She has been surviving alone up until the point in which she meets Andrea. Michonne is a strong female character who lacks weakness and fear. Michonne has no problem killing zombies with the help of her weapon of choice, a sword. This character has no problem with telling it like it is. Her curiosity leads to her discover the true characteristics of the season's villains, leading her to join forces with Rick's group and become part of their circle. Though a bit of a controversial character this season, and in spite of many attempts on her life, Michonne is a solid representation of a female thriving and surviving in the

zombie apocalypse, where all other female characters are at some point or another seen as weak and fragile.

Merle Dixon.

Merle Dixon comes back in season three, a character that the audience probably thought they would never see again. Merle's personality hasn't really changed, and he's become even more dangerous with his new weapon in the place of his missing hand. As a resident of Woodbury, a small town thriving in this post apocalyptic world, he holds a position of power as the right hand man for the leader of Woodbury. Merle serves as a henchman, sent to do the dirty work. He kills innocent people, and hunts people who The Governor, the town's leader, wants dead. It is in this that we see the theme of violence and monstrosity alive and well in one of the show's most hated characters. Also, Merle's anger and hatred towards the group that caused him to lose his hand is still present when he sees Glen and Maggie Greene on his way back from attempting to kill Michonne.

Philip Blake (The Governor).

Season three of *TWD* introduces the first blatantly villainous character that the audience has seen, Phillip Blake, otherwise known as The Governor. At first glance, the Governor seems like a man willing to help others and a leader who has been pretty successful at keeping his group alive and well. However, the Governor's villain status and evil ways, though hidden to other characters on the show, quickly come to light for the viewers watching. He maintains strategic lies to the people of the town of Woodbury, where he is dubbed leader, to convince the townspeople that he is humble, kind, and generous. Blake, however, is actually murderous, greedy, and vindictive. It's seen first when he guns down a group of surviving military soldiers. When the soldiers see Blake they are relieved to get some help and a place to rest their heads.

Instead, they are all gunned down and robbed of their weapons and ammunition. The soldiers could have probably been a major help to the group, but the Governor is not okay with losing the position as leader.

The governor establishes himself as a monstrous human being pretty early on in the season. His actions, though horrendous, are hidden from the rest of the town, and those who see the real him (Michonne) are next on his hit list. It isn't until episode three though, that we get a clear view of his monstrosity and insanity. Tucked away in a room in his apartment are several fish tanks full of severed heads of the people that he has killed. In the corner of the room, behind a cage door is his daughter, dead and reanimated, chained to the wall. We see the governor with his daughter a couple more times within the season, combing her hair or talking to her as if she were still human. This seems to be the only thing holding the last shreds of his humanity intact. So when Michonne breaks in and kills her, all hell breaks loose. The governor is stabbed in the eye with a shard of glass by Michonne, altering his appearance and making him even more menacing than before. The survival of the town is no longer important to him, and he is instead consumed by rage and the need for revenge. His need for revenge ultimately leads to the governor killing a large group of his own people and the rest of the town fleeing to the prison to get away from him. His actions in this season make him the most monstrous character yet and an excellent candidate for fantasy themes and monstrosity. The three characters I have highlighted from this season are excellent examples of fantasy themes in this television show. While focusing on fantasy themes like race, violence, and monstrosity, these characters stand out more than the others in this particular season.

Season 4

Philip Blake (The Governor).

Entering season four, the audience is left under the assumption that the people at the prison are safe from the wrath of the Governor. As the show spotlights what happens to Phillip after the attempt at war with the prison group, the audience is led to believe that he has left the past in the past. After being abandoned by the only two people who stuck by him (Martinez being one of them) Phillip is now trying to survive on his own. When he meets a family, including a widow and her young daughter, he tries to start over. Under the false name Brian, Phillip falls for the widow and cares deeply for her child, a little girl that reminds him of his own daughter that he lost in the previous season. However, while in search of a new home, the family encounters a new group of survivors with Martinez as the leader. Martinez allows Phillip and his new family to join their group and even follows along with his new identity. Martinez begins to treat Phillip the way that he used to be treated when Phillip was in charge. Phillip's new start doesn't last very long. His need to be in control overcomes him, and he kills Martinez, becoming leader of the new group. With control of the new group, Philip plots to finally follow up on the revenge he wanted. With the guise of finding a new and safe place to live, Phillip decides that he will kill all of Rick's group and take the Prison for themselves. He captures Michonne and Hershel Greene and declares war on the prison. Equipped with a tank, Phillip beheads Hershel and begins war on Rick and his people, destroying the prison in the process. It begs to question then, whether he really wanted the prison or whether he was still set on revenge. Either way, the Governor ends up dying in this season at the hand of Rick, Michonne, and the widow that he fell in love with who decided that he wasn't a good person after all.

The Claimers.

The best way to describe the Claimers in this series is savages. They envelope a multitude of themes that can be used in the analysis in the following chapter. The group exhibits forms of

monstrosity that fit in both the fantasy world and in the real one. We are first introduced to them in the abandoned neighborhood in which Rick and Carl find shelter after the battle at the prison. While we don't see their faces at first, we know that they will kill each other for a bed. We really get to know them when they allow a lonely Daryl to join them. They live and die by the rule of claiming what is yours. In fact, taking something that one of the other group members has claimed is grounds for punishment and death. While that alone sounds pretty harsh, we get the worst glimpse of what kind of people they truly are when they encounter Rick, Carl, and Michonne for a second time. After forcefully capturing the three, they tell Rick that they are going to rape and murder both Michonne and Carl front of him. Ultimately, with the arrival of Daryl, a fight breaks out and the entire group ends up dying violently at the hands of Rick, Daryl, and Michonne.

Carol Peletier.

In this season we begin to see a new side of Carol. While at first Carol was a representation of gender issues (being abused by her husband Ed) she now also begins to fit into the theme of monstrosity and violence. She has become a completely different person than who she once was. In fact, she has gone from weak and quiet to strong and fearless. Carol is seen teaching the children how to use knives and guns during what is supposed to be their story time. She's telling all of the children that they have to be strong and willing to kill. She gets close to two young girls, Lizzie and Mika, who she instructs to kill their father when he gets bitten by a zombie. Then, when an illness starts spreading through the prison she takes it into her own hands to kill the first two people with symptoms and burn their bodies to stop the illness from spreading. For her actions, she is exiled from the prison by Rick. After finding Lizzie and Mika

36

again after the battle at the prison, she tries to help them understand what they need to do to survive. However, after seeing Lizzie's alarming behavior and personality traits, Carol kills her.

Lizzie Samuels.

Lizzie is one of the children who has found refuge at the prison. She, along with her sister Mika, develop a very strong bond with Carol. Lizzie however is quite different from any other child, or character in general, that has been shown in *TWD*. She does not see the zombies as monsters. As a matter of fact, she refuses to. While Lizzie is being taught how to survive, she is heard giving the zombies names. While this at first seems innocent, later it proves to be a dangerous personality trait. Lizzie sees the zombies as people. She refuses to kill them and actually is devastated when she does have to kill them. After they survive the prison battle and find themselves with Tyrese, Carol, and baby Judith, Lizzie begins to show a side of herself that even her sister Mika doesn't like. It begins with a scene where Lizzie encounters a nest of baby bunnies, she hides them from the sight of Tyrese and her sister. Lizzie then snaps each baby bunny's neck and moves right along with her day, unaffected. We later find out that she was killing animals and mutilating their bodies inside of the prison, as well as feeding rats to the zombies at the fences. In one scene, Lizzie is left with baby Judith, Rick's daughter, and while she seems to try to stifle Judith's crying she takes it too far and begins to suffocate the baby. Had Carol not arrived, Judith would have probably died. The audience continues to see Lizzie playing with zombies, and getting angry at Carol for killing them. So, while it is shocking, it isn't unexpected to see Lizzie kill her own sister in order to turn her into a zombie. Carol and Tyrese return to find Mika's dead body and Lizzie with a smile on her face, saying she was going to kill Judith and herself next.

Rick Grimes.

This season was very interesting for Rick Grimes. At the beginning, Rick has calmed down a lot. He no longer carries a gun. He doesn't go on supply runs. He stays at the prison, gardens, and tends to the animals. He's become a less violent leader and really tries to make something out of the prison. When the Governor arrives at the prison with a tank and hostages, Rick tries to reason with him. He tells the Governor that they can share the prison and that they can all live there together. When the Governor rejects his suggestions and kills Hershel, Rick does what he has to do and fights back. Rick leaves the battle with his son Carl, and they later find Michonne. Together, the three of them begin to make their way towards Terminus, a chance for survival. On the way there, Rick and his small group encounter another group, the Claimers. The group threatens to rape and kill Rick's son while he watches. Again, Rick must fight back in order to protect his people. This moment in the season is the most brutal that Rick has been portrayed. With no weapons and his hands tied behind his back, Rick bites the neck of the leader of the Claimers and kills him, much like the monsters they run from. Covered in blood and brutally killing the man who threatened to rape his son, Rick becomes savage himself. This season had plenty of characters that encompassed various fantasy themes. They all contributed in highlighting violence, monstrosity, and murder. Compared to the rest of the characters in this season, the above mentioned were crucial for the application of monstrosity.

Season 5

The people of Terminus.

Though the people of Terminus promote a safe haven and sanctuary for all who arrive, the audience sees immediately that there are ulterior motives. In the last episode of season four and the beginning of season five, we see that the people of Terminus are capturing the people that arrive for shelter. While the group from the prison has finally found each other again, they

38

face an even worse situation with the people of Terminus: cannibals. Gareth and his mother are the leaders of the people of Terminus, and they claim that they were once a sanctuary. Gareth's mother mentions that a group came, raped all of their women, and held them captive. The terminus group then realized that they either had to "become the butchers or the cattle." The sole survival of this group is based on tricking people to come to Terminus and then giving them the choice to eat or be eaten. Eventually, Rick and the group fight back and destroy Terminus and all but a few of its inhabitants.

Gareth.

The leader of the Terminus group, Gareth survives the destruction of his home. Along with a couple of other survivors, Gareth is set on revenge. Following Rick's group all the way to the church in which they find refuge, they capture a group member named Bob. In an intense scene, the audience watches Bob wake up to a missing limb only to see Gareth's group eat it right in front of him. Gareth's sinister speech while consuming Bob's cooked flesh details how they came to eat people and touches on how women taste better then men. He mentions that the extra layer of fat that women have makes them an especially delicious meal. As Gareth plans the attack on the rest of the group, he falls victim to a trap and begs for his life before being killed by Rick and others.

Carol Peletier.

In the fifth season of this show, we see Carol in a way that we haven't seen her before. In this season she is bold and unafraid of consequences. Although her group has made it to Alexandria, Carol is on guard at all times and is waiting for the next time she has to fight back and survive. When she enters Alexandria, she pretends to be a person that she no longer is. As a ploy, Carol reverts back to sweet, feminine, housewife Carol. Despite the things that she's had to

face and the horrible acts that she has committed, she uses her old personality in Alexandria as a way of disguising herself in order to be seen as innocent and unsuspecting if any problems are to arise. In fact, Carol is the one person who is encouraging Rick to kill Jessie's husband, and poses the idea of supporting Rick in taking over the community. This is the fiercest we've seen Carol yet. She is brave and unapologetic. She even threatens to kill Jessie's youngest child after he catches her stealing a gun from the armory, scaring him into silence.

Father Gabriel.

Father Gabriel is introduced midseason and is seen cowering from zombies and screaming for help. He is one of the few if not only examples of religion in the series so far. However, though Father Gabriel might seem innocent and holy, the audience learns that he survived for so long at the expense of others. Gabriel refuses to open his doors to his parishioners seeking shelter, resulting in their deaths and a very guilty conscience. Gabriel becomes a nuisance and refuses to kill, but his worst trait is that he is always putting others in danger with his inability to survive on his own.

Dawn.

We meet Dawn as a leader of a community living in a hospital in Atlanta, and a former police officer. Dawn's group finds Beth, Hershel's daughter, and "helps" her. While the community offers medical help and shelter, Dawn does not let anyone go without repaying their debt. Anyone that is helped by Dawn and her group are not allowed to leave and are instead forced to work for the community in one way or another. Though she looks like a good leader, Dawn allows for the officers working for her to rape and harass women, and to treat people however they want. She turns a blind eye to any bad thing that her officers do as long as they obey her. Her tough persona is a false one, and most of her actions are due to her fear of losing

the power and control that she has gained. Rick's group makes a deal to trade Beth for some police officers they capture, and in an attempt to not look weak she ends up "accidentally" killing Beth and then dying for it.

Officer Gorman.

Gorman is an officer working in the hospital and is Dawn's right hand man. He attempts to claim Beth for himself after the woman that is working for him tries to escape and is injured. Beth soon finds that the woman working for Gorman is being raped. Gorman attacks Beth and she fights back. Gorman finds the woman who was previously working for him in his office during the fight. The woman had been unable to cope after being raped by Gorman and killed herself, becoming a zombie and killing him as he fought Beth.

Rick Grimes.

Rick in this season is playing it cautiously. He finally has his group back together, so trusting others isn't one of his stronger character traits. When the group is approached by Aaron and offered a place in Alexandria, Rick seems like it's too good to be true. After giving in to the pleas of the group, that's exactly what he comes to find out. Rick and the group are wanted in Alexandria for their experience in surviving the zombie apocalypse. Rick is seemingly the most valuable. He at first seems hopeful at the new life that Alexandria can provide for him and his family, and is even asked to be Sheriff. However, Rick soon realizes that the Alexandria community know nothing about what it means to survive. He begins to lose his patience with Deanna and her people, and at one point towards the end of the season is threatened with exile. Rick has to use his brutal and forceful ways to show the people of Alexandria exactly what it means to survive in the time of the zombie apocalypse. Now that I've detailed Rick's transition

and descent into monstrosity, as well as highlighting the important characters in each season, it is important to move on to where all of this takes place.

Scene and Setting

Season 1

The Hospital.

The audience only sees the hospital in the very first episode of the season. With the exception of flashbacks in later episodes, the only character to be shown there is Rick Grimes. Still, the hospital scene is nightmare inducing. Rick wakes to find the hospital deserted, completely empty of people and completely trashed. While the audience later finds out that the zombie invasion had only started months ago, the hospital we see in the first episode looks like it's been withering and decaying for so much longer. The walls and ceiling are falling apart, and there is debris everywhere. Locked behind a door is a huge horde of the living dead with the words "don't open, dead inside" written in blood. As Rick finds his way out of the hospital, he walks into the back parking lot where hundreds of bodies line the floor, some placed neatly, others thrown like trash. This scene is possibly the most blatant indication of the end of the world.

Atlanta Camp.

Located in the outskirts of Atlanta, the group of survivors takes refuge in the woods near a small body of water. Seemingly far from the harms of the infested city, the group has set up camp in hopes of survival. Living in the open, in the middle of the woods with no shelter ultimately proves detrimental to the group. The camp later gets attacked by a horde of zombies.

Atlanta Center for Disease Control.

Though this location is seen for a short amount of time towards the end of season one, it plays an enormously important role. Armed with giant walls, heavily protected security systems, underground levels, and a large amount of supplies, the CDC seems like the perfect shelter for surviving the zombie apocalypse. In fact, the CDC is a fortress that had the group been able to scavenge for gasoline to fuel the generators, could have benefitted them for quite some time. This specific location causes both happiness and trauma for the group. When they are finally let into the building by its only occupant they are pleased to find that they have access to food, power, showers, and air conditioning. It seems like they have found the perfect place to live, until the generators for the building begin to run out of fuel. With only minutes before the building self destructs, the group is left with the choice of whether to stay and die to not have to face the horrors of the outside world, or to leave and fight to survive. Before leaving, the group's leader discovers something in a conversation with Dr. Jenner that fills not only Rick, but the audience with the feeling of despair: There is no cure, and the virus is already inside of everyone. Meaning that, no matter how they die, zombie bite or not, they will become the very monsters that they fear.

Season 2

Greene Family Farm.

Almost the entirety of the second season takes place on the Greene family farm. Located miles from the highway and far from civilization, the farm becomes a haven to Rick and his group. Hershel, the owner of the farm, makes it clear to Rick that allowing them to live there is only temporary. Rick tries to reason with the old man to let them stay as long as they can. Rick and his group are not the only ones trying to find a home at the farm though. As we see later on in the season, Rick and Hershel, in a town nearby, are faced with people who threaten to take the

farm for themselves. Rick and Hershel make the quick decision to not allow anyone on the farm, stating that there isn't enough room. The invaders only add to the dangers that await the group on the property. The barn on Hershel's property is deemed as off limits, and the audience later finds that it has become a pen for the zombies that are being collected by the Greene family. Despite its location, as we see in the end of the season, the farm is not safe from zombies. The open space and lack of fences or walls ultimately results in the farms destruction at the hands of a large horde of zombies. With the only thing that could possibly provide them safety being the small farmhouse, the group and the Greene family are left vulnerable and out in the open. At the end of the season the group has to leave and find refuge elsewhere.

Season 3

West Georgia Correctional Facility.

When one thinks of a prison, the first instinct is probably not safety. In this season the prison sets up one of the most important settings in *TWD* thus far. The prison depicts a stable and important setting in this fantasy world, but it is the first of several locations to introduce influences of political and societal themes. A place that is meant to keep bad people in is now a sanctuary being used to keep people, and predominantly zombies, out. Rick and his group find solace in the prison's giant barbed wire topped fences, steel doors, and vast amounts of space. Of course, claiming the prison as theirs is no easy task. The group has to kill a huge amount of the walking dead before they can fully clear the cell block that they will soon call home. However, the prison is a huge contributor to the group's, and mainly their leader Rick's paranoia. It brings upon decisions of including and excluding outsiders to their group, which ultimately leads to both beneficial and damaging scenarios. When the group happens upon a few surviving prisoners trapped inside the kitchen, Rick's old policeman ways of helping anyone and everyone slowly

fade. In this season, after the betrayal of Shane, he becomes exceedingly cautious of who they let

enter their group. The group ends up killing all but two of the surviving prisoners and allows the

remaining men to join their ranks. However, a straggler that had been exiled causes the death of

two members of the group, including Rick's wife Lori. In the wake of this sad event, Rick denies

entry to the prison to another group seeking asylum. Rick is the sole decision maker in who can

or cannot not be allowed in the prison. While this power ultimately aids in the protection of his

own group at the beginning, it is also a contributor to their demise. The group that Rick turns

away later offers help to The Governor to take the prison down. Had Rick allowed Tyrese and

Sasha's people to stay, Rick and his group probably would have had the numbers to aid in their

survival. Eventually, the prison and its walls fail Rick, and the group suffers. What was once a

symbol of hope and opportunity for survival for the group, is later just another disaster. Later, we

see that the walls of the prison leave the group more trapped than safe from the Governor's

attack.

Woodbury.

Woodbury, another location crucial to season three, is an additional prime example of the

power of walls in *TWD*. In fact, Woodbury's walls are mentioned several times in some of

season three's episodes. Upon Andrea and Michonne's arrival, Andrea asks the Governor,

"What's your secret?" Her question is answered by "really big walls" and "the real secret is what

goes on within these walls." In other words, the abundance of "lots of guns and ammunition,

really big walls, and men willing to risk everything to defend them," are what keep Woodbury so

successful. Made with large trucks, old tires, wood and sandbags, Woodbury creates a barrier

large enough to keep out the horrors of the ongoing zombie apocalypse. While the walls of

Woodbury aren't nearly as large, sturdy, or intimidating as the ones at the prison, they seem to be

keeping a much larger group of people protected from the outside world. In fact, within the walls of Woodbury is a seemingly normal and thriving town loaded with people living semi-normal lives. A truly infamous scene within this season is one where the people of Woodbury have a block party. Equipped with barbecue, cold beverages, and even alcohol, the citizens of Woodbury are living a dream safe from the pressures of life on the other side of the wall. Still, the selection process for who gets to reside within those walls seems a bit more mysterious than Rick's bolder methods. It appears that anyone is allowed within the walls of Woodbury, that is, if they provide some sort of benefit in return. Those who don't provide something for the Governor or to be quite frank, aren't liked by the Governor, are sent on their way or killed. Again, the person in control of the group behind the walls holds all of the power to decide who they let in. Ultimately, with the help of Rick and a few others, the walls of Woodbury are breached, causing several casualties. Rick's attack proves that the walls in this season are neither indestructible nor impenetrable. Through fantasy theme analysis, one can see the existence of important political themes within scenes and setting like Woodbury and the prison. They provide material that is valuable for the comparison of fantasy worlds to the real world. Both of these locations are controlled or governed by one person, with no regard as to the opinions of the rest of the residents. Themes like the distrust and fear of outsiders resonates with current political issues pertaining to immigration. Additionally, both locations offer an example of the difference from living on different sides of a wall, in regard to safety, comfort, and access to common necessities.

Season 4

West Georgia Correctional Facility.

At the beginning of this season we see what life at the prison has become after the Governor. The people have all gotten to know each other, and Rick and the group are welcoming

more people in. There are gardens and animals, a station to cook large meals, and water barrels. The prison has developed into a flourishing community. Still, what goes up must come down. The prison group faces a lot of issues, including the spread of a deadly disease and fences that just aren't strong enough to hold back hundreds of zombies. Ultimately, it is people who cause the destruction of the prison. The Governor claims that he wants to take the prison for himself and his people, but instead completely destroys the fence system and the building itself, rendering the prison useless. What had become a home for many becomes a home for none.

Abandoned Neighborhood.

The abandoned neighborhood in season four is different than any other neighborhood seen in passing before. It is in this neighborhood that Rick and his son Carl find shelter after the prison is destroyed. It holds a rather symbolic moment for Carl in which he becomes stronger and more independent after his father lies unconscious for two days. The neighborhood itself is quiet and seems relatively safe from hordes of zombies. In fact, Carl finds a home in pristine condition that reminds him of the childhood that he could have had. Equipped with video games, sports memorabilia, comic books, and more, the room seems like a museum of what life could have been like. Still, no place is perfect. It later gets taken by The Claimers, and Rick and Carl must leave their bubble of comfort and seek shelter elsewhere.

Country Club.

The country club is a very interesting setting in season four. Located in a remote area, Daryl and Beth find it and attempt to find supplies inside. The building contains several corpses of people who used it as a refuge. The corpses are dressed in fine clothes and jewelry, and there is money scattered everywhere. In fact, Daryl fills a backpack full of cash until he realizes how

47

completely useless money has become. The place is devoid of supplies and completely in shambles inside.

Terminus.

All season long the audience has seen signs for Terminus stating shelter and safety. The signs seem so positive and appealing that though separated, the group all manage to head in the same direction. Terminus is well protected by huge fences and enclosed buildings. The group living there was able to use empty shipping containers to their benefit. Overall, the place seems like an ideal location to survive and avoid the dangers of zombies. When part of the group gets there they are greeted by kind people offering them a plate of food to eat. However, when Rick gets there shortly after, he notices the people of Terminus wearing clothing and holding items belonging to people from the prison group. Terminus loses its sense of safety when both groups take arms and Rick questions their motives.

Season 5

Terminus.

At the beginning of season five the Terminus group is seen taking Rick and his group into shipping containers and holding them prisoner. In fact, Terminus has several shipping containers filled with prisoners throughout the grounds. After Carol hears gunfire in the direction of Terminus she arrives and sees her group being taken into the buildings inside. Inside, Rick and several of the men from his group and another are held in front of a tub, hands tied behind their back, and on their knees. The Terminus workers then slit the throats of the men from the other group and let them bleed out into the tub, draining their bodies. It is not until Carol creates a distraction that Rick and his group are able to escape. The horrors of Terminus are all seen as the members try to regroup and escape. There are freezers and rooms filled with hanging corpses,

similar to animals being hung up by a butcher. There is also a shrine commemorating people who had died there, as well as dead bodies being prepared for dismemberment. The Terminus group was keeping prisoners for their consumption. They were eating people and living by the slogan "you have to be the butcher, or the cattle."

Grady Memorial Hospital.

In the center of a desolate Atlanta, Grady Memorial Hospital is a shelter for a group offering safety and medical help. Run by surviving law enforcement, the community is built to look like a functioning hospital, but in reality works somewhat like a prison. In a huge building surrounded by fences and military vehicles, the hospital is set up as a safe zone by the government until the city was evacuated and bombed. Those who enter the facility are "saved" in one way or another by the police officers who go out scavenging. Everyone who is given help must stay and work off their debts. However, the debts are seemingly never fully paid because every benefit received from staying there is added to the bill. Food, clothing, and shelter are all held against the people who enter, making them permanent workers for those running the building. The people in charge are divided by good and bad. The bad are the officers who abuse and rape the workers. Though this place looks like a stable and safe community, it isn't as great as it seems.

Alexandria.

We aren't introduced to Alexandria until the latter part of the season. Rick and his group have been watched and offered a chance to "audition" to join the community. The community needs people who have been out in the real world, fighting and killing. Alexandria is a functioning community of beautiful houses surrounded by huge metal walls. The community runs on solar power. They have food, water, and an armory. Every person has their own home

where they can live seemingly normal lives. It's an ideal location to survive this zombie apocalypse. Led by former politician Deanna and her family, Rick's group is pulled in so that the people of the community would feel safer. Upon arrival, Rick and the group realize that the people of Alexandria don't know how to survive outside of the community walls. Alexandria in season five deals with abusive husbands, trust issues, and the harsh reality of what it's like living in the zombie world. Still, it becomes a home for Rick and his group, protecting them from the struggle of moving from place to place and not having resources.

This chapter has allowed me to introduce and focus on characters and settings that contribute to themes and ideas being discussed through fantasy theme analysis. Characters like Shane, Rick, the Claimers, and the Governor are just a few examples of characters that exhibit themes of monstrosity and violence. Places like the prison, and Woodbury suggest similarities into political and immigration issues in real life. Though this chapter does not discuss every character, setting, and scene, it does highlight those that support this fantasy theme analysis. With this chapter, it is possible to move forward and analyze *TWD* and its fantasy themes without having to stop and explain the show to the reader. The analysis will follow in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Analysis

In this chapter, using fantasy theme analysis and the highlighted characters, settings, and situations mentioned in chapters three and four, I examine the similarities and connections between these fantasy themes and reality. This thesis discusses how the situations in *TWD* mirror the social realities of people in the real world. Fantasy theme analysis allows an opportunity to see reflections of real life topics, situations, and behaviors in forms of fantasy, like television shows and movies. The chapter discusses social and political topics, as well as themes like the monstrous other, race, gender, sexuality, and monstrosity. Each section will pinpoint parts of the show that mirror real life using fantasy theme analysis. The goal is to be able to connect topics like race, gender, social, and political ideas to the very themes that audiences watch week after week in *TWD* and on other television shows in general.

Monstrosity in *TWD*

Aside from the literal monsters (zombies) within the show, *TWD* spends a whole lot of time displaying the monstrosity of the living people that make up the important characters in this fictional world. In chapter two it was established that monstrosity manifests in more than just the physical. So it is important that before discussing other themes in relation to the real world, it is made clear that monstrosity encapsulates several aspects of this television series and in fact becomes one of the more prominent themes within this fantasy analysis. Some of the monstrous themes depicted in episodes of *The Walking Dead* are not unheard of in the real world. For example, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2016), the number of reported murders in 2016 totaled to 15,956, and a whopping 90,185 cases of rape were reported in the United States (para. 3). Those are just two statistics of many countless acts of monstrosity that occur in the United States. This is not to say that *TWD* purposefully introduces these themes in

an attempt to inform the audience of them, but the show doesn't hide possible horrors from the audience either. The show is tapping into the deeper, darker parts of humanity. It was mentioned in chapter three that fantasy theme analysis hits a "psychodynamic cord" and is an "important means for people to create their social realities" (Bormann, 1972, p. 399). So, it wouldn't be surprising that viewers can connect some of the situations within this television show to things that happen in real life. Fantasy theme analysis impacts groups of people who in turn create social villains and heroes. It creates the dynamic for rhetoric that "defines the evil within social realities" (Bormann. 1982, p. 292). So is it possible that people who are watching this show connect to it on the level of real world monstrosity? Yes, people can connect the actions, the feelings, and the horrors that this show provides to things that people have possibly felt in their real, personal lives.

Thus, while the monstrosity of the actual living dead is placed at the forefront of the first few seasons, the audience will come to realize that the characters that comprise this show, their actions, behavior, and established way of life, have also gained traits of the monstrous. So it is important that this analysis begins by discussing the actual creatures that first make the show so horrifying, and then progresses into the monsters that really make our skin crawl. By detailing the different types of monstrosity that are seen in the show, it is possible to compare them to the types of monstrosity that are seen in the real world as well.

The De-evolution of Zombies in *TWD*

Throughout this series, zombies are given many different names: geeks, walkers, lurkers, and more, but the true representations of zombies are monsters. Foreign and abnormal to the characters within *TWD*, these zombies are the driving force behind the entire show. However, while the focus on zombies is strong at the beginning of the series, the horrifying effect that these

monsters leave on the audience decreases over time. In fact, the scare factor that the zombies first brought to the show has in recent seasons moved entirely to the living and away from the dead (as noted in the slogan introduced in the earlier seasons: "Fight the dead. Fear the living.") From the first season to the most recent episodes, however, the zombie has changed. *TWD* has successfully dumbed down the zombies even further.

During the first season, zombies were fear-inducing creatures that were the root of all problems. These zombies are horrifying, not solely in the fact that they are reanimated dead, but because in this season they aren't as dumb and weak as they are portrayed in the later seasons. The first glimpse of this in season one is shown with Morgan's wife. Even though she's dead, she seems to come back to the place where her family presides every so often, even at one point seemingly looking through the peephole of the door at the person on the other side. Later, when the group of survivors is trapped inside an Atlanta department store with a horde of zombies at the door, the audience sees a zombie using a rock to try and break the glass. It's instances like these, in season one and later in season three where the group opens the doors to a deserted church only to find zombies sitting in the pews facing the altar, that the audience can question just how much of the zombie's brain actually works. In fact, Milton from season three actually puts this question into action, working on experiments to see how much the reanimated can remember.

The zombies from the first few seasons to the most recent have changed dramatically. Later on in the show, the presence and influence slowly shifts. Zombies are now slow, dumb, and no longer something to be largely feared, but rather an obstacle in the way of survival. The decreased importance of the animated monsters in this group makes way for an opportunity to

showcase another type of monster. The focal point of the show is no longer the decaying corpses of reanimated dead. Instead, it is the living monsters that the show is centered around.

Murder

Aside from killing the zombies that are trying to eat them, *TWD* is chock full of death and murder. The zombies within this show at some point stop being the bigger threat, and instead, the characters have to deal with danger from other types of monsters, as well as turning into monsters themselves. From the most loved character to the most hated, no one is spared from having to kill another living human. It becomes the new way of life for the characters in the series. In order to live peacefully, others have to die.

In some instances, characters have to go through major loss or psychological changes in order to develop the level of "monstrosity" and fearlessness needed to kill other people. For example, Carol Peletier, introduced to the show as one of the weakest characters, later becomes a monster herself. Carol's losses include her abusive husband and her small child Sophia, after which she goes from weak housewife to a woman ready for battle. Carol comes to realize that killing people is the only way that she will be able to keep herself and her group safe. She kills every time she needs to without the blink of an eye. In fact, in season three, after people in the prison they call home fall ill, Carol kills two infected people and burns their bodies so that the illness won't spread. For this character, killing becomes something that will ensure the survival of herself and her friends.

Rick Grimes, the main character in this series, has racked up the highest body count. Rick is shown in every single episode of the series, so the audience gets to see every step of his character development, which is important because Rick is the character who changes the most. Having been a former Sheriff deputy, Rick behaves in the first season just like any police officer

54

would. He values the lives of other people and tries to help whoever he can. As the show progresses, he begins to come to a realization that people pose a bigger threat to his group than zombies might. He begins to kill the people around him who are a threat to his life and the lives of the people whom he cares for, including his best friend Shane. As the series continues, Rick becomes more and more violent and begins to kill without guilt. In an attempt to protect his family and his group Rick kills all of the people that he needs to.

In season three he establishes questions that would allow a person to join their group. The questions involve asking whomever was trying to join the group if they had killed a living person before. If they answered yes and explained why, then Rick would allow them to join the group. He did this knowing that he needed people who would ultimately do what they had to do to survive. However, as the seasons progresses, Rick begins to show signs of increasing monstrosity. At times he begins to lose his grip on sanity, and in doing so, displays forms of savagery. The most blatant example of Rick's monstrous actions comes at the end of season four. Rick's son is threatened with rape and death, so Rick brutally kills the members of the group who are holding them hostage. Now, he doesn't kill them quickly, and he doesn't use a weapon. Instead, Rick bites through the neck of one of his assailants who quickly bleeds out and dies. This has by far been the most symbolic form of change into monstrosity. Rick, by killing a man with his teeth, becomes just like the zombies that he is evading. At the end of the scene Rick's appearance, completely covered in blood, makes zombies seems like the least of this character's worries. At the end of season five, Rick is seen as both a key to survival and a violent and brutal look at what truly has to be done in order to stay safe.

Shane Walsh, Rick's best friend, also exhibits a change in his personality that begins to showcase his monstrous side. After sleeping with Rick's wife and falling in love with her, Shane

is unhappy at Rick's return. He begins to struggle with going from being leader of the group to being a member once Rick assumes the position of man in charge. Shane's jealousy progresses, and he begins to display his anger towards others. Shane is tough and fearless, so it isn't hard for him to make decisions that benefit himself. Shane's behavior becomes more monstrous with each episode, but it is at the end of season two after trying to kill Rick, that he takes his final monstrous form, a zombie.

There are plenty of characters in the show that can be named when it comes to killing. In fact, at one point or another every single character has to kill another person. It's an inevitable part of survival within this television show. Characters like the Dixon brothers, the Governor, the Terminus group, Michonne, and Maggie embrace the need to kill other people for the sake of their own. Even children like Carl and Lizzie aren't exempt from killing others. Carl, Rick's son, actually begins to show monstrous tendencies himself. After watching his father and the rest of the group around him, Carl begins to lose his innocence and begins killing others as well, despite his age. As he kills and attempts to kill more people to protect the group, Carl turns harsh. He's more outspoken, and he wants to show how independent and brave he is. He begins to develop anger towards his father. Carl insists that he can do just as much as the older men in the group. Several of these characters begin to grow accustomed to having to kill other people, and it becomes almost as easy for them as it is killing zombies.

Still, despite the horrible deeds that these characters commit, they are in fact the heroes of this show. Rick, Carol, and Carl are not the bad guys; the bad guys are much, much worse. This show establishes and repeats the idea that everybody has to do horrible things, but it allows the audience to believe that the actions of some are justifiable and the actions of others are not. When it comes to the characters who are clearly depicted as villains, there are actions from other

characters so brutal that you couldn't even compare them to Rick and his group. For instance, far more ruthless actions are presented by different characters, like the Governor's unnecessary decapitation of Hershel Greene, or his fish tank full of severed heads. The Governor is a prime example of a monstrous villain that really takes murder to the next level. He kills the woman he is sleeping with, his friend and confidant, and the men who allowed him into his group. The Governor is one of the characters who kills for survival, but also kills for his own benefit and far more power. While Rick and his group fight people who threaten to kill them, the Governor kills innocent people who pose no threat at all. That is what separates the deaths in this series. The characters are divided between the people who kill out of necessity, and the people who kill even when they don't need to. There were plenty of both types throughout this season. Murder is one of the most prominent categories in the fantasy themes analyzed in this project. However, the themes in this show also deal with rape.

Rape

Although not as prominent as murder, there are several instances of rape in this television series. Though the audience is not shown the occurrence of rape, it is discussed and threatened several times throughout the first five seasons. From the Governor, to the Claimers, to the police officers at Grady Memorial, rape is a recurring theme among monstrous men in positions of power. The worst one comes in episode sixteen of season four, when Rick, Carl, and Michonne encounter the Claimers, who were mentioned in the previous section. In an attempt to get revenge on Rick for killing one of the group members earlier in the season, the leader, Joe, tells Rick that both Michonne and his son Carl are going to be raped then killed right in front of him. Threatening to rape and kill a child in front of his father has to be one of the most sinister threats

ever made on *TWD*. Luckily, the Claimers don't live long enough to follow through on their threat.

In season five, Officer Gorman of Grady Memorial makes several unwanted passes at Beth Greene. She later learns that the woman under Gorman's supervision has tried to escape. The girl claims that she would rather experience death by zombies than continue working for Officer Gorman. After confiding in Beth, the audience learns that Gorman has been raping this woman and looking for another woman to claim for his own. The woman later commits suicide to escape from the constant abuse and rape that she is experiencing, and in an ironic twist of fate, her zombie body ends up eating Officer Gorman. Gorman's character is unapologetic towards his actions. In fact, he seems to believe that because he is in a position of power, he deserves to do whatever he wants. His actions are ignored by the other officers, and the audience learns that he might not be the only officer taking part in these horrendous deeds.

Despite many instances in which rape is discussed, the series never actually shows someone getting raped. It becomes an unspoken horror. Still, facing horrible people that commit horrible crimes like rape is not rare in this show. The introduction of human monsters and their monstrous actions just perpetuates the desperate need to survive in the world with monsters. Moreover, monstrous people become especially terrifying when they begin to consume other people.

Cannibalism

Though cannibalism is not a theme that is often seen in the real world, it is one that depicts the worst type of monstrosity in *TWD*. The audience is already made to fear zombies who eat the flesh of living humans. Zombies were already monsters, reanimated corpses of the dead, so the fact that they eat people just adds to their description as monsters. The people of Terminus

however, are a different kind of monster. Gareth and the community living safely behind the walls of Terminus are holding people prisoners and then eating them. The viewers see bodies hanging from meat hooks and Gareth chewing on Bob's tender thigh. Gareth details the change from normal to cannibal in episode two of season five. He mentions that the community used to actually be a sanctuary. However, the situation changed when another group raped, beat, and killed most of their people. From then on, they had to change who they were and how they were going to survive. The horrible deeds of others produces something even worse. Still, despite the actions that lead to the Terminus group killing others for dinner, it doesn't excuse the fact that they are tricking people into thinking that they are going into a safe place, holding them captive as prisoners, and then killing them to be cooked for that week's meal. Terminus is the biggest example of human monsters thus far.

All of the examples within the categories above are meant to further depict the idea that monster is a term that cannot be confined to ghoulish creatures. The show and its themes of monstrosity serve as a means of showing the audience that even in a world filled with the undead, the biggest threat to mankind is mankind itself. Monstrosity in *TWD* has taken on a new meaning, and expands the interpretation of monsters. It allows for a focus on human horror, and sets aside the living dead to focus on the living. It also allows for an opportunity to separate people based on things like race, gender, and sexuality. Thus, creating the monstrous other.

The Monstrous Other

As mentioned in chapter two, Calafell (2015) mentions the monstrous other and the idea that a difference in race, gender, sexuality, etc. makes for a manifestation of monsters both literally and figuratively (p.4). So in what ways does *TWD* construct the monstrous other? It is in the way that *TWD* portrays race, gender, and sexuality. While these themes might not be

specifically placed or spoken of in the series to discuss these relevant social topics, they are seen in the show and can be noticed by the viewers. In fact, in most television shows and films, it is possible to find matters of social inequality that reflect relevant social issues in our current reality. One important part of this fantasy theme analysis is to focus on the theme of gender in this television show.

Gender

Women play a very large role in *TWD,* and the show does an excellent job at giving women important roles within the series. It showcases women who fight for their lives and women who aren't scared of a couple of zombies. Women hold crucial roles in this television series, and the series itself wouldn't be the same without the love scenes, romance, compassion, and oftentimes hope that female characters in this show bring. However, a lot of these roles include the portrayal of women as weak, inferior, and powerless. Calafell adds women to the category of monstrous other because women, no matter their race or appearance, are still not seen as equals. They do not fit into or with social norms about big, strong, fearless men in this show because they are women, and women are meant to be scared or dependent, or to think with their emotions. There are plenty of these issues of gender within this television series. Though they may not be clearly stated in the show, they are undoubtedly there.

An example of women's lack of importance is seen in Gareth's lengthy monologue in season five. As he eats another character's leg, he mentions that women make the best meal. The line itself isn't necessary. Its frightening enough that people are eating each other in the zombie apocalypse, but it to take it one step further and introduce the idea that eating women is way better than eating men further enforces Calafell's idea of otherness. "Women have an extra layer of fat for childbirth" (*TWD*, 2015, s.5, ep.2) which, according to the cannibalistic characters, makes them

extra delicious when cooked. Gareth's character turns a woman's strength, the ability to carry a child and create life, into a weakness. Now, something that is normal, human, and beautiful turns into a reason why women should be killed. Gareth takes it a step further by mentioning that "pretty people taste better" (*TWD*, 2015, s.5, ep.2), establishing that being a woman is dangerous, and being a beautiful woman is even worse. Does this mean that beauty standards still matter, even in a post apocalyptic world? The answer is yes.

It is not just seen in women who get murdered for food. It is also depicted with women who are threatened with rape. A prime example of this is in season five, where Beth finds herself at Grady Memorial. When the time comes for Beth to be assigned a job, Officer Gorman approaches her and tells her that she's pretty and that she should belong to him. At this point Beth is seen as a piece of property. Gorman claims that he found her and he should get to keep her as his worker. It isn't until the audience sees that the previous person working for him is also a beautiful girl and that she is being raped by him, that the reality of his threats are more frightening. While there are plenty of other workers in the hospital, Gorman tries to claim the beautiful women for a reason more sinister than one might think. Rape themes in *TWD* are not new or foreign. Looking back at season three, The Governor and Merle Dixon as his right hand man, rape themes are in fact present. When Merle kidnaps members of Rick's group, Glenn and his wife Maggie, the Governor induces fear with his form of threat and punishment. He takes Maggie into an isolated room, makes her take her clothes off and presses his body up against hers and insinuates that he could rape her at any moment. Maggie is disturbed by the situation for the next few episodes, proving that despite the Governor not following through on his threat of rape the situation still greatly impacted her. Then rape is threatened again when Rick encounters the Claimers. The men in the group threaten to rape not only Michonne, but his son Carl as well. All of the threats of rape

throughout the series have come from monstrous men in positions of power. Men like the Governor, Joe from the Claimers, and Officer Gorman seem to believe that women are weak and can be used, abused and thrown away. Though these villainous men seem like a more appropriate fit for the title of monstrous, their actions help establish the existence of females as the monstrous others.

Weakness seems to be a reoccurring theme in this series, and it's mostly showcased in characters who are women. A prime example of female weakness within *TWD* comes from women who suffer at the hands of abusive husbands. In particular Carol Peletier and Jessie Anderson. The audience is introduced to Carol in the very first season. Carol is quiet and fearful, and spends her time cooking, ironing, and tending to her husband despite the apocalyptic world around her. Carol is seen as the weakest member of the group in season one and later becomes one of the strongest, so her story is a positive one. In season five, however, Carol is painfully reminded of how horrible her husband was to her when she discovers Jessie's husband is beating her in Alexandria. Both of these women are an excellent representation of domestic abuse and will be brought up again in the following section to discuss its relevance to fantasy theme analysis. For now, it is still possible to place these characters in the category of the monstrous other for the simple fact that they fall in the category of women who are seen as so inferior to men, that their significant others abuse them. Both of these characters are introduced in a way that makes them likable and interesting, but as the show introduces their husbands and the violence that they suffer, the characters go from normal women to the damsel in distress. They represent women who need saving, and who can't handle situations on their own. They represent women who are weak, fearful, and powerless under the force of men. Jessie in particular becomes someone that Rick, the strong and powerful main

character, has to save. He and Carol deem her incapable of standing up for herself, yet again placing another man (Rick) in a position of power and Jessie in a position of weakness.

As the monstrous other categorizes women as inferior and weak, one can begin to notice that *TWD* also contributes to that idea by dismantling any occurrence of female leadership. Dawn is the first example of a female in a position of leadership in the show. She is shown as tough and smart. She is successfully leading the hospital community, and they are thriving. As a police officer she knows how to handle extreme situations. In fact, other officers under her leadership mention that Dawn took her position of leadership by force after she killed the former leader when he lost his mind. So it makes her leadership seem even more fierce when the audience comes to find that she took it from the clutches of a crazy man. Dawn even shows a monstrous reversal of roles when it is revealed that her assistant is a man, and he washes and irons her clothes for her. The audience gets a chance to see a real woman in charge and doing it quite well. However, as the show progresses the "true" version of Dawn seems to be discovered. She is weak and emotional, and lets the men under her control do horrible things. She takes her anger out on other women in the group. She is on the brink of losing her mind. The audience learns that Dawn is not respected by a majority of her staff, and they don't think she can handle the leadership. The group fears that she is going down the same path as the leader that came before her. She even allows men who work under her to abuse and rape other women. Eventually, Dawn dies trying to make a power move. She kills Beth after an attempt to not look weak in front of her peers. As Daryl Dixon raises his gun to shoot her in revenge, she pleads for forgiveness, motioning that what she did was an accident.

Deanna, a former politician, is the next female leader that is seen in the show. She has lots of knowledge, but she she doesn't know how to live in the real world outside of the protection of

her walls. She enlists the help of Rick and his group in order to allow the people of Alexandria to feel safer knowing that there are people in the community who are experienced in surviving the outside world. Deanna is in a position of power, great power. She has the privilege of deciding who does and does not stay. She has the power to give every member of the community a job, since Alexandria is her community that she built from the ground up with her family. Still, the second that Rick and his group join Alexandria, Deanna and her community are seen as weak. Rick tells her she doesn't know how to survive outside of her walls and her unwillingness to kill for safety makes her ill-equipped to be in charge. Rick eventually decides that if things don't work out with the group, they'll take Alexandria for themselves. Meaning that Deanna and her time as leader would come to an end. Eventually, Deanna deals with loss and allows Rick to handle things his way.

Both of these examples depict the false power that is given and taken away from the women in a position of leadership. Though you might think they are strong, they are eventually shown as weak and incapable of running things successfully. The show so far does not allow women to be superior to men in terms of positions of leadership. Both of these women, shown as examples of female leaders in the show, are built up only to be taken down.

Other female characters in the show are not given the same amount of power. Michonne, the lone wolf, is at first seen as the outsider of the group. She develops a close bond with Carl and Rick, and seems happy with finding a group to whom she belongs. Michonne is by far the most courageous and impactful woman on the show. She uses a sword as her weapon of choice. She keeps zombies on leashes. She isn't scared of a fight. She is opinionated and speaks her mind. Yet Michonne is never placed in a position of leadership. In fact, the only time she firmly makes a decision for the group, Rick seems to take the credit for himself. Michonne convinces him to go

to Alexandria, which he is originally reluctant to do, and then he basically takes all of the credit for it. Andrea, though gaining her independence and strength in season three, seems like she's capable of controlling the situation between Rick's group and the Governor. She has influence on both sides. She makes a decision to warn Rick's group of the upcoming fight with the Governor. The audience really begins to think that Andrea can make it, but ultimately she gets caught by the Governor and dies.

Rosita is another strong woman. She seems fearless and strong willed. Yet she seems to do everything that her partner Abraham tells her to do. Tara is shown as a member of the Governor's new group. She is ready for battle. She boasts about her bravery and her willingness to do whatever it takes to survive. At the battle for the prison however, Tara is frozen with fear, remorse, and shock. She doesn't kill anyone at the battle. She doesn't even fire her gun. She survives only by locking herself behind a fence and refusing to keep going. She feels immense guilt for what her group does to the people at the prison and seems traumatized by it for the remainder of the season. She goes from strong to weak in a matter of minutes in one episode and spends the rest of the season trying to rebuild her credibility. Carol is one of the more important characters in the series. She is important not for the role she plays in the show, but for what she represents to the audience. She goes from extremely weak to ridiculously brave, to monstrously intense. Still, like most of the other women in the show, she is not given a position of leadership. This comes as a surprise considering all of the things that she has done for the betterment of the group.

There are countless female characters who aren't seen as powerful figures in the series, at least not yet. Lori, Beth, Sasha, Maggie, and most of the women that contribute to powerful episodes and scenes still never get to have their moment of power, and some of them have to wait until the latest seasons. So going back to the question of the monstrous other, women find their

place in that category. Again, Calafell mentions that the monstrous other includes women. That is because women are and have always been seen as inferior to men and portrayed in the manner that *TWD* portrays them: weak, powerless, and dependent on men.

Despite all of the representations of women as weak and inferior, one of the more positive gender representations that the show creates is the strong, fearless woman warrior. In characters like Michonne, Carol, Maggie, and Rosita it is obvious that there is a will to survive and the ability to fearlessly kill when the need presents itself. What does this mean in terms of Fantasy Theme Analysis? The women in this show and the lack of leadership and power reflect that of real life. Women still don't find themselves as equal to men in reality just as in fantasy, so the comparison between worlds isn't a hard one. Now that inequality is beginning to be discussed, it is important to continue with another significant theme, and category of the monstrous other, race.

Race

It's important to begin with the blatant racism shown in the first few seasons, stemming largely from one character. Merle Dixon is one of the show's most unapologetic and disrespectful characters in the series. In the first episode in which he is shown, Merle makes several racist and inappropriate comments towards other members of the group. He calls a Latino character a "taco bender" and directs racial slurs at T-Dog, an African American character from the first few seasons. In the same scene, Merle physically attacks T-dog and threatens to kill him. Unsurprisingly, only moments later he refers to one of the women in the group as "sugar tits" and "honeybunch" and then tells her they should "bump uglies" (*TWD*, 2010, s.1, ep.2). Merle gets left behind by the group after T-dog loses the keys to the handcuffs that Merle is trapped in. Merle is an example of a villain in this show who isn't hated because of what he does, but is hated because of how he acts and what he says. In the first season, Merle is just a nasty, sleazy

person. Later in season three he becomes increasingly evil, but most of the hatred that the audience probably has for him stems from his behavior, racism, and lewd comments towards men and women within the first few episodes of the series.

Daryl Dixon, his brother, though beginning the show exhibiting the same racist tendencies as Merle, goes through a transformation as the series progresses. While in the first episode, Daryl is blurting racial insults at a gang that the group encounters, his behavior changes once his brother is out of the picture. In fact, several episodes later in season three, Merle and Daryl reunite. Merle discusses his actions of capturing part of the group to his brother. "I tried to kill the black bitch. Damn near killed the Chinese kid," Merle says, only for Daryl to reply with, "He's Korean" (*TWD*, 2013, s.3, ep.10). Now, it isn't saying much, but it certainly tells the audience that Daryl has developed more respect for Glenn, the character they are talking about, and will not group him into a racial stereotype. Daryl's reaction serves to further amplify that Merle is still flagrantly racist.

The cannibalism in season five is mentioned in the section about gender, but it also hit a few chords when it comes to race. As Gareth eats Bob's leg in front of him, he quickly blurts out that Bob "tasted better than we thought" (*TWD*, 2014, s.5, ep.2) he would. Why did they assume he wouldn't taste good? One has to assume that in the time that Terminus has been operating, they've eaten a significant amount of people. Is it because Bob is a black man? It seems like that's exactly what Gareth is insinuating. Bob is a man who is lured into Terminus, just like all of the other people being held captive. In this episode and this moment, Gareth and his crew of all white men make it seem like race is a factor in taste. He does say that women taste better than men, so if he's discussing gender in terms of taste, he could possibly be discussing race as well. It begs to ask if people of color who are watching this made the assumption as to whether the

67

show was referencing Bob's skin color. The show has seen racist characters before. Merle Dixon is the most obvious example for that. Either way, the whole scene is monstrous. Through the actions of Gareth and his group, and the insinuation of racial issues, race and the monstrous other in this show are amplified.

Interestingly, Glenn Rhee provides a positive example of race in the show. He is the first and only Asian character that has been seen so far, and he holds a very important role. Glenn is a pizza boy who saves Rick in the second episode and throughout the following seasons becomes a beloved character. He's kind and isn't going around brutally killing living people, like many of the other characters. He nabs the girl next door Maggie, and they get married and become *TWD's* favorite couple. He isn't portrayed as an Asian stereotype. As a matter of fact, stereotypes are not seen heavily in this show aside from the white trash Dixon brothers and the sexy Latina Rosita. Glenn is probably one of the most loved characters in the show. I mentioned previously that he is literally the only Asian in the show until at least season seven. However, while the inclusion of an Asian character to this series is great, it's curious why there is literally only one in the series thus far.

There are two views of this show when it comes to women of color. The first is that there are not enough. The second is that the women of color in this show offer a representation that inspires and encourages a lot of people watching. The proportion of women of color to white women in *TWD* is pretty dismal. While the show has no shortage of female characters, a plus for the gender, it's representation of diversity falls a little short. There have been plenty of strong white women, but there really have only been two strong black women and one Latina as main characters. While the characters who are women of color in this television show are fearless, courageous, loyal, and strong, there aren't very many of them. The show has been filled with

predominantly white women who take roles of villains, leaders, and sweet girls-next-door type characters. There have been plenty of main characters who have indeed been white women. The love interests of the Governor are white women. The matriarch of Terminus is a white woman. The leader of Alexandria is also a white woman. What this means for fantasy theme analysis, is that *TWD* and its portrayal of women of color reflects the monstrous other, race, gender issues, and the lack of colored women in strong roles in television, as well as reality.

Additionally, when it comes to Rosita Espinosa, though she might be seen as brave, fierce, and strong, she still doesn't escape the sexy Latina stereotype. While this specific topic could fit well in a discussion of gender, it also has a lot to do with Rosita's "race." When first introduced to Rosita she's dressed in short skimpy shorts and her shirt tied up into a crop top. Rosita is the only Latina in the group, and she is the only character who has ever been sexualized in this way. Yes, there has literally not been any other character in the series that has been shown in sexy clothes displaying most of their body. To contribute to just how sexualized this character is, despite the plenty of other sex scenes in the show, Rosita is the only one that is shown with her legs wrapped around her lover, moaning and talking dirty. The other sex scenes in the series thus far include white women and aren't as graphic. So it is safe to say that Rosita's character is introduced with the intention of becoming the sexy, feisty Latina, in turn amplifying racial stereotypes.

Sexuality

Now that the sexualized Rosita Espinosa has been introduced in the previous section, it is important to continue on to the theme of sexuality. Throughout the entirety of the first five seasons of *TWD*, the audience is introduced to only three characters who are not heterosexuals, both of them in the later seasons. Season four welcomes Tara Chambler, who mentions that she

69

is a lesbian in passing in a conversation with the Governor. She later finds a love interest who ends up dying in the battle for the prison. Tara is first brave and ready to fight, but later is shown as weak and filled with guilt after participating in the battle for the prison. Tara and her short term girlfriend are the only homosexuals in the show until season five. In season five, audiences are introduced to Aaron from Alexandria. The audience doesn't know right away that he is gay. In fact, it takes almost two episodes to introduce his husband Eric. Aaron is trying to convince Rick and his group to join the Alexandria community. He isn't afraid of what Rick's group might do to him, even after they hold him captive. Aaron still has faith that he can get the group to believe that he just wants to help. When a flare gun shot is seen in the distance, Aaron realizes that the person who accompanied him is in danger. It's not too long after that it is made apparent that it's Aarons husband whom he's running towards. When the group finds out that Aaron is lovingly married, Rick seems confused and surprised. Rick's look when he sees Aaron and his husband kiss is one of confusion and curiosity. It shows that homosexuality hasn't yet moved from different to normal, and different is the whole idea behind the monstrous other. Still, the inclusion of other sexualities is rare in the show, and when they are represented, it is through characters of little importance. Now that several social issues have been discussed, it is equally as important to move on to political ones.

Walls in *TWD* and the Real World

Season three is the first solid introduction to the importance of walls. In fact, the season is centered around walls and the groups that live behind them. This is a theme that continues throughout the rest of the series so far. The representation of walls within this season and the remainder of the show introduces themes of power and vulnerability. Within each instance of walls lies safety and danger. What is being kept out and what is being kept inside? Ultimately,

70

the characters within the show realize that one of the most crucial elements to their safety is the opportunity to be surrounded by walls that keep out zombies, but that also allow the people inside to manage who goes in and who comes out.

The prison presents the first prospect for walls becoming a safe haven within in the show. Everything else before is finding places to survive for short periods of time. Walls introduce the idea of long term safety and survival. The prison is a place where they are finally surrounded by fences, so they could be outside in the open without the work of dealing with zombies and outsiders. The layout of the prison and the introduction of it as the best chance for a home must have seemed ironic to the people watching. The places where we hold prisoners who have committed crimes are now the best bet for people to survive in the zombie apocalypse. The layout of the prison is excellent for the storyline within this show. It includes a double fence and metal doors at the entrances. The group is able to see who is coming towards the prison and still able to keep the zombies at bay. Still, once Rick and his group establish the prison as a home, it doesn't take long for people to want to take it for themselves. From prison inmates to the Governor, the location has people wanting the prison and attempting to take it. It also includes people asking to be let in, only to be rejected by Rick and sent away. In episode eight of season three, however, a small group of people stumble upon an entrance to the prison and make their way inside. When they find out that Rick's group is living at the prison they ask to stay and become a part of the group. In fact, they say that they'll earn their keep, and help in anyway possible in exchange for shelter. The group is ultimately turned away and left to find shelter elsewhere. At the end of the season Rick finally allows other people to enter the prison and creates a community. However, in the following season the prison is destroyed by the Governor in an attempt to take the prison and live there with his group. Unwilling to share the location, the

situation turns into "if one person can't have it, no one will," which ends up with no winning sides.

Woodbury is also a great example of the power of walls. In fact, it's in season three in which Woodbury and its leader the Governor are introduced, that the characters are actually clearly talking about walls. Andrea asks the Governor what his secret is, and his response is "a community, with lots of guns and ammunitions, and really big walls with men willing to risk everything to defend them" (*TWD*, 2013, s.3, ep.3). Watching this specific episode might sound more relevant now than it did when it first aired. Especially since in April of 2018, President Trump declared that he would be sending hundreds of National Guard troops to the border (Hart, 2018, para. 2) and immigration issues have been in focus now more than ever. In fact, a prominent part of Trump's campaign was the promise to build a wall along the U.S./Mexico border. Still, what is most surprising about Woodbury is the view of both sides of the walls that surround the community. On one side are zombies and destruction; on the other are people having block parties and barbecuing. The stark difference really enforces the impact that walls really have in this series. A wall determines whether you thrive or you die.

Having walls in this show also gives a character a certain amount of power. The leader gets to decide who can and cannot enter and who must leave. Rick has turned people away from the prison. The Governor has killed people so that he won't have to find a place for them. The group has had to "audition" to be able to live behind the safety of Alexandria's walls. These situations resemble certain situations in the real world. Walls have been an issue in the real world in current times too. The issue of immigration has existed for quite some time, but in more recent years, it's become increasingly prominent. Especially now, in the time of the Trump administration, tensions over immigration are high. The U.S. has seen people rejected, exiled,

and imprisoned for entering the United States. The idea of the difference in sides of the fence is the same. There is always one side that seems to have it better. How does this in any way resemble *The Walking Dead*? The issues are one and the same. While in our current reality we aren't in the midst of a zombie apocalypse, there are issues that revolve around walls, fences, and who gets to stay and who does not.

Woodbury, Grady Memorial, Terminus, and Alexandria are all locations in *TWD* that are surrounded and protected by walls. Be it fences, barricades made of trash, or giant metal walls, each of these locations has held a community both successfully and unsuccessfully. Thus far, the locations that have been depicted in this show have been a place of power and safety, but they've also been places of death, betrayal, and inner struggles. Woodbury ends up infested with zombies and abandoned by community members after their leader loses his sanity. The prison is destroyed by jealousy and greed. Terminus, containing a community of horrible people is demolished. Alexandria, at least in season five, is dealing with power struggles and internal threats. All of these places have been both a cause of happiness and distress. Still, the opportunity to suggest similarities between walls in the show and walls in reality is there. The theme of walls fully magnifies fantasy theme analysis. It reveals that themes within the show are certainly reflected in real life situations, and similarly, situations in real life are also reflected in the series.

Fantasy Theme Analysis and *TWD*

It has been established that Fantasy Theme Analysis uses things like characters, settings, and situations in fantasy scenarios and interprets the methods in which they are symbolic to reality and real groups of people. In chapter three it is mentioned that those groups can be large, small, political parties, work units, etc. (Shield & Preston, 1985, p. 102). *TWD* reflects through

its characters, storylines, ideas and situations that can be related or interpreted to resemble situations in real life. One can't look at *TWD* and state that it completely mirrors real life, because real life doesn't consist of surviving the zombie apocalypse. While it might seem impossible to say that *TWD* can mirror reality, it isn't. Yes, it is first and foremost a fantasy television show about the destruction of the world, caused by the zombie apocalypse. Zombies aren't a real threat to our world. They reside in a world of made up monsters. However, that is not the entire premise of the series. The show is about survival. It's about heartache and loss, and war and politics. It is about strengths and weaknesses and fighting to live another day. These are real life issues, and these themes can be and are reflected in our real world.

As mentioned in chapter three, Cohen argues that monsters can embrace the "cultural, political, racial, economic, and sexual" (1997, p. 7). The monstrous people discussed here, and their actions, depict social, political, racial, and sexual issues. Both the introduction of the monstrous and the monstrous other establish the ability to connect reality to the themes within this television show. So this section will look at fantasy theme analysis in monstrosity before making its way to the monstrous other and issues of gender, race, and later politics.

As mentioned in the previous section, *TWD* and its focus on the living dead begins to decrease over time. The focus now is placed on the people around which this show revolves. After all, the show is about surviving the zombie apocalypse and not just the zombies. Putting people as the center of the show allows me to connect the fantasy themes that are seen both in the characters, and the situations they are placed in, to people and situations in the real world. Zombies create a massive amount of the problems that the people in the series face, and "though the zombies are integral to The Walking Dead's plot, they're not what the show is really about. They're just a way to blow up the world" (Totten, 2014, para. 12). This can be interpreted as

saying that zombies are merely the cause of the need for survival, but survival is what the show is really about. Had the end of the world been caused by illness, nuclear bombs, solar flare, or whatever, it's worth considering whether the premise of the show would be similar, if not the same. While the show's premise is to destroy the world with a zombie outbreak, the end of the world still causes anxiety with other types of scenarios. No matter the situation, this show promotes that "with such cataclysms, man-made or natural, comes the risk of social breakdown that makes us so apprehensive" (Totten, 2014, para. 21). As is mentioned in chapter two, zombies are just a representation of fear and anxiety towards other events that could possibly lead to national or global panic. Totten (2014) further states:

> The anxiety about social collapse that has made The Walking Dead and other post-apocalyptic stories so popular isn't absurd. Our unprecedented prosperity is disturbingly vulnerable to systemic shocks. On an increasingly urbanized planet, global pandemics are terrifying…residents of cities like Baghdad and Damascus can relate all too well to the predicaments that characters face in The Walking Dead. Even Beirut…sees spasms of violence during which neighbors wake up one morning and start shooting at one another. Sometimes, in other words, breakdown is more than just a dark fantasy. Learning how one can survive and—just as important—remain a decent human being in such a crisis might be worth thinking about, even if it never happens. (para. 25)

Totten indicates that people watching *TWD,* and other shows like it, use this form of entertainment media to represent their fears and curiosities about about death and modernized versions of the apocalypse. Totten (2014) goes on to say:

> The world is providing a lot to trouble the sleep of even the non-neurotic—Islamic terrorists beheading innocent captives, debt bombs, financial meltdowns, mass shootings

in schools—all of it trumpeted by round-the-clock media. The omnipresent media

regularly remind us that natural calamity remains a possibility, too, even in the developed

world. (para. 20)

In other words, there is no shortage of real scenarios that represent things like murder, death,

rape, illness, and a vast majority of the scenarios that *TWD* presents week after week. It is only

further emphasized in James Poniewozik's article in *Time Magazine* (2014):

If there is no such thing as a time without bad news, there's a specific cast to the bad

news of today. Often, it's about systemic collapse, or the threat of it: pandemics, global

financial crises, climate change and rising sea levels, the threat of mass-casualty terrorist

events. In one way or another, we're constantly asked to envision how we and our own

would thrive if everything went to hell and we lost all our societal supports. It's

disturbing; in some way it all comes down to generating fear by selling fear. But it does

sell. (para. 11)

However, despite the idea that fear sells, it does not mean that fear is not meaningful. The

horrors of *TWD* are embraced by the audiences, because it mirrors fears felt in reality, further

enforcing fantasy theme analysis. Still, apocalyptic fears in this show are fueled by monsters.

Thus, it's crucial to move on to monstrosity in general.

I have discussed monstrosity, and the idea that monsters can mean a multitude of things.

The characters in this show, in the way that they act and the things that they do, each encompass

monstrosity in one way or another. An example of this can be seen in groups like the Claimers,

who kill each other over material things. Both in *TWD* and in real life, violence and death are

real. Fantasy theme analysis is correct in saying that these themes are reinforced both in fiction

and reality. There are people out there murdering each other. The Governor's rage is not

dissimilar to people who kill out of revenge. Some of Rick's tactics can be seen as killing for self defense. People have seen tactics like those in the real world too. The point is that the show has made monsters out of the people that the show revolves around. In the show, the groups kill hundreds of walkers over the first five seasons, but the audience has also seen them kill plenty of living humans too. Poniewozik notes that the show:

"allows us the distance of knowing that most of its 'kills' are walkers, who are already dead; but its living suffer too, often horribly. And that matters in an era where entertainment is no longer massaged to be palatable to audiences of every age and taste, as it was in the three-channel days of the 20th century." (para. 13)

Audiences embrace the monstrosity that this television show depicts, and maybe it's because they have anxieties over similar scenarios happening to them, or maybe it's because death isn't some farfetched idea. Fantasy Theme Analysis allows the ability to see themes in this series and in others that craft fear, anxiety, and opinions. It allows these themes to create an open discussion about those realities, displaying the value of fantasy theme analysis for examining entertainment media.

Moving on from monstrosity to the monstrous other, it is important to note that fantasy theme analysis is even more useful here. The monstrous other is a theme that is prevalent in the real world as well as the fictional one. Surrounding topics of sexuality, race, and gender, the monstrous others are those who are viewed as minorities and classified as inferior and unequal or "abnormal." The theme of the monstrous other can be recognized by the gender and racial issues issues displayed within the show. The view of women as weak and inferior exists in both the fictional world and in the real one. *TWD* shows themes of rape and doubts of survival when it comes to women. A good percentage of storylines that involve women also deal with having to

save the women from zombies and horrible people, reinforcing the idea that women can't handle things on their own, are not capable, or are outside of "normal" (i.e., monstrous.)

For example, in season five, Beth needs to be constantly rescued by Daryl Dixon. Glenn is always rushing to be Maggie's knight in shining armor. In another example, Rick must take leadership of Alexandria, because Deanna can't handle it on her own. All of these instances show women as unequal to the men in this show. While it does feature women acting in bravery, fighting the good fight, those characters also come with their flaws. While characters like Michonne, Carol, and Rosita can seemingly survive on their own, they always tend to rely on the company of others. In reality, women are seen just as the women that are depicted in this series. They are supposed to be weak, and inferior, and plainly unequal to their male counterparts. In real life, this can easily be seen this in the gender wage gap, for example, where women make significantly less money than men. According to the American Association of University Women, "women working full time in the United States typically were paid just 80 percent of what men were paid, a gap of 20 percent" (Hill, 2018, p. 4). In fact, there are many ways that females are seen as the less equal gender, so as fantasy theme analysis states, it's easy to make connections between real life gender issues and the ones rooted in fantasy television. These issues exist both in fantasy and in reality.

Additionally, the theme of sexuality is also one that can be examined through fantasy theme analysis. While as the years have progressed, to some extent, the real world has seen a surge in representation of the LGBTQA+ community and has begun to understand and accept the large percentage of the population who identifies within LGBTQA+ categories, the representation in fantasy entertainment is still lacking. This show only depicts two characters that are crucial to the storyline who identify as gay or lesbian. Their partners aren't really deemed

78

important or main characters, and no character in the series has ever identified as transgender, queer, or bisexual. *TWD* keeps it simple and straightforward, and while it's good that the representation is there rather than not existent at all, it still isn't enough. The issue is mirrored in reality as well. Talking about sexuality is still approached with uncertainty. In an article on *Queerty*, spotlighting blogs and commenters who discuss LGBT+ issues, one viewer notes, "LGBT viewers of *The Walking Dead* and television in general deserve much better. Better characters, better representation, and better advocating for such by concerned individuals and organizations" (Avery, 2012, para. 4). This article demonstrates how audiences are interpreting the themes in the show and demanding for connections to their own realities. While the issue of gender and sexuality is also an example of a monstrous other, it is also crucial to move on to the topic of race.

While the show does a good job at having a diverse cast, there is still a need for more representation of minorities or people of color. Audiences watching the show might be pleased to see that as the show has progressed it has also added more diversity in its cast. When the show started, it had only one African American character for the first two seasons and one Asian character for the entirety of the series. There were no Latino/a characters as main characters until the introduction of Martinez and Rosita Espinoza, one of which is only shown a few times and dies shortly after. When comparing the theme of race to the real world, people of color might be confused at the lack of representation. Deggans (2014) mentions that the show's "two African American characters weren't enough to reflect the diversity of its setting around Atlanta, where the population is more than 50 percent black" (para. 11). So, it makes sense that people might question the lack of African American characters in the series. This resonates both in the show

and in reality through fantasy theme analysis. Race issues and the need for more representation in important and successful roles are prominent in the real world too.

There are also a lot of issues when it comes to gender representation, especially with women of color. There are no leadership positions taken by women of color in this television series, so it isn't a surprise that when connecting it to reality women of color face the same issue. According to the Center for American Progress, women are significantly behind in terms of positions of power and leadership compared to men. Women currently make up only "29 percent of executive- and senior-level managers and 2 percent of CEOs" (Warner & Corley, 2017, para. 8). When it comes to women of color Hill (2018) states that:

> "Hispanic or Latina, American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NHPI) women had lower median annual earnings compared with non-Hispanic white and Asian women." (p.10)

The pay gap between white women and women of color alone is enough evidence to note that women of color hold fewer positons of leadership. In terms of fantasy theme analysis, viewers, especially women and women of color, can easily see their lives and situations mirrored in the show. In fact, women can develop really strong connections to many different situations in the show. This proves the importance of fantasy theme analysis, not only in television shows like *TWD*, but in all other forms of entertainment media. Issues of gender and race in these examples alone provide enough need for fantasy theme analysis to interpret other forms of media that audiences can relate to. For instance, topics like sexual assault and harassment, to suicide, and loss of loved ones, are found in entertainment media and real life. Either way, the fact that there are three women of color in *TWD* who comprise major roles is both a positive thing and a negative one. It is positive because the show demonstrates the existence of diversity in this world

of fiction. However, it reflects how minimally important diversity is not only fictionally, but realistically. Still, the characters Michonne, Sasha, and Rosita offer more than just the inclusion of minorities. They offer an example of courageous women who can survive anything, an inspiration to women of color watching the show. This leads us back to the idea that fantasy theme analysis is a functional tool for observation of these shows and movies. People of color watching have the opportunity to look at the show and know that some of the fiercest characters are women and men of color. In the case of *TWD*, "the show doesn't talk overtly about race anymore. But it does look a lot more like America, in ways that allow everyone to see themselves as the hero — or antihero" (Deggans, 2014, para. 18). Thus far, *TWD* has yet to introduce a character of color who has not been influential to the show. What does this say for audiences watching? Fantasy theme analysis allows groups to create themes that stem from fantasy, and these themes can be related to their realities. Furthermore, *TWD* has created characters that leave a lasting impression. Deggans (2014) goes on to note that the characters on the show are significant in their diverse representation:

> These aren't just tokens. They are fully fleshed-out characters with their own histories, storylines and goals. And they have come along as the Walking Dead has become the most popular series on TV with the young demographic advertisers crave. It's another example of how creating a cast that looks like America is good for TV stories and the TV business. Even in a zombie apocalypse. (para. 19)

These characters represent the women of color who can survive and who can fight back. It represents men who are strong and brave. It introduces characters who contribute more than just an opportunity for diversification. I mentioned in the first chapter of this research project that people have developed a fandom so large, that dressing up and representing favorite characters

81

have become a norm for comic book and television lovers alike. People are taking characters like

Michonne, Sasha, and Rosita and are adopting them in their own life. So not only can it be seen

through fantasy theme analysis that certain themes are being mirrored in real life, but there is

actual proof of people pretending to replicate it themselves. *TWD,* as is mentioned in the

introduction, has an enormous following and viewership. Poniewozik (2014) mentions that:

> "Though horror TV might not be a popular genre among all age groups, *TWD* TV's most
>
> relentlessly disturbing and violent drama is also arguably its most popular. Extreme is the
>
> new mainstream." (para. 3)

The following that this show has is outrageous, which makes it all the more important that the

themes that are analyzed here are present both in the television show and in reality. Still, issues

relating to race, gender, and sexuality are not the only things that can be portrayed in this

television show. There have been plenty of scenarios that can also mirror political situations.

Walls in the show have projected power and security, much like the walls and fences that

surround a nation-state border. Walls only enforce themes in the show that can be seen as a

reflection of current political issues, especially those dealing with immigration. This itself is an

example of fantasy theme analysis at work. In an article for *Vulture* (2016), Sean Collins notes

that current politics used *TWD* as a means of promotion of their policies based on already

developed anxieties that the show creates:

> Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner revealed that the Trump team targeted ads
>
> at *TWD's* viewers based on their fear of immigration, a fear the candidate was more than
>
> happy to stoke for votes and attention. In the form of both the cannibalistic undead and
>
> the frequently just as vicious bands of survivors our "heroes" encounter, the similarities
>
> to the supposedly untamed criminal hordes pouring in from Syria or Mexico or the enemy

nation of choice are unmistakable: For both the show and the future president, the only

proper response is a show of force. (para. 4)

This clearly demonstrates how some viewers are possibly taking the situations and scenarios and

actually finding connections to real life issues. Fantasy theme analysis is already happening, and

further encourages the need for more application of it. Not only that, but people like politicians

for example, are using themes that happen in these television shows and the way that they impact

their viewers for their own advantage. The similarities between themes in *TWD* and current

United States politics are evident. Walls have a lot to do with the main storylines in the show,

and they greatly mirror the issue that that can be seen on immigration. The zombies and even

humans in this show that are turned away from the safety of the walls that create sanctuaries are

a huge likeness to the current immigration issue. An example of this can be found in recent news

surrounding *Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals Act* (DACA), which allows immigrants

brought to the U.S. as children to receive deferred action of deportation, as well as the Trump

Administration's Muslim ban. Another example can also be seen in the recent decision to send

National Guard troops to the southern border. This is easily compared to the Governor's

successfully running community attributed to guns and people willing to risk their lives for the

walls of Woodbury. It also echoes the need for Rick Grimes and his group to "audition" before

actually being allowed and invited to join the Alexandria community. All of these examples are

relevant to the application of fantasy theme analysis. They all impart the idea that there certainly

is a connection between fantasy themes in entertainment media and in real life and politics.

Fantasy Theme Analysis in the Future

As mentioned in chapter three, fantasy theme analysis was later overshadowed by its younger

sibling symbolic convergence theory. It's been mentioned in earlier chapters that symbolic

convergence theory is very similar to fantasy theme analysis except for the fact that it deals with the creation of group think and group decision making. Fantasy theme analysis allows one to view the fantasy themes and connect them with reality. It doesn't require making a decision about something, but instead to just connect to it. When one looks at the television shows on air now and over the last few decades, it's evident that people have probably already been unknowingly partaking in fantasy theme analysis. If one looks closely at the television shows and films that people are watching (interpret what social and political themes audiences encounter, and then compare them to reality as done with *TWD*,) fantasy theme analysis allows people to discuss important and prominent themes and opinions, and encourages more impactful and meaningful communication, as well as more communication in general.

By using fantasy theme analysis in the shows that people watch everyday, we understand how audiences find messages that can relate to people, groups, places, and situations, but also to connect feelings and experiences. It brings people together and opens up realms for discussion, where people who are part of the audience can connect with each other and communicate about the themes that they watch regularly.

People watch television shows and movies in the comfort of their homes with the people they love, although most of them aren't willfully watching them with the purpose of finding hidden meanings and social themes. They watch for entertainment. Still, television shows and movies are influencing the lives of the people that watch them.

Television shows that leave an impact on audiences have been around for ages. Since 1961 and the premier of *The Defenders* and the 1963 premier of *Eastside/Westside*, the world has been familiar with television shows that cover important social and political topics (Littleton, 2017). For years, television shows have been a method of portraying messages to vast amounts

of people all while entertaining them. So, this project is not the first time that fantasy theme analysis has been used to connect to television and entertainment, and it shouldn't be the last. By observing television shows, the films that people watch, the music people that listen to and connecting meaning from the show to real life, there is an advancement of the discussion and awareness of important topics and themes.

Often, entertainment media consume large portions of a person's everyday life. So researchers should be using entertainment media as a means to gain insight into themes that are experienced both in fiction and in reality. Taking the perspective of entertainment as a form of communication to convey messages that reflect upon the people around us could be more impactful than one would think. It's the reason why rapper Logic's hit song "1-800-273-8255" on the day of its April 2017 release alone, resulted in the National Suicide Hotline receiving its highest ever call volume of 4,573 callers (Armstrong, 2017, para. 2). I mention the song, because it is not only a part of entertainment media, but it could possibly also be classified as a work of fiction. The song, and especially the video for the song, depicts a person struggling to deal with life's challenges. While the person that the song focuses on is merely an actor or a generalized anthem for others, and not specifically the artist, the song and its theme of getting help for people contemplating suicide reached millions of people and opened up the opportunity for discussion.

It's the reason why Netflix's hit original television show *13 Reasons Why* (2017) sparked outrage after suicide rates rose twenty percent shortly after season one was released (Gilbert, 2017). The case of a fictional character committing suicide after experiencing bullying and sexual assault are themes that men and women are already familiar with. Shows like *13 Reasons Why* (2017) have reached large groups of people who are dealing with depression, bullying,

sexual assault, and suicide. Entertainment media could possibly influence people to be more willing to talk about racism, feminism, and LGBT rights.

Shows like *Empire* (2015) promote African American success. *The Fosters* (2013) introduces themes of adoption and spotlights contemporary issues like gay marriage and transgender characters, and it also discusses immigration and illness. These forms of entertainment media beg to be analyzed, with messages and themes that connect strongly to the audience and their realities. There are may opportunities for researchers to make connections between themes from scenarios that are both real and not real, and to use them to gain understanding of the way that people live and act.

There has been and will continue to be a hunger for television shows that provide more than just meaningless entertainment. Television shows will continue to involve situations and scenarios that can be relatable to their audiences, and now more than ever, entertainment media are going to be a platform where talking about social and political issues of all types isn't taboo, but the norm. For television shows that depict the lives that people live and the things that people see around us, fantasy theme analysis could be the key to discovering so much more that researchers know about society.

Summary

The Walking Dead is not just about zombies. It is about the strengths and weaknesses, and the trials and tribulations that people must overcome in order to survive extreme situations, in this case: the zombie apocalypse. In this project I have discussed issues like race, gender, and monstrosity, among others, in an attempt to find similar themes within the real world and in fantasy television. In this chapter, the goal was to answer the following questions posed in chapter three:

RQ1: In what ways does *TWD* construct the monstrous other?

RQ2: What is to be gained from using fantasy theme analysis to analyze *TWD* and its significance in contemporary popular culture?

RQ3: How can fantasy theme analysis be used with analysis of current television shows in the U.S. in order to asses the relationship between fantasy themes and contemporary culture, social trends, or political issues?

By comparing situations from the television show *TWD* to reality, this research demonstrates that *TWD* does have the ability to connect with real life situations and people, and has allowed me to answer the research questions appropriately. First, the analysis of the series demonstrates that aside from the actual monsters that the story revolves around, (zombies) monstrosity develops in the people and characters who have to do whatever it takes to survive. *TWD* introduces characters that murder, lie, and steal. It was established that monstrosity comes in many forms. I found that *TWD* creates room for more than just one type of monster in this series. The show discusses more obviously monstrous topics like rape and cannibalism. There are wars and fights over materials and locations. The themes that are seen in this television series are also themes that are seen or heard about in the real world. Rape and murder are not uncommon, and people in the real world really do seek out revenge, pick fights, and cheat on their significant others. I also discussed the relevance of anxiety surrounding the end of the world. Fantasy theme analysis has the possibility to show how television shows impact the audience. An example in this case can be seen through promotion of the interest in survival and its commercialization. *TWD* and its themes of survival could be conected to the popularity of shows like *Doomsday Preppers* (2011), which depicts real people in the U.S. that are actively preparing for end of the world scenarios. The monstrosity that is depicted in *TWD* encapsulates

more than just creatures and monsters, it involves social, political, racial themes that create for unsavory situations, and glorify the theme of survival.

Furthermore, it is established that *TWD* does indeed further construct the monstrous other. Monstrous others and otherness describe the disparities that are seen in the real world in terms of equality (or lack of) for minorities, gender, and sexuality. These themes are also widely present in the television series. By using fantasy theme analysis, I highlighted a connection between real issues of race, gender, and sexuality and the show. In terms of the monstrous other and gender, it is seen that the television series manages to portray female characters in many instances as weak, inferior, and powerless. The lack of females in positions of leadership is a theme that can connect the fantasy world of *TWD* to the real world, in which women typically hold a dismal percentage of positions of leadership and power. When it comes to race the show doesn't shy away from characters who are openly racist. It also at times places characters of different races in a position that doesn't quite compare to that of the main character who is a strong, white man. We also posed the question of representation of people of color in the series and also discussed the positive outcomes of diversity within this television show. Lastly, in terms of sexuality, the show only showcases LGBTQA+ in minor characters. While the show does a good job of highlighting their sexuality, the characters just don't hold as much importance as others.

Using fantasy theme analysis, I was able to note the reflection of the use of walls in the television show to walls in the real world. I was able to connect issues of immigration to themes of power and control in the show. In *TWD* one can see characters who find sanctuary behind giant protective walls, but also see the theme of being able to decide who can go in and who

must stay out. The walls in the settings of this series create feelings of safety, but can also create problems between the characters and their groups.

With the help of fantasy theme analysis, I was able to determine that *TWD* is a show that holds value for not only its audiences, but to entertainment media as a whole. Aside from the numbers, with millions of people watching every week, the show presents reflections of real life situations that are possibly meaningful to the viewers. Had fantasy theme analysis not been used to analyze this show, I would have never noticed the reflections of important social and political themes. The show introduces important topics like monstrosity, gender, and politics, among so many others. The show presents topics that are evident in reality and in contemporary popular culture. It was important to use fantasy theme analysis with *TWD* in order to give other people the chance to see these themes for themselves, especially in one of the worlds most popular television shows.

Overall, it is important to highlight the connections that were made from the show to the real world. Fantasy theme analysis can be a tool that can and should be used to continue to analyze entertainment media. In doing this, there is a possibility to create or promote more impactful and meaningful communication, as well as to increase just how much can be learned about people through the things that they watch.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This study was conducted with three main goals. The first goal was to establish the existence of the monstrous other in the television show *TWD*. Secondly, I attempted to determine what the benefit is of using fantasy theme analysis on *TWD*, in order to assess its significance in contemporary culture. Lastly, the aim was that this project was a means to discover the importance of fantasy theme analysis and how it could possibly be used in the future to analyze other forms of entertainment media.

This thesis was divided into six chapters. In chapters one and two, it was established that zombies and monsters have been thriving as a popular theme in entertainment media for quite some time. While the background and history of monsters and zombies were introduced, it is also important to establish the meaning of monstrosity and the monstrous other. Using Cohen and Calafell's descriptions of monstrosity as being a part of social and political culture, I was able to develop a basis for themes that are popular among people in the real world. Additionally, these chapters served to reinforce the importance and relevance of *TWD* and its place in entertainment media. Through the analysis, I made the connection between social and political themes in reality and in *TWD*. The third chapter detailed the theoretical background that is applied to influence and develop the analysis in the last few chapters. The reasoning behind using fantasy theme analysis is made clear. There are large quantities of entertainment media being consumed by people all over the United States and the world. Despite the benefit of it, there is minimal research that uses fantasy theme analysis to interpret meaningful symbolism in more recent popular television shows and movies.

Before beginning the analysis, it was crucial to establish a set up (chapter four) of *TWD* in order to know important themes, characters, and settings within the show, without the need for

a complete summary for each episode in each season. I wanted to be able to address the themes and situations mentioned in the show, without actually needing to see the first five seasons of *TWD*. In the analysis (chapter five) I established how the *TWD* constructs the monstrous other. The inequalities that can be seen in the real world in terms of issues like race, gender, and sexuality are likewise found in themes within the television series. Through fantasy theme analysis, it is possible to determine that topics like rape, female leadership, racial stereotypes, and racism, among other things, are present in *TWD*. These similar themes can be found in situations that people in reality face as well. I presented topics like female leadership, with examples like the characters Dawn and Deanna. They were both women who were placed in positions of leadership, but were set up to fail. Despite the placement of women in positions of power, these characters only hold the power for a short amount of time or are shown to be weak and frightened, rather than fierce and brave. So, when you eliminate the false leadership that is given to these two characters, there really have not been any examples of female leadership within the first five seasons. When it comes to real life, the same can be seen in the *Center for American Progress* (2017) report. There is an extremely small percentage of women who find themselves in a leadership position. It states, as mentioned in chapter five, that women make up "29 percent of executive- and senior-level managers and 2 percent of CEOs" (Warner & Corley, 2017, para. 8). This example allows the possibility to relate the lack of leadership roles for women in both the show and in real life.

Fantasy theme analysis suggests that if audiences pay attention to themes that can be seen in the show, one being a lack of representation of people of color, there can be an opportunity for amplified communication about these themes. The more that people see these topics in entertainment media, the more likely they are to talk about them. People could be more willing to

discuss what they see on television with others who make up part of that same audience. For example, there is a lack of African American characters in the show in a place like Atlanta that has a high percentage of African Americans in reality. Additionally, there is also a lack of Latino/as, Asians and LGBT characters. While *TWD* does a good job at having a very diverse cast, there are still disparities between representation and the importance of having characters of color. This a theme that the audience has noticed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, audience members are influenced by the show and discuss it in articles and blogs. This means that communication is already happening, and it is influenced by fantasy theme analysis. Viewers are watching these shows and talking about how they resemble possible situations and themes in real life. Additionally, it is discussed that walls within *TWD* possibly influenced politically based discussion in the real world. It was even mentioned that the 2016 Trump campaign directed advertisements to viewers of *TWD* because of anxieties that had to deal with outsider threats. These examples prove that fantasy theme analysis can be used to successfully compare situations both in reality and in fictional works. It proves that people are paying attention to the themes in fiction and fantasy that people can relate to, and are using that to speak to audiences. If people were to pay closer attention to fantasy theme analysis with movies and television shows, no matter how farfetched, they can get a glimpse into themes that resonate with viewers. People who fear that the world will at some point face inevitable destruction are pulled in by shows like *TWD*. If the show reflects themes that they already see in reality, then the possibility of survival like the characters in the show is possible too. Moreover, fantasy theme analysis can be seen even in the horrible acts that people in the show commit, like murder, rape, and revenge, that echo the horrible acts that also occur in reality.

Through this research project, I was able to dive deeper into *TWD* than I ever have before. I noticed themes and messages that I had not payed attention to in the various times that I've watched it. Through the use of fantasy theme analysis, I have learned that there is more to scenes on these series than meet the eye. Usually, I watch these television shows, because I am invested in the development of characters and situations. In movies, you can't see characters change and grow. In television, however, there is a chance to see what happens next. Through fantasy theme analysis, I find myself paying attention to characters, settings, and situations. There is a newfound appreciation for interpreting the themes in fantasy television and applying them to the real world that I live in.

The main focus of this study was to determine whether fantasy theme analysis could be used with *TWD* and in the future with other entertainment media. This study demonstrates that fantasy theme analysis can still work in finding the connections between fantasy and reality. I found that it is possible for audiences to find situations and characters in fiction that can be relatable. In the analysis, I demonstrated that there were themes of monstrosity, race, gender, sexuality, and politics, that reflected people and situations in the real world. In fact, had I expanded this analysis, I could have even included themes like religion and environmentalism, which the show definitely touches on. When audiences and researchers take note of the television shows and the movies that people watch, or the music that people listen to and begin to infer meaning from the fantasy part of it to real life, there is potential opportunity for more impactful and expressive dialogue and knowledge of important topics and themes. Television can be a platform that people can use to find connections to their emotions and opinions. For some time now, television shows have been used to discuss things like social and political issues through entertainment. Shows are talking about LGBT issues, they are talking about race, they

are talking about gender, and they are talking about immigration. More shows are producing content that can be interpreted and analyzed. Fantasy theme analysis will allow us to observe correlations between fiction and real life experiences. Entertainment media are something that a multitude of people partakes in. The relevance of entertainment media is why researchers should be using fantasy theme analysis as a resource to advance understanding into topics that are faced both in fiction and in reality.

Limitations

The most recognizable limitation of this study is that it is purely qualitative. This research project is solely interpretive analysis. This thesis cannot be solved mathematically, it does not rely on accurate results, and did not require statistical methods or studies. In this analysis I had complete control over what I watched and observed. This study is based on and influenced by my interpretation of the material. Had this been a quantitative study, I would have possibly been able to measure the impact that the show actually has on audiences.

Another limitation of this study is that the analysis stops at season five. Analyzing the show from the beginning to its current season would have required a lot more time. The show is currently on season nine, and it looks like there aren't any plans to stop the franchise in the near future. Had the show been over, I would have been able to use fantasy theme analysis to interpret the show as a whole, rather than just a part of it. There is still so much more material left to cover.

Lastly, there was a possibility of expanding the themes that I covered in this research project. I introduced themes of race, gender, sexuality, and monstrosity, but I could have also introduced themes like environmentalism and religion. There are several other themes and topics that I could have covered in this thesis and neglected. In fact, environmentalism could have been

a prominent theme in this project, or a project of its own. Religion, family, maturity, and others are themes that could have been analyzed but were not.

Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis introduces the opportunity to conduct further research on *TWD* and fantasy theme analysis. As mentioned in the previous section, one of the limitations of this study was that the analysis covered only a portion of the show and that the show is not yet over. Now in its ninth season, *TWD* shows no signs of slowing down. I hope that fantasy theme analysis can be used in future work that encompasses the show in its entirety. It would be interesting to see how themes develop or change from the very beginning to the very end. Additionally, there is an opportunity to analyze the entire *Walking Dead* franchise. There are comic books, novels, a television spin-off, and there is even a movie trilogy in the works. Fantasy theme analysis can be used across each of the different entertainment platforms, or even all of them together. Additionally, future research could cover themes that were not present in this analysis. Themes like religion and environmentalism could introduce further meaningful interpretation through fantasy theme analysis.

More importantly, this analysis introduces the possibility of a quantitative study. As noted in the limitations, this project was purely interpretive. The analysis was based on what themes would correlate from fiction to reality and vice versa. However, it would be interesting to see how audience interaction and response influence the themes of this show. Future studies can be conducted using fantasy theme analysis and even symbolic convergence theory to determine what the themes in *TWD* make audiences feel, and how it impacts their lives. Does the show change opinions or behaviors in its viewers? Does it influence decisions or inclinations? There is

opportunity to conduct studies and actually see how the show and its fantasy themes effect a

person in real life.

References

Armstrong, M. (2017). Logic Tweets National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Statistics Since His '1-800' Release. *Billboard*. Retrieved from https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/8039094/logic-1-800-273-8255-national-suicide-prevention-lifeline-statistics-tweet

Avery, D. (2012, October 29). LGBT Blog Up In Arms Over Lack Of Gay Zombies On "The Walking Dead." *Queerty*. Retrieved from https://www.queerty.com/lgbt-blog-up-in-arms-over-lack-of-gay-zombies-on-the-walking-dead-20121030

Baker, S. (2014). The Walking Dead and Gothic Excess: The Decaying Social Structures of Contagion. *M/C Journal, 17*(4), 8.

Bishop, K. (2009). Dead Man Still Walking. *Journal Of Popular Film & Television, 37*(1), 16-25, 17-18.

Bishop, K. (2006). Raising the Dead. *Journal Of Popular Film & Television, 33*(4), 196-205.

Berg, M. (2016). The Walking Dead Returns To Impressive Ratings. *Forbes.com*. Retrieved

February 29,   2017, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2016/10/25/the-viewers-of-the- walking-dead-are-very-much-alive/#488494d6516b

Bo, K. (2013) Surviving the End. Thesis. University of Tromso.

Bormann, E. G. (1972). Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *58*(4), 396.

Bormann, E. G. (1982). Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later. *Quarterly Journal Of Speech*, *68*(3), 288.

Borrowman, S. (2009). "Remaking Romero." In S. Lukas & J. Marmysz (Eds.). *Fear, Cultural Anxiety, and Transformation: Horror, Science and Fantasy Films Remade* (pp. 64-80). Plymouth, U.K.: Lexington Books.

Calafell, B. M. (2015). *Monstrosity, performance, and race in contemporary culture*. New York: Peter Lang.

Cason, T. S. (2015). Creature Features: Monstrosity and the Construction of Human Identity in the Testament of Solomon. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *77*(2), 263-279.

Castillo, D. R. (2016). Zombie Masses: Monsters for the age of global capitalism. In D. Castillo, D. Schmid, D. Reilly & J. E. Browning (Ed.). *Zombie Talk: Culture, History, Politics* (pp. 40-46). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cohen, J. J. (1997). *Monster theory: Reading culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Collins, S. T. (2016, December 03). The Fascism of The Walking Dead. *Vulture*. Retrieved from http://www.vulture.com/2016/12/the-walking-deads-fascism.html

Comstock, G & Scharrer, E. (1997). *Television: What's on, who's watching, and what it means*. San Diego: Academic Press, 21-75.

Deggans, E. (2014, November 28). "Diversity On 'The Walking Dead' Wasn't Always Handled Well." *NPR*. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2014/11/28/366655295/diversity-on-the-walking-dead-wasnt-always-handled-well

Dendle, P (2001). *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*. North Carolina: Mcfarland & Company, 1-10.

do Vale, S. (2010). Trash Mob: Zombie Walks and the Positivity of Monsters in Western Popular Culture. *At The Interface / Probing The Boundaries, 70191-202*, 194-198.

"Four Walls and a Roof." *The Walking Dead*, season 5, episode 3, AMC, October 26, 2014.

Gilbert, S. (2017). Did 13 Reasons Why Spark a Suicide Contagion Effect? *The Atlantic*.

>   Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/08/13-reasons-

>   why-demonstrates-cultures-power/535518/

"Guts." *The Walking Dead*, season 1, episode 2, AMC, November 7, 2010.

Hart, B. (2018, April 07). "Trump Administration Sends National Guard Troops to U.S.-Mexico

>   Border." *New York Magazine*. Retrieved from http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/

>   04/trump-administration-sends-national-guard-troops-to-border.html

Hill, C. (2011). *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap* (2018 ed., pp. 1-30, Rep.).

>   Washington D.C: AAUW.

Hinckley, D. (2014, March 05). Average American watches 5 hours of TV per day.

>   *Nydailynews.com*. Retrieved November 08, 2017, from http://www.nydailynews.

>   com/life-style/average-american-watches-5-hours-tv-day-article-1.1711954

"Home." *The Walking Dead*, season 3, episode 10, AMC, February 16, 2013.

Katz, A. J. (2015). They're Not Afraid of the Dark. (cover story). *Broadcasting & Cable, 143*(9),

>   12-14. (p. 12).

Littleton, C. (2017, March 14). "A Medium With a Message: Inside TV's Long History of

>   Tackling Social Issues." *Variety*. Retrieved from http://variety.com/2017/tv/features/tv-

>   social-issues-history-the-defenders-east-side-west-side-1202007945/

Nededog, J. (2016, May 26). 'Game of Thrones' is having its highest-rated season - here's how

>   many people are watching. *Businessinsider.com* Retrieved February 29, 2017, from

>   http://www.businessinsider.com/game-of-thrones-season-6-ratings-2016-5

Nickel, P. (2010). Horror and the Idea of Everyday Life. In T. Fahy (Ed.). *The Philosophy of

>   Horror* (p. 15). Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Neel, K. C. (2013). The Fright Stuff. (cover story). *Broadcasting & Cable, 143*(39), 10-12. 11.

Phillips, K. (2005). *Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture*. Westport,

> Connecticut: Prager. (pp.82-100).

Poniewozik, J. (2014, October 14). "Why Is The Walking Dead So Popular?" *Time Magazine*.

> Retrieved from http://time.com/3506057/why-walking-dead-so-popular-ratings/

Porter, R. (2016, October 21). Here's just how huge 'The Walking Dead' has been in the ratings.

> *TV By The Numbers*. Retrieved from https://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/more-tv-
>
> news/heres-just-how-huge-the-walking-dead-has-been-in-the-ratings/

Rielly, D. (2016). The Coming Apocalypses of Zombies and Globalization. In D. Castillo, D.

Schmid, D. Reilly & J. E. Browning (Eds.). *Zombie Talk: Culture, History, Politics* (pp.64-66).

> New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shields, D. & Preston, T. C. (1985) Fantasy Theme Analysis in Competitive Rhetorical

> Criticism, *The National Forensics Journal*. 3.

Stitt, C. (2012). Syndication of broadcast television programs. In B. Batchelor (Ed.). *Cult pop*

> *culture: How the fringe became mainstream* (pp. 185-198). Santa Barbara: Praeger.

"Strangers." *The Walking Dead*, season 5, episode 2, AMC, October 19, 2014.

Totten, M. J. (2016, January 27). "The Walking Dead in an Age of Anxiety." *City Journal*.

> Retrieved from https://www.city-journal.org/html/walking-dead-age-anxiety-13688.html

U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2016). "Latest Crime Statistics

> Released." Washinton, D.C. https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/latest-crime-statistics-
>
> released

"Walk with Me." *The Walking Dead*, season 3, episode 3, AMC, October 28, 2012.

Warner, J., & Corley, D. (2017, May 21). "The Women's Leadership Gap." Center for American

    Progress. Retrieved from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports

    /2017/05/21/432758/womens-leadership-gap/

Wójcicka, N. (2010). The Living Dead: The Uncanny and Nineteenth-Century Moral Panic over

    Premature Burial. *Styles of Communication, 2010*(2), 176-186.

Vita

Katherine Alanis Ramirez was born in Wasco, California. She moved to El Paso, Texas from Bakersfield, California as a child. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Journalism from the University of Texas at El Paso in the fall of 2015. Her major academic highlights include a position as captain of the Speech and Debate team, Dean's List honors for the duration of her undergraduate career, and graduating Summa Cum Laude. She began graduate school in Spring of 2016 and will receive a Master of Arts in Communication with the completion of this thesis.

Contact: kataram93@gmail.com