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The Borderland of Humanity: Monsters and Humans in Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*

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Abstract

This article examines the portrayal of zombie children in M. R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) as metaphors for marginalized immigrant populations, framed through theories of monstrosity and postcolonialism. The novel reflects contemporary Western anxieties surrounding immigration, cultural identity, and societal fears of the 'Other.' The zombie children, or "Hungries," embody societal fears, fantasies, and aspirations, symbolizing broader issues such as death, memory loss, and cultural displacement. The analysis highlights how these children are confined, exploited, and denied self-discovery through manipulative education, mirroring the systemic oppression faced by immigrant children in Western societies. The treatment of the zombie children is linked to real-world policies, such as the confinement of immigrant children during Donald Trump's administration, illustrating the dehumanization of those perceived as different. Through the protagonist Melanie, a hybrid child who challenges traditional notions of humanity, the novel critiques societal prioritization of fear over empathy and acceptance. Melanie's struggle for identity and belonging underscores the broader themes of hybridity and resistance, while the Hungries symbolize the consequences of systemic marginalization. Ultimately, the essay argues that *The Girl with All the Gifts* uses the figure of the zombie child to expose the ethical failures of a society that dehumanizes the 'Other' and to advocate for a more inclusive and empathetic world.

Keywords: Immigrants, humanity, monsters, postcolonial, zombies

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Introduction

In his novel *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, Gaiman provides a poetic definition of monsters, stating: "Monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are things people are scared of. Some of them are things that look like things people used to be scared of a long time ago. Sometimes monsters are things people should be scared of, but they aren't" (151). This suggests that monsters manifest in various forms and sizes. While some are easily recognizable, some, however, are more subtle and ingrained in our daily lives. As Lestel argues, "monstrosity is an anomaly that forms an integral part of the living" (260), implying that we are inextricably linked to the monsters we create. The monsters encountered in the novel are not merely superficial or imagined, rather, they serve as signifiers and displacements of something hidden behind their ugly faces, something beyond their monstrosity. To better understand these monsters, it is necessary to examine the etymology of the word. Huet explains that the word 'monster' derives from the Latin word 'monstrare,' meaning to show or display. In this regard, the term 'monster' "belongs to the [same] etymological family that spawned the word demonstrate" (Huet 6). Furthermore, the word monster stems from 'monere,' meaning to warn, connecting abnormal births with a prophetic foresight of impending catastrophes (6).

In 1616, Fortunio Liceti articulated a perspective on monsters, asserting "Monstra sic dicta sunt, non quod monstrent futura…sed quod tantum novitate & insolentia sui spectantium animos admiratione & stupore percellant, & sic omnibus ostendi velint" (2), a passage translated by Marie-Hélène Huet as "monsters are thus named, not because they are signs of things to come...but because they are such that their new and incredible appearance stirs admiration and surprise in the beholders, and startles them so much that everyone wants to show them to others" (6). During the 17th and 18th centuries, the birth of a child exhibiting monstrous traits was often interpreted as a manifestation of the mother's unfulfilled aspirations, hidden ambitions, and suppressed desires. Furthermore, such occurrences were viewed as societal warnings, indicative of underlying sins and urging caution regarding individual actions and their repercussions. In contrast, contemporary interpretations of monstrosity have evolved significantly; the existence of a monster is no longer exclusively associated with maternal imagination or repressed desires. Instead, modern society perceives monsters as constructs arising from social categorizations, cultural anxieties, and collective desires. They may also function as instruments within political agendas to marginalize or categorize 'Other' populations. As Weinstock observes, "The monster comes into being the moment it is called a monster" (3). Additionally, Carroll

argues that monsters represent significant threats to our psychological well-being, ethical frameworks, and societal structures, possessing the potential to disrupt individual identities and foster alternative societal models that embrace these entities. Ultimately, the concept of monstrosity transcends mere physical appearances; it encapsulates profound symbolic meanings, reflecting societal fears and aspirations.

In the discourse surrounding monstrosity, it is evident that societies, political entities, and cultural frameworks construct monsters for their own strategic purposes. Weinstock articulates this notion by stating, "It takes a village to make a monster. By this, I mean that nothing or no one is intrinsically or 'naturally' [a] monster" (358). This perspective is further supported by Cohen, who posits that the body of a monster is "pure culture... like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself" and represents "always a displacement" (4). Consequently, monsters emerge as embodiments of profound societal fears, desires, anxieties, fantasies, and aspirations. Over time, the forms, shapes, and meanings attributed to these monsters evolve across various cultural contexts. Weinstock emphasizes that "we inevitably make our own monsters with the ingredients we have on hand, so the recipe keeps changing—even when the monsters themselves have been passed down from generation to generation" (358). Thus, monsters hold significant cultural importance as they symbolize the concept of the 'Other'—distinct from humanity. Understanding the essence of humanity necessitates an engagement with monstrosity, as all that contrasts with monsters resides within the human domain. In contemporary contexts, monsters reflect our self-perception and interactions with the world, as Weinstock notes, "how we think about ourselves and our relation to the world" (359).

In contemporary popular culture, the zombie has emerged as a prominent figure, supplanting traditional monsters such as dragons and giants. Originating from West African and Haitian voodoo and witchcraft practices, the concept of zombies involves "the reanimation of corpses or the placement of the living into a death-like trance" (Conrich 16). Under the control of witches or sorcerers, zombies are compelled to return to the world of the living, serving as slave labourers known as "dead men working" (McNally 124). Devoid of identity, memory, emotion, or consciousness, zombies utilize their physical bodies solely to become slaves in industrial societies. The presence of zombies ensures the absence of disgruntled workers planning strikes for better wages or shorter work hours, revealing the truth that capitalism thrives on the necessity of enslaved people rather than free individuals.

The modern conception of the zombie was established in 1968 with the release of George A. Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead*. This seminal work expanded

the representation of zombies beyond their traditional role as mere slave labourers, incorporating complex themes such as consumerism, mobile technology, Alzheimer's disease, and immigration. In the post-World War II context, both America and several European nations have confronted issues related to race and class upheaval, utilizing zombies as symbolic representations of these societal tensions. In the twenty-first century, zombies have frequently been interpreted as representations of illegal immigrants or refugees, particularly from Eastern regions. Their depiction as decaying, soulless figures traversing urban landscapes evokes profound societal fears related to death, memory loss, generational crossbreeding, and multiculturalism. Micali notes "a zombie is a figure deriving from man and maintaining some of his human features, but it has been transformed into something else. … combination of similarity and difference always poses a conceptual problem, raising multiple issues of an epistemological, ethical, metaphysical or political nature" (16). This duality—sharing similarities with humanity yet remaining fundamentally Other—raises significant conceptual challenges and prompts critical discussions regarding moral, cultural, and racial dynamics.

In the twenty-first century, significant challenges, particularly the influx of immigrants into affluent Western nations, have led to the portrayal of these individuals as monstrous entities reminiscent of zombies. This transformation occurs due to their perceived differences and similarities, as well as their classification as threats to the existence, culture, traditions, and languages of the host countries. Consequently, immigrants are often depicted as soulless, famished, and dejected figures. Downey articulates that the lives of immigrants existing beyond national borders are characterized by marginalization: "Lives lived on the margins of social, political, cultural, economic, and geographical borders are lives half lived. Denied access to legal, economic, and political redress, these lives exist in a limbo-like state that is largely preoccupied with acquiring and sustaining the essentials of life" (109). Immigrant camps are frequently conceptualized as purgatorial spaces, described as "living death" (Downey 405), where inhabitants, clad in tattered clothing and bearing disheveled appearances, communicate in exotic languages and exhibit vacant expressions. They navigate these camps aimlessly until the gates open, granting them the opportunity to surge into urban environments and attempt to reconstruct their disrupted lives.

Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, the zombie has emerged as a prominent figure in popular culture, reflecting the anxieties and crises of modern Western society. As Landis proclaims, seen as the twenty-first century monsters, "zombies

have now evolved into modern agents of the apocalypse" (76). Monsters have always been present, but their prominence varies across different eras. As Braudy notes, the more compelling question is why monsters lie dormant in some ages and haunt the imagination in Others. Each century harbours specific fears, and the history of horror intertwines with the disquiets of the soul and the public manifestation of inner life, reflecting the prevailing characteristics of the era in which it emerges. Accordingly, monster stories are interwoven with colonial narratives, often representing marginalized groups such as people of colour and the lower classes. In the aftermath of 9/11, a new generation of zombies emerged, faster and more globalized than their predecessors, with their contagion spreading rapidly. This shift is exemplified in Carey's 2014 novel, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, which tells the story of Melanie, a zombie child living in a military base as a lab rat. Melanie and the Other "Hungry" children represent the new generation of zombies or "Hungries" with emotions and an appetite for human flesh. Although Melanie is depicted as a blonde, white girl, the treatment of the British army and scientists supports the notion that Melanie and the Other Hungry children belong to marginalized groups whose culture, language, and ancestry are not native to the land in which they are captive. This article seeks to examine Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* as a postcolonial novel and explore the portrayal of the Hungry or zombie children as the new generation of immigrants living in Western countries who are imprisoned and feared by Western governments.

The Girl with All the Gifts: New Monster

In the discourse surrounding the themes of life and mortality, McGillis articulates that "the child may remind us of the glory and the dream, but it also reminds us that the glory and the dream are time-bound and subject to an end" (101-02). Presently, there exists a demographic of children who emerge from contexts of migration, conflict, and interracial unions. These children are perceived as aberrations within certain societies, likened to the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In the novel, the character of Melanie, alongside Other children, can be depicted as non-Western, symbolizing a new generation categorized as 'the unnatural Other,' embodying notions of impurity. Moreover, as articulated in the narrative, Melanie and her peers evoke trepidation among adults: "Some of you are new. You don't know what the hell you've signed up for, and you don't know where the hell you are. You're scared of these frigging little abortions, right? Well, good. Hug that fear to your mortal soul. The more scared you are, the less chance you'll screw up" (Carey 7). In the narrative world inhabited by Melanie, children have become

emblematic of societal anxieties, reflecting the prevailing concerns of contemporary existence.

In a manner reminiscent of the policies enacted during Donald Trump's administration, the governing authority depicted in *The Girl with All the Gifts* confines children within cages, treating them as if they were wild animals. The educational framework provided to these children is dictated exclusively by the scientists, who prioritize their own agendas over the genuine developmental needs of the children. In a post-apocalyptic context, survival necessitates specialized knowledge and skills. However, Melanie and her peers are systematically denied access to this crucial information. Dr. Caldwell and Sergeant Park assert that these children do not require specific knowledge for survival, as they are not intended to endure but are instead destined for extermination by Dr. Caldwell. As civilization collapses, the remnants of society endeavour to reconstruct within a city known as Beacon. Yet, Melanie and her fellow children, perceived as deviant iterations of humanity, find themselves marginalized within this new society. They are relegated to the status of parasites or subjects for scientific experimentation, as articulated in the text: "And though it speaks and can even be christened with a boy's name or a girl's name, is not the host. It's the parasite. And the parasite, whose needs and tropisms are very different from human needs and human instincts" (35). This portrayal underlines the broader implications of societal fears regarding the nature of humanity and the ethical considerations surrounding the treatment of those deemed 'Other.'

In literary and cultural traditions, monsters have historically been depicted as grotesque creatures engaging in horrifying actions. In the novel *The Girl with All the Gifts*, the protagonist Melanie, who has been identified as a monster by various authorities, including the government, society, and science, has endured a decade of confinement in a laboratory described as "a small and square cell" with "a bed, a chair and a table" (5). This portrayal draws parallels to the contemporary phenomenon of children being captured and imprisoned in cells reminiscent of Melanie's, particularly in the context of the influx of refugees and immigrants in countries like America. Not only are these children held in windowless cells, but their access to knowledge is also deliberately restricted. Even if they receive an education, they are prevented from discovering their 'True Self,' as articulated in the text:

> Because the one thing they never learn about, really, is themselves. And by this time, Melanie has thought of the big exception to that rule about kids having mothers and fathers …. Melanie thinks that would be better, in some ways, than having a mother and a father who you never even got to meet.

> The ghost of her parents' absence hovers around her, makes her uneasy (Carey 21).

The primary intention behind these actions is to isolate these children from the rest of society and exploit them to achieve the goals of those in power.

The vulnerability of individuals is fundamentally rooted in their limited understanding of the Self. The formation of the Self is intricately linked to "the relation to the norms and practices of the society around us" (Osmond 70). Within the context of the post-apocalyptic society inhabited by Melanie, concepts of identity and the Self are imperilled not only by zombies but also by the uninfected. The identities and Selves of Melanie, alongside those of Other children and humans, face significant challenges, which extend to "the ways in which [they] treat each other" (Carey 70**).** For the reconstruction of society, it is imperative that all members acknowledge and accept the identities and Selves of newly emerging individuals. Melanie's narrative serves as a poignant illustration of a society deficient in empathy and the willingness to accept new members as they are. Instead, individuals are often regarded not as humans but as subjects for research or as vermin. As articulated by Carey, "The subjects aren't human; they're hungries. High-functioning hungries. The fact that they can talk may make them easier to empathize with, but it also makes them very much more dangerous than the animalistic variety we usually encounter" (Carey 44). Through the depiction of zombies, or "Hungries," Carey effectively critiques contemporary societal fears and anxieties regarding immigrants and individuals perceived as different, as evidenced by the experiences of Melanie and Other children.

In this regard, the emergence of literature on terror is intrinsically linked to "the terror of a split society, and out of desire to heal it" (Moretti 83). In the narrative of Melanie, she is positioned within a fragmented world where she embodies a duality: she is both the object of fear and a representation of the yearning for healing, which is manifested through the violent sacrifice of her body and Self. Unfortunately, there is a significant absence of parental figures, guardians, or institutional support to protect these children from their abusers. As a result, they lack the foundational roots necessary to define their identities and sense of Self. Carey articulates this distinction by noting that "the kids who were different, by the way they moved… But the weird kids move even when they're not hunting, so you can tell them apart. And they react to stuff that isn't food, so you can get their attention—with a mirror, say, or the beam of light from a torch, or a piece of coloured plastic" (60).

In addition, the emergence of stories like *The Girl with All the Gifts*, which feature monsters as protagonists, has had a profound impact on culture and society. By positioning the monsters as the central characters, these narratives foster empathy towards them and provide an escape from the oppressive effects of hegemonic social forces seeking normalization, as Weinstock suggests in *The Monster Theory Reader*. Furthermore, these stories shed light on real-world issues, such as the existence of hybrid children, a contemporary problem. In these narratives, problems are personified as monsters, as Bodart suggests, helping "us understand our own humanity by showing us what we are not" (qtd. in Brock-Servais 23). Dr. Caldwell's actions towards the Other children in *The Girl with All the Gifts* highlight her lack of humanity, as Miss Justineau compares her to witches, stating, "you're like the wicked witch in a fairy tale!" (Carey 44). Despite her belief that she is acting in the name of science and for the betterment of humanity, Dr. Caldwell behaves as a true monster by mercilessly slaughtering children. By exposing the world's main fears—impending collapse, the birth of chaos, and the loss of control over the universe—Carey strives to depict the true nature of humankind on the verge of annihilation.

Melanie's narrative reveals a profound truth: "As humans, we are not only monsters, but, moreover, vectors of monstrosity. Furthermore, we are also meta-monsters who produce and generate monsters." (Lestel 260). Consequently, Melanie and the Other children should not be regarded as the true monsters; rather, they are victims of the inherent monstrosity that resides within individuals occupying roles such as scientists, politicians, soldiers, and educators. Fundamentally, all adults pose a threat to the existence of Melanie and the Other children, who are raised either as animals or as lethal objects. Given the education provided to these children, who represent the first generation of posthuman or hybrid beings, they have been deprived of the opportunity to recognize their True Selves and identities. Specifically, Melanie remains unaware of her true essence, compelling her to seek her identity through myths, stories, and fairy tales recounted by her teachers. For posthuman children like Melanie, these stories often manifest as hallucinations that stimulate their imagination, ultimately leading to a sense of alienation from their 'Self' rather than imparting genuine meaning to their lives.

Melanie, as the central character, embodies the future generation that serves as both a haunting reflection of our humanity and a cautionary tale regarding the destructive consequences of aggressive behaviour towards these children. The violence depicted in the narrative is exclusively perpetrated by adult humans, including zombie adults who exist as subservient entities to the Junkers or as mere reminders

of lost memories. Daily, Melanie encounters soldiers and teachers, yet instead of receiving positive interactions, she is subjected to violence and humiliation: "When the key turns in the door, she stops counting and opens her eyes. The sergeant comes in with his gun and points it at her. Then two of the sergeant's people come in and tighten and buckle the straps of the chair around Melanie's wrists and ankles" (Carey 8). The roots of this violence are not solely attributable to the Otherness of the children; rather, they stem from the sense of superiority that adults feel towards them. It is crucial to recognize that Melanie and the Other children represent a new generation of posthuman beings endowed with remarkable capabilities to survive among both humans and Hungries. They resist becoming weapons for the Junkers or being confined to the past. The future of the Earth ultimately lies in the hands of these hybrid or posthuman children, who challenge the existing power dynamics and assert their right to exist beyond the constraints imposed by adult society.

The fundamental source of fear and horror in humanity is rooted in the inherent capacity for malevolence towards Other human beings and the natural world. Melanie and the Other children symbolize a new generation of posthuman and hybrid beings while also representing the lost children of the past who have endured brutal deaths or imprisonment due to their Otherness and uniqueness. Despite the misleading education imposed upon them by adults, Melanie and the Other children are driven to advance and protect the future generation. As depicted in the narrative, "The children. Sullen and awkward, sitting cross-legged on the ground, cowed into silence by Melanie's fierce warning glares. Justineau has only the haziest memories of the night before, but she can see the awe in their eyes as Melanie walks among them, shushing sternly" (Carey 322).

The modern conception of the monster is characterized by its absence of grotesque features; instead, "the modern monster is hidden amongst the mundanity of everyday life" (Christie 50). However, in Carey's narrative, the monsters are readily identifiable, despite the prevailing belief that Melanie and the Other children do not conform to traditional depictions of monstrosity. Since the early twenty-first century, children have frequently been portrayed as malevolent beings or potential threats to society. In the interest of maintaining societal integrity, adults often label children as monsters, lacking culture or education, particularly the new generation of immigrant children who are born and raised in unfamiliar countries. These children carry the remnants of their parents' cultural heritage while simultaneously embrace their new environment. From Edward Said's perspective, Melanie and the Other children exist in a liminal space; they are neither 'us' nor 'not-us,' but rather represent a strange

Other that embodies "the opposite between 'us' and 'them,' or between man and not-man … which inspires the very idea of 'alien'" (Kerslake 8). This characterization underscores the complexities of identity and belonging in a society that often marginalizes those who do not fit conventional norms.

The intense fear experienced by the survivors leads them to abduct Melanie and the Other children at birth, confining them to a military base for experimentation. This action "not only highlights the brutality of man in the name of scientific progress but also the ethical issue of imprisoning a vulnerable child" (Christie 43). As victims of callous scientists and governmental authorities who regard them as mere scientific instruments rather than as children, Renner characterizes children like Melanie as gifted individuals, asserting that "the personal rights and freedom of gifted children are largely ignored" (44). Despite her exceptional abilities, Melanie utilizes her gifts to protect the very adults who have harmed her or even sought to end her life. Amidst her emotional turmoil, Melanie, as a posthuman child, strives to be a valuable member of society, seeking integration: "But she was lying when she said she wasn't afraid. To be right here in the middle of them—to look up at their bowed heads and half-open mouths, their off-white eyes—is very frightening indeed" (Carey 190). Nevertheless, she is often treated as an outsider, akin to an animal, as illustrated by her attempts to engage with people.

As previously discussed, the characters Melanie and the Hungry children serve as representations of emigrants, often depicted in various media as feral and voiceless entities. This characterization strips them of their agency and frames them as societal threats. In contrast, Carey subverts this narrative by illustrating Melanie as a victim of adult cruelty who embodies both vulnerability and potential menace to those around her. As noted in the text, "She wrestles with a wild animal, and the animal is her. So she knows she's going to lose" (Carey 97). Consequently, Melanie and the Other children, along with their Hungry parents, contest the authority of native adults, instilling profound fear through their very existence. The presence of Melanie's parents and the Hungry adults is perceived as a contaminating force within contemporary society, leading to chaos and destruction. Dr. Caldwell and Sergeant Parks rationalize their harsh treatment of these children by persuading themselves and the rest of the team that these individuals lack humanity: "'Not everyone who looks human is human,' he says. 'No,' Miss Justineau agrees. 'I'm with you on that one'" (Carey 15). This perspective results in the dehumanization of the children, who are regarded as feral and dangerous, deemed suitable only for scientific experimentation: "'They're children,' Miss Justineau points out. 'No.'

'Psychologically speaking, yes. They're children'" (Carey 14). This discourse underscores the broader implications of societal perceptions regarding marginalized groups, revealing a complex interplay between identity, agency, and the constructs of humanity.

Caldwell exhibits a complete disregard for the well-being of the children under her care, perceiving them as monstrous entities mimicking human behaviour. She explicitly states, "'Please remember, Doctor, that the subject presents as a child but is actually a fungal colony animating a child's body. There's no place for sentiment here'" (Carey 84). Caldwell's actions toward the Other children are even more monstrous than the Hungries' treatment of humans. She is fully aware of the implications and consequences of her actions. These children, along with their parents, are victims of the brutality perpetuated by various cultures, societies, and governments. They have never been acknowledged or treated as human beings. As Other, they have always been instructed to mimic their superiors in order to be accepted. Bhabha defines mimicry as "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (qtd. in McLeod 48). Bhabha further refers to individuals like Melanie and Other children as '"mimic men' who learn to act English but who do not look English and are not accepted as such" (qtd. in McLeod 48). The Hungries and their hybrid offspring represent the descendants of emigrants. Their entire lives have revolved around replicating the actions of their masters. However, unlike the emigrants of the past centuries, the emigrants from Asia, Africa, and South America, along with their children, are perceived as monsters in the twenty-first century, merely mimicking native Western individuals. Historically, emigrants reshaped and coerced natives to reiterate the emigrants' actions and cultures, resulting in "a subject who reflects a distorted image of" (Nayar 28) the emigrant master. The presence of both yesterday's natives and present emigrants rekindles the oppressive methods employed by past emigrants. Carey narrates the story of the twenty-first-century emigrants and their hybrid children, who are the descendants of the previous natives mistreated by emigrants. With their distorted identities, this new generation of emigrants and their hybrid children accurately reflect both their old and new masters. Melanie and the Other children do not belong to either emigrants or the natives. Thus, the natives grant themselves the authority to treat these children as mere test subjects and regard them as less than human.

The birth of a monster has long been interpreted as a "providential warning from God" (Renner 16) and a consequence of moral depravity, vices, and wickedness. In Carey's novel, the origins of this moral corruption can be traced back to the actions

of Western governments throughout the centuries. These governments bear responsibility for the immense suffering, loss of life, and anguish experienced by countless individuals, as their malevolent deeds inflict severe emotional harm upon their victims. The result of this emotional damage manifests itself in the form of the Hungry children. In the book, we encounter Hungry adults who serve as reminders of the traumas endured by the victims. For example, there is a woman with a dead baby and an old fellow with his song and old photos, '"In her long, straight, blonde hair there's a single cornrow braid. She's pushing a baby carriage. …why is she clinging to an object? Among the myriad things a human being loses when Ophiocordyceps infiltrates the brain and redecorates is the ability to use tools. The baby carriage ought to be as meaningless to this creature as the equations of general relativity would be'" (Carey 149). All Hungries depicted in the book symbolize those who have suffered all their lives and now lament their sweet past. The grotesque features of Hungry individuals mirror those of immigrant individuals, who are now perceived as threats to the normality of natives. These Hungry individuals embody the deepest fears experienced by all humans, such as death, being forgotten, nostalgia, and the loss of everything and everyone. However, when viewed as immigrants from foreign lands, they become the embodiment of the fear of becoming a living death, an outsider, an alien, or even an uncanny being.

A significant aspect of Carey's narrative is his choice to refer to his zombies as "Hungry" rather than simply zombies. The term "Hungry" conjures images of impoverished individuals deprived of adequate sustenance and care, in contrast to the traditional portrayal of zombies as mindless, flesh-eating creatures. As previously noted, Romero's films introduced a variant of zombies characterized by a diet of human flesh. These "Zombies Ghoul" represent "a fusion of the Haitian undead zombie with the flesh-eating ghoul," lacking "an essential self and operating to varying degrees as an eating machine" (Boon 57). While Carey's Hungry shares certain similarities with Romero's zombies, they also exhibit distinct differences. Additionally, they retain elements of "Zombie Drones," which are archetypal zombies devoid of Self and reduced to mere empty shells. Consequently, these figures are exploited as slave labour, subjects for scientific experimentation, and even as weapons against non-Hungry humans: "Using the hungries as battering rams, as weapons of war. He wonders how the junkers rounded up so many" (Carey 89).

The presence of zombies in Carey's narrative serves as a profound reminder of a deeply unsettling element that transcends the fear of death itself: absence. From an ontological perspective, absence instils terror by negating the very essence of

humanity, functioning as a harbinger of nothingness that transforms individuals into metaphorical black holes. Carey's Hungry, particularly in contrast to characters like Melanie and the Other children, embody these black holes. This theme is further emphasized when the Hungries encountered outside the base express a mournful yearning for their lost past, as illustrated in the passage: "Another thing they don't do is look at pictures, but this one is. As he sings, he holds in his lap a wallet, of the kind that has a loose-leaf insert for credit cards. This one hold not cards but photographs. The Hungry is trying to flick through them, with one of the remaining fingers of his right hand" (Carey 161). The Hungries react promptly upon perceiving signs of human presence; however, in the absence of sound or movement that indicates life, they remain motionless. Paradoxically, they pursue life rather than flesh, craving existence over mere bodies. This pursuit mirrors the experiences of immigrants, who embark on a quest for happiness or a better life only to encounter violence and rejection. Thus, Carey's portrayal of the Hungry not only underscores their tragic existence but also reflects broader themes of alienation and the search for identity in a world that often denies them humanity.

Kee argues that zombies are a reflection of society's fear of "anarchy or the monster inside us all" (23). As civilizations have flourished, the "Other" has often been portrayed as monstrous. However, the existence of these monsters can be traced back to the very societies that create them and the shadows within their own psyches. The "Other" is depicted as monstrous, such as zombies, in order to conceal the true evil that resides within the collective unconscious. Both Romero and Carey present the true victims as monsters who seek to tear apart the minds and bodies of their oppressors. Melanie, like traditional zombies, submissively serves her masters and even sacrifices her own life to save the lives of her killers. The underlying message is that all zombies are monuments to slavery. By using children, or more specifically, Other human beings, as test subjects and killing them without remorse in the name of preserving lives, cultures, and integrity, the inhumanity of the masters is exposed. Dr. Caldwell, in cold blood, decapitates children who are fully conscious and capable of feeling pain. Caldwell and the residents of the base treat these children as reminders of the tragic lives of colonial slaves who were killed and brutally tortured by their masters.

Furthermore, Caldwell's characterization as a witch is underscored by her actions, which parallel those of a voodoo priest or malevolent sorcerer. Métraux notes the existence of "another type of zombie, souls stolen from corpses and stored in bottles that are sought after by sorcerers to increase their magical power" (qtd. in Murphy

xiv). In a similar manner, Caldwell preserves children's brains in bottles to augment her scientific authority. The parallels drawn between Caldwell and witches serve to highlight the abandonment of humanity, even by members of the scientific community. Boon asserts that the distinction between zombies and humans lies in the absence of certain personality traits, such as volition, consciousness, or a soul. However, the critical difference between Carey's Hungry and humans is not found in the Hungries or zombies themselves, but rather in the lack of consciousness and humanity exhibited by some humans. As argued, the Hungries symbolize contemporary immigrants who leave their homelands in search of a better life in the West, only to be treated as slaves or test subjects by the native Western population, which depicts them as monsters. In legal terms, these individuals are rendered invisible and are denied basic rights to protect themselves against their abusers, including scientists.

Moreover, historical evidence indicates that societies have long harboured a profound fear of zombies rather than the individuals who resurrect and control them. Seabrook defines zombies as "a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive" (qtd. in Kee 13). He further asserts that the eyes of zombies resemble those of the deceased: unblinking, vacant, and devoid of vision. This classical definition of zombies allows their masters to subject them to brutal treatment, as Seabrook contends that they exhibit all the characteristics of dead individuals, particularly their lifeless eyes, which signify a complete absence of vitality. Consequently, there is no ethical dilemma in killing, torturing, or abusing them; a dead creature has no rights in modern civilized societies. In the case of Melanie and the Other children, they are perceived merely as objects to be dismantled in the pursuit of scientific advancement against the Hungries. This treatment is characterized by disdain and degradation, as illustrated in the text: "Melanie has almost never been naked. It's not a nice feeling at all, she decides; it makes her feel vulnerable and ashamed" (Carey 83). The perception of Melanie and the Other children as non-human entities, akin to lifeless beings, provides Caldwell with a justification for her actions and encourages people to engage in heartless abuse. For instance, Caldwell states, "'If the noise is troubling you,' Dr. Caldwell says, 'I'll remove the pharynx first,' and she puts the cold edge of the blade against Melanie's throat" (Carey 84). Caldwell's cruelty stems not only from her dehumanization of Melanie and the Other children but also from her belief that she is acting in the best interest of humanity or her own ego. The manner in which Caldwell perceives the Other children and adult Hungries, combined with the

exploitation of Hungries as weapons by the Junkers, serves as the primary catalyst for Melanie's determination to dismantle Caldwell and the Junkers' humanity. She articulates this resolve by stating:

But only if you let them grow up, she finishes. 'If you keep shooting them and cutting them into pieces and throwing them into pits, nobody will be left to make a new world. Your people and the Junker people will keep killing each other, and you'll both kill the hungries wherever you find them, and in the end, the world will be empty. This way is better. Everybody turns into a Hungry all at once, and that means they'll all die, which is really sad. But then the children will grow up, and they won't be the old kind of people but they won't be hungries either. They'll be different. Like me, and the rest of the kids in the class. They'll be the next people. The ones who make everything okay again. (Carey 320)

Conclusion

Zombie literature exhibits a profound connection with colonial and postcolonial literature, utilizing zombies as a metaphorical representation of victims who endure abuse and murder under the guise of humanity. Drawing parallels to colonialism, Carey's novel *The Girl with All the Gifts* exemplifies how the colonial government victimizes its subjects. As the descendants of emigrants, Melanie and the Other children reveal how their minds have been colonized through the education they have received from their teachers. In this respect, they have always seen themselves as inferior beings, even feral. By rejecting the opportunity to have their own language, Melanie and the Other children are forced to communicate in the language of their captors, effectively subjecting their thoughts and actions to manipulation by individuals like Dr. Caldwell. Even Miss Justineau, despite her ostensibly benevolent actions, inadvertently undermines Melanie's true identity. The crux of the matter lies in the fact that all adults involved in shaping the children's world actively contribute to a narrative that portrays them as monstrous creatures and their parents as terrifying beasts. Consistently indoctrinated with the idea that they pose a threat to humanity and that their culture, parents, and past hold no inherent worth, the children are coerced into accepting their assigned role as subjects of scientific experimentation and subsequent torture.

Perceived as hazardous and detrimental to societal integrity, Melanie and the Other Hungries function as a metaphor for the oppressed inhabiting a society that reflects and perpetuates colonialist norms and values. The colonizers, exemplified by Dr. Caldwell, endeavour to obscure their own deficiencies and vulnerabilities by

providing education to the colonized, including Melanie and the Other children. This educational imposition renders the necessity for military force to dominate these subjects superfluous, as the colonizers exercise control through educational manipulation and the fabrication of a deceptive utopia that conceals their true motives. Nonetheless, as the character Danello asserts, posthuman entities such as the Hungries are stripped of authentic joy, happiness, and comfort. Specifically, for marginalized individuals like Melanie, their existence is characterized by anguish, sorrow, and a profound absence of hope for any favourable or adverse future.

The novel unequivocally establishes from its outset that Melanie and the Other Hungry children are devoid of a future. Along with their hybrid offspring who resemble normal humans, the existence of Hungries presents a challenge to the authority and knowledge of the human population. Individuals such as Dr. Caldwell, who previously exhibited confidence in their comprehension of the world, perceive their rationale, power, and knowledge as threatened by the presence of the Hungry individuals. Consequently, akin to colonizers who harbour both fascination and fear towards the colonised, Dr. Caldwell and those in power treat the Hungries, particularly their children, with brutality and without remorse. This maltreatment ultimately incites an uprising against her, culminating in massacre, death, and destruction. Despite her intentions, Miss Justineau employs, or more accurately, abuses education and knowledge as a means to dominate the Hungry children. Through education, children internalise the language and culture of their oppressors. They mimic their oppressors' speech and behaviour. However, they remain unaccepted by the broader society. As illustrated, they are fated for slaughter and are denied the opportunity to experience life in the capital city or coexist with people.

An essential consideration is that Hungry children lack a connection to their parents and their pasts. They are effectively strangers to their progenitors, and this disconnection is not merely a consequence of their consumption of their parents' flesh, as suggested by Dr. Caldwell; rather, it stems from the forcible removal of their parents. Consequently, these children become estranged from their true identity or Self. In this context, they possess no agency over their destinies, as they are excluded from the process of identity formation, which is intrinsically linked to their True Self. Rather than being positioned at the centre of their existence, they are marginalized by individuals such as Justineau, who appropriate their authentic identities. The result is a manipulated being devoid of a stable identity, one that is externalised and controlled by external powers.

Melanie's actions in destroying humanity to protect herself and the Other children can be interpreted as a reflection of their marginalised existence. Acknowledging their alienation from humans, including their parents, who lack any recollection of them, leaves them vulnerable and devoid of external protection. The Hungries are ensnared in a lost past, exhibiting no desire to engage with the present. Their lives have been effectively stolen from them, prompting a retreat into nostalgia as a coping mechanism. Driven by a longing to reclaim their lost lives, they resort to attacking living individuals to satisfy their unfulfilled desires. The events depicted in Carey's novel serve as a metaphor for the realities of contemporary life. This is why Murphy draws a parallel between modern existence and zombification, both characterised by uncanny, terror, and dehumanization. The modern world appropriates the individuality of Others while simultaneously preserving the individuality of those who conform to societal norms. By depicting the Hungries as monstrous beings driven by a hunger for human flesh, society rationalises their extermination and obliterates their individuality.

It is evident that neither Melanie nor the Other children, nor children globally, possess a promising utopian future. They are confronted with two potential paths: to perpetuate the mistakes of their parents and continue the cycle of violence and destruction or to reconstruct a new world from the remnants of the old. Carey's portrayal of a fatal disease deeply rooted in loathing suggests that science cannot provide a remedy. Consequently, for the sake of the Other children, Melanie feels compelled to eradicate the obsolete humans who would never accept the new generation. By eliminating the older generation, the new generation is afforded the opportunity to begin anew, fostering reconciliation and healing within the world.

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