

2010

Brides of Death, or How Zombies Brought Feminism to Pre-Victorian Women in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

Alondra Rogers
Fort Hays State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholars.fhsu.edu/liberal_studies



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rogers, Alondra, "Brides of Death, or How Zombies Brought Feminism to Pre-Victorian Women in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*" (2010). *Master of Liberal Studies Research Papers*. 13.
http://scholars.fhsu.edu/liberal_studies/13

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Liberal Studies Research Papers by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

Brides of Death, or How Zombies Brought Feminism to Pre-Victorian
Women in Seth Grahame-Smith's
Pride and Prejudice and Zombies



Fort Hays State University
Alondra Rogers
Submitted for completion of
English 874, The Culminating Experience

A Reflection

When Seth Grahame-Smith decided to re-write Jane Austen's revered novel *Pride and Prejudice*, he took a risk; when he decided to re-write the novel in order to include young Regency women with violent skills, killing zombies, he risked his professional career. In his modification, he gave Regency women skill, strength and value beyond their beauty. More than these, he gave them choice where before there was none. Elizabeth Bennett, her sisters, and other women in this novel can chose to become and remain "Brides of Death" or they can chose to marry and carry on a traditional Regency lifestyle.

This is the subject I'm lucky enough to get to pursue for my Culminating Experience project as a part of the Masters in Liberal Studies (MLS), English Concentration program at Fort Hays State University. This project is built upon work that I have done in other MLS classes. It is possible because of instruction, reading and writing I have done since I first entered the program in 2007. Four courses that influenced this project are: Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspective; Information Literacy; Nineteenth Century Women Writers; and Literary Criticism.

- Ways of Knowing in Comparative Perspective, IDS 801-CB: Fall 2007 with Professor Tim Murphy. Standard education spends almost no time asking a student how one knows what he or she knows. Before taking this class, I don't think I ever considered this question. Without this class, I surely would never on my own have come to appreciate the value and the intricacies of other ways of knowing. There were three main things I learned from this class: there is more than just the scientific method;

literature is a way of knowing; and through Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*, meaning can be found in many places.

Coming in the door, I may have had some idea that there were different ways of knowing available to people other than the scientific method, but I probably wouldn't have been able to articulate them. The Scientific Method is a concept I believe in as more than just a way to test a theory. It is an important tool to confirm the validity and veracity of something. As a skeptic in a world of fast flowing information, it is a value I believe in. Empiricism allows questions to be answered directly and for those answers to be confirmed through retesting. Though I believe most questions can be answered in this way, there are other types of information that are not possible to learn from this method. This moment was an epiphany in my life that allowed me to be more open to other ways of knowing and therefore to more things to know. It allowed me to accept other peoples' beliefs that I may previously have disregarded. It prepared me to look at the world slightly differently. And it led me to understand that something I love so much is also a way to know the world we live in: literature.

Ways of Knowing prepared me for my Culminating Experience by teaching me to understand that knowledge comes to us in many forms including literature. I've always loved stories and looked at them as a way to understand the experiences of others. Ways of Knowing deepened and widened my understanding; it gave me a comprehensive skill to approach a work of literature as a communicating device. It's not a riddle or a secret; it's a message—lots of messages really. And evaluating or

analyzing or applying theories to a piece of literature is about pulling out the message that spoke loudest and sharing it with others so that they can see it too.

I can't talk about the Ways of Knowing class without talking about a tiny book with an astounding impact. Viktor Frankl's jaw-dropping, tear-jerking amazing work of memoir, psychology, human suffering and hope made an indelible mark on me. *Man's Search for Meaning* was a profound book I never would have read if it wasn't for this class. Amid the lessons to be offered by Frankl's education and experience is the belief that life is a search for meaning. On Frankl's first night at Auschwitz he said this, "...I made myself a firm promise...that I would not 'run into the wire'" (p. 18). On his first night at one of history's most terrible places, he decided, stripped of his identity and dignity, that he would not commit suicide, that he would survive if he could for the things that gave him meaning. For Frankl, it was to re-write the book that was taken from him when he became a prisoner of the Nazis and imagined conversations with his wife, who did not survive her imprisonment. Of the many things I learned from Frankl, I learned to find meaning everywhere. One of the ways I search for meaning is in literature. I strive to share those meanings with others whenever I can. It's not the kind of meaning Frankl offers us, but I truly hope I never have an experience like the one that was so great a teacher to him.

- Information Literacy, IDS 804-CC: Fall 2007 with Professor Renee Levant.

Information Literacy is a class that teaches how to research, what sources are reliable and how to use the information one obtains. At the end of the course, students are asked to put their work into practice with a term paper. Professor Levant allowed students to write on topics that interested them. I offered a topic proposal I was sure

would get shot down: I wanted to write a paper on the cultural implications of the 1973 film *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I was pleased beyond words that my topic was approved. Writing my paper, entitled “Chicks, Chainsaws and Bar-B-Que: A Study of Gender, Violence and Animal Cruelty in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*,” gave me confidence that the texts that I find meaning in are valued by my professors even though they may be unconventional. My professors (may or) may not be interested in the texts themselves, but the fact that I can support the meaning I find there is enough. When I began thinking about topics for the Culminating Experience, I knew I would try to write on another topic that was meaningful and interesting to me: another unconventional text. I was just as excited when my topic was given approval. My confidence in my ability to find meaning in works that might be overlooked by literary critics was again bolstered. Information Literacy offered some experience with graduate research, which was very helpful to my pursuit, but it also offered a belief in my work as a graduate student to find meaning in a slasher flick. This was something I appreciated so much more.

- Nineteenth Century Women Writers, ENG 601-CC: Spring 2008 with Professor Amy Cummins. The Nineteenth Century Women Writers class presented further opportunities for me to experience literature I may never have read on my own. For this, I’m truly grateful. I was able to experience the lives of women who came before me. The works we read in the class offered me a foundation of understanding of the female experience in the 19th century and budding feminism in literature. As my Culminating Experience project is a comparison of two novels set in the 19th Century—one written by a woman in that time period—this background is essential.

In this course, I read *The Mill on the Floss*, *Ruth Hall*, *Marianne*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *The Coquette*. Each of these works was wonderful in its own right; each detailed the tensions of some particular situation for a woman living in the Nineteenth Century; each enhanced my understanding of the desperate plight unique to oppressed women. These stories taught me what women had fought and died for with curtsies and timid smiles on their faces. Each book became for me a badge of courage for Western women: a Purple Heart for injuries received during the Battle of “Things We Deserve.” This class made me proud to be a woman and forced me to try to live up to the expectations laid out by proto-feminists and feminists of this and every era since. Without these texts, I would not have an eye for seeing the oppressions by men and other women or small victories for women in other novels I’ve read since. *Zombies in Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* don’t make a change so drastic that suddenly Regency women are considered viable options for military service or public office, but they are seen as powerful, indispensable and worthy of making their own decisions. *The Mill on the Floss* showed me how forced dependence can forever damage a person. *Ruth Hall* showed me how antiquated and dangerous mores can be changed in a whole society one person at a time. *Marianne* showed me that the strength and independence of women is inherent. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* confirmed for me the expression of Nietzsche, “[She] who has a Why to live can endure almost any How.” And *The Coquette* showed me that women are loved sometimes for and sometimes in spite of their “frailties.”

- Studies in Literature: Theories and Techniques of Criticism, ENG 812-VA: Spring 2010 with Professor Amy Cummins. I thought literary theory and criticism was the

boring stuff I had to get through in order to get to the good stuff I liked until I took this course. The textbooks used for this class, *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature With Critical Theory* (2008) by Steven Lynn and *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* (2009) Deborah Appleman, are surprisingly accessible. Now I wonder how I ever got through literature classes without this detailed understanding of the tools used to look at literature. Of the two textbooks, I prefer Lynn only because I'm not currently and don't plan to be a secondary English teacher but both take the pretention out of literary theory—these works are practical. I think this is the incredible strength of them both. They explain the theories, applications and examples in clear language meant to teach and not to confuse or confound the reader, or inflate the author. Since I include myself in the body of readers who tend to close off to literati critics, I am indebted to Lynn and Appleman for truly educating me and making my approach to literature more informed. Currently, when I read a book or poem I read it for content and look for clues as to what critical theories may be best used to evaluate the work. I make notes to remind myself later of what thoughts I had when making my first read. At some point in my reading, a theme reads loudest for me. When reading *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* that theme was feminism. I've learned to let the text guide me to what tools to use. In some cases, a text is open to many different literary tools. I then chose one based on what theme seems most prominent or attractive to me. For my Culminating Experience project, I plan to use the Feminism/Gender Studies approach and probably some Reader Response as well. Though I do not plan to use it

in my project, I can easily see the use of Deconstruction and Post-Colonial Theories being well used on this work.

As I noted in my Prospectus, I believe in the power of synergy, especially in education. It allows students like myself to see the connections among disciplines and in the world around us. Each of the courses I took in the MLS program interacted with and built upon the others. This synergy increased my understanding of the subjects we studied and prepared me for the Culminating Experience project.

When Grahame-Smith decided to modify a beloved novel, he took a risk. When he decided to revision *Pride and Prejudice*, he made a change that brought Third Wave feminism to the Regency story. The instruction I've received in the MLS program has prepared me to read this novel, make an assertion about its meaning and support that meaning through research and the text itself.

ABSTRACT: This paper considers the revisionist work *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) by Seth Grahame-Smith and its implications for contemporary or Third Wave feminism. It argues that the changes made to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Grahame-Smith to include zombies and significant marital arts training for young women transform a pre-feminist work into a contemporary feminist work focused on individual empowerment and choice. This assertion is supported through extensive textual reference from Grahame-Smith's novel. The philosophy of Third Wave feminism is first examined in order to provide a clear framework and definition for this critique. *Pride and Prejudice* is briefly reviewed as a proto-feminist work in order to compare the original novel to the adaptation. To further define the impact and contributions of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, feminism and the roles of women in other works of horror are discussed along with a brief examination of the use of zombies in contemporary media as social commentary.

Brides of Death, or How Zombies Brought Feminism to Pre-Victorian Women in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. –Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains. –Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

Thank you, sir, but I am perfectly content being a bride of death. –Elizabeth Bennet—Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

There is no explanation offered as to why corpses walk the countryside in search of human flesh in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), but like other unmentionables of the time, the plague of the living dead simply must be dealt with in the most English fashion possible. That is to say that no matter the level of unpleasantness, the Bennet girls must face a zombie horde with poise, grace and a well-wielded katana sword.

Jane Austen's six Regency Era novels, including *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), were penned nearly two hundred years ago and are perhaps more popular now than they have ever been before. Her novels have increasingly gained popularity due in part to a surge in film adaptations including period pieces such as *Mansfield Park* and *Sense and Sensibility*, modern re-imaginings such as *Clueless*, re-tellings such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* and new storylines sometimes with the author herself as a character such as *Jane Bites Back*, and the 2009 literary mash-up *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies takes Austen's original novel and adds to it zombies, ninjas and martial arts lessons abroad for the Bennet sisters. The addition of zombies and the arming of female characters by Grahame-Smith to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* takes a proto-feminist novel and transforms it into a Third Wave feminist novel. These changes

empower the characters with lethal skill and offer the women of Regency England a choice beyond either marriage or spinsterhood. Becoming a “Bride of Death” offers a woman a range of strengths and skills beyond what is otherwise available to her; it offers a chance at battlefield equality with the suggestion of further equality to come. Understanding the contemporary feminist movement and feminism in the horror genre provides an essential framework for interpreting *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

Understanding The Third Wave

Before contemporary, or Third Wave, feminist theory can be applied to Grahame-Smith’s “bone crunching” novel of “zombie mayhem,” the theory requires some exploration and a clear definition (back cover).

Contemporary Feminism goes by many names and definitions largely because there is little academic or critical consensus as to exactly what it is and what it isn’t. The Third Wave is sometimes called Postfeminism, Postmodern feminism, Third World feminism or even Reactionary feminism (Lotz 3-4). In order to have an intertextual dialogue between this paper, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and works of criticism on Jane Austen, feminisms, and the horror genre, an unambiguous definition of feminism as it is used here must be offered.

Third Wave is the umbrella term for contemporary feminisms. The Third Wave is so called because it comes after the First Wave (the Women’s Suffrage Movement) and the Second Wave (the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 70s focusing on improving social and legal equality). The Third Wave is often seen as being generational because this term is usually used to apply to feminists who “are too young to have experienced second-wave feminist

activism” (Lotz 3). They are too young to have experienced a life before feminism, and it is therefore a reaction to the Second Wave. It acknowledges the Second Wave’s exclusion of women of color, women in the Third-World and transgendered women by expressly including these women in its philosophy and writings as subjects and as scholars (Gillis et al. 232). It’s also a reaction to the “femi-nazi” stereotype created by the media’s interpretation of Second Wave activists: the Third Wave embraces contradictions and all expressions of femininity.

In her forward to *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, Imelda Whelehan notes that whereas the Second Wave disagreed internally on the ownership of feminism, the Third Wave is willing to accept that no one owns feminism and “in doing so have thrown all the certainties up in the air...” (Gillis et al, xv), thus making feminism more open and inclusive. Rosemarie Tong makes Third Wave feminism a bit more clear in her book *Feminist Thought*: “[Third wave feminist] writers...insist that nowadays, women are free to be whoever they want to be and to do whatever they want to do” (Tong 290). Further emphasizing the openness of the movement, Tong states, “Third wave feminists are open to women’s different social, economic, political, cultural and sexual differences” (Tong 287). Another important aspect in understanding Third Wave theory is its dialogue with other theories. Scholar Ann Brooks writes that:

Postfeminism [or Third Wave feminism] expresses the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism, and as such represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks. (Brooks 4)

The Third Wave of feminism has no single unifying definition universally agreed upon by scholars. Third Wave feminism is used here to mean the philosophy that promotes the individual empowerment of women through an acceptance of multiple and even contradictory

identities. These identities are achieved through an individual's ability to choose behaviors, interests and direction within the individual's culture, social and political situation. This individual empowerment is the foundation for broader social change. The Third Wave is open to women who were previously shut out of the movement during the Second Wave, and the Third Wave incorporates the ideas that interrogate oppressive practices. This last aspect is important to the Third Wave movement though it is not applicable to either *Pride and Prejudice* or *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* except where it is to note the absence of women of color or other underrepresented groups.

Manners, Marriage and Mayhem

Set in Regency England, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* follows the Bennet family of the fictional village of Meryton. The Bennets have five daughters and an entail on the estate they inhabit, making marriage for their daughters an important priority. The girls' mother, Mrs. Bennet, makes it her primary job to assist her daughters in marrying well. The story follows Elizabeth, the second eldest daughter, most closely. Elizabeth is the novel's heroine. The novel tells of Elizabeth's civil interactions with family, friends, potential suitors and others. The prideful Fitzwilliam Darcy draws out Elizabeth's prejudice. This oppositional tension becomes romantic tension.

Ever present in this comedy of manners are the perils of living in a pre-Victorian world on the verge of being overrun with the walking dead. Interwoven with Elizabeth's polite society are her battles with the unmentionables. Quirk Books, the publisher of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, describes the book on its title page as "The Classic Regency Romance—Now With Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem." Essentially, this statement succinctly summarizes Grahame-

Smith's story. Grahame-Smith takes the revered Austen novel and "adds only the lightest sprinkling of walking corpses, Shaolin training, katana duels, dojos on country estates, and young ladies succumbing to the strange plague," writes Donna Bowman who reviewed the book for the *Onion's A.V. Club* (n. pag). Though the majority of the work remains Austen's, the additions fill out the narrative without making them stand out. Grahame-Smith makes his presence largely seamless, revealing the undead and Bennett sisters' skill in the deadly arts rather than creating a clunky interference with the rest of the story. "His book is actually 80 percent original Austen text—he's simply woven a complementary monster story line into the existing romance" (Hesse n. pag.).

The author himself acknowledges the delicacy of reworking a classic saying, "I didn't want to mess with Jane Austen's overall structure, because it's a masterpiece. Who am I to screw with one of the most brilliantly plotted novels of all time?"(qtd. in Grossman n. pag.). What comes across in the transformation from romance to romance with zombies is both a sense of humor and a respect for Austen's art. Grahame-Smith's somewhat light touch and treatment of *Pride and Prejudice* allows Austen's work to shine, preserving and even enhancing her original themes. "...For a Jane Austen fan, the gratifying aspect of reading *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is not the comic bloodthirsty additions, but rather how they highlight the humor that already exists in the original *Pride and Prejudice*" (Hesse n. pag). The humor and the horror added through *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* underscore the themes in the original and builds upon them, particularly the theme of feminism.

The proto-feminist elements present in Austen's novel, notably the independence of Elizabeth, is developed in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* with that independence turning into women's almost superhero fighting skills. The Bennett sisters have been trained in the "deadly

arts” in China at some point before the story begins. The location of their training is significant. In the novel, Japanese training is considered the best available. Having Chinese training puts the girls at a social disadvantage, though their skills, particularly Elizabeth’s, prove to be exceptional. The extreme training they receive and the physical strength and skill they possess are equivalent to that of other trained assassins such as the ninjas, who also make an appearance in the novel. Stepping outside the norms for feminine behavior in Regency England, which was less restrictive than the later Victorian era, Elizabeth and her sisters possess the power to kill humans and non-humans even as they meter their behaviors through the social mores of the age. Grahame-Smith finds Austen’s work to lend itself well to the inclusion of zombies for a similar reason:

...These people in Austen’s books are kind of like zombies. They live in this bubble of extreme wealth and privilege, and they’re so preoccupied with the little trivial nothings of their lives—who’s dating who, who’s throwing this ball, or having this dinner party. As long as there’s enough lamb on the dinner table, they could care less what’s falling apart around them. So in this book, in this version, it literally is falling apart around them, and they sort of carry on writing letters to each other about hurt feelings and loves and passions and all these things.

(Grahame-Smith qtd. in Grossman n. pag.)

Elizabeth, like the book, is herself a mash-up: She is a lady, and she is a trained killer. The Bennets’ training in the deadly arts lead the girls to accept the title of “Brides of Death.” Like being a knight, being a Bride of Death requires a commitment to the defense of the Crown. One of the few ways to terminate this contract is marriage. During the course of the narrative, Elizabeth’s close friend Charlotte is bitten by a zombie, and during the long period of her

transformation into one of the undead, she marries Mr. Collins, the cousin of the Bennet's who has the good fortune to be the closest male relative and is entitled to the Benett's estate at the death of Mr. Bennet. Charlotte's change goes unnoticed or at least unspoken of by all but Elizabeth, who keeps the information to herself. Charlotte's change highlights the tendency of this pre-Victorian age to simply ignore the unpleasant, as Jacobsen notes: "As the plot and Charlotte's disease progress, zombieism takes its place alongside sex, love and money as things not talked about in polite society, even when they are obvious" (Jacobson n. pag). Ignoring the objectionable or providing comfortable euphemisms is a part of Austen's humor in her original novel, and those elements are alive and capitalized upon in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. "Reading *Zombies* means discovering that half of the things you're laughing about were written 200 years ago by Austen herself" (Hesse n. pag.). The themes present in the original *Pride and Prejudice* are still present: issues of class, education and gender equality and feminism still exist, but the addition of zombies by Grahame-Smith enhances these themes and adds greater meaning.

A Word About Women, Horror and Zombies

An examination of feminism in a zombie story should not neglect either the background of the roles of women in horror nor the history of zombies in books and cinema. For this purpose, I offer a brief exposition on women in horror stories and zombies as meaning makers.

WOMEN IN HORROR

Few horror films have been nominated or won an Oscar in a major category aside from the thriller *The Silence of the Lambs*, yet this shouldn't imply that the genre is without depth or value above the entertainment of a late night movie or a book read with the covers pulled close.

In these drama packed stories, society's best and worst traits are examined. Among the issues examined are gender roles, particularly the roles of women who are often victims and heroines (Clover 4). The extreme circumstances in horror stories allow for the situations of everyday existence to be closely examined. In these stories, some people are helpless while others selflessly save friends and family. In these stories, women can be as strong or stronger than the men. Horror is both a vehicle for the exploitation of women just as it is a vehicle for the empowerment and equality of women, sometimes even for the same character in the same story. One such example of this type of story is the genuinely horrifying 1978 rape-revenge film *I Spit on Your Grave* in which a young woman is savagely raped by four men whom she spends the rest of the film emasculating and killing (IMDB). Carol Clover, known for her writings on the subject of gender in horror films writes, about slasher films and finds *I Spit on Your Grave* and other revenge films to be about the transformation from victim to hero (or vigilante) (Clover 123). Another victim-heroine in horror is Carrie White in the novel and film versions *Carrie*. In this story, supernatural powers are linked to Carrie's menarche. A victim of bullying by other students and religiously based oppression by her mother, Carrie's transition from girl to sexually mature woman gives her power. Stephen King, author of *Carrie*, comments on the feminist themes in *Carrie* in comparison to another horror film in his book on writing, *Danse Macabre*: "If the *Stepford Wives* concerns itself with what men want from women, then *Carrie* is largely about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality..." (King 171-2).

More common in the horror genre is the so-called "final girl," the last female alive in the film who takes on the killer/monster/evil and overcomes him alone (or sometimes waits it out for help) (Clover 35). Examples of films that feature the "final girl" are *Friday the 13th* (1980),

Scream (1996) and *The Descent* (2005). These films feature women who are stalked and terrified by a killing force. They watch their friends die and end up only narrowly escaping death themselves before they are finally able to kill the killer themselves. The final girl is a representation of the abilities of women and of the strengths of feminism. The final girl emerges from an ordinary woman going about her ordinary life when acted upon by an extreme situation. Her self-preservation and strength appear to come from some natural source within her. Another representation of this internal source of strength is in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Buffy is also a prime example of woman operating as a feminist in the Third Wave. "...Buffy 'has the sort of conscience that appeals to the daughters of feminism's second wave', women for whom 'a certain awareness of gender and power is ingrained and inextricably linked to our sense of identity and self esteem' (par. 8)" (Fudge qtd. in Gillis et al. 226). The pretty former cheerleader turned trained killer shares much in common with the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Buffy is a contradiction, and she, like Elizabeth Bennet, is a force to be reckoned with. Pender finds Buffy to be a promoter of the Third Wave. "The refusal of misogynist violence, the battle against institutionalized patriarchy, and the potential of transnational feminist activism are issues that remain at the forefront of the third wave agenda..." (Gillis et al. 234). Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Elizabeth Bennet the Zombie Killer are sisters in slaughter and each represent the Third Wave woman.

The horror genre in both books and films is filled with fairy tale like lessons on living in the modern world (Clover 231). Horror writers and directors are saying something with their work, something about society's institutions, and very often those relate to gender and feminism. When answering the question "why horror?" in the afterward of her book *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, Clover offers an extensive answer that ends with this: "Because at least some horror

filmmakers read Freud” (Clover 232). Her answer suggests that horror is more than entertainment for Halloween night; it is a representation of as well as a critique on our culture. Horror writers and directors make decisions in their narratives to use psychology as well as other disciplines to convey their criticism of culture.

ZOMBIES AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY

The reception of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* proves the overwhelming popularity of the zombie horror subgenre. The reason for the popularity of this apocalyptic group of stories is the versatility of the subject and corresponding themes: zombies are a stand-in for social issues and the expression of a desire for social change. The father of the modern zombie is writer-director George A. Romero (Paffenroth 1).

Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) not only defined the genre in terms of putting forth the rules for zombies, but it also set the bar for the social commentary of zombies as well. The critique in *Night of the Living Dead* is subtler than in Romero’s other films and perhaps all the more powerful for it. Race is never mentioned in the story where a black man and a white woman, strangers to each other, lock themselves in a rural farmhouse surrounded by zombie hordes. At the end of the story, only Ben, the black man, remains, and when a posse of white men with guns and dogs comes upon the house, they shoot Ben on sight, assuming he is another zombie. The posse is often compared to a lynch mob murdering Ben for “living” with a white woman (Paffenroth 37-8). Zombies in this film are a stand in for racism, which at the height of the Civil Rights Movement could be considered to be a force capable of devouring anyone touched by it. *In Night of the Living Dead* the devouring is literal (and disgusting). “Romero uses horror rather more as it is used in the tradition of American Gothic literature...where shocking violence and depravity are used to disorient and reorient the audience, disturbing them in order to

make some unsettling point, usually a sociological, anthropological, or theological one” (Paffenroth 2). Zombies can represent any group of people or behavior. Zombies are still people. They look like us and act like us in some very basic ways; “...what makes zombies more terrifying than other monsters is that this confusing resemblance of zombies to normal people never goes away” (Paffenroth 9). Zombies are us.

Zombie stories have a particularly interesting history where feminism is concerned. Women in zombie films—with the noticeable exception of *Night of the Living Dead*—are strong women who hold their own. “The critique of sexism in zombie movies is not nearly as prominent, and seems more a mocking jibe directed at the audience’s expectations, than it is an indictment of the characters in the audience” (Paffenroth 19). Of note is the remake *Night of Living Dead* (1991) in which the female lead character significantly differs from her original 1968 counterpart when she overcomes her fear and helplessness and becomes a strong character and picking up a gun to fight. Paffenroth goes on to note that nearly “every movie...features strong women characters who are nearly as effective at killing zombies as the male characters, and who are much more compassionate, caring and cooperative with other humans than their male companions” (Paffenroth 19). It seems that in many ways the disaster of a zombie outbreak helps to bring equality to women in these stories, essentially showing that women are better at survival and human relations even under the tense circumstances of the dead rising from their graves.

In this tradition, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* uses the presence of zombies to elevate the status of women. Seth Grahame-Smith comments on meaning of zombies in an interview, saying:

And since the '20s, when *White Zombie* came out, and in the 1960s, with the

Romero movies, zombies have always been an easy metaphor for whatever ills society finds itself up against. They've been used to represent everything from rampant consumerism to the spread of communism. We live in an age when it's very easy to be afraid of everything that's going on in the world. There are these large groups of faceless people somewhere in the world, who mean to do us harm, and cannot be reasoned with. Zombies are sort of familiar territory.

(Grahame-Smith Interview by Grossman n. pag)

It seems that Austen also lends her work well to the infusion of zombies (as well as feminism): “So much of Austen is about the unmentionable – about using wit and good manners to cover up nasty things like sex and money. So why not have one of those unmentionable things be zombies?” (Grossman n. pag).

***Pride and Prejudice* as Proto-Feminism**

During feminism's Second Wave, feminists began turning to classic literature and applying a new critical feminist lens in order to illuminate meaning in these texts. Since the late 1960s, readers of Austen's works have enjoyed an added element overlooked before. The independence of thought and action demonstrated by Elizabeth Bennet has become a sort of pre-feminist beacon for feminist thinkers from the Second Wave forward. Lloyd Brown writes on feminism in Austen at the height of the Second Wave in his article titled “Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition.” His assertions in this article clearly align Austen's novels with a feminist philosophy, particularly that of Mary Wollstonecraft who penned the 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which would have been available to Austen. Brown suggests that Austen's heroines embrace feminist ideas before the word feminist was coined, “...the experiences and

states of Jane Austen's heroines, especially in *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*, suggest that Jane Austen is sympathetic to the eighteenth-century feminist revolt against narrow male definitions of female personality and women's education" (Brown 332). Austen's work comes at a time when women are just starting to consider inequities in general, social terms. Her work doesn't scream feminism, but rather, it whispers an exception, a challenge to the contemporaneous ideas about female behaviors and the ideas about female constancy, education and marriage. Of these, education is a key point in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. At the core of the argument in both novels, but particularly in *Pride and Prejudice*, is the "female accomplishment" debate. This scene is at the center of the issue and is further supported by the differences between the characters.

...It is in *Pride and Prejudice* that we are most aware of a conscious, and extended, preoccupation with conflicting concepts of education for women—and the relationship between that education and marriage. The conflicts are explicit in the differences between the Bennet sisters, in the parents' incompatible attitudes towards their own roles as mother and father, and in the spirited debate on "female accomplishment" at Netherfield. (Brown 328)

The differences referred to by Brown are one of Austen's methods of drawing the reader's attentions to the contradictions between reality and prejudices through the contrast of real versus caricatured characters. The "accomplished female" debate in *Pride and Prejudice* is a part of this method showing the Regency Era's upper and middle class expectations of women. The accomplished female debate also shows Darcy's interest in something more than the common expectations of a woman that Mrs. Bennet or Miss Bingley might believe paramount, a woman

who can play music and sing. The debate shows Elizabeth's irritation with the expectations of her and her fellow women, and it allows the reader to see that Darcy and Elizabeth are a match. Brown finds Austen to be in agreement with one of the original proto-feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, through Austen's accomplished woman debate where a so-called "ornamental" approach to education, such as in Miss Bingley's knowledge of music and dancing and the like, is challenged by Darcy's statement and Elizabeth's persona. Darcy finds that the woman he desires as a mate, an accomplished woman, be in possession of something more "...in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (Austen 27). This cues the reader to note that the best candidate in the story to fit Darcy's interest is Elizabeth. "The eventual union of Darcy and Elizabeth emphasizes the superiority of the truly accomplished mind as it is defined by Darcy. Elizabeth herself is obviously intended to approximate the Darcy (and Wollstonecraft) ideal" (Brown 332).

It's easy for the reader to see that Elizabeth is the ideal. She is to the reader a "real" person. Elizabeth is not a romantic figure of a literary daydream like Emma Bovary: she is a realistic character. She is emotionally strong, bright and genuine. "Elizabeth Bennet, who, like all the heroines, is presented as an undistorted portrait. The simplest comic effects are gained by bringing the caricatures into direct contact with real people, as in Mr. Collins' visit to the Bennets and his proposal to Elizabeth" (Gray 298). More than comic effect, this contrast between real and caricatured characters is where meaning is made in the story. By highlighting differences in behaviors between characters using the caricature versus the realistic character, these contrasts politely point an arrow at the social issues of the roles of women. This works particularly well for Austen's subtle proto-feminism. Elizabeth is the realistic character in contrast to many other women in the story including her younger sisters, her mother, Miss

Bingley and Lady Catherine. Elizabeth's mother and sisters and Miss Bingley are tied up in manners and a path towards marriage with no interest in any other subject that isn't related to making them more appealing as wives:

Miss Bingley, Lydia and Kitty are all sex-seekers [women who base their identity on their sexual roles], determined to complete their identity within a narrow concept of sexual roles—a concept that is embodied, on the parental level, by Mrs. Bennet, whose 'business' in life is getting her daughters married. (Brown 330)

Possibly the worst example of this in the novel is the well-meaning Mrs. Bennet. She is a poor representation of a felicitous wife. Her only focus in the entire story is also on marriage times five: a husband, any husband as it turns out, for her daughters. It is, however, fair to note that the entail on the Bennet's estate is a reasonable concern for a mother of five unmarried daughters who could not inherit (Pool 90).

In short, Mrs. Bennet, out of ignorance and an adherence to commonism, is willing to sell her daughters short on happiness in exchange for having them married. There is nothing malicious in Mrs. Bennet's ideology or behavior, but it is driven by a one-mindedness that marriage is the only goal for a woman. That one-mindedness cannot even be assuaged by the love for her five daughters. Though Mrs. Bennet would likely disagree, her concept of participation in and expectations of other women's female constancy is shown in *Pride and Prejudice* to be as the result of socialization and not of biology: "Female constancy is a result of social conditioning, rather than inherent 'sentimental talents.' 'A mistaken education, a narrow, uncultivated mind, and many sexual prejudices, tend to make women more constant than men'"

(Wollstonecraft qtd. in Brown 327). The culmination of Austen's work in *Pride and Prejudice*, particularly the unions of Jane with Bingley and Elizabeth with Darcy, is a softly treading challenge to the ideas of female constancy, what composes a quality education for women and what marrying well means for the characters of the story. Instead of an endorsement of the requirement of women to marry, Austen endorses the idea of marriage for love through the wedding of Jane and Bingley and Elizabeth and Darcy.

Jane Austen's work is proto feminist because she asks questions of the established mores for women in regard to female constancy, education and marriage. This foundation of pre-feminist awareness is the basis for Seth Grahame-Smith's infusion of Third Wave ideals into the literary fabric of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Since the original work already contains the issues of female constancy, education and marriage, it seems a natural in Grahame-Smith's 2009 edition that those issues be highlighted under a contemporary lens. Female constancy gives way to the contradictions of well-mannered female trained assassins. Education takes on a physical aspect and therefore an androgynous one. And marriage becomes more an option and less a requirement.

***Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* as Third Wave Feminism**

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies takes Austen's original novel and adds to it undead, flesh eating ladies and gentlemen of the Regency era, kung-fu, sword fights and masked ninjas. The addition of zombies to *Pride and Prejudice* changes the proto feminist novel into a Third Wave feminist novel by empowering girls in petticoats and ruffles with a lethal education and offering them a choice outside marriage or spinsterhood. The work and discipline involved in becoming a Bride of Death offers a woman a range of strengths and skills beyond what is

otherwise available to her at this time and place in history. It gives a woman at least one forum of equality: the battlefield. This serves as a likely gateway for future equalities including one in the form of marriage as is suggested by the union of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Grahame-Smith's revisionist *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* exists in an era of inequality for women. It adds extreme circumstances that alter the dynamics of gender roles and offer options for the Bennet girls and other women with an interest in cultivating physical strength and mental acuity. These changes open doors leading to beginnings of gender equities with the suggestion of more to come.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies is a hybrid work of literature based on the book by Jane Austen and transformed by Seth Grahame-Smith, a male writer born in 1976 and reared in the era of the Third Wave. The resulting work stands strongly upon Austen's original themes of issues of social class, the education and roles of women, and marriage and presents them within the contemporary framework of feminism. Austen herself has already laid the feminist groundwork as is noted here: "Anyone who's read Lizzie Bennet's smack-down of Mr. Collins's marriage proposal knows that the girl is not going to be flailing about helplessly when the aliens [or zombies] come to town" (Hesse n. pag). The revisions made in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* build upon the themes of the original novel; those changes reflect Third Wave viewpoints on the issues of education, marriage, sexuality, contradictions and choice.

EDUCATION

The issue of the education of women takes on new meaning in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. In addition to the conventional education available to women in the Regency period, education through books and institutional education, the zombie outbreak in this version of the

novel has necessitated another kind of education: physical education, specifically, intense martial arts and combatives. Before zombies, this sort of education is almost exclusively available to males and is rare even for them. Even the title of Jane Austen's novel makes a reference to the education of women as it implies human faults; Elizabeth's being prejudice, but pride and prejudice can be seen as "...necessary defects of desirable merits: self-respect and intelligence" (Rubinstein 97). Elizabeth's natural intelligence and a physical education set her apart from the other women in the novel. Elizabeth is the accomplished woman. Elizabeth's response in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* to the "accomplished woman" debate at Netherfield is a bit different than in the original Austen version. Present is still Elizabeth's irritation at Darcy's comment and his desire for a woman with everything, but added is Elizabeth's defense of her and her sisters. She says, "In my experience a woman is either highly trained or highly refined. One cannot afford the luxury of both in such times. As for my sisters and I, our dear father thought it best that we give less of our time to books and music, and more to protecting ourselves from the sorry stricken" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 34). Though Elizabeth as our heroine is somewhat special, all of the Bennet girls and any other girls with the same kind of physical education are at an advantage.

Several times throughout the story, the Bennet sisters save lives through their honed, elite skills when others without such skills are not equipped to save themselves. At the Netherfield Ball, the festivities are interrupted when a horde of unmentionables break in. The partygoers rely on the skill of the Bennets to deal with the threat using "the pentagram of death" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 14). Again and again the Bennet sisters prove in life and death situations that not only are they finely trained but also that their execution of that training is superior to others trained in the deadly arts.

The subject of the Bennet sisters training also touches upon the issue of social class. The Bennets are a middle class family, and for issues of finances or otherwise, Mr. Bennet chooses to send his daughters to China for their training. Chinese training is looked down upon by the upper class as is demonstrated by Lady Catherine when she says, “Young ladies should always be properly guarded and attended, unless they are that rare sort of lady, like myself, who has been trained by the most respected masters of Japan—and not by those appalling Chinese peasants” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 168). Late in the novel, Elizabeth takes an opportunity to answer to Lady Catherine’s insults in a martial arts showdown. Elizabeth shows the old guard how it’s done in what is possibly a reference to the Third Wave reaction to Second Wave feminists. She takes on the snooty Lady Catherine and fights her almost to the death, restraining herself for the benefit of Lady Catherine’s nephew and Elizabeth’s future husband, telling her, “And for the rest of your days, you shall know that you have been bested by a girl for whom you have no regard, and whose family and master you have insulted in the harshest possible manner” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 292). Elizabeth proves to Lady Catherine what the reader by this time already knows: the lethal education offered to the Bennet girls makes Elizabeth and her sisters intensely well equipped for any situation. For Elizabeth, this education leads to a more liberal attitude towards acceptable behaviors and roles for women other than marriage.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is a central theme in this novel about five young sisters living during the 19th Century. In fact, marriage is a major preoccupation for just about all of the characters in the novel. Perceptions of marriage and the representations of marriage, however, vary significantly. The only marriages in the novel Austen depicts in a positive light are those based upon love. This

remains true in Grahame-Smith version. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, the depictions of the urgency of Mrs. Bennet's need to marry off her daughters take on an absurdity enhanced by the life and death drama unfolding on a constant basis. Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Collins in the midst of her transformation into an unmentionable emphasizes the emotional death that can occur for a woman who marries out of perceived necessity. Elizabeth is disinterested in marriage (in favor of her position) until she is moved by love. This supports the Third Wave ideal of choice and acceptable contradictions.

Mrs. Bennet is introduced to the reader as a one-minded biddy focused only on the marriage of her daughters. "The business of Mr. Bennet's life was to keep his daughters alive. The business of Mrs. Bennet was to get them married" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 9). Mrs. Bennet is a flat character who seems only to serve as a comic example of the old way of thinking about the value of and the roles of women, that is to say, a non-feminist way of thinking. Of the two parents, Mr. Bennet is a better representation of Third Wave feminist thought. Unlike his wife, he is focused on providing the best he can make available for his daughters for the preservation of their lives as well as for their happiness. It is Mr. Bennet who has given his daughters a choice in life by taking them to China to learn the deadly arts. Mrs. Bennet only thinks of marrying her daughters off. She sees their pursuit of strength and skill as unimportant: "What joy to see them all thus provided for! To see them entertaining at their own estates; raising their own children, instead of all this silly training and fighting" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 79). The senior Bennets don't make marriage look like the romance the younger Bennet girls seem to imagine it to be. They are a fairly poor example of marital bliss.

Had Elizabeth's opinion been drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. Her

father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humor which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. (Austen and Grahame-Smith 189)

This summary of the Bennet's marriage is original to Austen's novel. Elizabeth alone seems to take notice of the lessons a poor marriage has to offer. Her younger sisters are strongly allied with their mother on their opinions of marriage as a goal. Though the younger Bennet sisters are somewhat empty headed, they are also skilled fighters who have a cool approach to violence. When they stumble upon an unmentionable in wedding clothes they easily put her down and note with sadness the waste of a beautiful wedding dress, reminding the reader that they are their mother's daughters and focused on marriage or finery at all times (Austen and Grahame-Smith 91).

After Lydia runs off with Wickham, Darcy renders him lame by breaking his legs and pelvis and forcing him to make things right by marrying Lydia, which he does (Austen and Grahame-Smith 243-5). Mrs. Bennet is happy for her daughter's marriage in spite of the many reasons not to be: "To know that her daughter would be married was enough. She was disturbed by no fear for her happiness as the eternal nurse to a lame, fortuneless husband, nor humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 246). In the revision, Lydia and Wickham's fates become tied with their marriage; she becomes his caregiver, resigned—even pleased—to empty a bedpan for the rest of his life. In marriage, Elizabeth's dearest friend Charlotte fares no better.

Charlotte is the poster child for Regency womanhood. She is refined; she is not trained as the Bennet sisters are. She behaves herself and acts as any etiquette manual for the times would instruct. She tells Elizabeth, “happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance, and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 20). Charlotte’s marriage to Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is a marriage for convenience that symbolically kills her. At the same time Elizabeth and the reader learn of Charlotte’s impending marriage to Collins, we also learn that Charlotte is infected with the virus that causes zombification. Charlotte’s marriage to the unpleasant Collins, a man she doesn’t love, is linked to her transformation into an unmentionable herself (Austen and Grahame-Smith 99). At the moment she announces her upcoming wedding, she also announces her upcoming death.

And at her wedding, Charlotte’s terrible condition seems to go unnoticed by all but Elizabeth (Austen and Grahame-Smith 110). Women marrying men they do not love for financial or social motivations are so commonplace as not to register except to the enlightened Elizabeth. Once Charlotte is near the very end of transformation, when she has lost speech and politeness, her husband, Mr. Collins offers this compliment of her to Elizabeth, “My dear Charlotte and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in everything a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us. We seemed to have been designed for each” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 171). When Charlotte has lost herself to marriage and zombieism, Collins finds her to be a perfect wife. Elizabeth is heart broken by Charlotte’s marriage/death. She understands Charlotte’s motivations but knows that she is not forced to rely upon a husband because she has an option of her own.

Elizabeth Bennet views marriage as an option—one she's not very interested in for much of the novel. In the revision, Elizabeth states, "My talents and my times demand my service, and I believe the Crown more pleased to have me on the front lines than at the altar" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 115). At this point in history, marriage could mean the end of a woman's own identity. "When a husband and wife exchanged vows, they became one person, and in the words of jurist William Blackstone, 'the husband is that person'" (Pool 184). This is not the kind of marriage Elizabeth would be willing to accept. She finds herself in her artful skills at death. Marriage would end her required contract with the Crown: "...We are each commanded by His Majesty to defend Hertfordshire from all enemies until such time as we are dead, rendered lame, or married" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 226). For Elizabeth to consider a relationship as strong as marriage, she requires an equal. When her cousin, Mr. Collins proposes marriage to her, she is disgusted with him because he is not her equal. "She was horrified at the thought of marrying a man whose only skill with a blade was cutting slivers of gorgonzola" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 71). Elizabeth wants a partner or no man at all. Her physical education offers her that choice. Elizabeth is not desperate for a husband as her mother would like her to be or as her younger sister as doing themselves. When she meets Mr. Darcy, she is put off by his pride in himself and his arrogant behavior. When he delivers his ill-mannered comment to Elizabeth, her first instinct is violence: "The warrior code demanded she avenge her honour" (Austen and Graham-Smith 13). Elizabeth reaches for her ankle dagger but is distracted when a group of zombies crash the party. Elizabeth thinks for herself; marriage is not a priority. What changes for her is discovering a partner in Darcy. She falls in love with a man who she knows respects her in all aspects, who respects her strength as a warrior. She makes a choice to enter a marriage for love and not out of need. Elizabeth sees her marriage as a partnership of equals, "What a pair of

warriors they would make!” Sparring by the river at Pemberly; crossing the Altai Mountains in a fine coach on their way to Kyoto or Shanghai—their children eager to master death as their mother and father had before them (Austen and Grahame-Smith 250). Third Wave theory embraces this type of contradiction. Elizabeth doesn’t buck tradition entirely and abstain from marriage on principle. She does what makes her happy and allows her to retain her identity. In keeping with another portion of Third Wave theory, it seems that Elizabeth doesn’t abstain at all.

SEXUALITY

Elizabeth’s time was somewhat less restrictive than the Victorian era that followed only 20 years after the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*. The Regency era had somewhat relaxed social requirements of men and women. “In Jane Austen’s era, Evangelicalism had not yet cast its blight over everyday middle-class and upper-class life, and clothes were still gaily colored and tight fitting...and unmarried men and women could sometimes socialize or go for carriage rides together, unchaperoned...” (Pool 187-8). What seems most obvious about this time is its somewhat freer acceptance of sexual behavior in contrast to the Victorian era that followed. “In 1800, about a third of the brides were pregnant on their wedding day” (Pool 189). In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, there is another element of the Third Wave lightly added. Expressions of sexuality in the form of sex outside of marriage and differing sexual orientations are accepted implicitly within the Third Wave without judgments. The first hint of Elizabeth’s sexuality is suggested when she is enchanted with Wickham. When Wickham enters the room, Elizabeth is affected: “Such was his effect on her—that those traits of her sex, despite all her training, remained susceptible to influence” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 62). More direct sexual notes are playfully suggested in Grahame-Smith’s novel in a way that can be considered juvenile but

can also indicate openness to sex. In one instance, Charlotte asks Mr. Darcy if he approves of her request for Colonel Forester to host a dance, a ball. His response: “With great energy; but balls are always a subject which makes a lady energetic” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 21). The original text in *Pride and Prejudice* uses the word “it” in place of “balls” (Austen 17). This sexual double entendre can seem silly but it implies that much like the “unmentionables” there is more going on in the story than is fit to print. This same term is used again in a conversation between Elizabeth and Darcy during a zombie attack. Elizabeth asks for Darcy’s musket bullets: “Your balls, Mr. Darcy? He reached out and closed her hand around them, and offered, “They belong to you, Miss Bennet” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 205). This is foreshadowing of the burgeoning sexual relationship between the two. “Fatigued as she had been by the morning’s attack, they had no sooner dined than she set off in quest of her former acquaintance, and (unbeknownst to the sleeping Mr. Gardiner) her evening was spent in the satisfactions of intercourse renewed after many years’ discontinuance” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 207). This one sentence is a subtle offering but is radically different than anything written by Austen. This passage clues the reader into Ms. Bennet’s openness with her own sexuality noting that this is not her first sexual encounter. Elizabeth is a representation of a Third Wave feminist. She is a lovely young lady who attends dances and country balls, who kills zombies—sometimes without the aid of weapons, who plays cards and adheres to social etiquette and is sexually active. Elizabeth embraces her own contradictions.

CONTRADICTIONS

“...[Elizabeth] is a warrior first, and a woman second” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 20).

Third Wave feminism accepts and even celebrates femininity in all of its forms. It embraces the

dynamic incarnations of womanhood. It promotes choice for women. Therefore, Elizabeth's free flowing traditional femininity and her more masculine, warrior traits are seen as harmonious. At any given time, Elizabeth is both a warrior and a woman. For instance, near the beginning of the book, "Elizabeth lifted her skirt, disregarding modesty, and delivered a swift kick to the creature's head, which exploded in a cloud of brittle skin and bone" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 28).

It's this complexity in character that Darcy seems to be attracted to in Elizabeth as was suggested in the accomplished woman debate. "...For never had he seen a lady more gifted in the ways of vanquishing the undead" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 42). This shows that Darcy is smitten even as Miss Bingley tries to sully Elizabeth's sparkle saying, "And, if I may mention a delicate subject, endeavor to check Miss Bennet's unladylike affinity for guns, and swords, and exercise, and all those silly things best left to men or ladies of low breeding" (Austen and Grahame Smith 42). Darcy seems to accept and appreciate the contradictions in Elizabeth. He certainly is aware of the womanly virtues that Miss Bingley holds, but she is missing something. Elizabeth is fully able to function in both worlds and appreciate the skills of women and warriors. Once Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst have bad-mouthed Elizabeth, they then spend the rest of the evening being as "agreeable" as never before. "Despite their lack of fighting skill, she had to admit that their powers of conversation were considerable" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 43). Elizabeth is able to respect their level of skill in something that is still important in Regency society, though she states, "if words were capable of beheading a zombie...[she] would...[be] in the company of the world's two greatest warriors" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 43). She admires them for the skill they possess, a trait of the Third Wave.

Elizabeth is a realistic superhero, a contradiction. Grahame-Smith styles her at times to be like a Greek goddess "...and with her sword, began cutting down the attackers with all the grace of Aphrodite, and all the ruthlessness of Herod" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 117). And at other times, just a girl: at Darcy's confession of love for her, she is so angered by his prideful manner and at his interference with Jane's happiness that she physically assaults Darcy. After the fight concludes, she sits down to cry, blaming "the feminine weakness which she had so struggled to exercise from her nature..." (Austen and Grahame-Smith 153).

And yet, Elizabeth remains a feminine woman with the strength of a fighter. When Elizabeth fights Lady Catherine's ninjas and wins, she takes a bite of one of the ninja's hearts. Later Elizabeth demonstrates a feat of unnatural strength where she executes a handstand and hold herself aloft with only a finger on each hand—but not before "fastening a modesty string around her ankles securing her dress" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 135-6).

In the end, Elizabeth understands that her unique composition of contradictions is what made Darcy fall in love with her. When he asks, Elizabeth tells Darcy why she believes he fell in love with her saying:

You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking, and looking, and thinking for your approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike them. I knew the joy of standing over a vanquished foe; of painting my face and arms with their blood, yet warm and screaming to the heavens—begging, nay daring, God to send me more enemies to kill. The gentle ladies who so assiduously courted you knew nothing of this joy, and therefore, could never offer you true happiness. (Austen and Grahame-Smith 311)

Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is one of Third Wave feminism's best representations in contemporary popular fiction. Not everyone favors this individualist approach that agrees to these contradictions. Second Wave feminist author, Susan Douglas, seems to prefer a more politically and socially active version of feminism in *Enlightened Sexism*, but she is able to supply a succinct summary of this portion of the movement.

[Feminism's] real achievement was to give young women the right to choose what they wanted and what they always and truly wanted, it seemed, was to be feminine and loved by a man. This new freedom to be feminine was a 'postfeminist triumph' that set apart the young women of the 1990s from the old feminists who cared too much about boring (and irrelevant) old politics. (Douglas 103)

Douglas notes that many representations of what she calls "the new girliness" are both "celebrated and mocked" (Douglas 102). Douglas clearly doesn't embrace all of the ideas of the new feminism, but she does acknowledge the dualities of the Third Wave, even if she finds it flippant in some of its manifestations. Girls can be both feminist, self aware and overtly traditionally feminine as Elizabeth Bennet is shown to be in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

CHOICE

The final element demonstrated in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is perhaps the most important to Third Wave feminism in the novel. It is the choice made available to women not to be defined by marital status (to become something other than wives or old maids). Ultimately, Jane, Elizabeth and Lydia all marry when they have the option to remain Brides of Death and work on behalf of the monarchy. Instead, each finds love and chooses to marry. Craig Jacobsen,

writing in the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, finds *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* to fall short of its feminist potential for exploring the change that zombies could bring to Regency England because "...Grahame-Smith's Bennet sisters are in the end married off, just as Jane Austen's are" (Jacobsen n. pag). It is true that the Bennet sisters marry at the end of both novels. The difference in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is that the sisters marry for their own reasons, namely love, after considering their choices. "Brides of death—were now, three of them, brides of man, their swords quieted by that only force more powerful than any warrior" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 317). Unlike poor Charlotte who has no training or other options, the Bennet sisters have an opportunity to do more than simply marry. The point is less about what the women in the story end up doing, the point is that they can choose at all. Jacobsen neglects the fact that marrying may end their contractual obligations but does not change the education they have had and how that will continue to be a part of their personalities and behaviors in the future, nor does he mention how such strength and skill may change the dynamic from traditional marriages.

At times Elizabeth sees her choice between her current lifestyle as a warrior for the Crown in opposition to a married life (Austen and Grahame-Smith 272). And this is confirmed with Mr. Collins as well as with Mr. Darcy. Mr. Collins assumes that Elizabeth will accept his most generous offer of marriage, and he also tells her that she must lay down her sword after her wedding day. To this, Elizabeth refuses his offer of marriage and assures him of her service to her position saying, "...for I am a warrior, sir, and shall be until my last breath is offered to God" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 85-6). And later, she decides that if Darcy doesn't propose, she will "never again divert [her] eyes from the end of [her] blade" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 274). In the end of the story, Elizabeth is able to reconcile her contradictions and chose both. Her

marriage to Darcy doesn't require her to give up her passion. She marries *and* continues to practice her skills in a dojo at Pemberley with Jane where she also trains Miss Darcy (Austen and Grahame-Smith 316-7). Contemporary feminism "allows" women to be professionals, wives, mothers and individuals, and in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, that philosophy is at work, allowing Elizabeth to make choices to be both a wife and a zombie killer.

In Conclusion

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies presents a literary mash-up of a piece of revered proto-feminist fiction with modern horror and contemporary Third Wave feminism to produce a complex work with meditations on the roles of women. The empowerment of the female characters in the story through a physical education, the challenges to marriage as a female duty, the embrace of contradictions in female constancy, and the choice to do something other than marry all suggest that feminism is flexible, open and important to society.

Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters, face to face with walking death, still have to face gossip, country balls, and dating as a part of life in their time and place. Grahame-Smith's subtle weaving of zombies into the pre-feminism cloth of the Regency Romance is informed by the work of the Third Wave, the horror genre, and the influence of George A. Romero.

There is no explanation offered as to why corpses walk the countryside in search of human flesh in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, but like other unmentionables of the time, the plague of the living dead simply must be dealt with in the most female, English fashion possible: with style, attitude and a sharpened katana sword.

Works Cited

- Austen, Jane and Seth Grahame-Smith. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009.
- Bowman, Donna. Rev. of "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies." *The Onion, A.V. Club*. The Onion, 16 April 2009. Web. 1 April 2010.
- Brown, Llyod. "Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 28.3 (1973): 321-338. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 April 2010.
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Dir. Joss Whedon. 20th Century Fox, 1997-2003. DVD
- Carrie*. Dir. Bryan DePalma. MGM, 1976. DVD.
- Clover, Carol. *Men, Women and Chain Saws*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Descent*. Dir. Neil Marshall. Lions Gate, 2005. DVD.
- Douglas, Susan. *Enlightened Sexism*. New York: Times Books, 2010.
- "Feminism in Jane Austen." Pemberely.com. Republic of Pemberely. n.d. Web. 1 April 2010.
- Friday the 13th*. Dir. Sean Cunningham. Paramount, 1980. DVD.
- Gillis, Stacy and Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, eds. *Third Wave Feminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Gray, Donald, ed. *Pride and Prejudice: A Norton Critical Edition, Third Edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- Grossman, Lev. "Pride and Prejudice, Now with Zombies!" *Time.com*. Time Magazine. 2 April 2009. Web. 1 April 2010.
- Hesse, Monica. "Zombie? Let Austen Flesh it Out." *The Washington Post*. The Washington Post Company. 17 April 2009. Web. 1 April 2010.

- Hockensmith, Steve. *Pride and Prejudices and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2010.
- "I Spit on Your Grave." IMBD.com Internet Movie Database, n.d. Web. 1 April 2010.
- Jacobsen, Craig. "Book Review." Rev. of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Vol. 3. Transformative Works and Cultures. 2009. Web. 1 April 2010.
- King, Stephen. *Danse Macabre*. New York: Berkley Books, 1981.
- King, Stephen. *Carrie*. New York: Doubleday, 1974.
- Lotz, Amanda. "Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the Next Century of Feminist Endeavor." *Women and Language* 26.1 (2003): 2-5. Print.
- Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. George Romero. Weinstein Company, 1968. DVD.
- Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. Tom Savini. Sony Pictures, 1991. DVD.
- Paffenroth, Kim. *Gospel of the Living Dead*. Waco, Texas: Baylor Press, 2006.
- Pool, Daniel. *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. Print.
- Rockler-Gladen, Naomi. "Third Wave Feminism." Suite101.com. Gay/Gender Studies. 3 May 2007. Web. 3 April 2010.
- Rubinstein, E., ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Pride and Prejudice*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969. Print.
- Schuessler, Jennifer. "I Was a Regency Zombie." NY Times.com. The New York Times. 21 Feb. 2009. Web. 1 April 2010.
- Scream*. Dir. Wes Craven. Dimension, 1996. DVD.

“Seth Grahame-Smith.” IMBD.com. Internet Movie Database, n.d. Web. 6 April 2010.

“Sketching a Background.” Regency.inamorta.nu. Regency, an era of Elegance, n.d. Web. 3 April 2010.

Stepford Wives. Dir. Bryan Forbes. Paramount Pictures, 1975. DVD.

Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2008.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.” 1792. New York: Penguin Classics, 2004.

A Reaction

As an undergraduate, I majored in Journalism. While the research and writing components of the program were intense, they were much different than in a literature program. The last year of the Journalism program requires students to work on a school publication. I wrote for the magazine and the online version of the magazine. There was no other thesis or final project. Therefore, the Culminating Experience represents the largest research and writing project I've undertaken in my academic career.

I began by reading. I read *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* first. I read this novel for personal enjoyment, but as I read it, I found much meaning in it. I knew I wanted to spend more time on this work. After the first few chapters, I knew I wanted to use it as the basis of my thesis. I spent a few months contemplating the story and its themes, looking for books I thought were related, and reading them. I revisited Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Then I spent two weeks gathering journal articles and reading them. And then, I was finally prepared to write. I spent two weeks writing, revising, reading and re-reading sources and looking for new sources. It was an intense experience. It was harder than I expected. Through the process, I learned some interesting things about academic writing, research and the difficulty of providing background for assertions in an academic paper. I learned some things about myself and my writing process. I believe that what I have learned will inform work I can do in the future, and that this work could lead to positive change at large for the study of literature.

During the course of this project, I read a great deal of academic work. I learned a number of things: 1). Academic writing is complex and verbose but seldom direct or succinct; 2). Scholarly consensus can be elusive; and 3). Providing enough background and context for a paper can be all consuming. I read a number of academic articles in journals and books on the

subjects of feminism, Third Wave feminism, Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, gender in horror and the themes represented by zombies. I was overwhelmed by some of these articles, particularly the articles on the Third Wave theory. I sought out these articles for the main purpose of finding a concise definition of the term “Third Wave feminism.” I never found one. In fact, I was surprised and a bit frustrated that so many articles were written on a topic that was defined only as not having an agreed upon definition. As a student, I was uncomfortable with defining this term myself while professional academics shy away from doing so. I determined that the only way to proceed was to use elements from scholars’ work through quoting and offer my interpretation, including a clear, concise definition of my own crafting.

At the same time, I found that many articles did not seem to agree with one another. One would define Third Wave feminism as applying to feminists born in a certain timeframe where others say that the generation is not as important as the ideals that the Third Wavers adhere to. I felt concerned about how to handle what elements are apart of this philosophy. I found myself asking “if these people don’t agree, how can I define what is included in Third Wave theory?” I felt that there is some measure of fear in the academic community on defining this term and maybe in other areas too. I took the same approach to the definition of Third Wave feminism. I collected as much information as I could. I wrote my understanding as clearly as I could and provided support from the same academic sources that began their works with a disclaimer that there isn’t much consensus.

The research I did on feminism and Third Wave feminism showed me that I couldn’t just insert a sentence of two into my paper defining my terms. I knew I needed to provide background. Once I started my section “Understanding the Third Wave,” I began thinking about what I wanted to say in my paper. My original plan had been to jump into analysis of *Pride and*

Prejudice and Zombies, pausing intermittently to provide a bit of background and scholarly explanations. I soon learned that my readers may not have the same background as I do—they may not have had a lifetime of study in the horror genre; they may not have any background in the gender studies and horror—and even if the reader does share a common history with me, I still need to lay out my findings and my assumptions to provide context for my final analysis. This changed my whole approach. No longer was my essay simply about one book: it was about influences from diverse scholarly and cultural sources that affected the creation of that one book and on my interpretation of that same book. Suddenly, I had to write detailed sections on the Third Wave, about the feminist elements revealed in the original novel through the Second Wave lens, about women in horror and about the use of zombies as social commentary. I needed to do all of this in order for the potential reader and the writer to be on the same page to begin to examine *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* as an example of Third Wave feminism influenced by a cultural history of horror as feminist liberator and zombies as instructional. This experience will continue to impact me, as I will be able to use it wherever I go in my career.

Perhaps having the experience fresh on my mind affects my response here, but I do believe that I will use what I've learned through this experience in the future. I will continue graduate work and will apply what I have learned about research and academic writing. In August, I continue with graduate education in another discipline—Social Work. Again I will be reading and researching. One of the main things I will do in future research projects is take a wider view of the subject before I drill down to details. I think my thesis is better because of the time I took and the effort I made to fill in background information. I believe if I can do that (maybe not so extensively) in future projects, my work will be better served, and my reader will be better informed.

When I started the MLS program, I was employed by the Oregon Department of Human Services, Addictions and Mental Health Division. If I'm lucky, I'll be able to return to the Department in another capacity once I have obtained my Masters of Social Work. The Division is the body that administrates over the state run mental hospital and all of the mental health and addiction treatment facilities and services in the state of Oregon. Nearly every position there requires research and writing. My previous position was as a Policy Analyst for the Medicaid program. Every time federal or state changes in the law were proposed, I was tasked with reading proposed legislation and writing impact statements for upper management. I may return to doing this kind of work. Even though I did a fine job of researching and writing under these circumstances, I think this huge project has changed the way I look at research. I feel more confident in relying on my judgments based upon my research. I have a better understanding of where to go for sources—I'm not limited by what I'm given—I can seek sources wherever I can find them.

And I am interested enough in the topic of feminism in horror to continue reading about it and writing about it. The reason I chose the MLS program in the first place is a lifelong wish to teach college level English. If I ever get the opportunity, I will seize it, even if it's teaching one class at a time. But whether or not I get to teach, I will always find the topic of women and feminism in the horror genre to be completely entertaining and academically engaging. There is no doubt that I will continue to read about the subject. If it appears that journals are interested in publishing my work, I will most certainly write about it. If it's possible to pursue publication, I believe my project can have a positive outcome on others.

The Culminating Experience has most certainly had a positive impact on me personally; and the work I did in my thesis can be used to have an impact on others. If I am able to publish

my essay, it may be used to promote the use of horror novels in literature classes for post-secondary and even secondary students. There is core set of horror novels that seemed to be a part of the high school and early college classes such as *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*. However, these canonical gothic tales are safe, and are so widely known and popularized as to be less instructional and more repetition of stories that students are already very familiar with. With exposure comes comfort, and if teachers and administrators become more comfortable with horror as an acceptable and beneficial genre to teach, then it's possible that teachers may be able to engage students who may have declined to pick up a book before.

My paper, along with other criticism, could help to convince teachers to use classic horror novels or even contemporary horror novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies* to engage male students disinterested in 19th century women writers or just young readers disinterested in reading. As a military spouse, I interact at meetings and bar-b-ques with young soldiers and their spouses. Most of these individuals are people who graduated high school and did not attend college, while some of them did not graduate high school. Many of these young people have told me things like "I don't read;" "I can't concentrate on a book;" "I never read a book in my life;" "Books are boring;" or "I only read fantasy [or romance]." As a lifelong reader, I find this to be sad and almost impossible to understand. How can these young people survive without books? How different...how much better off would they be if they *had* read books? It's possible that if they were introduced to a novel they were interested in enough to read that the world of literature would open up to them and impact the rest of their lives and even the lives of their children. Reading can be haven, especially for the young. I think that the high school curriculum should be a blend of genres designed to help students discover books, the world and themselves.

In addition, my thesis and other scholarly articles provide support for the critical value of horror novels. That is to say, that the more literary criticism written about the horror genre, the more accepted it will be as worthy of study for students and worthy of consumption for casual readers and filmgoers. As this body of work grows, popular critics may take the horror genre more seriously. My experience in reading the weekly reviews of horror films coming to my local theater is that the reviewers are most critical of the horror genre and only seem to comment on the face of the film. It's a rarity to see even a lapse into analysis of a horror film. If critics and consumers alike are able to evaluate a novel or book for its meaning, and find meaning, then they are able to place a higher value on that work. As a fan of the genre and its intricate themes, this is something I would like to see happen, and something I would like to contribute to wherever possible.

Coming to the conclusion of the Culminating Experience and my MLS program at Fort Hays State University feels like a true accomplishment. It's taken me longer to complete the program than it should have. It's been more work than I expected. And it will linger with me for the rest of my life. The work I did here was difficult and rewarding. I learned that I'm critical of academic writing. I learned to trust myself and my supported opinions. I learned that I can take an idea that seemed silly—writing about feminism in a zombie book—and make a legitimate academic argument. I have done something here that I am proud of.