

## Article

# Bloody Petticoats: Performative Monstrosity of the Female Slayer in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

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**Abstract:** In 2009, Seth Grahame-Smith published *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, sparking a subgenre that situates itself within multiple genres. I draw from the rebellious nature of nineteenth-century proto-feminists who tried to reclaim the female monster as an initial methodology to analyze Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth Bennet. I argue that the (white) women in this horror rewriting inadvertently become the oppressors alongside contextualized zombie theory. This article also explores Grahame-Smith's Charlotte Lucas as a complex female monster, as she is bitten and turned into a zombie, which reflects in part Jane Austen's Charlotte's social status and (potential) spinsterdom. It is the mythos of the zombie that makes Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth Bennet's feminist subversion less remarkable. And it is Charlotte's embodiment of both the rhetorical and the religio-mythic monster that merges two narratives: the Americanized appropriated zombie and the oppressed woman. Grahame-Smith's characters try to embody the resistance of twenty-first feminist sensibilities but fail due to the racial undertones of the zombie tangentially present in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

**Keywords:** female monsters; zombie theory; Elizabeth Bennet; Jane Austen; feminist theory

## 1. Introduction

I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud [...] and pieces of undead flesh upon her sleeve, no doubt from her attackers. Seth Grahame-Smith *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 35)

From mythology to twenty-first-century politics, the female monster image has remained pervasive in literary, historical, cultural, and political spheres. However, that has not prevented women from endeavoring to reclaim negative images as a protest to disrupt patriarchal societies and narratives. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Grahame-Smith 2009), Seth Grahame-Smith reimagines a proto-feminist ideology found in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which highlights the prescriptive female monster.<sup>1</sup> However, a twenty-first-century feminist rewriting of *Pride and Prejudice* unilaterally is unextraordinary. It is the zombie addition within Grahame-Smith's text that complicates the female monster role. The political and historical mythos of the zombie render the rebellious spirit of Grahame-Smith's female warriors in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* less impactful. Through the catalog of the female monster and the historical, social, and political mythos of the zombie in both England and North America, this article combines these two monsters to argue that the feminist reading in Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is less impressive than in Austen's original. These historical, proto-feminist movements have been repurposed and rewritten in Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, highlight feminist ideologies already found in the original texts, and promote an active, intersectional neo-nineteenth-century female monster image. However, I argue that these texts miss a crucial opportunity to subvert oppressive monster images for women. As in, the zombie mythos diminishes any subversive imagery gained by a post-*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon 1997–2003), third-wave feminist movement (Whedon 1997–2003). As the zombie is a racial monster grounded in the Haitian Revolution, their role as the direct opposition to Grahame-Smith's female characters creates a precarious sphere for both



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perceived and literal monsters. Therefore, this paper will ultimately argue that the open defiance of Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth Bennet lacks the rebellious essence informed by Austen's original characters and plot because of the racially informed—the *zombi(i)e*.<sup>2</sup> With Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth Bennet specifically, the author is engaging in an open dialogue with Jane Austen's text, playing and replaying the gender politics already present in the original *Pride and Prejudice*. I also conduct a close reading of Grahame-Smith's Charlotte Lucas to suggest the female monster epistemology and the zombie narrative merge to create a monstrous performance in this horrified reimagining, and Lydia Bennet, whose sexual transgression in Austen's text demonized her in two historical moments. In the succeeding section, I will catalog the female monster, beginning with separating the religio-mythic and the rhetorical monster—the latter connotes a culturally monstrous imagery predicated on the open defiance of Eve and Lilith.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this paper is mostly concerned with the rhetorical, human 'monster' imagery demonized by generations of association and comparison to the religio-mythic creatures that continue to haunt women in multiple spheres across several historical moments. Further, I conduct an expansive record of the zombie mythos, which reveals the Americanized reappropriation of a historically rebellious 'monster' derived from Haiti. In Grahame-Smith's horror reimagining, these 'monsters' are pitted against each other, challenging Austen's original progressive, proto-feminist ideology.

Although Austen's text features proto-feminist sensibilities, a close reading of this horrified reimagining reveals a deviation from the female monster discourse under the guise of progressive feminism. Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth's function within this horror reimagining suggests that she is the vehicle used to eradicate another demonized group and, therefore, violates the subversive disposition of their feminist predecessors. While Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth does promote an independent spirit found in the original nineteenth-century texts, in the rewriting process for a twenty-first-century audience, the female monster motif has changed to fit a less disruptive dialogue. In this horror reimagining, women seem to have lost some of the transgressive prowess present in their original counterparts. It is not their physical or military acumen that sets them apart from the original characters, but her function in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* perverts any kind of progress as the zombie's purpose represents a minority group previously enslaved.

## 2. Situating the Female Monster

Female monstrosity has historically been categorized in two ways: the religio-mythic monster, predicated on biblical and mythological stories, and the rhetorical monster, which functions as a hyperbolic tool to instill fear against progressive women. The rhetorical slander seems to consistently subsist from the biblical or mythological women who transgressed against the patriarchy as constructed by men, or in Eve's case, G-d.<sup>4</sup> The distinctions between these two categories reverberate against each other, creating a regularly hostile environment for women throughout many historical moments. The rhetorical female monster is repeatedly compared with the religio-mythic female monster and is demonized accordingly.

The second prevailing religio-mythic female monster figure is Lilith. Known as Adam's first wife who refused to submit to her husband sexually, Lilith is seen 'as both a succubus and a destroyer of infants' and claims the status of the first female monster in Jewish lore (Senf 1979, p. 1). When G-d threatened to drown her, she rejected him and subsequently gained a reputation for killing children and men who slept alone. In the *Zohar*, a principal text in Kabbalistic mysticism, men were discouraged from sleeping alone, and it is advised that newborns be adorned with protective talismans: 'Lilith's life was spent in two activities: seducing men and killing children' (Patai 1978, p. 233). According to Raphael Patai in *The Hebrew Goddess* (Patai 1978), the image of Lilith as the child killer haunted Jewish women, as well as women from other denominations, through the nineteenth century (Patai 1978, p. 240). This reading is seconded by Siegmund Hurwitz in *Lilith: The First Eve* (Hurwitz 1992), who argues that Lilith occupies the dominant 'demonic images' of not

only Judaism but the general female experience, as women were forced into a monstrous construction that has prevailed well into the twenty-first century (Hurwitz 1992, p. 25). Like Lucifer and Eve, Lilith's monstrosity became a symbol of empowerment and resistance for nineteenth-century feminists. Per Faxneld in *Satanic Feminism* (Faxneld 2017) argued not only that Lucifer became a symbol of liberation for women but also that famous nineteenth-century female figures adorned satanic motifs as a form of resistance against the established patriarchy (Faxneld 2017). And while Lilith made 'appearances in gentile texts' throughout the Middle Ages, she regained popularity and recognition with writers during the Romantic movement who painted her as the 'ancient femme fatale', which in a contemporary landscape is perceived as sexy or positive, but from a medieval or nineteenth-century lens, carries heavy misogynistic overtones (Faxneld 2017, pp. 57–59). From Eve to Lilith, religio-mythic monsters from theology and mythology, women were inescapably branded, forever compared, blamed, and damned for their behavior.

Mythological female monsters have haunted the female experience, evoking fear in the collective consciousness throughout various historical moments. The witch, for example, is an image so powerful and pervasive that women all over Europe were persecuted and legally prosecuted at various times throughout history, as the witch represented 'a complete inversion of the ideal good Christian wife and mother, and the persecution of witches thus served to uphold conventional standards of proper conduct for women', not unlike Eve or Lilith (Faxneld 2017, p. 67). Ronald Hutton argues that the witch is often 'a symbol of independent female authority and resistance to male domination', as a means of eradicating this female monster (Hutton 2017, p. x). The book of *Exodus* addresses the witch figure, stating, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live', which encouraged legal and cultural ostracism (The Holy Bible 1961, Exodus 22:18; Kramer and Spenger 1497; King James I 2014).<sup>5</sup> The 1480s saw a significant rise in witchcraft persecutions and prosecutions in France and Germany, and again in 1560 in Britain and Switzerland, as the European waves of female persecution were built on the belief that women had an underground society that focused on Devil worship (Faxneld 2017, p. 66). It was a justification to exercise biblical and misogynistic practices under the guise of maintaining Christian values, mirroring the biblical narratives of Lilith and Eve.

The most infamous witch trial in American history occurred in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, the Salem Witch Trials had racially motivated implications that ran alongside this clear gender bias. Tituba, an enslaved woman from Barbados, confessed to dealings with the Devil, implicating other women in her admission (Howe 2014, pp. 141–48). Tituba's historical portrayal signifies the genesis of race tension within the feminist movement in North America. Further, the Salem Witch Trials had a wider cultural impact, seeping into political propaganda used predominantly against women (Schiff 2016, p. 412). Female politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Margaret Thatcher are often labeled witches, with Thatcher, upon her death, inspiring a chart revival of the song 'Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead' from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) (BBC 2013; Miller 2018; O'Carroll 2013). Female hegemony provoked anxiety in men who used the biblical transgressions of Eve and Lilith to harass and murder women throughout history. These monstrous stigmas have prevailed in popular culture, always working towards suppressing women.

Within nineteenth-century literature, specifically Gothic literature, women are classified by the social and religious constructs that worked in tandem to trivialize the female experience, making them either monsters (transgressive) or saints (obedient). There was no in-between: 'The portrayal of women is generally wicked' (Faxneld 2017, p. 69). Jack Halberstam offers a feminist reading of Victor Frankenstein's aversion and ultimate obliteration of the female monster:

Woman is reduced to a "half-finished creature" that man may take apart but not assemble. The making of a womb, apparently, challenges Victor with a scientific feat that he simply cannot perform. (Halberstam 1995, p. 47)

While women are not at the forefront of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Halberstam makes it clear with one scene that the female monster, either mythological or manufactured by science, is unwelcome in any social context (Shelley 2018). The culturally constructed mythos of the female monster forced a performative experience, one where the woman is defined and understood through societal and religious paradigms. As Halberstam claims, the female monster is not even categorized as a whole being, or as he argues, "the female monster cannot be human because it is always only an object, a thing, "unfinished"" (Halberstam 1995, p. 51). Indeed, Nina Auerbach seconds this, arguing that the woman has been reduced to a fantasy, either sexual or saint-like, both of which are machinations of misogynistic hegemonies. From 'raging hormonal imbalance' to 'inferior brain weight', the woman is demeaned through contrived, misogynistic constructs, not unlike people of color (Auerbach 1982, p. 12). These cultural stereotypes of women, and Halberstam's 'half-finished creature', echoed into actual monstrosity such as vampirism that only perpetuates more fear (Halberstam 1995, p. 47): 'A literal woman, her recurrent fits of vampirism, somnambulism, mesmerism, or hysterical paralysis illuminate powers that were somewhat fancifully, somewhat wistfully, and somewhat fearfully imagined in women throughout the century' (Auerbach 1982, pp. 15–16). Thus, the rhetorical female monster is locked in an interrelationship with the religio-mythic female monster, and they continually infiltrate literary imagery.

To Bram Dijkstra, the female monster is a direct result of male desire, which scientists of the nineteenth century reinforced by creating new terminology to encompass insatiable female desire—nymphomania—which 'came into general use during the 1860s to describe that 'abnormal' interest of certain women in sexual gratification' (Dijkstra 1986, p. 249). As a literary consequence, Elaine Showalter uses this term to describe Lucy and Dracula's Brides 'over-sexed' actions (Showalter 1992, p. 180). Gustave Bouchereau in 'Nymphomania', A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine' (1892), writes that nymphomania is strictly a female disorder, particularly affecting older women who have become 'deranged' (Bouchereau 2000, p. 294). Bouchereau continues by claiming that the 'morbid affliction' is a form of hysteria, a commonly prescribed malady for women, suggesting that sexual appetite in women is linked to mental illness, deepening the dichotomous female experience of negotiating between the general discomfort of societal constraints and (apparent) lunacy and forcing women to either implement resistive performances or integrate into systemic patriarchal oppression (Bouchereau 2000, p. 294).<sup>7</sup> The scientific community in the nineteenth century tried to label and ultimately alienate women from public life, similar to the African-American community. This scientific term acted as a rhetorical tool to instill the terror of female sexuality in male consciousness. Thus, the alienation of women was reinforced by an increasingly weighty scientific scholarship; it justified the diminished space women were forced to occupy.

Moving away from the scientific community and recalling the religio-mythic female monsters, the siren reinforced this narrative. Described as 'aggressive and predatory' with a 'masculine force', the siren lured innocent men into darkness and pulled them down to their deaths. The siren is best known for luring sailors into the reef and then killing their victims through song, while the succubus, as discussed earlier, is a branch of the Lilith mythos (Creed 1993, p. 2). Mary Y. Ayers in *Masculine Shame: From Succubus to the Eternal Feminine* (Ayers 2011) calls Lilith the Queen of the succubae, but claims that the child-killing narrative is a derivative of masculine shame grounded in a desire and ultimate failure to control their sexual 'other' (Ayers 2011, p. vii). Again, both the religio-mythic and the rhetorical female monster motif stem from a male desire to control women and maintain patriarchal dominance. Any threat to masculine hegemony is met with derision and an intransigent need to counteract female sexual freedom, as well as social and political agency. These monsters are all derived from Eve and Lilith, showing the reach of religious mythologies in the cultural, political, scientific, and rhetorical female experience.

### 3. Political Female Monsters and Woman's Suffrage

These religio-mythic female monsters, Lilith, Eve, witches, vampires, sirens, and succubae, to name the most prominent, have been used by the patriarchy to demonize and exclude women from public spheres, as shown in the utilization of female monstrosity in anti-suffrage material, encouraging the rhetorical female monster. In Britain, feminist figures like Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Emily Davidson, who lost her life for the suffrage cause, and Lady Constance Lytton championed the women's suffrage movement, which focused on gaining the right to vote and obtaining a voice for women in the political sphere. In America, suffragettes Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Victoria Woodhull fought Congress for their right to vote (Conkling 2018). In both countries, anti-suffragists expressed their displeasure by canvassing a female monster, a woman with three sharp teeth and monstrous features, accompanied by the caption 'We Want the Vote'. There is a clear undertone of racial discrimination and prejudice in this poster. The skin color, nose, lips, and hair all draw on negative African stereotypes, demonizing both white women and women of color, implying that both groups are equally monstrous, and perhaps satirizing the idea that either group should be granted political representation. While race and gender foster separate narratives of oppression, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* combine both lenses, using gender to eliminate figures who are also racialized, finding similarities in multiple centuries of misogynistic and racist political fervor.

In another anti-suffragette poster, the artist depicts an upper-class woman with three men holding her down with a stone over her chest while force-feeding her. These political postcards, meant to parody the force-feedings the suffragettes endured when they went on hunger strikes in prison, are reminiscent of a witch stoning, thus drawing a clear parallel between witch trials and suffragettes, as stoning is a common method for disposing of a witch as stipulated by a passage in *Leviticus*: (Rosen 1974) 'They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them' (The Holy Bible 1961). There were many other monstrous representations of women in anti-suffrage posters, from physical abuse towards husbands to children crying over their absent mother, satirizing stereotypical feminine, domestic attributes. The treatment of the woman's suffrage movement only heightens the rhetorical female monster narrative: Any woman who subverts prescriptive gender roles is categorized as a religio-mythic monster for rhetorical purposes. The rhetorical campaign to demonize women's independence in any sphere resurfaces during moments in history featuring political or economic unrest, as the monster narrative is implemented as a scapegoat to isolate and prevent women from entering the public sphere.

All the cultural, political, historical, and biblical female monster narratives paint a bleak outlook on the female experience. In the twenty-first century, Grahame-Smith has reappropriated a nineteenth-century female-authored text in a historical moment that post-dates the women's suffrage movement and the US occupation of Haiti, prompting the American reappropriation of Afro-Caribbean culture in cinema. Thus, we would anticipate *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* to include gender and racial politics that reflect contemporary sensibilities. However, upon closer analysis, this text seems to reinforce negative images and narratives for white women and women of color. In this text, the religio-mythic female monster is informing the rhetorical female monster to maintain a demonized view of progressive women. In Grahame-Smith's horror reimagining, 'dreadfuls' and 'unmentionables' are two terms designated for the zombies. Applying Sarah Juliet Lauro's theory, those phrases have a heavy racial prejudice attached to them, as they suggest a racial component, denoting how slaves and people of color are ostracized even in language, through many historical moments. While it is important to contextualize the epistemology of the zombie, I am more interested in the function of the *zombi(i)e* within horror reimagining as the monster that must be defeated by the female characters. Through my reading of this text, we can see how it shifts the focus from the *zombi* as a metaphor for slavery (or the Americanized cultural appropriation of the Haitian slave) and slave rebellion onto the vehicles that have been chosen to defeat these 'dreadfuls'.

#### 4. Mythology of the *Zombi(i)/e*

The zombie mythos is rooted in the Transatlantic slave trade in Haiti, and the motif is deeply entrenched in historical imageries of colonialism (Boluk and Lenz 2011, pp. 3–4). Scholars including Dawn Keetley, Stephanie Boluk, Wylie Lenz, Roger Luckhurst, Christopher M. Moreman, Cory James Rushton, Lars Bang Larsen, Karen Embry, and Sarah Juliet Lauro contextualize the zombie as a product of imperialistic and capitalistic institutions that prayed for minorities. According to Kyle William Bishop, the zombie is symbolic of nefarious economic practices: ‘The ideology connected to them [zombies] is directly linked to the political and social life of postcolonial Haiti [...] Indeed, it is a creature born of slavery, oppression, and capitalist hegemony and in that way a manifestation of collective unconscious fears and taboos’ (Bishop 2010, p. 37). However, like Lucifer, who became a symbol of resistance for women, the zombie embodied a positive, resistive mode that was designated for slave rebellion: ‘the zombie is a myth that was taken (up) from Haiti, where it represented a people’s history of enslavement and oppression and was made to the psychological labor for another group of people’ (Lauro 2015, p. 9). Lauro argues that the zombie is framed through three definitions that correspond with separate lexiconic connotations. According to Lauro and Embry in ‘The Zombie Manifesto’ the *zombi* is the labored slave from Haiti, a being in body only; the *zombie* is the Americanized appropriation of Haitian culture and religion through cinema; the *zombii* represents the ‘posthuman’, a being that is ‘consciousless’ (Lauro and Embry 2017, p. 396). Keetley argues that the *zombie* forces a larger discourse on the meaning of humanity and where ‘we fail’ (Keetley 2018, p. 52). According to Keetley, the *zombie* represents an existential figure, one that merges humanity’s deepest traumas, culminating in ‘a possible catastrophic future’, exasperated by scientific and technological advances, also echoed by Bishop (Keetley 2012, p. 1; Bishop 2010, p. 36). While not using Lauro and Embry’s *zombie* term explicitly, Keetley does contextualize the monster with similar attributes, responding to the uncertainty of humanity’s future and the potential limitations of the human condition. With technological advancements constantly probing notions of humanity and the human soul, Keetley’s description of the *zombii/e* builds on the ‘consciousless’ being Lauro and Embry describe. All three scholars are responding to a cultural shift where humanity seems displaced and yet still exists within a liminal space. Further, as the *zombie* is often read through a postcolonial mode, this particular monster, in its reappropriated voodoo culture, plays on the discomfort white Americans experienced when faced with the cultural representations of the harsh realities of slavery during the period of US-occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1935. Thus, Western culture, in reappropriating the Haitian racial context behind the *zombi(i)/e* narrative, has commodified and recommodified an entire minority group for an audience that fears a socially constructed monster predicated on hard labor with no political voice while commenting on the uncertainty of humanity’s outlook.

There are varying interpretations regarding the development of zombie imagery; however, there is a shared view that the trope developed in distinctive waves. While Rushton argues for two waves, claiming that there is only the Haitian zombie and the Americanized reappropriation of the Haitian zombie, Boluk and Lenz argue for a three-generation development (Moreman and Rushton 2011; Boluk and Lenz 2011). The original zombie originates in Haiti, or the labored *zombi* that Lauro stipulates, which depicts a mindless, ‘vacant-eyed drone’ working in the fields—a reanimated body that could still work but is ‘socially dead’ (Lauro 2015, pp. 6–17). This image became an enduring fear in the American collective consciousness with the film *White Zombie* (1932), starring Bela Lugosi as the evil magician who casts a voodoo spell on his slaves, which ‘summoned the zombie in the service of various Caucasian fears and racisms’ (Halperin 1932, p. 2). This film left a negative impression of US-occupied Haiti on the largely white audience. George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968) is referenced as a turning point in zombie mythos, or the second and final wave according to Rushton, as it represented an ‘Americanized version of the Haitian zombie’, adding cannibalism onto the already blurred ‘social boundary’ of cultural appropriation for an audience that feared people

of color while ignoring the atrocities of slavery under US-occupied Haiti (Romero 1968; Boluk and Lenz 2011, pp. 4–5). Deviating from Rushton’s argument, the most recent wave is the zombie as a form of pathology, according to Boluk and Lenz. *28 Days Later* (Boyle 2002) is just one cinematic example of how the zombie now represents the fear of contracting terminal diseases like AIDS, H1N1, the bird flu, and now, COVID-19 (Boyle 2002). The zombie is a monstrous embodiment of the anxieties surrounding incurable epidemics that plague contemporary audiences. Grahame-Smith’s zombie firmly maintains the pathological zombie, as Charlotte Lucas’s narrative typifies (discussed more fully in the coming sections), with undertones from the first wave of the zombie mythos: She is bitten before her marriage to Mr. Collins and, subsequently, slowly descends into a mindless, gruesome state, losing her language and control over her faculties.

Embedded with cultural reappropriation is a somewhat malignant drive for financial gain. The destructive side of capitalism is read as responsible for the Americanized *zombie* trope. One can peripherally draw a line from Lauro’s Transatlantic, labored *zombi* to the theories of capitalism, as both economic practices rely heavily on a laboring class. Jen Webb and Samuel Byrnannd argue that capitalism, which is predicated on the desire for ownership of goods, is the primary stimulus behind the *zombi(i)/e* image, as mindless consumerism promotes the unthinking being that Lauro and Embry consign as the *zombie* (Webb and Byrnannd 2017, pp. 111–23). Like colonialism and the slave trade, capitalism encourages ‘insatiable’ consumerism that manifests in various monstrous modalities (Webb and Byrnannd 2017, p. 116). As capitalism depends on the labor class, the transatlantic slave trade could be considered an outdated economic derivative, although it is still separate from forced labor. The *zombi(i)/e*, originally a part of Afro-Caribbean religion that was reappropriated into a product of colonialism and racism, is now recommodified into something embroiled in ambiguity, something ‘apathetic’ and unthinking, like a slave or the consumer that perpetuates the need for a labored class, which, again, is redolent of Lauro and Embry’s *zombie* and the *zombie* (Larsen 2017, p. 157). Grahame-Smith follows this recommodified image of a revenant figure roaming around fields devoid of purpose or emotions; they are the *zombie*, a recommodified pastiche of the Haitian labored slave with a slight inclination toward the *zombii*, a kind of ‘posthuman’ that has no political, social or cultural consciousness, as seconded by Keetley (Keetley 2012, p. 2). Grahame-Smith’s zombies do not occupy any particularly significant independent narrative at all; they have a more tangential (at best) role within the text, mostly seen as a thing that the characters are forced to fight and eliminate.<sup>8</sup>

The *zombi(i)/e*’s function, then, in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, I argue, is the labored monster that the equally monstrous female (in this context, Elizabeth Bennet) must defeat. This reflects the transcultural political resistance to the oppressive, hegemonic ideologies of the twenty-first century, albeit with a humorous lens. Women must now defeat the socially constructed and recommodified monster of slavery reimagined through female-authored nineteenth-century texts that already express ideals of resistance for women. The *zombi(i)/e* addition to a sophisticated ‘high-brow’ nineteenth-century text then suggests a kind of political commodification, an attempt to resist and change established modes of harmful supremacies from within the establishment. The *zombi(i)/e* then acts as the conduit for exercising such malevolent structures from within—pitting two minority groups against each other with no inconvenience to those in the majority and for the express benefit of hegemonic systems. Elizabeth Bennet’s monstrosity is implicit as they carry out these acts in petticoats while brandishing swords and stakes. This is not to say that white women from the middle to lower classes act as the savior for enslaved people or people of color, but rather, from a third-wave feminist epistemology, the female slayer’s monstrosity should adequately prepare these female protagonists to battle oppressive institutions. If the *zombi* is a metaphor for slavery and rebellion, then the monstrous female called to defeat the creature is equally dichotomous, employing both monster and saint alike, since the *zombi(i)/e*, like the female monster, is a contrivance for both repression and liberation. My

reading of Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth exemplifies the limitations of the female monster's rebellious spirit.

### 5. Elizabeth's Monstrosity in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*

Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth is indicative of the pitfalls of the subversive woman engaging in the attempt to reclaim the female monster stigma. In this section, a close reading of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies* will situate Grahame-Smith's horrified reimagining within the female monster dialogue to establish the rebellious nature of the original female characters and employ those monstrous treatments in my analysis of their contemporary doppelgängers. *Pride and Prejudice* has no gothic elements; there is no mention of monsters or harsh, confining settings; thus, there is no monstrous precedent for a horror rewriting. Grahame-Smith is writing back to Austen, using American horror motifs like *zombies* and monster slayers to underscore current contentious gender politics while engaging directly with Austen's feminist sensibilities. Helena Kelly, in *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical* (Kelly 2016), argues that Austen places subliminal, subversive narratives throughout her work, including a comment on topics such as slavery and women's rights and an intricate critique of Regency Britain's social construct (Kelly 2016, p. 165). In *Pride and Prejudice*, darker political themes are explored tangentially and are often overlooked because the romance between Darcy and Elizabeth is so prominent within the narrative. There is mention of a flogging in passing and references to the many wars Britain was embroiled in during Austen's life, as illustrated through the arrival of the militia in Meryton:

The militia aren't in the novel to provide young men for the Bennet girls to dance with; they bring with them an atmosphere which is highly politically charged, they trail clouds of danger—images of a rebellious populace, of government repression and, more distant but insistent nevertheless, the fear of what might happen if the men in the militia, the troops, mutiny. (Kelly 2016, p. 131)

Political themes are just one example of Austen's subversive nature peppered throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Edward Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* (1814) specified the political and racial undertones found in Austen's text, concentrating on, if only peripherally, the upper-class British families in the nineteenth century (Said 1994, p. 84). Specifically, Said argues that Austen, 'a pre-imperialist author', is implicated in imperialist mentalities as the female protagonist in *Mansfield Park* covets a class that is seen while representing the ignorance of her station (Said 1994, p. 84). Grahame-Smith recaptures Austen's political subtlety—even nineteenth-century imperialist ideologies—through casually mentioned battles that are supposed to signify momentous military conflicts where victory is questionable as no further details are divulged: 'He [the late Mr. Darcy] was slain in the second Battle of Kent' and, later, 'Not since the Battle of Tumu Fortress had an assault been so poorly conceived (Grahame-Smith 2009, pp. 68, 220). This is just one example of how Grahame-Smith parallels Austen's proclivity towards subliminally interspersing political unrest in what earlier criticism has derisively seen as principally a romance novel. Thus, hidden political and social commentary by Austen works to establish an environment where women match the indirect insurrection against an overt patriarchal construct. This allows Grahame-Smith to rewrite those gendered subversions through a horror motif.

Austen pays equal subliminal attention to gender politics, which is rewritten by Grahame-Smith in a more conspicuous and, unfortunately, less progressive manner. Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth possesses all those same qualities Austen bestowed upon Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*—she is haughty, outspoken, and appears jocular about the confining weight placed on women to make an advantageous marriage. All these qualities are parodied to fit a twenty-first-century, post-*Buffy* motif. However, Elizabeth is still disliked and ostracized by other female characters, such as Caroline Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Elizabeth Bennet offers the perfect example of Grahame-Smith's constant engagement with Austen in an open dialogue. Elizabeth's monstrosity in both texts is illustrated through her resistive properties, such as her independence and insistence on a marriage based on mutual respect.



For this horrified reimagining, training as a zombie slayer is an established requirement for young ladies, much like embroidery, painting piano, and modern languages in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen 1996, p. 39). In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, those traits are parodied: 'A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages; she must be well trained in the fighting styles of the Kyoto masters and the modern tactics and weaponry of Europe' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 38). In Grahame-Smith's text, the extent of what a lady in society ought to have mastered has changed with the unlikely addition of weapon mastery, but Elizabeth's subversion of those standards remains the same. Thus, Elizabeth's military acumen does nothing to distinguish her from her peers. Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth's monstrosity is not necessarily defined by her physical strength used to fight zombies, but rather, by her continual acts of resistance, especially given that her training was undertaken in China, not Japan, where members of the upper class sought their instruction.

The Chinese training is meant to signify the Bennets' lower social status, as originally presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. In Austen's text, the Bennet sisters are seen as beneath the Bingleys because of their 'low connections' as described by Caroline, which Grahame-Smith rewrites as training in China instead of Japan (Austen 1996, p. 36). Elizabeth uses this diminished status to assert moral and even intellectual dominance over the Bingley sisters and Lady Catherine in both texts, as Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth emphasizes the superiority of her Chinese instruction as a means to rebel against the social structures placed on both her class and gender:

Elizabeth could hardly help smiling as she assured her that had not been the case.

'Then, who protected you when you saw your first combat? Without ninjas, you must have been quite a sorry spectacle indeed.'

'Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such was our desire to prevail, and our affection for each other, that we had no trouble vanquishing even our earliest opponents' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 130).

This quote highlights how Elizabeth's pride in her lowered social status allows her a moral and intellectual high ground against Lady Catherine, for she uses drawing room etiquette constructed by the Georgian era to foreground her resolve to disrupt the limitations placed on her gender and class. Thus, part of Elizabeth's monstrosity is in her refusal to submit to Lady Catherine simply because society dictates that those with titles and powers should rule over those without them.

Grahame-Smith's Lady Catherine also publicly admonishes Elizabeth for her lack of formal Japanese training while praising her own celebrated battle prowess. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine's criticism of Elizabeth's lack of education in the absence of a governess is reappropriated in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* as military instruction in Japan:

'I assume you were schooled in Japan?'

'No, your ladyship. In China.'

'China? Are those monks still selling their clumsy Kung Fu to the English? I take it you mean Shaolin?'

'Yes, your ladyship; under Master Liu.'

'Well, I suppose you had no opportunity. Had your father more means, he should have taken you to Kyoto.'

'My mother would have had no objection, but my father hates Japan.'

'Have your ninjas left you.'

'We never had any ninjas.'

'No ninjas! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without any ninjas! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your safety'. (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 130)

Elizabeth is demeaned and belittled because of her lowered social strata, which is exaggerated by her Chinese tutelage and lack of ninjas. This exchange suggests a subtle subversion of societal structures enforced on women in both historical moments. Not only was it monstrous of Elizabeth to respond with so much conviction, but her unabashed pride in the perceived lowered Chinese training suggests a rebellious nature. But there is also satire in the above exchange. Grahame-Smith substitutes standard nineteenth-century education for women with Kung Fu instruction, supplanting books and music with physical training, and replacing the governess with ninjas. London is also displaced by Japan, and smaller villages are replaced with Shaolin, China. This dialogue between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine best illustrates how Grahame-Smith reappropriates Austen's humor and attaches a new layer of satire to Austen's already scathing parody of aristocratic women with an infallible image of how young women should perform drawing room etiquette.

Crucially, Lady Catherine's reference to 'slave' in the final line of the above quote appears equally intentional and problematic given the horrified peripheral setting. The racial contextuality of the *zombi(i)/e* grounded in Afro-Caribbean slavery and the Haitian rebellion suggests Grahame-Smith, rather questionably and unintentionally, is gesturing toward Aristocratic neglect and willful ignorance of the atrocities transpiring across the Atlantic because it directly benefits the British home, as argued by Said (Said 1994, p. 84). Although Lady Catherine is referring to Elizabeth's mother and not the 'capitalist hegemony' of the *zombi(i)/e* mythos, the slave comment, when coupled with the equally troubling Orient imagery promoted in Grahame-Smith's horrified rewriting, hints at a blatant connection to the colonialist dogma found in nineteenth-century British literature (Bishop 2010, p. 35).

Elizabeth's first encounter with Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* ends in a sparring match between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine's ninjas:

When his blade was only inches from her throat, she moved from her opponent's path and dragged her Katana across his belly. The ninja dropped to the floor—his innards spilling from the slit faster than he could stuff them back in. Elizabeth sheathed her sword, knelt behind him, and strangled him to death with his own large bowel. (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 134)

While it is easy to claim Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth's monstrosity is triggered by the bloodlust present in this scene and it is her predilection for brandishing her skill, her insistence on displaying fighting dexterity in mixed company that is the source of Elizabeth's monstrosity in both texts. Grahame-Smith has rewritten Elizabeth's penchant for showcasing various talents—usually with intellectual banter—into a sparring exposition with Lady Catherine and other members of the party as an audience.

Even though ladies in Grahame-Smith's Georgian Britain must be proficient in battle tactics and weaponry, and Elizabeth more than meets that requirement, she is still ostracized. For Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth, observing societal stipulations is still insufficient for acceptance. Grahame-Smith's Caroline Bingley decries Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy for being too focused on military training: 'Endeavour to check Miss Bennet's unladylike affinity for guns, and swords, and expertise, and all those silly things best left to men or ladies of low breeding' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 46). Elizabeth's monstrosity is thus embedded in a constant and conscious subversion of societal requirements in both texts. Elizabeth's dedication to guns and swords still separates her from the other ladies in the drawing room, as they demonize her efforts. Caroline continues to poke fun at Elizabeth's physical prowess: 'Miss Elizabeth Bennet!' repeated Miss Bingley. 'Defender of Longbourn? Heroine of Hertfordshire? I am all astonishment. You will be having a charming mother-in-law, indeed; and, of course, the two of you would fell many an unmentionable with your combined proficiencies in the deadly arts'. (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 27). The hypocrisy of societal exclusion for being too proficient at a skill that is required by society itself fosters a kind of contradiction where women are always on the outside of the drawing room construct even while trying to live within it. This prevents women in both historical moments from securing a place within society, allowing the religio-mythic and rhetorical monster narrative to continue, providing no relief from the stain of the female monster image. Grahame-Smith's

Elizabeth's precarious place within this twenty-first-century rewriting of Georgian Britain reveals how the rhetorical female monster still haunts the dichotomous female experience. Elizabeth's resistive qualities are also a metaphor for perpetual patriarchal oppression. It is not necessarily the actual fighting ability that is socially problematic to Caroline, but the independence slaying affords, and Elizabeth exercises that tool without embarrassment. Nothing is enough, it seems, for Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth to find a solid place amongst her peers.

Elizabeth's subversive independence found in both texts thrusts the rhetorical female monster onto her narrative, heavily influencing the already acrimonious dynamic between Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. The violence between Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* adds to the gender and class tensions always boiling under the surface of Austen's text. As Kelly argues, Darcy and Elizabeth offer a 'revolutionary fairy tale', one predicated on a radical, social reformation (Kelly 2016, p. 167). Upon meeting at the public assembly, and after Elizabeth overhears Darcy's insult, the characters are met with an attack of the 'unmentionables.' Darcy's watchful eye catches Elizabeth's fighting ability: 'Mr. Darcy watched Elizabeth and her sisters work their way outward, beheading zombie after zombie as they went. He knew of only one other woman in all of Great Britain who wielded a dagger with such skill, such grace, and deadly accuracy' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 18). Darcy is immediately impressed with Elizabeth, whose admiration for her 'fine eyes' has been parodied into an admiration for her swordplay (Austen 1996, p. 27). Comparatively, Elizabeth reacts to Darcy's slight with an internal threat: 'She meant to follow this proud Mr. Darcy outside and open his throat.' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 18). This is a laughably vicious response to Darcy's insult that acts as a twenty-first-century retort that women can more easily identify with and even applaud. However, during the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth comments on his fighting ability: 'There was no denying Darcy's talents as a warrior. If only, she thought, his talents as a gentleman were their equal' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 86). These quotes denote a more critical elucidation of how each party is secretly monitoring the other's proficiencies and deficiencies. Grahame-Smith gives the audience a more penetrating perspective into the early inner workings of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, which is more pronounced during Darcy's first and failed proposal to Elizabeth—an event that, in an anticipated turn of events, deteriorates into sparring:

As she pronounced these words, Mr. Darcy changed color; but the emotion was short, for Elizabeth presently attacked with a series of kicks, forcing him to counter with the drunken washwoman defense [...] One of her kicks found its mark, and Darcy was sent into the mantelpiece with such force as to shatter its edge. Wiping the blood from his mouth, he looked at her with a smile of affected incredulity. (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 156)

Elizabeth and Darcy are locked in a metaphorical and, at times, literal battle that showcases Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth's reappropriation of Austen's Elizabeth's resistive properties. The violence not only amplifies the animosity boiling under the surface between Darcy and Elizabeth, but it also reveals a sexual undertone, especially when accompanied by the illustration, that is missing in *Pride and Prejudice*, at least explicitly: 'Elizabeth presently lifted her dress above her ankles and struck a basic crane pose, which she thought well-suited for the cramped quarters.' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 153). This is another example of how themes are altered in twenty-first-century rewritings of nineteenth-century texts. Grahame-Smith might not be informed by scholarship surrounding the connection between female sexuality, male desire, fear, and monstrosity, but this Elizabeth is staging her intervention into female sexuality—one where female sexuality paired with military skill equates to that of her male counterpart. However, this new intervention is predicated on Darcy's response. Instead of demonizing and ostracizing Elizabeth's talents, he matches her both in wit and in battle. Together, Darcy and Elizabeth challenge, or at least try to challenge, the hypersexual, monstrous female image by displaying an equal dynamic in their argument. While the lynchpin of this argument is grounded in male

acquiescing to female equality, which is not ideal, it does illustrate the capability of men and women to work together to integrate the dichotomous female experience into a single, positive narrative.

The theme of merging violence with verbal sparring in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is exhibited again in the final argument between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine. The notorious verbal brawl towards the end, in which Lady Catherine voices her displeasure at the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, becomes a fight to the death in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*:

Her ladyship looked skyward and saw Elizabeth atop a rafter—sword in hand. The younger dove toward the floor as the elder leapt toward the ceiling; and their swords met in the air that separated the two. A ferocious contest of blades filled the dojo with the clanging of steel upon steel [. . .] After several minutes of flying about, attacking one another with force that would have sent legions of lesser warriors to their graves, Lady Catherine’s sword was dispatched with a well-aimed butterfly kick. Defenseless, her ladyship retreated to the wall of weaponry, where she hastily procured a pair of nunchucks; but these were promptly cut in two by Elizabeth’s Katana [. . .] “But you shall live. 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. Now, I beg you take you leave.” (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 296)

This scene, along with the combative interaction between Elizabeth and Darcy, shows how violence is employed to replace the spoken animosity between the parties involved. The implications of violence displacing verbal sparring suggest more acutely how Grahame-Smith has actualized Austen’s repartee with multiple characters, as the verbal battle between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine results in a Kung Fu match. However, the chemistry between Elizabeth and Darcy, especially through the first proposal, is unspoken and, yet, peripherally accepted. These accompanying fight sequences adapt Austen’s cutting wit for a twenty-first-century American audience, recommodifying substantial dialogue with a cheapened scene of violence for entertainment and with a varying degree of levity. It also highlights how women seem to have access to additional agency over their bodies and actions in this horror reimagining. The fighting allows women to express the anger that nineteenth-century women were forced to suppress for fear of being labeled hysterical and subsequently shoved into an asylum, delivered in a more palpable and perhaps entertaining mode. That is not to say that Austen’s Elizabeth and Lady Catherine possessed no rebellious qualities, but rather that Grahame-Smith gives the women an explicit mode to manifest and express aggression against harmful social constructs and each other. Thus, both Elizabeth’s and Lady Catherine’s monstrosity is defined not just by their ability in a physical confrontation but also by their execution of those skills in the public sphere in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

Grahame-Smith’s Elizabeth’s nuanced rhetorical female monstrosity, predicated on the religio-mythic monster, the rebellious, and even the sexualized women that instill fear in cultural collective consciousness, is complicated by the *zombi(i)e* narrative. Grahame-Smith’s Elizabeth has all the makings of a conventional, rhetorical female monster, as her subtle subversion of drawing room etiquette should elevate Elizabeth’s resistance more substantially, especially given the alternative parameters Grahame-Smith has constructed, which afford her more physical autonomy than that of her nineteenth-century counterpart, whose only agency was walking. However, as stated above, the *zombi/e* mythos decreases the importance of Grahame-Smith’s Elizabeth’s defiance, especially considering the *zombie* is the Americanized appropriation of Afro-Caribbean culture, bastardized in cinema, meant to represent resistance and oppression.

These two narratives converge to create a diverse reading experience, one where the female monster trope and the Afro-Caribbean reappropriation work together to complicate both narratives and add negative layers to both groups, albeit while trying to entertain the masses with satirical motifs. Thus, Grahame-Smith’s Elizabeth does not align with

the rhetorical or religio-mythic female monsters as defined by Hutton or Creed. Nor does Elizabeth's narrative coincide with the destructive and cruel motif of Lilith, the queen of the succubae, the witch, the demon lover, or the siren as described by Faxneld. Further, since Austen's Elizabeth predates the organized woman's suffrage movement, the rhetorical demonization of assertive women by the anti-suffrage campaigners does not apply, and Grahame-Smith's protagonist's position within Faxneld's argument for performative monstrosity as a mode of resistance becomes infinitely more intricate.

As a *zombi/e* slayer, Elizabeth embodies a very different kind of female monster, one for which the rebellious agency falls somewhere within the two narratives of the religio-mythic and rhetorical female monster, and between the rebellious and oppressive dichotomous narrative. It is the equally dichotomous *zombi/e* mythos that doubly complicates Grahame-Smith's main female protagonists, for the *zombi* as a symbol of slavery and slave rebellion and the Americanized, recommodified *zombie* force an uncomfortable context for Elizabeth. Instead of oversimplifying the relationship between white women's predicament and the slave plight, Grahame-Smith seems to use Elizabeth and Jane as the vehicle to eradicate both groups' subversive impact, as the monstrous *zombi(i)/e* in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is only a secondary theme; the female slayers' earnest dedication that borders on hatred to eradicate those monsters renders all performative resistance that might be present less noteworthy. Thus, these women are neither a rhetorical nor a religio-mythic female monster; instead, they occupy a space of monstrosity that wavers constantly between acceptance and ostracism, subjugation and insurgence, and back again.

With the women in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* losing some resistive power in the rewriting process of Elizabeth and the Bennet sisters, they function as a vehicle to exterminate the *zombi(i)/es*. The happy ending that collides with proto-feminist sensibilities throughout the text is equally disappointing, although thoroughly predictable: 'And the sisters Bennet—servants of His Majesty, protectors of Hertfordshire, beholders of the secrets of Shaolin, and brides of death—were now, three of them, brides of man, their swords, quieted by that only force more powerful than any warrior.' (Grahame-Smith 2009, pp. 320–21). Even though their proto-feminist sensibilities are doubted due to the *zombi/e* racial context as depicted by Lauro and Embry, Keetley, Luckhurst, Larsen, and Webb and Byrnannd, twenty-first-century gender equality is grounded in the narrative that marriage is no longer a necessity for happiness or financial/societal solvency. Nor does it ignore the narrative that marriage prohibits individual pursuits, either economic or social. Indeed, Austen's depiction of marriage based on mutual respect suggests that she uses the marital space to showcase societal discourse surrounding class and gender politics of the Georgian/Regency era. But, for Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth and Jane, the understanding that their union with Darcy and Bingley requires them to lay down their sword seems like a gross misunderstanding of current gender politics, as most contemporary narratives condemn women who sacrifice power for men and/or marriage: 'Determined that they should keep their skills sharp, though His Majesty no longer required them to do so, their husbands built them a sparring cottage precisely between the two estates, in which the sisters met joyously and often.' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 318). However, with the labored *zombi(i)/e* as a representation of racial oppression and rebellion running underneath the gender and class commentary originating from *Pride and Prejudice*, Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth's acquiescence to those societal norms is perhaps more appropriate, as her rewriting suggests a more conservative reading, which is magnified by the staunchly anachronistic ending. It is easier to force women to retire their swords in a social construct that demands their acceptance be based on killing an equally dichotomous monster than to demand they continue fighting after achieving Georgian Britain's conventions for female success.

## 6. Female Monstrosity in Charlotte and Lydia

The female monster is a complicated figure, as illustrated through Grahame-Smith's Charlotte Lucas, who is performing both the physical and rhetorical female monster through the *zombi(i)/e* motif, and Lydia Bennet, whose female monstrosity is defined

by her extramarital transgression. Austen's Charlotte's monstrosity is most firmly found in her advanced age before marriage, at least by Regency Britain's standards; being 27 years old and unmarried created a social stigma redolent of a status that evoked shame and pity upon the woman and the family. As Melina Moe argues, Charlotte, at 27 years old, is not 'expected to be ambitious nor opinionated about marriage', and resembles a 'disinterested martyr' about marriage (Moe 2016, p. 1090). Austen's Charlotte's compliance with societal pressures for marriage at a young age leaves Grahame-Smith's Charlotte incapable of combating the monstrous conversion, especially at her advanced age.

Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is not a skilled warrior like Elizabeth and the other Bennet sisters, and it is never mentioned where or not she trained in Kyoto along with other members of her class. Grahame-Smith's Charlotte is already distinctive from Elizabeth based on age and fighting ability, which only reiterates Charlotte's conventional character. Further, since there is no rebellious intent behind her inability to marry, her monstrosity in Austen's text is predicated on the social ugliness placed on an older woman with no husband. Thus, Charlotte's monstrosity as the (potential) spinster only stimulates her *zombi(i)/e* narrative. Grahame-Smith presents Charlotte as the only main female character who is 'stricken' by the 'strange plague' (a euphemism for the zombie epidemic) in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which provides a new incentive for marrying Mr. Collins (Grahame-Smith 2009, pp. 13, 320).

Charlotte's motivation for marrying Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* during her impending monstrous change places her in Lauro and Embry's *zombii* category as she transforms from a human being to a revenant being devoid of any social consciousness or self-referentiality. It seems Charlotte moves from the rhetorical female monster to the spinster, to the *zombie*, and back again. From spinsterhood to *zombii* to her burial, the reader sees Charlotte, without any resistive qualities, shifting from one negative image to the next until she is killed by her husband with alarming passivity. As stated previously, Grahame-Smith's monsters align more with Lauro and Embry's pathological *zombii*, as they are virus-based creatures lacking any purpose or consciousness. With one bite, the victim will turn into an unthinking 'unmentionable', incapable of exuding any agency, as these 'undesirables' are only motivated by the hunger for brains. For Charlotte, her wedding postdates the attack from an 'unmentionable': 'Elizabeth, I beg you will not be angry with me or cut me down where I stand! But Elizabeth, I can have no secrets from you—I have been *stricken*' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 103). Thus, Charlotte's inducement into marriage in this horrified reimagining is Mr. Collins's status as a clergyman: 'I don't have long, Elizabeth. All I ask is that my final months be happy ones, and that I be permitted a husband who will see to my proper Christian beheading and burial' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 103). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte marries Mr. Collins because he finds a wealthy patroness in Lady Catherine, and her age forbids her from refusing such an advantageous match. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Charlotte needs Collins's occupation to behead and bury her in the Christian tradition of Grahame-Smith's constructed rewriting. The seemingly opposing rationale behind entering a marriage that is only for material and social comfort possesses a more nuanced interchangeability. Collins acts in both texts as a savior to Charlotte and the Lucas family from the shame of harboring a spinster, for it reflects poorly on every immediate relationship. In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Collins's pastorate takes on a more significant role: to save Charlotte from eternal damnation, as her metaphorical monstrosity as the (almost) spinster is rewritten as a physical monster. His occupational connection to G-d and subsequent Christian burial of his *zombie/zombii* wife solidify a monstrous reasoning for marrying Collins divorced from Charlotte's need to obey conventional female roles for a financially advantageous matrimonial match.

Grahame-Smith's Charlotte complicates the female monster connection to the Americanized *zombie*, for she is the only character in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* who is both female and a *zombii*. Elizabeth's monstrosity, as shown above, is monstrous not only because of her fighting prowess but also because of her resistance to drawing room moral codes. She is never 'stricken' and marries a socially progressive man. Charlotte accomplishes

neither. After marriage, Grahame-Smith's Charlotte deteriorates to the point of losing language, limbs, and, even more embarrassingly, control of her bowels at Rosings Park:

Elizabeth watched Charlotte bow slightly, and then limp to the furthest corner of room, where she lifted the bottom of her gown and bent her knees into a squat. Elizabeth immediately excused herself, rose, and (taking care not to draw attention) grabbed Charlotte by the arm and escorted her to the toilette, where she watched her stricken friend suffer through a quarter-hour of a sickness too severe that decorum prevents its description in these pages. (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 132)

This is a shocking attempt to establish drawing room moral codes to the point that it is an obvious parody. However, the parodied action exposes both the dichotomous female experience and the function of the Americanized, reappropriated *zombi/e*. It also highlights what happens to a character and narrative when the two motifs combine.

Charlotte's female experience and the Americanized *zombi/e* mythos merge into one performance that is, unfortunately, devoid of resistive qualities. The *zombie* motif counteracts any subversive properties because Charlotte's actions were encouraged by the *zombie/zombii* virus that renders the 'stricken' unthinking and socially unconscious. Grahame-Smith's Charlotte's zombieism provides not so much a cautionary tale of what not to do in both historical moments but more of a tool to justify her monstrosity as an almost spinster in *Pride and Prejudice*. At the risk of oversimplifying the gender and racial relationship, Grahame-Smith's Charlotte has all the potential to merge these two narratives in a discursive way. As the *zombi(i)/e* carries a racial dichotomy as a symbol of Afro-Caribbean culture and its colonial reappropriated counterpart, Charlotte's physical and rhetorical monstrosity is magnified by embodying two equally juxtaposed narratives. However, in combining two monsters with separate motifs but similar functions, Charlotte is the one character that defies any stable categorization of the female monster and the *zombi(i)/e*, for she embodies both without resistive intent. She is the product of a recommodified culture whose role, through an American horror lens, illustrates the need for unthinking gore purely to entertain the masses at the expense of women and Afro-Caribbean religious culture simultaneously. Grahame-Smith's Charlotte's gender works in tandem with monstrous and horror modalities to demonize a conventional character. With the monster soaked in racial commentary, Charlotte's *zombie/zombii* performance marries two similar and yet opposing narratives.

Lydia Bennet, unlike Charlotte, in *Pride and Prejudice* is the most obvious example of the hypersexual female monster as described by Bouchereau, Showalter, and Creed. Her extramarital transgression with Wickham caused an enduring stain not just on herself but on the entire Bennet family. This sexual indiscretion is arguably more egregious than Charlotte's advanced age without marriage; thus, Lydia's punishment in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* should be as dreadful, if not more so, than Charlotte's *zombi/e* monstrosity. However, Grahame-Smith chose Charlotte's contravention as more shameful than Lydia's overt sexuality, for Lydia faces far less castigation for her behavior: 'Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy and fearless' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 257). Indeed, it is Wickham who suffers more than Lydia.<sup>9</sup> In Grahame-Smith's text, Wickham is crippled by Darcy for seducing Lydia, forcing Lydia to look after a man who no longer has control over his bowels: 'And then Wickham would surely punish me with an ill-timed soiling' (Grahame-Smith 2009, p. 261). However, it is not as harsh a punishment as Grahame-Smith's Charlotte, whose rhetorical monstrosity is rewritten literally.

The audience is left with the understanding that it is far more monstrous to be unmarried than to be hypersexual out of wedlock. This feels like a major oversight, especially given the cultural context of the oversexualized woman in the nineteenth century. Charlotte's punishment in Grahame-Smith's text implies that it is far more monstrous to be a female in the Georgian period without a husband than to engage in extra-marital relations. With theological and even scientific scholarship working to demonize and suppress sexual expression in women, it is hard to comprehend why the almost spinster should embody the

indignity of the *zombii* monster while the hypersexual woman's only 'penalty' is marriage to a physically incapable man. With the third-wave feminist movement providing for sexually transgressive women in society, we would expect Grahame-Smith's Lydia to have suffered a similarly gruesome fate, considering both women engage in socially subversive behavior. While Austen's treatment of Lydia is not always considered negative, Grahame-Smith's Lydia's actions have forced her and Wickham to leave their known acquaintances and retreat to the New Castle. This caused Elizabeth public embarrassment, as evidenced by the exchange with Lady Catherine, who used Lydia's transgression to express further disapproval, admonishing Elizabeth for having such a sister. Grahame-Smith had an opportunity, if nothing else, to threaten Lydia with the same disgust as his literary predecessors; however, deviating from pervasive and harmful female monster tropes appears to be a leap Grahame-Smith is unwilling to take. Perhaps creating an intersectional female monster is not possible because gender bias is too deeply ingrained in cultural consciousness. Instead, Lydia is depicted as one-dimensional, whose only purpose is to be relegated among the insipid, preening, and hyper-female characters that no one wants to associate with in both texts. Nothing has changed for Lydia.

Lydia's extramarital relations as an act of rebellion seem more salacious to a Georgian audience in both Britain and North America. In Grahame-Smith's text, however, Lydia's transgressions are not as unpardonable to a twenty-first-century readership, as marriage is no longer a requirement for physical intimacy. Thus, Grahame-Smith's decision to leave Lydia unencumbered with a monstrous narrative suggests an embedded understanding of twenty-first-century gender politics, as it feels like a gross injustice to provide her with too much kindness, especially when juxtaposed with Charlotte's treatment. Grahame-Smith's Lydia's acumen as a warrior, like her sisters from this horrified reimagining, functions as the social exterminator, which forces a more conservative lens onto an originally exceedingly monstrous character. Interestingly, Austen's Lydia would have been a more favorable choice for the political liberation of women than Grahame-Smith's Lydia, whose physical prowess, as stated above, appears to take a backseat to her sexual and societal insurrection with Wickham. A character that is arguably two centuries old is more progressive than a sword-wielding female soldier of the twenty-first century.

In appropriating Afro-Caribbean religious culture through a Christian lens, the underlying issues lie in the colonial commodification of a culture that is isolated and repressed. Thus, Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth has not maintained any rebellious properties through the last two centuries within this horrified reimagining, as the racial implications of the *zombie* and its colonial Transatlantic context render the female slayer's mission much less courageous. Female slayers reach beyond a simple gender role reversal or a perversion of patriarchy in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*; indeed, they act as the social exterminators, the observers of drawing room etiquette, and the extinguishers of those who subvert specific cultural and moral mores. Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth is then no longer categorized by masculine or feminine binaries, as established by their predecessor Austen, but by their ability to surveil and eradicate adversaries of conventional social constructs.

The female monster used as a rhetorical device to promote liberation by nineteenth-century female political advocates and, even later in the century, by suffragettes does not translate into *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. By nineteenth-century standards of gendered activism, this horror rewriting maintains harmful stereotypes for women and the rhetorical female monster. However, for a twenty-first-century audience, Grahame-Smith's Elizabeth Bennet generates a more positive image, or at least, less outrageous. The female monster, once used as a politically reappropriated statement for liberation in many European countries, is now recommodified in a humorous revision of British texts that underemphasizes the implications of female resistance for an American audience.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Considering Austen's writings precede the modern feminist movement, I use the phrase proto-feminist to denote gender-based rhetoric in the Georgian/Regency era and feminism for Grahame-Smith's characters as he is working within a contemporary, post-*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* framework.
- <sup>2</sup> In the coming sections, I will use the phrase *zombi(i)e* to combine the differentiating 'zombie' taxonomies as highlighted by Sarah Juliet Lauro in a later section. The amalgamation of *zombi*, *zombie*, and *zombii* into a single term, *zombi(i)e*, showcases the intersectional role of the creature in Grahame-Smith's twenty-first-century horror rewriting. Further, I also use the *zombi/e* at times to eliminate the reference to *zombii*, as all three categories are not always applicable.
- <sup>3</sup> It is important to note that Grahame-Smith's female protagonists reflect the rhetorical monster, a creature despised for her independence and subversion to patriarchal oppression rather than prescriptive monstrous imagery.
- <sup>4</sup> I am referring to the Abrahamic G-d of the Old Testament. In the Jewish religion, it is disrespectful to spell out the word G-d in its entirety. I will, throughout this thesis, refer to the Abrahamic G-d with a dash in between the letters in accordance with my religion.
- <sup>5</sup> Women were also the targets of scholarly publications that received wide critical readership. Both King James I in *Daemonologie* (2014) and Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger in *Malleus Maleficarum* (2019) considered the witch figure as corporeal and unforgiving, with Kramer and Sprenger positing that only women are susceptible to Satan's charms; (Kramer and Sprenger 2019, p. 41; King James I 2014, pp. 30–40).
- <sup>6</sup> Stacy Schiff has shed new light on the Salem Witch Trials in *The Witch* (Schiff 2016), claiming that the catalysts behind Salem are more complex than a terror of women's connection to Lucifer, mostly because the accusers were women against women. Indeed, Schiff attributes the witch trials in Salem to boredom, religious oppression, and silence around sexual assault. Schiff argues that the Salem Witch trials remained a historically legal blunder well into the nineteenth century, especially in North America. Witch trials are the actual and legal consequences of the fear surrounding female autonomy, which has lasting cultural ramifications for women; (Schiff 2016).
- <sup>7</sup> This justified harsher work conditions or opportunities for nurses or governesses. As Bouchereau warns, a nymphomaniac who is employed as the sole carer of children should immediately be sequestered so as not to negatively influence their impressionable charges.
- <sup>8</sup> This *zombii* narrative, however, does not translate to the film *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Steers 2016). In the film starring Lily James, the *zombi(i)es* have orchestrated a collective attack on Britain while the characters worry about how to defend their homes and country from a monster who actively and consciously multiplies with ease. The implication here is that the film *zombiis* have morphed again from Grahame-Smith's mindless beings to vicious conquerors, perhaps denoting a cultural shift from pathological or weak monsters to fearsome creatures that can vanquish and even subjugate their enemies; (Steers 2016).
- <sup>9</sup> While this chapter focuses on female monstrosity and the subsequent marginalization of women, it is interesting that Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is the one who gets maimed. Perhaps this was Grahame-Smith's nod to a more contemporary feminist sensibility, where women are no longer the sole perpetrators of sexual transgression. With Wickman as the cripple at the hands of Darcy, Grahame-Smith could be giving a twenty-first-century audience a more satisfying and more just ending to a deviant philanderer like Wickham, placing the blame on the male seducer instead of the woman, which history sought to bear the brunt of the blame and shame onto for falling prey to a man with less than honorable intentions on their female counterpart.

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