

Are You Hungrier Than a Fifth Grader?
The Rise of the Monstrous Child in *The Walking Dead*

by

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Abstract

Contemporary Western zombie narratives have become overrun with the little girl zombie. This figure exists in a liminal space: its function in the narrative is difficult to pinpoint because—even as monster—it is often treated more like a human child. Using Jack Halberstam’s analysis of monstrous bodies and Lee Edelman’s discussion of the figural Child, I explore the function of the little girl zombie, adding to the existing scholarly studies of Monstrous Children in film, television, and literature. The Monstrous Child is a site in which to play out the repressed desire to destroy the embodiment of the figural Child, a desire that—because the child embodies the highly valued innocence and futurity associated with childhood—is simultaneously dangerous and yet cathartic.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I. It's the End of the World

This thesis addresses a variety of zombie narratives with a focus on one singular recurring representation—the little girl zombie. The zombie narrative is overrun with the appearance of the little girl zombie: *The Walking Dead* offers a new one each season including the unnamed little girl zombie in the pilot season, Sophia in season two, Penny in season three, and—while she does not appear as zombie onscreen—Mika from season four; “Little Girl Zombie” from *Dead Rising: Watchtower*; and the list goes on. “She” is a figure that represents the figural Child, the monstrous body, the Monstrous Child,¹ and the zombie simultaneously. Essentially, the concept of the Monstrous Child becomes a multi-representational device that can and does highlight many answers to Jack Halberstam’s question of “who must be removed from the community at large?” (3). Halberstam’s question refers to the monstrous body in general as “a kind of trash heap for the discarded scraps of abject humanity” (143). Because the monster embodies those qualities that a community wishes to displace onto an Other, the monster becomes the figure that must be “removed from the community.” However, this definition of the monstrous body interrogates the underlying principles that construct the figural Child as the embodiment of innocence and futurity.

The post-apocalyptic narrative highlights the inability to sustain a representation of the figural Child, and the concept of the Monstrous Child functions as a space that allows one to play out the desires of destroying this ideal figure while maintaining a kind of innocence and futurity. The desire to destroy representations of the figural Child stems from the fact that sustaining what the figural Child signifies is too demanding and because the figural Child is so idealized, it calls out for its own destruction. I argue that the zombie narrative, regardless of where it pinpoints the cause of its manifestation of monstrosity, is unquestionably dealing with the loss of futurity, and the Monstrous Child is the actual embodiment of a post-apocalyptic innocence. Therefore, while the zombie

¹ This term appears in two forms throughout this thesis: the “Monstrous Child” refers to the overarching idea or concept of this figure, and the “monstrous child” refers specifically to a single character in the narrative.

narrative may function against futurity, the concept of the Monstrous Child does not; instead, it interrogates the oversaturated meanings of innocence and futurity and poses a new form of representation in the body of the monstrous child—specifically the little girl zombie. This is why the figural Child is sustained and eclipses the monstrous body when the monstrous child appears onscreen. I argue that this process takes place in a series of steps: the figural Child first appears as a white, stereotypically gendered little girl always accompanied by a toy; this character is, second, either constructed according to the “Save the Child” discourse, or the death and reanimation of the child occurs in the space of the “unscene”; and, finally, the other characters in the narrative are presented with a “non-choice” when the monstrous child appears. This process allows the contemporary zombie narrative to reinforce the figural Child as well as the innocence and futurity it represents, even as it seems to present its opposite in the monstrous body of the zombie child.

II. Somewhere Beyond the “C”

Before defining the “Monstrous Child”, I will first define the related figures of “The Child,” the child, and the “monster.” The “child” and its childhood were culturally constructed as separate from the adult sphere in the seventeenth century and have been reinvented in each successive cultural movement (Ariés 341). At the end of the eighteenth century the Romantic child was constructed, according to James R. Kincaid, as an “inversion of Enlightenment virtues and was thus strangely hollow right from the start: *uncorrupted, unsophisticated, unenlightened*” (Dickens 32). However, he continues, the culturally constructed child is far from empty; it is “a location where we can dump all manner of lies, displacements, longings, hatreds, hypocrisies, and denials,” in a way that already identifies it as a space in which to displace anxieties—like Halberstam’s monstrous body (Dickens 30).

The “modern zombie,” meanwhile, which consumes human flesh and dominates contemporary Western zombie narratives, first appeared in 1968 with the debut of George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*. Romero’s film also debuted the first zombie child, who consumes her own parents. Philip Jenkins identifies this same year as “the symbolic date when the forces of insurrection and cultural upheaval reached their climax” in America, ultimately culminating in a shift in the discourse constructing the

child—this is when the figural “Child” begins to take shape (108). The figure of the Child, as Lee Edelman defines it, is the figure of the future, and so to protect that future and to make sure civilization (or the dominant culture) continues, the idea of the Child must be protected and remain “*uncorrupted*,” in Kincaid’s terms. Therefore, the cultural construction of the modern child arose not as the antithesis of the modern zombie, but somewhat alongside it. So what happened in 1968? In America, the “baby boomers” began to reproduce, resulting in a series of new laws targeted at the protection of children (Jenkins 18), and so the “Save the Child” discourse emerges. Over the next decade a series of agencies and mandates were created: the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, the Children’s Defense Fund, the Society for Young Victims, and so on (Jenkins 113). All of these were created with separate agendas, but they all used the figure of the Child to further specific political goals, such as limiting access to abortion, and limiting the rights of homosexuals, each being constructed as threats to the Child (Jenkins 121). In fact, in 1977, Anita Bryant established a movement entitled “Save Our Children” that operated under the mantra of “I don’t hate the homosexuals! But as a mother I must protect my children from their evil influence” (quoted in Jenkins 121). The Child here was originally created as a figure always at risk of corruption. Throughout the “200 years of child-worship” that shaped the modern child, the primary consistent “characteristic,” although undergoing changes of its own during this time, is that of innocence (Kincaid, *Dickens* 36). This is because “innocence makes you vulnerable, badly in need of protecting, which is one reason adults like it to be in others” (Kincaid, *Dickens* 32). The result of the desire to Other innocence is to Other the Child itself. Kincaid points out that

when we invented the modern child, we made it live in another country, a country we then decided to make exotic and heartbreakingly attractive, so attractive we did not know how to deal with it—except by invading it, eroticizing it, protecting it with heavy arms, weeping over it, hating it, loving it, lusting after it, disowning it—doing everything but leaving it alone. (*Dickens* 30).

Essentially, the Child became a figure simultaneously idealized and yet *unheimlich*. According to Kincaid, “we care for the idea of the child so deeply that the actual children

before us are annoying intruders. The idea of the child can hardly put up with actual children” (*Dickens* 30). The “idea”—the Child—is inherently *idealized*. Kincaid’s emphasis on “actual children” becoming “annoying intruders” highlights how any real child cannot embody what the idea of the Child demands because those demands are so great; therefore, the representations—child characters—serve as sites to play out this annoyance—the chance to push them out of the way so that the idea of the Child remains *ideal*.

Lee Edelman emphasizes the big “C” in his definition of the figural Child: “the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust...the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse” (21). In fact, the Child is not killed off when the child is destroyed. Like Kincaid, Edelman highlights the division between “real” and “representative” children. His capitalization of the term “child” creates a proper noun, but one without a signifier, suggesting that the culturally constructed, idealized Child, is more real, almost hyperreal, than any actual child. The problem with this construction is that it is created with an inherent irony: if the Child is a proper noun, it is “a name used for an individual person, place, or organization,” and therefore not originally able to extend to all things within its common noun (“Proper Noun”). So, each narrative that adopts the discourse constructing the figural Child must do so through the representation of a single character who embodies what the political discourse seeks to communicate. In gothic narratives, and the zombie narrative specifically, when that child becomes “corrupt,” the concepts of innocence and futurity themselves are also threatened and, because these concepts never fully break down in the zombie narrative, they manifest in the body of the zombie child instead. Why? Because this body continues to be the closest representation of the figural Child remaining in the narrative. In the non-gothic narrative, representations of the figural Child abound, and in most gothic narratives the threat of the monster is limited by the number of monstrous bodies that can be produced—which are often in the minority. In contrast, in the zombie narrative the survivors are often the minority, resulting in human children becoming a rarity that are constantly displaced by the zombie child. It is imperative to emphasize displacement rather than replacement because the zombie child

continues to embody the markers of innocence purported by the Child; the monstrous child does not take the place of the representation of the figural Child, but due to the high demands put forth in order to maintain this representation, the monstrous child displaces the child temporarily as a respite from these demands.

Steven Bruhm states that in the gothic “there seems to be a startling emphasis on *children* as the bearers of death” (*Nightmare* 98). This is not to reject the narratives of innocence and futurity put forth by Edelman, but rather to highlight that in gothic narratives, “because the child can be constructed, it can [be] corrupted at the same time” (Bruhm, *Nightmare* 99). Emerging out of the fear that drives the “Save the Child” discourse is the “Gothic Child,” the child who, according to Bruhm, “knows too much” (*Nightmare* 103). This knowledge disturbs precisely because it interrogates the narrative of innocence that the figural Child is purported to represent. A subset of the Gothic Child—having some qualities in common with it and yet rejecting others—is the monstrous child, the child that quite literally appears as monster. It is no wonder that the monstrous child is a subset of the gothic child because, according to Halberstam, “the monster...announces itself...as the place of corruption” (2). Unlike other gothic children, whose “evil essence precedes existence” (Bruhm *Nightmare* 102)—such as Rhoda in *The Bad Seed* (1956) or Damien in *The Omen* (1976)—who are always already knowing and inherently “evil,” the Monstrous Child upholds the narrative of innocence first and foremost. For example, Claudia’s monstrosity in the 1994 film adaptation of Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* is a corruption of her innocence so that, even as the newly monstrous child vampire is feeding, Lestat refers to her as “so innocent” (Jordan). Claudia’s monstrosity is rooted in the fear produced by the figural Child who is knowing and yet upholds the “Save the Child” discourse. The zombie child, in contrast, resists this knowingness, resulting in a reliance upon a series of other signifiers to construct both its innocence and its monstrosity.

III. The “Save the Child” Discourse

The “Save the Child” discourse is a discourse that seeks to preserve childhood by killing off the figure of the Child before they become a threat to innocence and futurity. This can be better explained using Max Brooks’ 2006 novel *World War Z*. In one of the

short stories, the narrator visits the Rothman Rehabilitation Home for Feral Children in Kansas to see a little girl named Sharon who survived “the Zombie War” alone in the forests of Wichita (Brooks 73). According to her caseworker, she is “‘lucky.’ [She says] ‘At least she has language skills’”; however, her “language skills” are the simultaneous signifiers of her humanity and her near monstrosity (Brooks 73)—it is these “language skills” that highlight the liminal space that children in the zombie narrative occupy. During his interview with Sharon, the narrator says, “Sharon mimics the moan of a zombie. It is undoubtedly the most realistic I have ever heard” (Brooks 75). While Sharon possesses the ability to speak like a human, her temporary time in the forest reveals her relation to monstrosity through her ability to also “speak” like a zombie; she proves how the representation of the figural Child—because of the demands put forth by the concept—is already Othered. Sharon and other children hide in a church with their parents, Sharon later tells the narrator that Mrs. Cormode, the pastor’s wife says, “‘the children! Don’t let them get the children...Save the children! Save the children!’...Abbie cried hard. Mrs. Cormode picked her up. [[Sharon] mimes lifting something, or someone, up and swinging them against the wall.] And then Abbie stopped” (Brooks 75). Mrs. Cormode’s actions suggest that the statement “Save the children” is inherently paradoxical; however, in the zombie narrative it actually functions to reappropriate the concept of innocence and adapt it to the post-apocalyptic narrative. Sharon’s mother is drawn into the “Save the child” discourse put forth by Mrs. Cormode: “[Her hands move down from [Sharon’s] face to her throat, tightening into a strangling grip.] ‘I won’t let them get you. I WON’T LET THEM GET YOU,’” she says (Brooks 75). It is only at the intervention of another mother that Sharon is freed from her own mother’s grasp, and seeks refuge alone for an undisclosed amount of time in the woods (Brooks 76). While Sharon is not a monstrous child, Brooks’ story does introduce the complexities inherent in the representation of child characters in the zombie narrative and the “Save the Child” discourse refers to the imperative to destroy the child; how these bodies are treated and talked about separates them from the mass of other bodies—monstrous and human. In Sharon’s case, part of the horror in the narrative derives from the “Save the Child” discourse because of her explicit embodiment of the figural Child.

IV. I'm Friends with the Monster That's Under my Bed

The term “monster” derives from the Latin term “monstrum” meaning portent, and “monere” meaning to warn (*Canadian Oxford*). Whereas the monster of the nineteenth century “metaphorized modern subjectivity as a balancing act between inside/outside, female/male, body/mind, native/foreign, proletarian/aristocrat,” the monster of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries rejects the metaphor in favour of writing monstrosity on the body itself: “monstrosity in postmodern horror films finds its place in what Baudrillard has called the obscenity of ‘immediate visibility’” according to Halberstam, this “makes the surface itself monstrous” (1). The key word in Halberstam’s analysis is, of course, the “monstrous” or “monstrosity,” not to be confused with the “monster” itself. The reason to highlight this difference is because the human in a gothic narrative can be rendered monstrous through acts of “monstrosity” and by their appearance, whereas the monster cannot be rendered human through acts of “humanity,” which has been proven by the oldest of literary monsters—Victor Frankenstein’s creation.² One of the many reasons in which the Monstrous Child does not succumb to the discourse of the monstrous body is that its surface is saturated with those markers of ideal innocence that will be discussed in the next chapter. The second reason to highlight this difference is that the “monster,” insofar as the term is being used here, refers to those bodies that adhere to a series of qualities. A few aspects of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” are useful to define the monster in this way. Firstly, Cohen states that “the monster’s body is a Cultural Body... an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place” (199). The monster’s ability to produce fear lies in its propensity to shift between cultural moments. Cohen goes on to state that monster theory itself “must therefore concern itself with strings of cultural moments” (6). These “strings of cultural moments” often manifest in a particular trope or recurring motif such as the Monstrous Child, which has become common in millennial American film. The rise of the Monstrous Child, then, is not merely coincidental; it provides valuable information on the culture in which it manifests. The zombie narrative specifically aligns “safe zones” with cultural symbols—like the American prison in *The*

² Regardless of Frankenstein’s monster’s attempts to act human, the other characters in Shelley’s novel cannot look past his monstrous surface.

Walking Dead—thereby temporarily asserting these as the ideal locations from which to protect the figural Child and the culture for which it stands.

Likewise, Cohen argues that “the monster is the harbinger of Category Crisis... they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration” (6). Monsters, therefore, manifest in a variety of ways based on the particular “needs” of a society. The contemporary zombie like that which appears in the *Resident Evil* (2002) and the *28 Days Later* (2002) franchises are generally viral-based (Brown 40). This raises the question of what it is about the virus in contemporary America that produces fear and how does the representation of the child embody this fear? This is a question that cannot necessarily be answered within the scope of this thesis, but it suggests that the rise of the Monstrous Child is related to the growing fear surrounding viruses. This is also not to state that zombie children did not appear in other zombie narratives, only that they seem to proliferate in contemporary viral-based films. The virus differs from other anxieties resulting in the manifestation of the zombie like radiation (*Night of the Living Dead*) and Haitian Voodoo (*White Zombie*) because it is biologically based, transferable and, in the case of *The Walking Dead*, it already lies dormant in every body. Children in these narratives are at risk to infection—or corruption—from all other bodies as well as their own, and the inevitability of the emergence of the Monstrous Child suggests that it is impossible for the child to be protected. The only options when faced with the body of the monstrous child are to let it be or to destroy it—which ultimately become the same thing, thereby eliminating any actual perceived choice. Every narrative discussed here chooses to eventually destroy these figures.

In postmodern horror, the monster is coupled with “a banality that fractures resistance because the enemy becomes harder to locate” (Halberstam 163). As a result, the Monstrous Child is rendered aporific and paradoxical, and the consequence is an inability to locate “the enemy.” Like other monsters, the Monstrous Child exists in a category crisis where they are simultaneously both and yet neither monster nor child. Kincaid states that the creation of the Child was accompanied by “a peculiarly modern double-speak that made every act of child-worship an act of desecration, every act of self-sacrifice an excuse for murder” (*Designing 2*). This “double-speak” is why the

concept of the Monstrous Child represents the release of repressed desires to destroy representations of the figural Child, in part because the “act of child-worship” that Kincaid highlights becomes an “act of desecration” through the very fact that the figural Child calls for its own destruction. This is also in part due to the fact that the creation of the ideal figural Child “kills” the real child. An inescapable by-product of the “Save the Child” discourse is that it is “a discourse of child-hating and child-desiring that offered kids up as if they were menu items: isolated, ‘present,’ sanitized and guaranteed not to upset, meant for our eyes and our palates only” (Kincaid, *Designing* 2). According to Kincaid, the “sanitizing” of the Child results in a form of Othering: “the child is a species not only separate...but endowed with the capacity for allowing and excusing feelings and attitudes one would never entertain for a knowable species. Awe, for instance, and detestation” (*Designing* 4). The Child, then, is close to monstrosity because it is Othered. This is not to state that the figure of the Child is in any way already monstrous, only that the very qualities it has been imbued with to make it the Child are the same qualities that Other it, that make it unfamiliar. The fact that the figural Child lends itself to the discourse of the Other means that the “Save the Child” discourse is not necessarily the antithesis of the monstrous, but a parallel discourse. While this thesis discusses the Monstrous Child in general as a subset of the Gothic Child, for the sake of brevity it focuses solely on the zombie. The little girl zombie, therefore, is used to interrogate and realise meaning in the concept of the Monstrous Child.

Edelman poses the question, “what...would it signify *not* to be ‘fighting for the children’? How could one take the *other* ‘side,’ when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side *of*, by virtue of taking a side *within*, a political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends?” (19). The concept of the Monstrous Child highlights this paradox because the other characters in the zombie narrative cannot take a side outside of that which idealizes the figural Child, and the “Save the Child” discourse typifies the irony within which the figural Child is situated in gothic narratives. Edelman points out that the “Figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights ‘real’ citizens are allowed” (11). Edelman’s

statement reveals the imbalance that “real” citizens seek to correct by destroying representations of the figural Child.

Chapter 2: Some Assembly Required: The Toy and the Unscene in the Zombie Narrative

In the zombie narrative, childhood and the representation of the figural Child associated with it is too demanding to maintain, and can therefore only exist temporarily. However, the presence of children in the narrative does not end in response to the inability to maintain childhood; therefore, childhood itself alters to suit this post-apocalyptic world—a kind of post-apocalyptic innocence. To fully understand how post-apocalyptic innocence functions, it is necessary to assemble the markers that make a child innocent, starting with the key signifier that identifies the representation of the figural Child—the toy. The function of the toy in these narratives changes according to the presence or absence of the child. When the child is present alongside the toy, the embodiment of the figural Child is complete, thereby firmly establishing and reinforcing the narratives of innocence and futurity. However, when the child enters the space of the unscene, the toy disappears as well, marking the endangerment of the child and activating the “Save the Child” discourse. Finally, the reappearance of the toy precedes the appearance of the monstrous child from the space of the unscene. Separated, the toy stands in for the child and marks the child’s absence, but continues to highlight how the concept of the figural Child remains. Because the toy is a signifier of the simultaneous presence and absence of the child, children are compared to toys in moments when they are most at risk. It is a discursive technique for immortalizing the figure of the Child, because the physical object of the toy outlasts the child. So, even in the zombie narrative, where objects that serve no function in the continued survival of the human characters are often rejected, the toy remains. In zombie narratives like *The Walking Dead* and *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, the signifiers that mark the Child as innocent precede the representation of the figural Child and so emphasize how the discourse of the monstrous body cannot emerge.

I. Kids Eat the Darndest Things

According to Chuck Jackson, the idealized Child must be represented by certain visual signifiers: “media-produced representations of childhood often ask that we collapse a child into the child, forgoing differences, in order that we may enjoy the spectacle of untainted childhood” (Jackson 65). Like Edelman’s figural Child, Jackson’s child is a homogenous cultural construction set in direct opposition to that which is corrupt, dirty, evil, or impure. Citing Richard Dyer, he highlights the “aesthetic and racial meanings that inhere in representations of whiteness: Goodness, purity, and cleanliness [that] stand in contrast to the presence of dirt, darkness, and evil” (Jackson 66). This relationship means that the representation of the Child—to truly embody the innocence that Edelman identifies—must be racially white. This racialization highlights two prominent details in the zombie narrative. The first is that the white body is always presented to be more at risk than other racialized bodies. Halberstam states that “skin is at once the most fragile of boundaries and the most stable of signifiers” (163). The reason for this dualistic function is that the skin’s very fragility *is* the stable signifier; while it contains, it also reveals what cannot be contained. For example, Halberstam points out that “monsters within postmodernism are already inside—the house, the body, the head, the skin” (162). In *The Walking Dead* for example, the potential to be a monster already resides in every body and constantly threatens to break the boundary of the skin and reveal itself. Skin, then, or skin colour, simultaneously becomes a signifier of potential monstrosity as well as the first signifier of childhood innocence depicted by the representation of the figural Child. The monstrous child, then, exhibits both monstrosity and innocence on the surface of its body, thereby culminating in a visual signifier of post-apocalyptic innocence.

In Brooks’ novel *World War Z*, the child Sharon is described as “beautiful by almost any standard—with long red hair [and] sparkling green eyes” (73). This is the only physical description of Sharon and while her race is not explicitly stated, characteristics such as red hair and green eyes are cultural signifiers of whiteness; what Jackson would call “invisible constructions of ‘whiteness’” (65)—the concept that limited visual cues imply other visual cues that are necessarily left undescribed in the narrative. The narrator’s correlation between these signifiers and Sharon being “beautiful

by almost any standard” reinforces Jackson’s point that untainted childhood relies on a culturally constructed ideal representation—that whiteness is part of the standard of beauty. Also, because this limited physical description opens the chapter before anything else about Sharon is revealed, her childlike innocence precedes and precludes any potential monstrosity. Similarly, in *The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor*, the first novel in an ongoing series co-authored by Robert Kirkman and Jay Bonansinga, seven-year-old Penny is described in accordance with Jackson’s concept of whiteness combined with the innocence suggested by the toy: her “face ghostly in the darkness...with an almost porcelain complexion, like that of a china doll” (5). The emphasis on contrasting ghostliness with darkness highlights how the meanings inherent in whiteness are sharpened by the darkness surrounding the figure. This scene creates a chiaroscuro effect that sets Penny—the ideal figural Child—in the spotlight; apart from all other characters in the narrative, whether they be human or monster. Also, this description highlights how Penny is compared to a toy in moments where she is most at risk to the dangers presented by the zombies in the narrative. For example, in this particular scene in the novel she is hiding in the closet while her father is on the other side of the door killing the monsters. Therefore, physical signifiers of ideal innocence are made more prominent in the zombie narrative where the dangers to the figure of the Child must be emphasized.

Building on Lori Merish’s theory of “the cute” in relation to the “Creepy Little Girl,” a further subset of the Gothic Child, Karen Macfarlane identifies the hypergendered little girl as the simultaneous signifier of innocence and uncanniness (1). While the Creepy Little Girl is quite different from the Monstrous Child, she is adorned with similar visual markers of her race and gender. Macfarlane states that “she is marked by all of the overdetermined and overdetermining elements of the ideal little girl: the frilly dress, the shoes [or slippers], the haircut...all signifiers in western culture of an innocence, of a sweetness, and of an unknowing that precedes and overlays the girl as subject” (7). In other words, the little girl in the gothic is created in accordance with idealized gender markers. This is also true of the Monstrous Child in the zombie narrative. Following Baudrillard, the simulation (the Child) precedes its referent (a child) (“Precession”).

In the 2015 film *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, Maggie—one of the survivors—goes in search of her unnamed missing daughter—referred to in the credits merely as “Little Girl Zombie” (Lipovsky). The very naming of this character identifies her solely by her representation as a “little girl”—echoing Macfarlane’s Creepy Little Girl—coupled with her appearance as a zombie. The mother’s desire to find and protect Little Girl Zombie regardless of the fact that she is a zombie highlights how the figure of the Child as a figure in need of protection precedes the discourse of the monstrous body. In this scene, Maggie enters a dark room filled with an indistinguishable mass of zombie bodies; the only figure presented in detail is that of a little girl sitting in the center of the room. Every filmic device in this scene is being employed to privilege the embodiment of the figural Child. While other bodies are in darkness, Little Girl Zombie sits in the bit of natural light that seeps into the room—reminiscent of the chiaroscuro effect highlighting Penny in the closet. Finally, to complete the image of post-apocalyptic innocence in this scene, an uncanny lullaby plays in the background. The use of a lullaby not only signifies that Little Girl Zombie is associated with childhood, but that the music associated with the Child eclipses any soundtrack that typically accompanies the horror film. In this sense, the representation of the figural Child trumps the discourse of the monstrous body. Because the lullaby only plays when the mother and the monstrous child are simultaneously present in the same space, the uncanny lullaby functions as a nostalgic call from the past; the distraught mother attempts to turn back the clock in an almost psychoanalytic return to the dark space of the womb.

Little Girl Zombie is the epitome of “girlness”: she is adorned in a pink frilly dress with blue ribbons woven through her long blonde pigtails. In the spotlight of the dark room she stands and—due to the limitations presented by her zombie limbs—she walks somewhat tilted, arms out to the side in a mimesis of a dark ballet. Her mother Maggie kneels on the floor and spreads her arms, calling “mommy’s here, mommy’s here” as if her status as mother is not eliminated by the fact that her daughter is a monster; thereby continuing to identify Little Girl Zombie as a child (Lipovsky). Little Girl Zombie drops the torn, half-chewed bear she was ripping apart only seconds before as she steps into Maggie’s arms and begins to consume her. The camera angle shifts to a close-up of the unrecognizable remains of the toy lying on the floor. The switch from

Little Girl Zombie to the dismembered toy suggests that the dismembered toy shows up when the monstrous child is represented as more “child” than “monstrous.” The dismembered toy, like the monstrous child who is still treated as “child,” signals the innocence of childhood, but argues that that innocence can only exist as an uncanny nostalgia, even as it is ever-present.

II. Accessories Sold Separately

The toy is an object that functions quite differently from other objects in the zombie narrative. Weapons and clothing become objects that function as signifiers of survival, and objects like radios and jewelry become scarcer and signify luxury—the attempt to participate occasionally in the pre-zombie world. The toy sometimes signifies survival and sometimes signifies luxury, but it is an object that rarely gets sacrificed and, although it does break down through dirt and decay, it rarely leaves the narrative entirely. Because the toy often stands for the child, to leave it out completely is to abandon the representation of the figural Child, but because the representation of the figural Child never succumbs to the discourse of the monstrous body, the toy remains. Toys essentially function as innocent objects of play: Froebel wrote that “play is the highest phase of child development” and the toy is the primary tool for play (quoted in Gupta 582). According to Bernard Mergen, toys are “possessions that are prized, sticks that can be transformed by the imagination ...as with all words [and objects], the meaning changes according to context. When is a ‘G.I. Joe’ an ‘action figure?’ When is it a toy soldier? When is it a doll? Why is Barbie a doll and not an action figure?” (Quoted in Baxter 41). When is it referred to as something totally external to the toy? This classification can be attributed to the different expectations of children based on gender. Victoria Carrington states that toys “provide information on, among other things: broader cultural landscapes and values; constructions of childhood and associated expectations of behaviour, activities and interests; parent-child relations...and gender socialization” (297). The toys that appear in zombie narratives are dolls and teddy bears—toys that are associated with very young children and the little girl. This consistent representation suggests that the symbolic meanings associated with the doll and the teddy bear are crucial in completing the embodiment of the figural Child. Mergen’s statement above sets the doll in direct

opposition to the action figure, so that the toy can never be both doll and action figure simultaneously. If this is indeed true, then Mergen's point about Barbie not being an action figure calls for a brief interrogation of these two terms. Whereas a "doll" is defined as "a small model of a human figure, usu. a child or woman, esp. for use as a toy," the "action figure" is defined as "a doll representing a person or fictional character capable of or known for vigorous action" (*Canadian Oxford*). The big difference between the two is "vigorous action," which is not to state that the toy itself is vigorously active, only that what it represents must be. If the toy in zombie narratives often stands in for the little girl at risk, then the use of the term "doll" as opposed to "action figure" signifies that the figure of the Child is incapable of action. The toy, then, upholds the discourse of the child as always at risk and in need of protection in a way that overshadows the discourse of the monstrous body.

The toy also functions very differently in the zombie narrative in comparison with other horror narratives. In other horror narratives, the toy often undergoes its own form of gothicizing, which is evident in such films as *The Conjuring* (2013), *Finders Keepers* (2014), and the *Child's Play* (1988) series. It is important to note, though, that the toys in other horror narratives still appear primarily as dolls, which suggests—like the representation of the figural Child itself—that which is considered to be the most innocent produces a greater source of horror when it is corrupted. Whereas the toy in most gothic narratives exists in the liminal space between childhood and monstrosity where the source of horror can be pinpointed in part due to this object's inability to be confined to its function, the toy in zombie narratives exists precisely in accordance with its purported symbolism of innocence and play. Unlike the toys in other Gothic narratives, toys in zombie narratives are not inherently supernatural, evil, or monstrous, but they do unsettle; play in the zombie narrative is unsettling, in part because the toy rarely appears clean, whole, or new.

The toy in the zombie narrative thus rewrites innocence in its post-apocalyptic form as corrupt—dirty and decayed—but still upholding the representation of the figural Child. For example, in *The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor*, the group of survivors find themselves temporarily seeking refuge inside a toy store—"Tom Thumb's Tiny Toy Shoppe" (204). The alliteration reinforces childhood with its catchy phrasing and

suggests that this toy shop is a space for little people, like Tom Thumb himself. In this scene “Penny is transfixed by the broken dolls and eviscerated teddy bears (205). Neither Penny nor the other survivors are horrified by the sight of the broken toys even though the use of “eviscerated” suggests a kind of “disembowel[ment]” and therefore it is not a term typically used to describe inanimate objects (*Canadian Oxford*). The toy simulates the impending monstrosity of the child when it appears in a dismembered state; therefore, even when the child appears as monster, it does not appear dismembered because the toy embodies this aspect of its transformation instead. While the toy is clearly made of fabric and stuffing, the use of such terms as “eviscerated” imbues it with Halberstam’s theory about the fragility of skins discussed above. Instead, toys, unlike the zombie children that “play” with them, are not inherently abject, therefore, while their skins are also stable signifiers of the fragility of boundaries, as Halberstam argues, they have no impurities to dispose of in the manner that Julia Kristeva’s theory on abjection would suggest (3). A lack of “impurities” suggests that the toy is “pure”—or at least is treated as such—even when it appears dirty and decayed. This lack of abjection means that the toy can remain as “toy” even in its dismembered state—what changes is the manner in which the toy is played with. I call this post-apocalyptic innocence where representations of the figural Child remain and where the toy is still always present and played with, but not necessarily in the pre-zombie way.

In *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, Little Girl Zombie simultaneously combines play, the dismemberment of the toy, and consumption in a single moment—interrogating the meaning of the term “consumption”: to purchase or own an object and to literally eat it as Little Girl Zombie does. By combining whiteness, feminine “cuteness”, and a doll or teddy bear, the zombie narrative constructs the most innocent representation possible and immediately makes the signifiers invisible—submitting the embodiment of the figural Child to the space of the unscene—in order to heighten the anxiety and maintain the representation of the figural Child; this is true of virtually all monstrous children in the zombie narrative.

III. Let's Play Hide N' Seek

In season two of *The Walking Dead*, Rick and his group of survivors spend seven episodes and an undisclosed amount of time searching for Sophia, the twelve-year-old daughter of Carol. Sophia, with her white skin and dirty blonde hair, is emblematic of the narrative of the figural Child. Season two opens with the group stranded on a highway in what is referred to as “a graveyard” of abandoned vehicles (“What Lies Ahead”). The camera presents a series of close-ups revealing dirty and decaying childhood objects like a pink backpack and a partially filled baby bottle. It is as if these objects function as precursors to a narrative constructed around the figural Child and the concept that the innocence represented by these objects precedes the appearance of the child itself. The toys here are tombstones for the missing bodies of the children with which they are associated. In a sense, the child calls out for protection through the very appearance of these objects. For example, when Morales and his family separate from the group in the first season of the television show, Morales’ daughter gives her doll to Sophia. This doll is a representation of the figural Child—it is white with blue eyes and exaggerated red lips with a pink and white frilly dress—but, of course, it is dirty. It marks the continued presence of this little girl as well as her absence—the fate of the Morales family is never revealed and the audience is reminded of this “lost” little girl whenever Sophia and her doll appear on-screen. Sophia’s possession of the doll, combined with the markers of her race and gender, posit her as the embodiment of the figural Child—and therefore innocence and futurity. Therefore, when Sophia is chased by zombies into the unscene space of the forest accompanied solely by her doll, her representation as the figural Child relies on the other characters participating in a discourse that highlights her absence but still posits her as the continued embodiment of innocence and futurity. Essentially, the presence of the toy—a symbol of childhood—is also a signifier of Sophia’s entrance into the unscene where the monstrous child is born. This immediate entrance into the unscene is a result of the representation of the figural Child being too demanding to maintain for long periods of time. As a consequence, the child is forced into the unscene until the characters in the zombie narrative can reconcile that the representation of the figural Child cannot remain in the post-apocalyptic zombie narrative, nor can they choose to

eliminate this figure themselves; therefore, it is visually set aside while they maintain the concept itself, because it is easier to uphold a concept than it is to uphold the actual child.

IV. Toys “R” Us

The unscene is defined as that which occurs off-screen; it is a space that simultaneously signifies a presence and an absence. The “scene” refers to the locality of an event, the representation of an incident—essentially a pun on the act of witnessing that is inseparable from the setting in which the event occurs. The unscene functions differently from that which does not appear or that which occurs simply outside the scene. It means that the events signified by the unscene can never be separated from the “scene” itself, they are always gesturing toward it. While the term was originally used to refer to scenes that occur offstage and are constructed solely through the dialogue of characters in Early Modern drama, it has often been used since then in reference to literature and cinema. Marjorie Garber states that “to perform it [the scene that is hidden] would be to risk anticlimax, as spectacle competes with words. The scene gains in power precisely because of its displaced or deflected nature” (43). The use of the unscene has several functions in the zombie narrative. Firstly, as Garber states, it heightens the suspense regarding what is occurring in the space of the unscene—is Sophia still a human child, or is she a monster? Secondly, it produces affect through the immediate appearance of the monstrous child from the space of the unscene—Baudrillard’s “obscurity of immediate visibility” combined with Garber’s point that “spectacle competes with words,” and eventually revealing how strong those words are in constructing the missing child according to its embodiment of the figural Child. Finally, the use of the unscene provides the other characters with the ability to participate in the “non-choice” mentioned in Chapter 1. In order for the “non-choice” to fully manifest, the appearance of the monstrous child must be sudden and unexpected—leaving zero chance for the other characters to determine how to deal with the figure when they are finally faced with it. This is the framework from which the monstrous child emerges in the zombie narrative.

Returning to *The Walking Dead*, while Sophia remains in the space of the unscene, her presence as “child” continues to be established by the other characters in the narrative. For example, Carol consistently cries out that “she’s only a child” and, while

searching the forest for Sophia several days after she has gone missing, former police officers Shane and Rick represent opposing sides of the “Save the Child” discourse; Shane, in favour of abandoning the search, says, “72 hours, and after that, you’re looking for a body” (“Chupacabra”). Shane’s reduction of Sophia to “a body” suggests that he is trying to shift from constructing the representation of the figural Child to supporting the concept of the Monstrous Child. Shane in this moment represents the minority that supports the “Save the Child” discourse because abandoning the search means that the survivors are choosing to destroy the child before her childhood is lost; yet, by employing the discourse used in the case of a real world Amber Alert, Shane still roots his argument in the constructs that posit the figural Child as privileged, making evident Edelman’s point that to take either side of the political discourse of the figural Child is to continuously contribute to the narrative of the “non-choice.”

It is only at the reappearance of Sophia’s doll that the representation of the figural Child is upheld by all of the characters in the narrative. Sophia has been missing for five episodes, and Daryl, one of the other survivors, discovers her doll while searching for her in the forest (“Chupacabra”). While she is nowhere in sight, the appearance of the doll draws Daryl down a sharp embankment to take possession of it as if doing so is also a way of saving Sophia herself (“Chupacabra”). The struggle that Daryl endures throughout this episode to bring this doll back to the rest of the group is proof of how this object represents the figural Child. It is only after the doll is revealed to the rest of the survivors that the episode ends with a renewed “hope” of finding Sophia. The toy, representing the innocence of childhood and the simultaneous presence and absence of Sophia, drives the narrative of the figural Child. The toy, then, adheres to Baudrillard’s simulation, the “duplication [that] is sufficient to render both artificial” (“Precession” 1563).

Baudrillard’s point highlights how the existence of the referent and the simulation actually eliminates both. The simulation, in this case the toy, becomes so “real” that the referent, the child, becomes indistinguishable from it. I argue that this process, which is common in the zombie narrative, is one way in which the representation of the figural Child eclipses the discourse of the monstrous body. Baudrillard also states that “to dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn’t. One implies a presence, the other an absence...[but] to simulate is not simply to

feign,” it is to produce the actual “symptoms” as a result of simulation (“Precession” 1558). Essentially, the other characters in the narrative dissimulate the toy while they simultaneously simulate the figural Child—they make the toy less object and more subject while simultaneously making the subject more of an object—therefore the toy, in a way, becomes the temporary locus simulating the figural Child. Baudrillard’s point regarding the production of “symptoms” highlights the function of childhood objects in preceding the appearance of the monstrous child from the space of the unscene. The simulation—the toy—calls for the child. Because of this, “simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false,’ between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’” (“Precession” 1558). As the appearance of childhood objects such as the toy blur the distinction between the object and the subject, the reappearance of the subject, even in its monstrous form, is expected to be the embodiment of the figural Child and therefore the other characters construct the monstrous child according to the “symptoms” they expect. Simultaneously, the toy undergoes a dismemberment that the monstrous child does not. The concept of the Monstrous Child relies upon visual signifiers of monstrosity but does not necessarily physically break down in the manner that other monstrous bodies do in the zombie narrative: the Monstrous Child must maintain the representation of the figural Child, which cannot be achieved if the body falls apart, and the monstrous child becomes objectified—doll-like—and allows the toy to break down in its stead.

In zombie narratives like *The Walking Dead* and *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, the signifiers that mark the child as innocent (whiteness, “cuteness”, and the toy) precede and produce the appearance of the figure of the Child according to these signifiers in their respective narratives. These figures are marked by whiteness, overtly feminized characteristics, are always accompanied by a toy, and spend a considerable portion of the narrative in the space of the unscene. This series of signifiers constructs an ideal child and places them in ultimate danger. The narrative of unchallenged childhood innocence remains intact—although somewhat altered to suit the post-apocalyptic narrative. The horror associated with gruesomely representing the death of a child onscreen is indeed one such reason why these scenes are absent from the zombie narrative, but more importantly, “zombifying” these characters in the same manner that adult humans are

turned into monsters would undermine the privileged quality of the figural Child. To manifest the monstrosity of the child in the same way that the monstrosity of the adult manifests would be to suggest that the child being destroyed is neither privileged nor exceptional, and not even zombies would do that.

Chapter 3:
“Look at the Flowers”:
The Obscene and the “Non-Choice” in the Zombie Narrative

From the space of the unscene, the figure of the Child calls for its own destruction in response to the too high demands of maintaining innocence. To understand how that which is *idealized* calls for its own demise, I turn to Baudrillard’s collection of essays on *The Spirit of Terrorism*. He states that “no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic,” resulting in a kind of “deep-seated complicity” in its destruction (Baudrillard “Terrorism” 5-6). In fact, Baudrillard goes on to discuss how both those who support and are against a hegemonic power have this desire because “the increase in the power of power heightens the will to destroy it” (“Terrorism” 6-7). While Baudrillard is referring specifically to the Twin Towers in America during 9/11, his underlying concept can be transferred to the figure of the Child here because they are both material embodiments of the myth of unending power. The Child represents no real singular child but stands as an embodiment of global innocence and global futurity in much the same way that the Twin Towers were a symbol of “a whole (Western) value-system and a world order,” but more specifically American futurity that functions on a global scale (Baudrillard “Requiem” 37). The proliferation of the monstrous child and the zombie narrative that depicts it are millennial—post 9/11—American gothic narratives. To be clear, though, this chapter is not a comparison between the Monstrous Child and the Twin Towers, nor am I suggesting that the zombie narrative and its fictional monsters are in any way representative of the real-world events that Baudrillard discusses; rather, the theory he applies to the concepts of terrorism and globalism are constructed in response to a symbol that is idealized and ultimately too demanding to maintain, just as the Child is. As a result of these demands, the symbol calls out for its own destruction, resulting in a temporary respite from the pressure of maintaining it. Bruhm discusses a concept called *schadenfreude*, the “pleasure in observing the demise of ... the most normal and normalizing impulses in contemporary Western culture” (“Foreword” 1). The normal impulse to worship and protect the Child transforms here into a desire to eliminate representations of it in contemporary Western gothic narratives; what Bruhm identifies as “monstrous destruction [that] restores fairness to an unfair world”

(“Foreword” 3), that is to say, a correction of an imbalance so that other “citizens” in the zombie narrative temporarily have a share in the rights typically monopolized by the Child—at least until the next representation of the figural Child appears in the narrative.

To better explain why the appearance of the monstrous child is met with such an intense response, I turn to Baudrillard’s “obscenity of immediate visibility.” In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Baudrillard states that “obscenity begins precisely when there is no more spectacle, no more scene, when all becomes transparence and immediate visibility, when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication” (20). Baudrillard’s obscenity hinges on the aporia of visual communication, which is why it works when discussing the zombie narrative. The root of the term “obscene,” like that of the unscene, is inseparable from the scene itself; therefore, the unscene and the obscene are related to and yet opposite from one another. Whereas the unscene makes the “non-choice” produced by the missing figural Child invisible, the obscene makes the “non-choice” produced by the appearance of the monstrous child immediately visible. When the embodiment of the figural Child inhabits the space of the unscene, the other characters in the narrative either construct the child as the innocent living human that must be saved by participating wholeheartedly in the discourse constructing the figure, *or*—and to a lesser extent—they firmly believe that the Monstrous Child is an inevitable outcome of the missing representation in the post-apocalyptic narrative. However, when the child reappears as monster, all other characters—regardless of their former position—react the same way, thereby embodying the “non-choice.” Therefore, the obscenity of the Monstrous Child is linked to its immediate visibility in two ways: the first is in its own witnessing of the obscene that the child experiences in this post-apocalyptic world, and the second is the appearance of the body of the monstrous child. Baudrillard’s statement highlights how the “spectacle” or “scene” is lost when the obscene begins, essentially “when everything is exposed.” This is because the body of the monstrous child sheds light upon itself as well as all of the other characters in the narrative—it no longer hides in the space of the unscene, leaving the other characters to question its monstrosity—nor does its appearance continue to divide the survivors based on their differing opinions. Instead, it becomes the immediately recognizable “obscene.”

As in the previous chapter, I argue that the representation of the figural Child eclipses the monstrous body, and ultimately the actual, embodied child. In this chapter, I prove that this eclipsing occurs by addressing the filmic devices used to construct the monstrous child. The sudden destruction of the representation of the figural Child is tied to the sudden appearance of the monster—still embodying all the visual signifiers of the figural Child—so that there is no time to adequately accept that the child is replaced by the monster.

I. Introducing the M.C. for the Evening

In *The Walking Dead* episode, “Pretty Much Dead Already,” two days after Daryl has discovered Sophia’s doll in the gorge, the survivors take refuge on a farm. Upon discovering that the family who owns the farm is keeping zombies in the barn, Shane becomes enraged and yells, “enough risking our lives for a little girl who’s gone... if you want to survive you’ve got to fight for it” and he opens the barn doors (“Pretty Much Dead Already”). Shane actually rejects the discourse of the figural Child while simultaneously reinforcing it here by setting the representation of the Child in direct opposition to the survival of the group as a whole—repeating Edelman’s point that the idea of the Child limits the rights that “real” citizens are allowed.³ What emerges from the barn is a mass of monstrous bodies, indistinguishable from one another, followed by silence. A moaning from the darkness signifies the impending presence of one final zombie. The survivors look on in stunned silence when Sophia emerges from the barn as a monstrous child. In fact, the camera pans to highlight the faces of each individual survivor, all depicting a similar expression combining surprise and horror because the immediate visibility of the monstrous child is shocking and obscene. The characters clearly demonstrate the inevitability of the “non-choice,” because destroying the monstrous child is to destroy the final remaining representation of the figural Child—to be culpable in the destruction of the final embodiment of innocence in the zombie narrative. Therefore, even as monster, Sophia temporarily upholds the narrative of the

³ The use of scare quotes highlights how the Child is an idea that effects the choices that other characters make. In this scene in *The Walking Dead*, Sophia is missing and yet the idea of finding the missing child has put the rest of the group at risk—limiting their rights.

figural Child as the privileged sign because she—like Little Girl Zombie in *Dead Rising: Watchtower*—has held the focus of the narrative throughout her absence as well as in her isolated reappearance. Her mother continues to construct her as “child” in this moment, rejecting her monstrosity by repeating her name (“Pretty Much Dead Already”). The fact that several moments pass in stunned silence suggests that nobody wants to be responsible for the destruction of the child—even one who is so clearly monster. Therefore, even characters like Shane who try to reject the figural Child, also reject the shift to the discourse of the monster when immediately faced with the monstrous child. The reason that this double-rejection occurs is the “non-choice.” Shane embodies Edelman’s earlier point about how refusing to participate in the discourse constructing the Child is actually a form of participation itself. It is a participation without actively making the choice to do so—essentially, a “non-choice.” The “non-choice” relies heavily upon the immediate visibility of the monstrous child—its appearance, even when the embodiment of the figural Child has been missing from the narrative for long periods of time, is always unexpected because the other characters continue to construct them as an embodiment of innocence during the child’s time in the space of the unscene. How the monstrous child appears when it leaves the space of the unscene is crucial for continuing to uphold this representation of the figural Child in these narratives.

II. Up-Close and Personal with the Monstrous Child

Camera angles are used in zombie films to separate the monstrous child from the survivors and other monsters. Camera angles that construct the monstrous child in *The Walking Dead* appear in two very specific forms: the close-up and the aerial shot. When Sophia emerges from the unscene space of the barn, the camera shifts from the close-up shots of the shocked faces of the survivors and narrows in to a close-up shot of Sophia’s face where every detail of her monstrosity is clearly written on the surface of her skin. Once Rick finally steps forward and raises his gun, the camera presents a second close-up shot of the zombie’s face, only now it appears to be seen from Rick’s point of view. This second close-up presents a distortion of the monstrous child’s face: it is slightly blurry, the colour seems off, and she is now moving in slow motion (“Pretty Much Dead Already”). The distortion in the second close-up suggests that the features that mark the

surface of the body as monstrous are less clear from the point of view of the other characters in the narrative; their need to uphold the concept of the figural Child obscures their ability to fully realise the monster in the “monstrous child.” Just before Sophia reaches Rick he shoots her. Like Maggie in *Dead Rising: Watchtower*, Rick remains still and allows the monstrous child to approach him; suggesting that the monstrous child in *The Walking Dead* is never presented as a threat, which is part of why the monstrous child in the millennial zombie narrative proliferates. The only way in which the monstrous child can safely make physical contact with the human survivors is with their parents, for whom the child is never truly monstrous. This is because the narrative of the family comes into play and the parent provides an important role as protector for the monstrous child—thereby participating in the representation of the figural Child that is always in danger—and using their categorization as “mother” or “father” to posit the monstrous child as simply “child.” The episode ends with a rare aerial view depicting Sophia laying between the group of survivors and the group of dead zombies.

The aerial shot often has multiple functions. Firstly, it represents a physical disconnection from the events by displacing the viewer from the same visual plane as the characters to a higher plane. Secondly, it appears as a form of surveillance. Much as in the use of cameras and aerial surveillance by law enforcement, “the camera is used here as a form of intrusion and policing of our behavior” (Sturken and Cartwright 106). In the context of the Monstrous Child, surveillance takes the form of an aerial view precisely when the embodiment of the figural Child has been destroyed, suggesting that behaviour must be policed in the exact moment when the innocence and futurity purported by the figural Child is lost. This surveillance highlights how the destruction of the child is considered criminal and, so long as the embodiment of the figural Child remains, the “real” citizens police themselves. The aerial shot combines the powers of displacement and surveillance and reserves them exclusively for the destroyed body of the monstrous child.

The aerial shot is used in precisely the same manner in the pilot episode for *The Walking Dead*. Rick finds himself in a seemingly abiotic landscape until a childlike figure in bathrobe and bunny slippers crosses his path (“Days Gone Bye”). She is preceded by close-ups of objects such as a pink tricycle and a dirty doll, securing this

series as one dealing primarily with the narrative of the Child in much the same way as the narratives discussed in the previous chapter. Uncannily, this childlike figure carries a dirty teddy bear in one hand, completing the image of ideal childlike innocence (“Days Gone Bye”). Upon Rick calling out “little girl?” the figure turns around, revealing itself to be a zombie (“Days Gone Bye”). Rick’s choice to say “little girl” precedes the revelation that this figure is a monster, suggesting that the signifiers of innocence also precede the monster. “She,” like the children discussed in chapter two, is marked by the “overdetermined and overdetermining elements” of her gender and her childhood (Macfarlane 7): white with long blonde hair, female, similar in age to the other “little girls,” adorned in shades of white and pink, and carrying a toy (“Days Gone Bye”). The sudden and unexpected shift from the spectacle of the figure of the Child to that of the Monstrous Child leaves Rick in a moment of shock where the empathy and pain of this encounter is clearly written on his face (“Days Gone Bye”). Unsure of how to proceed in this situation, he finally reaches for his gun, and in the second before the monstrous child reaches him, he shoots her (“Days Gone Bye”). Rick’s reaction clearly enacts the “non-choice” that characters when the monstrous child emerges from the space of the unscene. As with Sophia, Rick stands still and allows the unnamed little girl zombie to approach him, waiting until the last possible moment before destroying it. Rick’s actions suggest that the monstrous child is not inherently dangerous; that “she,” like non-monstrous little girls, needs to be “saved.” Because the narrative continues to posit these figures as “little girls,” the discourse of the monstrous body does not actually take over, which is why the unnamed little girl zombie in this episode never reaches Rick. The final depiction of this unnamed monstrous child is—like Sophia—an aerial camera shot of her full body laying face up in a pool of blood (“Days Gone Bye”). Similar to the premise of Baudrillard’s “obscenity of immediate visibility” that “exposes” everything, the aerial shot steps back and takes a wider overarching view of it. Earlier, I discussed how the monstrous child constantly displaces children in these narratives, and the use of the aerial shot is one technique that achieves this because the last image is that of the monstrous child. It is imperative of the “non-choice” and the cathartic destruction of representations of the figural Child by providing a last look at the destroyed body of the monstrous child.

III. Out of the Mouths of Babes

The story of Mika in season four of *The Walking Dead* returns to the argument that the figural Child calls for its own destruction from the space of unscene. In “The Grove,” the group have been separated and Carol hides in a farmhouse with Tyrese and three children: Lizzie, her younger sister Mika, and Rick and Lori’s baby daughter Judith (“The Grove”). Both Lizzie and Mika are marked by the overdetermining elements of their gender and their childhood: they are both female with dirty blonde hair, and close in age to one another as well as the other “little girls” in these zombie narratives, but only Mika truly embodies the figural Child. Firstly, Carol uses language that posits the child as innocent and in need of protection by telling Mika that she is “little” and “sweet, and those are things that can get you killed” (“The Grove”). And secondly, Mika finds a doll in the house. Her doll is white with red hair and a frilly dress, and its appearance in this episode both completes Mika’s embodiment of the figural Child and signifies that this is the moment when she is most at risk, a point that is made apparent when, immediately following the discovery of the doll, Lizzie kills Mika in the space of the unscene. When Carol and Tyrese discover a bloody Lizzie standing over Mika’s dead body, the horror expressed on their faces is the expression of the “non-choice” (“The Grove”). Therefore, everything leading up to Mika’s death functions in the same way it does for monstrous children in other zombie narratives, the only difference being that, even though Mika’s death is unscene, her dead body is revealed. The big question is why and how, if at all, this changes the function of the Monstrous Child as a site to play out the desire to destroy embodiments of the figural Child? To answer this question, it is necessary to explore in greater detail the difference between the embodiment of the figural Child and other children, especially in an episode where the only visual marker differentiating Lizzie and Mika is the possession of the toy.

Neither Lizzie nor Mika ever appear as monstrous children in “The Grove,” even though everything in the episode sets Mika up to become one. Lizzie is actually a different subset of the gothic child—the evil child. She is not entirely like other gothic children who, according to Bruhm, “know too much,” but rather, she does “know” or believes that she “knows” something that makes her dangerous and identifies her as a source of horror. Lizzie destroys the embodiment of the figural Child for two reasons that

support the function of the Monstrous Child in the zombie narrative. Firstly, she believes wholeheartedly that zombies in general are not dangerous, not monsters, but “friends” that she can “play” with. The emphasis on play and naming—things that children do with their toys—are associated with childhood. For example, when Mika finds her doll earlier in this episode, the first thing she does is name it and sit in a patch of light in the middle of the dark farmhouse and play. Like Penny and Little Girl Zombie, the placement of Mika suggests that she is the innocent here—she successfully participates in childhood. In contrast, Lizzie does not have a traditional toy; it is too demanding to embody the figural Child, so she interrogates the concepts of innocence and futurity by “playing” with the monsters instead. Mika as monster would be the ideal playmate for Lizzie. Because the little girl zombie does not physically break down like other zombies, Mika would be the ideal “doll” that Lizzie desires. Secondly, because Lizzie still participates in the representation of the figural Child as the symbol of innocence and futurity, Mika becomes the only one worthy of embodying her desire to prove that monsters are not dangerous. This belief stems from the fact that Lizzie—in her gothic knowingness—is aware that Carol favours Mika as the ideal child. As a result, the embodiment of the figural Child calls for its own destruction because other children in the narrative can never embody it themselves. The reason why this call comes specifically from the space of the unscene is that there is a suspense that builds throughout this episode—similar to the suspense that leads up to Sophia’s emergence from the barn. Lizzie is increasingly being constructed as the unpredictable gothic child that refuses to adhere to the concept of innocence even as she performs it occasionally—like Rhoda from *The Bad Seed*. So, just before Mika’s death there is a scene where Carol and Tyrese are discussing how to handle Lizzie’s desire to “play” with the zombies as well as Mika’s innocence, which happens to be the only scene in this episode with no children in it. This is the moment of suspense where all three girls inhabit the space of the unscene. When Carol and Tyrese discover Mika’s body, Lizzie says “don’t worry she’ll come back...we have to wait” (“The Grove”). Lizzie’s emphasis on “she” reveals how the potentially monstrous child—Mika—is a post-apocalyptic continued embodiment of the figural Child. It is not a monster that will come back, but specifically “she”—Mika. The fate of Mika’s corpse also occurs in the unscene, which leaves the short scene depicting the destruction of the

figure of the Child shockingly visible and framed by unscene spaces. But, the monstrous child is never revealed to complete the release of the repressed desire to destroy representations of the Child. So Mika's death lacks the cathartic, balancing effect that the other zombie child deaths have had. This difference is rooted in the presence of a second gothic child; the instability produced by the narrative that tries to create a monstrous child when an evil child is already formed. As a result, the monstrous child never emerges.

The destruction of the monstrous child signifies a release of the repressed anxieties associated with maintaining the representation of the figural Child, and for this to be fully realized it must be visible—obscene. Therefore, I argue that Mika does not fully form into a monstrous child. Mika, instead, is submitted to the "Save the Child" discourse. Whereas Lizzie does not kill her to "save" her, Carol's presumed dismemberment of Mika's corpse in the space of the unscene to prevent her manifesting as a monster is part of preserving her innocence and childhood. However, when the destroyed body of the monstrous child is not revealed, the balance that is promised by its destruction does not sufficiently occur. This is why Lizzie must be destroyed as well. Carol takes her into the same field that Lizzie "plays" in with the zombies and tells her to "look at the flowers," and then she shoots her ("The Grove"). Lizzie may not be a monstrous child, but because she is gothic and can never embody the innocence and futurity purported by the Child, the destruction of this child is acceptable and restores balance. Only, it is not cathartic. "The Grove" ends with a forty-five-degree aerial shot of Mika's doll laying abandoned on the floor. In lieu of the now missing representation of the figural Child, the toy stands in not only for its simultaneous presence and absence, but for the missing moment of revelling in the destruction of the Child. By ending with objects that mark the space of childhood and innocence, this episode continues to participate in the discourse constructing the figural Child even after its destruction and thereby not allowing the discourse of the monstrous body to ever take hold.

At the end of the narrative, the monstrous child must be destroyed to protect the concept of the Child. Rick destroys the unnamed little girl zombie in "Days Gone Bye" and Sophia in "Pretty Much Dead Already," and Carol destroys Mika and Lizzie in "The Grove." The result is a balancing act where the other characters take back the power monopolized by the figure of the Child, but only ever temporarily. The witnessing of the

monstrous child, however, leaves the effect of having witnessed something that one should not have—having desired the fall of something that one should not have desired. The paradox of the Monstrous Child, then, is a demonstration of how the body of the Monstrous Child, once seen, cannot be unseen.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Contemporary Western zombie narratives in post-9/11 America have been overrun with the little girl zombie. This is not to state that there is a mass of child zombies shambling through these films, novels, and television series, only that many of these narratives seem to begin or end with a monstrous child. In fact, the very singularity of the little girl zombie and its placement in the narrative posits the monstrous child as privileged—part of what creates the representation of the figural Child. There is already significant existing work on other manifestations of monstrous children in contemporary gothic narratives, as well as a growing body of work on zombies in general, but there is a significant lack of scholarship produced exclusively on the zombie child. This could be because the zombie child does not submit entirely to the discourse of the monstrous body, as other monsters do; the zombie child exists in a liminal space entirely its own. As a result, the concept of the Monstrous Child needs to be expanded to encompass the proliferation of the zombie child. As this thesis demonstrates, the Monstrous Child is constructed as an aporia in which the figural Child perpetually precedes, is thrust against, and ultimately eclipses the monstrous body to correct an imbalance in Western cultural narratives. This imbalance is, of course, the child's "equal share in a nation's rights" actually coming to monopolize those rights. The concept of the Monstrous Child then, is about creating the ideal embodiment of the figural Child, and then turning it into a monster so that the other characters in the narrative are provided with the opportunity to reclaim their own share of a "nation's rights" without destroying the necessary narratives of innocence and futurity by playing out the desire to destroy the Child.

One can argue that there are other children, such as Lizzie, Carl, and Morales' daughter in *The Walking Dead*, who appear alongside the representation of the figural Child, but these children do not fully embody the figural Child. As a result, the function of other children in zombie narratives highlights how all children may participate in childhood, but not all children are representative of the innocence and futurity purported by childhood. Also, the function of other children interrogates the idea of the Child as an overarching representation of all children, revealing the idea of the Child to be an inadequate representation—something highly demanding, nearly impossible to achieve

and maintain, and dangerous to the other children who can never fulfill the dictates of the idealized figure.

Once this idealized child is fully formed, it must be immediately eliminated because of the impossible demands. Because the construction of the figure of the Child precedes and is a stronger cultural construction than the monster, the monstrous child in the zombie narrative is a post-apocalyptic embodiment of innocence—a post-apocalyptic embodiment of the figural Child. Kincaid states that “it’s not that the monster is in the basement or the closet or the woods. It’s disguised as innocence, as tenderness, as desire; and it nestles in the nursery of our own hearts” (*Designing* 10). Kincaid’s statement is rooted in his central argument that the Child is indeed Othered; it is so ideal that it is unrecognizable. But, Kincaid may have been onto something else that he did not recognize in his own brilliant foray into the Child. While he is highlighting how the idea of the monster has been made innocent because the idea of the Child is dangerous in its uncanny embodiment of innocence and desire, resulting in the inability to distinguish it as monster, I suggest that the rise of the Monstrous Child in contemporary Western gothic narratives is the cathartic creation of a site in which to play out the desire to destroy the Child. Identifying innocence as disguised monstrosity still leaves the unresolved problem of facing the Child and not being able to do anything, but identifying monstrosity as disguised innocence provides the perfect opportunity for correcting a long unresolved imbalance.

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