The Walking Dead: Identity Crisis in the Post-9/11 Era

Mariam Vergeti
S1762394

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Supervisor/ First Reader: Dr Michael Newton
Second Reader: Dr Evert Jan Van Leeuwen
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Introduction

"So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation."

-Mary Shelley, *Frankensten*

Many scholars regard *Frankenstein* an early science-fiction novel. In this passage from *Frankenstein,* Mary Shelley displays the title character's great scientific passion to be a pioneer and to explore the unknown. As readers realise by the end of this classic Gothic work, all the grotesque things that occur throughout the novel derive from Frankenstein's scientific passion, which in the novel represents the aggressive nature of science. Since the novel deals with fears surrounding the possibly fatal consequences of science, scholars like Sarah Wasson and Emily Alder argue that *Frankenstein* is probably the first science-fiction novel (Wasson & Alder 2). In addition, Wasson and Alder argue that *Frankenstein* can be used to prove the notion that science fiction and Gothic have always been merged and confused by critics (3). Specifically, they argue that the Gothic 's capacity "to evolve and diverge has enabled it to become more than a simple category marked by a series of tropes or by a particular form" (1). To them, the Gothic has a unique capacity "to adapt to new historical moments" and has often been attached to other genres to become relevant to many other eras than merely the nineteenth century (1). Accordingly, in the case of *Frankenstein,* Gothic fiction has merged with science fiction, forming what is now called "Gothic science fiction".

The Gothic genre merged with science fiction in Shelley's novel, and this marriage of genres still regularly occurs in the current post-9/11 era as well. According to Kyle William Bishop Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* comic book series, which revolves around a zombie apocalypse caused by medical experiments, embodies the cultural anxieties and "social

insecurities resulting from the September 11th terrorist attacks" (Bishop 73). The series' main antagonists, zombies, are an extension of the archetypal Gothic figure of the [undead?] monster, in the mould of Frankenstein's monster, a 'mummy', or a vampire. Wasson and Alder claim that zombies address the concept of the supernatural, intrinsic to the Gothic genre as well as to the "horror produced by humans", as an aspect of science fiction narratives. The fact that zombies exist between life and death gives them supernatural qualities (5). At the same time, as Fred Botting explains, the reason for their existence, which has to do with the "technological effects" of the "modern urban society" (Botting 40), also addresses science-fiction anxieties. Hence, this monster is the product of merging Gothic and science fiction and, according to Bishop, is used in many cultural texts as a critique of the concept of humanity itself (Bishop 73). Alexandra Lykissas agrees that the Gothic tropes and themes "are relatable to different cultures and different historical moments" and argues that the Gothic has been adapted to many cultural products, including television and graphic novels, "as a way to examine the effects of a post-9/11 world" (Lykissas 15). Similarly, Bishop suggests that in the post-9/11 era, while complex cultural anxieties permeate American society, zombie narratives attempt to "excise our collective fears and doubts" (Bishop 73).

Indeed, basing his conclusions on two studies concerning identity and terror, Curtis S. Dunkel suggests that, among other consequences, the effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks "produced greater anxiety" concerning identity. He also adds that terrorism salience produced higher levels of identity exploration and at the same time greater identity commitment, which he defines as the embracement and defence of the already established worldviews (Dunkel 287). Specifically, Dunkel explains that, according to the terror management theory, the realization of one's mortality can cause "an immense amount of anxiety or terror". In psychology, the realisation of one's mortality is called mortality salience and is part of the terror management theory. Based on that theory, Dunkel suggests that as the emphasis on the

self and the value of an autonomous identity have grown in the modern world, death, which "is the end of the highly valued self", can be considered as the "ultimate identity loss" (Dunkel 289). Consequently, people adopt several conscious or unconscious mechanisms to cope with the terrorising possibility of losing their identity. One of those unconscious mechanisms is, according to him, the adoption of a "cultural worldview" (287), which is a set of "beliefs about the nature of reality shared by groups and individuals" (Greenberg, Solomon & Pyszczynski 65). Dunkel adds that the subtle reminders of death lead individuals to the exploration for a meaningful worldview, which acts as a buttress for identity (293).

However, Dunkel explains that the 9/11 produced a different kind of salience. Specifically, he argues that "terrorism salience should not only produce the reminder of mortality, but may also lead to a feeling that one's world and one's cultural worldview are under attack" (297-8). Individuals with high identity exploration exhibited more anxiety under the terrorism salience as they did under the mortality salience too. Not only did the events of 9/11 produce a more intense identity exploration and a greater anxiety concerning identity, but it also led to identity commitment (297), which is defined as the "adoption of a worldview" (289). Dunkel, specifically, argues that since "terrorism salience contains not only a reminder of one's mortality, but also an assault on one's world", individuals tend to embrace even more "basic Western cultural beliefs and values" (299). He explains that this happens because the 9/11 attacks were seen by the vast majority of US citizens as "repugnant and representative of evil" and, consequently, this non-ambiguous nature of the attacks is associated to normative information processing styles and leads to the reinforcement of conventional reasoning, which, ultimately, leads to an identity commitment that affirms conventional Western cultural views and values (298). In other words, Dunkel's study suggests that the 9/11 attacks affected individuals' identity and identity formation processes. Thus, individuals experience an identity crisis and find themselves between normative worldviews, which are seen to be under attack,

and the exploration of a new identity as means to cope with the terror of physical and spiritual death.

Patrick McGrath agrees that death is the ultimate identity loss. To him, the Gothic speaks of death as it tends to “subvert any and all established structures" and questions "essential identity" (McGrath 156). McGrath also argues that the Gothic's popularity is a result of a prevalent perception that civilization and "social structures are breaking down" while "the normal inhibitory mechanisms" cannot prevent this degenerative process (153). The post-9/11 years is an era that is characterised by these elements and Dunkel’s study confirms that identity is subjected to this tension. According to Bishop, Kirkman's comic book series *The Walking Dead* is one of the many examples of cultural products that comment on the post-9/11 status quo, while adapting to the Gothic genre (73-4). Hence, this study will focus on the analysis of *The Walking Dead* as a Gothic text that elaborates upon the identity crisis described by Curtis S. Dunkel.

Specifically, this identity crisis will be analysed in terms of three typical Gothic tropes and themes pervading *The Walking Dead*, namely the Gothic double, insanity, and decay. Each trope or theme will be discussed separately with the aim of establishing a solid argument regarding *The Walking Dead*'s Gothic nature and its relevance to the post-9/11 era identity crisis. Evidence will be gathered by a close reading of the source material and, therefore, the thesis will consist of three chapters that will each include a close reading of the primary source in terms of specific Gothic tropes or themes. In order to proceed, this introduction will set the methodological framework by addressing the literature concerning comic book criticism as well as the zombie archetype in popular culture.

First of all, the Oxford English Dictionary initially defined a zombie as "a corpse said to be revived by witchcraft, especially in certain African and Caribbean religions" and states it

later came to be known as "a person or reanimated corpse that has been turned into a creature capable of movement but not of rational thought, which feeds on human flesh" ("zombie"). According to Sarah Juliet Lauro and Deborah Christie, zombie evolution in popular culture is divided in three main stages, with the first one being the Haitian folklore zombie that is linked to voodoo practices (Lauro & Christie 2).

During the next stage, as claimed by Kevin Bonn, the zombie moved from folklore to fiction and film (Boon 6). Even though the reanimated-by-witchcraft zombie concept has roots in Haitian folklore the first book featuring this particular fictional creature was only officially introduced to American audiences in *The Magic Island* by W.B. Seabrook published in 1929. Specifically, zombies were depicted as mindless creatures, acting under the spell of an evil magician. Notable examples of that phase are Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* and *Revolt of the Zombies* (Boon 7). As suggested by Elizabeth McAlister, during that stage "the zombie, along with cannibal practices that were inputted to be part of the Haitian culture, become image of the Other through which barbarism comes to be the sign for the Haitian", resulting in the dehumanization of Haitians to further American imperialism (McAlister 472). Consequently, the Zombie archetype was used during that era as a means of dehumanising the Other in American society and foreign policy and, therefore, the Zombie narrative was inextricably linked to American foreign politics and business interests.

The last stage of the zombie evolution in popular culture came to the fore, as explained by Ashley Knox, in George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968 (Knox 6). Deborah Christie specifically explains that in the last stage of its evolution, the archetypical zombie is "no longer the benign sleepwalker or the organic puppet of a voodoo master", but "[has become] a force of nature that moves under its own autonomy, propelled forward by its own instinctual needs"(Christie 61). Stokes argues that George Romero "stands as a touchstone in the history of the modern zombie, (…) creating a monster which would forever change our

perception of the undead" (Stokes 13). In addition, Stokes explains that this stage of the zombie archetype's evolution gave birth to the concept of the zombie apocalypse, which dominates the modern zombie narrative (29). Sarah Baker explains that in the post 9/11 era "apocalypse and zombie narratives represent the worst-case scenario for both the people of the USA and the world" and zombies "are used as faceless creatures to present either an unknown threat or (...) as social critique" (Baker 1). Thus, even in the last stage of the evolution of the zombie archetype, zombie narratives remain relevant to the political culture of the United States.

Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, as a post-apocalyptic narrative, also addresses that latest stage of the zombie archetype evolution. Specifically, zombies are used in the series to depict the unmaking of the identity in the post-apocalyptic world. It is worth noting that for the reality of the series the 9/11 attacks have never happened. However, the post-apocalyptic world of the series resembles the post-9/11 world in several points. Not only is survival the focus in both of these worlds, the fictional and the real, but survivors' struggle to redefine themselves in the new reality as well. Post-apocalypse finds survivors in both the fictional and the real world trying to face the fact of mortality, which is a direct threat to their own existence, physical and mental. As said before, mortality signifies the end of the self and a post-apocalyptic world symbolises the collapse of one's world and worldview. The characters in *The Walking Dead* have lost their world and face the threat of losing their identity too. The loss of identity is expressed in the text through the 'zombification', where characters lose the conscious control of their body. As explained by Dunkel this situation is the result of terrorism that not only threats one's self but one's world too. In such situations individuals display greater anxiety concerning their identity, which derives from their struggle to balance between identity exploration and identity commitment. Indeed, the characters in *The Walking Dead* experience severe anxiety as they tend to embrace conventional Western worldviews while at the same time they are engaged in an identity exploration so that they can define themselves and their

position in the new world, in which the conventional Western worldviews are irrelevant. Of course, in *The Walking Dead* the zombie archetype plays a major role and functions as a catalytic power. Particularly, zombies not only provoked the identity crisis, but they also appear to be a reminder, even the embodiment of this crisis as well as of mortality and terror, and also reflect the characters' darker aspects. Thus, zombies in *The Walking Dead* add to the 'unmaking' of the human, of the self, and of any stable identity.

While *The Walking Dead* comic book series is part of the modern zombie narrative, including post-apocalyptic elements and zombies that are products of science and autonomous entities driven by their own instincts, the series focuses as much on the undead as it does on humanity's reactions to them in this post-apocalyptic America. Specifically, Kyle William Bishop suggests that the series "present[s] the otherwise sympathetic protagonists as monstrous creatures" instead of presenting the actual horrible creatures, the zombies, as such (Bishop 73-4). According to Bishop, the post-apocalyptic setting plays a major role in the dehumanization of the protagonists, who tend to be like zombies themselves in this post-9/11 era (73). The collapse of the world in the series represents a kind of moral collapse since morals seem to matter less and less in a world focused on survival, such as in the post-9/11 worlds. Alexandra Lykissas suggests that in general, the Gothic genre's tropes, characteristics and content, whether connected to the zombie narrative or not, have been revitalized in and adapted to the post-9/11 narrative (Lykissas 15). She also claims that many cultural products, such as the TV show *Supernatural*, have "adapted the Gothic as a way to examine the effects of a post-9/11 world by (…) highlighting the concept of evil or terror within" (15). In general, to Lykissas, the supernatural elements of the Gothic have been used as "a way to comment on the cultural and social conditions of their historical moments", with the Gothic of the twenty-first century being just one more example among many (16). Therefore, this thesis will also examine the

Gothic aspects of *The Walking Dead*, keeping in mind that humans are also an element of terror in the series, which connects the series' content to the post-9/11 era.

As mentioned above, the thesis's analysis will be based on close reading, in accordance with current theories concerning comic book criticism. According to Aaron Meskin and Roy T. Cook, comic books as part of the popular culture constitute a form of hybrid art since it appears to be a combination of several earlier art forms (Meskin & Cook xix). However, Meskin and Cook argue that comic books are not merely a sum of combined pre-existing art forms, but rather a complete art form that "evolved from its heterogeneous origins" and developed a wealth of (…) conventions governing panel placement, panel borders (or frames), speech and thought balloons, narration boxes, sound effects, motion lines and other emanata , and a host of other characteristics. Also, to them, those comic book conventions vary from culture to culture and, therefore, "comics are saturated with convention, and cultural variation of convention, to a degree unmatched by any other visual art form" (xix).

Several comic book artists, philosophers and scholars, including Scott McCloud, Will Eisner, and David Kunzle, have attempted to explain the nature of comic books and, therefore, the way they should be analysed. Comic book artist McCloud, for instance, argues that comics should be analysed from the scope of formalism, since comic books' popularity is based on their structure; that is the "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" that "convey information" and "produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 9). On the other hand, Will Eisner agrees with art historian David Kunzle that comics hold a "moral and topical" nature (Kunzle 1973) and suggest that despite its structure and visual apsects, comics are a "form of reading" and should be analysed in relation to their content (Eisner 1). Nevertheless, it was David Carrier's work that shed most light on the study of comic books. Specifically, Carrier explains that comics interpretation differs from the interpretation of other art forms as comics are in fact a sequence of "self-interpreting pictures" (Carrier 121).

Despite the nature of the comics, one other concern in comic book criticism is representation. The relationship between images and text in comic books is part of the representation. According to Thomas E. Wartenberg, "it is characteristic of comics to give equal priority to the text and the pictures (…) neither the text nor the image provides an independent constraint upon the other" (Wartenberg 87). Indeed, the majority of the Academy sees comics as a form of literature. Nonetheless, Aaron Meskin argues that comics is a hybrid form of art that combines literary devises with pictures and, therefore, it should be analysed respectively. Henry John Pratt agrees and indicates that narrativity, which is a major literary device, plays a crucial role in comics' interpretation too but he also suggests that comic books' analysis and interpretation resembles that of films since narrativity is merged with images (Pratt 107-110). Wartenberg claims that unlike illustrated books, where images agree with the meaning of the words (Wartenberg 89), in comic books "the images and text both contribute at an equally basic level to their story-worlds" (97). Moreover, Wartenberg suggests that in comic books images are not merely pictorial, meaning that they do not only give an image but they also function in a descriptive way. One such example is, according to him, the 'speed lines', which are drawn in a panel not for pictorial purposes but to describe that an object or a character is moving fast (97). Similarly, text in comic books is not only descriptive or narratological but "is used in a representational way, but not visually or pictorially" to represent "sonic elements of the scene that is represented pictorially by the images in the other frames in the strip". The use of the word "Pow" to indicate a sonic event in comic books is an example of this kind of representation that functions as "a translation of (usually) auditory features of the depicted (fictional) world of the comic into visual form" (100). Consequently, the use of both text and images enables comics to represent descriptive, narratological, pictorial, and auditory elements as the films do.

Indeed, comic books resemble films in the sense that they both employ image, text, and suggestions of sound. However, Roy T. Cook explains that it is a mistake to apply the techniques and theories constructed for the interpretation of films in the interpretation of comics (Cook 165). Cook argues that "there is a genuine need for a separate account of the structure and aesthetics of comics" since film theory and criticism seems at some points unable to grasp the complexity of the comics' nature (184). Moreover, according to Karin Kukkonen, comic books are now considered to be literature due to "their complex narrative strategies", which "allow to them to participate in and reflect on the contemporary cultural debate" and, therefore, the development of analysing methods for their interpretation is necessary (Kukkonen 177).

Kukkonen agrees with Neil Forceville that cognitive approach is the most fruitful way to analyse comics (Kukkonen 14, Forceville 89). Particularly, Forceville argues that cognitive approach in comic book analysis derives from linguistics and focuses on "the systematicity and pattern-finding" that is related to the meaning-making process (Forceville 90). He also adds that as far as it concerns comic book analysis, cognitive approach is interrelated with culture and ideology and, therefore, narrative and language theories contribute to the better understanding of comics, even though comics is a non-verbal or partly verbal art form (90-91). To him, cognitivist-oriented comic book analysis is mostly influenced by conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory as well. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is the attempt to "conceptualise abstract and complex phenomena by *systematically* understanding them in terms of concrete phenomena" (91). Even though Conceptual Metaphor Theory entails to a degree hybridity, "there are many other forms of hybridizing" that can be better capture by Blending Theory (93). Blending Theory "postulates that different semantic domains (…) merge to create a new 'blended space' (…) , which combines selected elements from the input spaces and as a result yields new, emergent meaning that was not present in either of the input spaces"

(93). In other words, two sides are combined and provide an implied meaning. Finally, Forceville suggests that both Blending Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory "rely on mental structures known as "image schemas": the patterns that function as the abstract structure of an image, which connects different experiences to a central recurring structure" (94).

Thierry Groensteen also supports that comics function as a system, whose parts conform to central recurring structure, also known as "codes" (Groensteen 7). To him, comics are primarily a language, "an original ensemble of productive mechanisms of meaning" and, hence, should be analysed in terms of cognitivism and not "through a grand theory, such as structural analysis or narrative semiotics" (2). Groensteen also explains that there are four distinct eras of comic book analysis, which either concentrate on structure or on ideology and usually analyse comics in terms of minimal units and not as a whole (3). According to him, though, comics should be seen as a system of codes, either visual or narratological, and should be analysed both in terms of smaller units and broader codes. Particularly, he suggests that "at certain analytical moments, we move to the interior of the panel" to explore "certain component elements (…) with reference to the codes (…) that determine these components" (7). In addition, the code system of a comic is ruled, to Groensteen, by a spatio-topical code, "which organises the co-presence of panels" and "governs the framing relations" between the visual and the narratological elements (6).

Not only does Groensteen argue for the interpretation of comics as a system, but he also claims that the comic book analysis should be analysed in terms of 'elementary relations' (which is a form of restricted arthrology focusing on the sequence of panels, frames, and codes) and 'general arthrology' (which is the network that links the elementary elements) (22). Using the term "arthrology", Groensteen underlines the systemic nature of comics and compares them to the human body, where all of the bones are connected to the broader frame and they function cooperatively. Furthermore, page lay-out and breakdown, as parts of arthrology "mutually

inform one another" and contribute to the analysis of comic books (143). Specifically, the lay-out has to do with the arrangement of the panels in one frame and the breakdown with the sequence of the frames within a comic book. As said before, the broader narrative of a comic book determines these elements and, henceforth, the analysis of lay-outs and breakdowns is able to reveal the nature of the comic's main narrative.

Taking into account the literature concerning the analysis and criticism of comics, this study will treat *The Walking Dead* as a whole, while analysing it in terms of both narrative and image. As in every comic book, there are some major narratological codes that determine the smaller units of *The Walking Dead* too. This thesis considers the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era as the major concept that runs throughout the series and determines its arthrology. Specifically, readers can make sense of *The Walking Dead* based on Kukkonen's methods, which address cognitive meaning-making. As part of the wider literature of the post-9/11, *The Walking Dead* draws elements from its contemporary cultural memories, which for the best part are influenced by the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath. As said above, the identity crisis as an issue of the post-9/11 era runs through *The Walking Dead* and influences its elementary relations, including visual and narratological codes, frames, and panels. This study, which aims to explain how *The Walking Dead* as a Gothic text deals with the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era, takes the code system of *The Walking Dead* as consisting of three main sub-codes/narratives. These codes are actually the three main Gothic tropes that will be discussed in the next three chapters respectively and they influence the arthrology of the series as well. Particularly, the thesis will focus on the Gothic double or else the Doppelganger archetype, insanity, and the Gothic decay or degeneration as the three main Gothic tropes, which function as main codes in *The Walking Dead*. Consequently, Gothic influences somehow the way the series seems to deal with the broader code, which is the post-9/11 identity crisis. Each trope determines the series' lay-outs and breakdowns and interferes in the meaning-making process,

that is to say the way readers make sense of the series' codes. This study will concentrate on these three Gothic tropes while analysing the series in terms of both visual and narratological codes and, henceforth, will be developed in three chapters (one for each of the Gothic tropes in question).

The first chapter will revolve around the Gothic double as a traditional Gothic trope and will identify the ways in which it is developed in *The Walking Dead* comic books series. The chapter will explore several questions: What is the Gothic double's importance in the depiction of the post-9/11 status quo? What is its role in the depiction of humans as monsters and what does that mean for the sociocultural conditions in the post-9/11 era? Particularly, this chapter will argue that, as many Gothic texts do, *The Walking Dead* uses the Gothic double to critique the contemporary status quo of post-9/11 America and specifically the identity issues related to the 9/11 attacks. The Gothic double is one of the major codes that runs throughout the series and is also linked to the concept that zombies represent humanity. This concept links the Gothic double to the main narrative, which, at least for this study, focuses on an identity crisis. Hence, the first chapter will employ close reading of both the visual and textual elements of the story so as to connect them to the main narratological code: that is, the concept of identity crisis. The role of the concept that zombies represent humanity plays a vital role in connection the Gothic double to the main narrative as well.

The second chapter will focus on Gothic insanity, which is also considered to be one of the narratological codes that influence the development of *The Walking Dead.* In *The Walking Dead* characters lose their minds due to the lack of security, constant fear, and the loss of those established worldviews which constitute the basis of one's identity. All these lead to an identity crisis that resembles the culture's identity crisis of the post-9/11 era. The chapter discusses the ways insanity works in the series and the ways it connects itself and the sub-codes to the main narrative, the identity crisis. In doing so, this chapter defines the importance of identity

exploration and the effects of identity commitment in a post-apocalyptic setting. Finally, the chapter stresses the connection between insanity and the Gothic double as well as the way these elements combined contribute to the general narratological code and regulate the elementary elements of series so that they can also relate to the main code.

Ultimately, the third chapter will examine decay as a characteristic Gothic concept and will attempt to describe the ways in which it functions in *The Walking Dead* comic book series in relation to identity crisis. Specifically, the series, being a post-apocalyptic narrative, addresses those fears of degeneration that usually proliferate within contexts that are characterised by instability. The post-9/11 context can be read as such, since the 9/11 terror attacks have radically changed the status quo of Western societies. Also, the post-9/11 era is characterised by fear and identity crisis, which can be seen as the result of this change. The concept of decay describes the collapse of the world as we know it and, therefore, provides a reminder that identity can be subverted too. Consequently, the depiction of decay in the series can also be read as such and is mostly expressed in two main ways: the decay of civilisation and the physical decay of the human body. Furthermore, the chapter links this last code with the previous two and explains their connection to the central issue of identity crisis in the post-9/11 era.

1. "We Are the Walking Dead": The Gothic Double as a Reflection of Shifting Identity

"You think we hide behind walls to protect us from the walking dead? Don't you get it? We ARE the walking dead!"

(*The Walking Dead* Vol 5)

Here, Rick Grimes, the main character in *The Walking Dead* comic book series, explains that the survivors of the zombie apocalypse have become, metaphorically speaking, zombies themselves. With this quote, Robert Kirkman, the creator and writer of the series, suggests that humans resemble the 'walking dead' and that zombies and humans present two sides of the same coin. In general, zombies in *The Walking Dead* are used as a kind of a double for both the characters in the series and humanity in general. Of course, the Gothic double is a popular Gothic trope, employed in Gothic texts for centuries as a means to comment on contemporary society. For instance, in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, according to Gry Faurholt, Edgar Allan Poe makes use of the Gothic double so as to provoke "unease by 'terrorizing' the reader in order to ultimately re-establish the necessity of […] values and boundaries" (Faurholt 2). Similarly, in *The Walking Dead* the Gothic double, which is one of the main codes that guide the series' arthrology, is used to portray the 9/11-related identity crisis and provide a critique to the post-9/11 era concerning the fate of humanity. Hence, this chapter will focus on the way the series deals with the issue of identity crisis in the post-9/11 era in terms of the Gothic archetype of the double.

The chapter will be structured in two main parts. Since the Gothic double is one of the main codes that determine the smaller units of the series (including the lay-out, the panel sequence, and the conceptual content of the panels), the study will offer an overview of the archetype's nature, history, and literary function. Naturally, the chapter will discuss the ways

in which this archetype was used in Gothic texts throughout the centuries, and its function in such texts will be briefly touched upon. Also, the relation between the Gothic double and Gothic monsters, from the monster of Frankenstein to vampires and zombies, will be discussed. Once the term is adequately defined and explained as a Gothic trope, the chapter will move on to the analysis of this thesis' main primary source, or in other words, *The Walking Dead* comic book series. Particularly, how the Gothic double functions in the series will then be explained, as will the kinds of doppelgänger that can be identified by the readers, their role in the plot of the series, and their connection to post-9/11 identity crisis issue. Hence, the Gothic character of the text will be highlighted and explained, at least when it comes to the use of the Gothic double. Finally, attention will be devoted to explaining how the Gothic double constantly evolves and is able to adapt to new narratives, such as comics, in order to provide a kind of social critique.

First, a definition of a literary Doppelgänger needs to be provided. According to several scholars, such as Tony Fonseca, Dimitris Vardoulakis, and John Herdman, the term was coined by Jean Paul in his serial novel *Titan* (Fonseca 187; Vardoulakis 82; Herdman 13). Clifford Hallman follows a linguistic approach to the term used by Paul based on its translation, which is literally "double-goer" (Hallman 25). Hallman also notes that nowadays the Doppelgänger is used to refer to the 'second self' (25). Tony Fonseca argues that for Hallman "as far as the literary Doppelgänger is concerned (…) 'double' can mean almost any dual, and in some cases even multiple, structure in a text" (quoted in Fonseca 188). Moreover, Fonseca agrees with Sir James George Frazer that the double is a "physical manifestation, or result, of an inner being existing without" (Fonseca 188). Fonseca also suggests that the 'evil twin' and the 'alter-ego' are "subsets of the Doppelgänger" (188). He specifically explains that "in the case of the alter-ego, physical manifestations can be in the form of an intimate friend, an associate, sometimes even a stranger who looks eerily similar, and the alter-ego can represent a unique facet in an

individual's personality" (188). In addition, to Fonseca the Doppelgänger is a second self, or even an alter-ego, that constitutes a distinct and separate literary being, while it only exists "in a dependent relation to the original" (189).

As said before, Fonseca traces the birth of the literary Doppelgänger to German folklore and, then, literature. To him, German Romantic authors, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Ludwig Tieck, and Heinrich von Kleist, used the Doppelgänger in the same way as Jean Paul did, establishing the first literary Doppelgänger (Fonseca 190). To him, the literary tradition of the Doppelgänger continues within the Gothic, and, specifically, in novels such as *Frankenstein* (1818), where a monster functions as a double for the main character (196). Many scholars, such as Linda Dryden, have pointed out the association between the literary Doppelgänger and the Gothic. Dryden, specifically, argues that "it is rare to find a tale of doubles or doubling that does not contain elements of Gothic" (Dryden 38). To Fonseca, the fact that the literary Doppelgänger was born in the same German literature (Fonseca 190) that also gave birth to the Gothic, is an interesting point to think about. Of course, Dryden is not the only scholar who supports the connection between the literary double and the Gothic. In fact, Mary K. Patterson Thornburg also argues that Gothic literature is "a perfect breeding ground for Doppelgänger texts" even though there are plenty instances of comedic doubles as well (1).

The Doppelgänger motif, as Mary Ellen Snodgrass supports, soon moved from Germany to Britain, where it was widely used in Gothic novels (Snodgrass 84). Snodgrass argues that the literary Doppelgänger in English Gothic literature "typically depicts a double who is both duplicate and antithesis of the original" (84). Among the novels which make use of this kind of Doppelgänger, Snodgrass lists Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Nevertheless, Snodgrass argues that in crime novels, the Doppelgänger is manifested in the

face of a demonic ego, as in the case of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (date), Robert Montgomery's *Bird's Nick of the Woods* (date), and Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (date) (84).

Edgar Allan Poe also elaborated upon this typical Gothic motif in his effort to internalise Gothic terror, providing a renewal of the genre and establishing the American Gothic. One of the most striking examples of Poe's use of the Doppelgänger is in "The Fall of the House of Usher" in which the death of Madeline, the main character's twin sister, resulted in the death of her brother. Even though, the siblings of this story are not identical doubles, as are the doubling pair in "William Wilson", doubling in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is more interesting since the relationship between the twin brothers of the novel is doubled in the text in the form of the house in which the siblings live. As soon as the twins die, the house collapses. To Snodgrass, American Gothic literature "produced a unique twist on the motif of the double with examinations of white and mixed-race children in the Antebellum South". A novel which successfully does this, according to her, is George Washington's *The Grandissimes,* which explores social class themes through the confrontations between the Creole and mulatto sons of a powerful landlord (84).

The twentieth-century Doppelgänger motif is visible not only in novels, but in films, comic books, and video games as well. Some of the films that used the Doppelgänger motif are Robert Hamer's *The Scapegoat* (1959), George A. Romero's *Martin* (1977) and *The Dark Half* (1993), as well as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000). Not only did the Doppelgänger appear in films, but, Fonseca argues, in television series as well (Fonseca 210). To him, some of the series that manifest the Gothic double are *The X-files, Star Trek,* and *Supernatural* (210). Finally, Fonseca traces the use of the Doppelgänger motif in video games such as *Prince of Persia*, *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening*, and *The Legend of Zelda*, among others (210). In modern times, the Doppelgänger motif has also been used by comic books and graphic

novels. Specifically, as defined by 'comicvine.com', the Doppelgänger is "a prominent trope among several forms of media including comic books", which normally "denotes a villain who is nearly identical to the hero in many ways, including background, personality, and powers" ("Doppelgänger"). Comicvine.com also suggests that the Doppelgänger is used in comic books to show the reader what the hero could have become.

The Doppelgänger, as a Gothic trope, is usually related to Gothic monsters. Particularly, according to Samantha Halpin, the appearance of the Doppelgänger has a major role in the analysis of the original character since "it is a figure that represents the externalization of the repressed aspects of the human psyche" (Halpin par. 2). Thus, the monsters as Gothic doubles indicate a cruel, usually evil, aspect of the original character's psyche. According to Halpin, in the case of *Frankenstein*, the monster functions as a mirror image of its creator's dark soul (Halpin par. 3). Similarly, Stephen king's *Cycle of the Werewolf* introduces, according to Heidi Strengell, another kind of double, the werewolf (Strengell par. 1). As suggested by James B. Twitchell, the vampire is another monstrous Doppelgänger, which comes into life during the transformation of a victim from human to vampire (Twitchell 86). In other words, the blood consuming monster functions as the Doppelgänger of the character before his transformation into a vampire. Even though the vampire is not physically ugly, it is its monstrous nature that functions as the externalization of a character's own dark nature. Finally, concerning zombies, Kyle William Bishop suggests that they also are used as doubles of main characters to signify humanity's monstrous aspects (Bishop, "How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture" 73-4).

Therefore, the literary Doppelgänger, which was born in German folklore and soon moved to German literature, was first used by Romantic authors. Later, as a popular trope in English literature, it became a characteristic of Gothic fiction. The kind of Doppelgänger that was used in English Gothic fiction triggered the formation of the American Gothic, with Edgar Allan Poe being one of the first to use the Doppelgänger in order to give a Gothic dimension

to his works. In the twentieth century, the literary Doppelgänger was not only used in novels but in films, television, comic books, and video games as well. Moreover, since the creation of the literary Doppelgänger coincides with the birth of the Gothic itself, these literary tropes are closely tied, and, unsurprisingly, the Doppelgänger is considered by many to be one of the most prominent Gothic tropes. Finally, in Gothic texts, the Doppelgänger is often manifested in monsters such as the monster of Frankenstein, vampires, werewolves, as well as zombies. As zombies are the vital component of *The Walking Dead*, and even play a significant role in the duplication process throughout the series, it is no wonder we should consider the Gothic double to be one of the central codes that define the series and contribute to the linking of the sub-codes to the main narrative, which is the identity crisis.

Gothic and Gothic tropes have been used as a means to critique the society in which the text was written. Since *The Walking Dead* is part of the post-9/11 narrative, its use of the Gothic double functions as a comment on that contemporary situation. Especially in the post-apocalyptic setting of the series, the Gothic double can challenge the reader's own fears concerning the post-9/11world and their place in it. According to Kyle Bishop, "[Post-9/11] genre protocols include not only the zombies and the imminent threat of violent deaths, but also a post-apocalyptic backdrop, the collapse of societal infrastructures, the indulgence of survivalist fantasies, and the fear of other surviving humans" (Bishop, "Dead Man Still Walking" 20). In other words, the post-apocalyptic setting of the series works as an allegory for the post-9/11 world. In that setting, *The Walking Dead* plays with readers' fears concerning the 'Other', which in the post-9/11 word is seen in the face of Al-Quaeda and terrorists in general. So, the Gothic double in the series also addresses this fear and the fearful "Other" is reflected on the Doppelgänger figures of the text. Indeed, the Doppelgänger archetype is extensively used in the comic book series alongside the monster (that is to say, the zombie) and the human antagonists. Thus, the rest of the chapter will focus on the ways in which doubling

works in the series in relation to the post-9/11narrative, and, especially, the related identity crisis. First, the doubling between main characters and zombies will be focused upon and, next, the doubling between main characters and their antagonists in the text will be touched upon. These two kinds of doubling contribute to the portrayal of the post-9/11 identity crisis in *The Walking Dead* comic book series, as they deconstruct fixed identity and, therefore, convey the mental tension experienced by the subjects of the studies in Curtis S. Dunkel argument.

As said before, the *The Walking Dead* comic series uses the Gothic double in two main ways. One of them resembles the use of the vampire as a Doppelgänger of a main or side character. During the first issues of the series, zombies bite humans causing their death and their resurrection as zombies. In other words, as with the vampire myth, if a zombie bites a human, the human turns into a zombie himself. Thus, we can read each particular zombie in the series as serving as the Doppelgänger of a character before his or her transformation. Of course, this is not very clear from the very beginning of the series, since the first zombies to appear are of unknown origin and the audience is not aware of the transformation procedure.

As soon as the readers become aware of this vampire-like transformation, the concept of the Gothic double is introduced. The first striking example of this doubling is seen in the face of Shane, the best friend of the series' protagonist Rick. In the first pages, which shortly depict life before the zombie-apocalypse, readers witness Rick and Shane talking about marriage as two good friends and colleagues. However, some minutes later, Rick gets hurt during a gunfight and falls into a coma. When he wakes up he is in the middle of the zombie-apocalypse and he cannot find his family. Soon, he sets out to find them in Atlanta. Indeed, Rick's wife, Lori, and their son, Carl, are in a camp with Shane and other survivors. What Rick does not know, though, is the fact that Shane is in a romantic relationship with Lori, since they both thought he was dead. Nonetheless, when Rick finds them, Lori ends her relationship with Shane and goes back to Rick. Shane, though, cannot accept their break-up and acts very

strangely, often endangering the whole group of the survivors. Finally, Shane decides to kill Rick, but he gets shot by Carl. While the group have buried him properly, Rick returns to Shane's grave and finds out that he has been reanimated (Fig. 1). The zombie-Shane is nothing more but the externalisation of Shane's soul that turned dark during Volume One. During Volume One, Shane became extremely violent, reckless, and lost his moral values. Indeed, when Rick sees the reanimated body says: "You were a good man, Shane. I don't know why you did what you did. But you were a good man" (TWD Vol 3:67). Rick implies that Shane has changed from a good man to someone who is ready to kill his best friend. At some point, Shane's transformation from human to zombie signifies his transformation from a good to an evil man. In addition, the fact that Rick addresses the zombie as if he was the actual Shane, also underlines the notion that the monster functions as Shane's Doppelgänger. This same thing is also supported by Shane's depiction in this panel, where he looks exactly the way he used to be. However, Rick's words function as a reminder of his changed situation and readers become aware that the apocalypse has shifted this man's personality.

In general, zombies in *The Walking Dead* comic series are seen as main characters' Doppelgängers not only in terms of specific characters but in terms of humanity as well. If in the series the protagonists represent humanity, zombies, who function as their doubles, are humanity's Doppelgängers. Indeed, as suggested by Kyle William Bishop, every zombie narrative revolves around the key premise that "the monsters represent humanity" (Bishop, "How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture" 73). Particularly, Bishop argues that in the post-9/11 era, which is filled with fear and cultural anxieties, filmmakers, comic book writers, directors, and videogame creators, use the zombie as a way "to excise our collective fears and doubts" (73). He, also, suggests that zombie narratives of the twenty-first century, such as *The Walking Dead* comic book series, not only address the monstrous behaviour of the zombie hordes, "but also the monstrous acts committed by the few humans struggling to survive a

dangerous post-apocalyptic world" (73). In other words, the post-apocalyptic fictional world of *The Walking Dead* can be read as the post-9/11 world and the protagonists as humanity itself. This concept, which is another recurrent code in the series, also influences the arthrology and plays upon the Gothic double to intensify the effect of the 9/11 to American identity.

Indeed, the zombies in *The Walking Dead* function as the main characters' doubles. At the start of the series, the zombies look intimidating and scary. The series contains many scenes in which brutal zombies devour human bodies. In Volume One, for instance, Rick finds a horse and gets to Atlanta. There, he comes across a huge horde of zombies, which devours his horse (Fig. 2). The series devotes a couple of pages to depicting the fate of the poor animal with images that are extremely explicit. In fact, this is the first scene in the whole series that the audience witness zombies actually eating a live creature. Of course, from that point onward, such scenes abound. Volume Five's opening scene, which is a twelve-image sequence, depicts a zombie eating a human alive (Fig. 3). The first image shows the zombie eating the hand, in the second one the zombie reached the victim's arm, the third shows how it devours the arm, and the rest of the images depict how the zombie greedily consumes the rest of the body. The explicit quality of these scenes as well as their length stems from the fact that the concept that zombies represent humanity influences the series' arthrology and links other main codes to the main narrative. If zombies represent humans and the main narrative supports the thought that humans have become more monstrous, the depiction of scenes where zombies devour living creatures intensifies the effect of identity shift.

As the story progresses, though, humans become scarier than the creatures and transform into "monsters" themselves, making the doubling between zombies and humans even more distinct. Thus, the zombies in the series are a physical manifestation of humans' monstrous nature. Indeed, the protagonists' behaviour shifts throughout the series and resembles the zombies' acts. One example of the brutality of the post-apocalyptic world is

Shane's murder by little Carl. The fact that a child can commit murder is shocking in and of itself. However, afterwards Carl feels awful and tells his father "it's not the same as killing the dead ones, daddy" (TWD Vol 1:143). Rick then agrees and repeats twice: "It never should be" (TWD Vol 1:144). Therefore, in the beginning of the series, killing a human is not applauded but sometimes seems necessary. As explained by Bishop, "for a number of post-9/11 zombie narratives, the so-called heroes of survival fiction must make difficult choices to ensure their continued existence" (Bishop 74). Bishop adds that in the post-apocalyptic world, which equates to the post-9/11 reality, characters are "forced to make increasingly difficult decisions, and what is 'right' has become supplanted by what is 'necessary'" (75). Similarly, Shane's murder by Carl is presented as something that is not right but has to be done for the sake of survival. Furthermore, the point when Carl makes the distinction between zombies and humans indicates that the shift from human to zombie is a shift of identity as well. In this way, the series reflects Dunkel's argument that after 9/11 attacks Americans' identity was in crisis and shifted in another direction.

In later Volumes, however, the main characters do several brutal things without those things being necessary. In Volume Six, Michonne, who has been raped and beaten up by the Governor, a major antagonist in the series, finally takes her revenge. The series dedicates a lot of pages to depict Michonne's revenge, which is explicitly brutal. When she gets to the Governor's chambers, Michonne says: "I don't want it to be this quick, I don't want it to be over", meaning that she wants to take pleasure in torturing the Governor (TWD Vol 6:49). During her fight with the governor, Michonne is seen biting him and cutting off whole pieces of his flesh, resembling a zombie herself (Fig. 4). She even crucifies him, drills holes in his body, pulls out his nails, cuts his hand, and, eventually, gouges his eye out. All this graphic content is explicitly depicted in the series in the same way zombies' actions were depicted earlier on, enhancing the doubling and underlining the notion that the protagonists have turned

into monsters themselves. Thus, the real monsters of the series are nothing more than a reflection of the humans' monstrous nature, which is triggered by the post-apocalyptic setting. Many scholars, such as Kyle Bishop, have pointed out that in the post-9/11 era people fears not only revolve around the "Other" but also their own selves (Bishop, "How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture" 78). In that sense, people are afraid that they are becoming terrorists so as to contain terrorism. In April 2004, that fear had ruffled American reality when the scandal of the torture perpetrated at Abu Ghraib was made public. Clearly, Michonne's brutality while torturing the Governor draws a parallel between the series reality and the Abu Ghraib torture scandal. Indeed, Michonne becomes a monster herself and the zombies of the series are nothing more than a mirror reflecting her dark self. Moreover, Michonne's revenge is itself a kind of doubling, one which derives from the concept of "an eye for an eye". Her behaviour somehow duplicates Governor's own behaviour and, consequently, Michonne becomes Governor's double. The book presents the torture of Governor in several panels and the lay-out favours brutality making the frames disturbing to the readers. This disturbance results from the readers' awareness that people's identity in post-apocalyptic contexts can shift to be brutal and monstrous. Americans' concern about their own shifting nature and their fear that their actions might establish them as terrorists themselves is a form of identity crisis as well. Thus, the disturbing scenes of torturing plays upon this pattern and convey the internal tension experienced by Americans concerning their identity in the post-9/11 era.

Not only do the zombies function as Doppelgängers for the protagonists, but their human antagonists do so as well. In general, the series presents the group of the protagonists as the good characters in the narrative, which have to deal with both the zombies and other groups of survivors. In the antagonists, the readers recognise the dark aspects of the protagonists' nature. Throughout the series, the group come across several antagonistic groups, which are presented as evil. The first major antagonist is considered to be the Governor, who

tried to take the shelter of Rick's group, an abandoned prison. Among others, the Governor sliced Rick's hand, brutally raped Michonne, ruined the prison, murdered, tortured, raped, and fed people to zombies. The Governor, as the leader of his group, can be read as Rick's own Doppelgänger. Rick is also the leader of a group and at several points had to perform brutal tasks to survive. However, the series presents Rick's psychological battle between good and evil and his ongoing transformation from an honourable police officer to a man who is capable of everything in order to survive and protect his people. At the point in the series at which the Governor is introduced, Rick is still undergoing an internal struggle and the Governor, as his Doppelgänger, functions as the externalisation of Rick's evil aspects. This internal tension between evil and good is in fact an identity crisis, as being evil or good is a qualifier of the nature of one's identity and determines the way people act and react. Hence, characters' struggle to resist their evil self can be read as an attempt to resist one's shifted identity, as in the concept of identity commitment explained by Dunkel.

After the prison's destruction by the Governor, the group meets the Hunters, a group of cannibals that try to eat them. The cannibalistic behaviour of this group signifies the doubling between the humanity and the zombies, which also perform cannibalism. In this instance, the series offers a dual doubling in the sense that zombies are the Doppelgängers of the Hunters and the Hunters are the Doppelgängers of Rick's group, which tends to share many of the same monstrous characteristics. Nonetheless, the Hunters are not the only antagonistic group that embodies this dual doubling. In Volume 22, Rick's group comes across the Whisperers, a mysterious group of survivors who cover themselves with zombies' skin to blend in with them (Fig. 5). The members of this group live among the zombie hordes, which they use as a means to attack other groups of survivors. Again, these antagonists are presented as being similar to the zombies not only in terms of their behaviour but in terms of their appearance as well. Since the Whisperers act as a double of Rick's group reflecting that group's dark aspects, we may

assume that Rick's group at that point resembles the monsters more than ever before. The fact the Whisperers live among the zombies strengthens the connection between the real monsters and humans, who in the post-apocalyptic world have become monsters themselves.

Not only do the antagonist groups function as the protagonists' Doppelgängers, but they also confirm the doubling between zombies and humans. Firstly, they do so in terms of their own behaviour, when they become zombie-like creatures that eat human flesh or live as zombies among the hordes, and, secondly, as the cause of Rick's group's transformation into 'monsters'. Having to deal with both the actual monsters and the monstrous humans of the post-apocalyptic world, Rick's group must perform brutal acts, which, finally, turn them into monsters. Throughout the series, the group becomes more and more monstrous in order to survive. In Volume Eleven, for instance, Rick's group finally captures the Hunters. The series depicts Rick, Michonne, Abraham, and Andrea torturing the Hunters by mutilating them (Fig. 6). Rick even threatens them saying: "Maybe we'll carve off a piece and have us a taste" (TWD Vol 11:113), meaning that Rick's group will eat parts of the Hunters' bodies as they did with Dale, a member of their group. The fact that the brutality of Rick's group is presented as a necessary action against their antagonists' (potential) actions fits, according to Bishop, the general post-9/11 reality, which is based on "cultural fears about what terrorists might do" (Bishop, "How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture" 77-8). However, Bishop argues that the series does not reflect the cultural fears concerning the terrorists' actions "but rather what the 'good guys' can do against potential or suspected terrorists" (78). In other words, people should not fear "the monstrous Other [the terrorists] but our[their] monstrous selves" (78). Thus, in the fictional reality of the series, Rick's group, which is presented as the 'good' force in the text, should not fear the zombies or the other survivors but rather fear their own selves. Again, the doubling in the series is determined by the concept that zombies represent humanity's monstrous nature. The co-existence of these two codes (the doubling and the humanity-zombie

resemblance), regulates the relationship between Rick's group and their antagonists and contributes to the depiction of identity crisis, since it intensifies the characters' fears of losing their identity and becoming evil themselves.

To sum up, *The Walking Dead* comic book series, as a Gothic text, makes use of the Gothic double, also known as the Doppelgänger motif. As many Gothic texts do, *The Walking Dead* uses the Gothic double to critique the contemporary status quo of the post-9/11 consensus and specifically the identity issue related to the 9/11 attacks. As said before, the Gothic double is one of the major codes that runs throughout the series and is also linked to the concept that zombies represent humanity. This concept links the Gothic double to the main narrative, which, at least for this study, focuses on identity crisis. In addition, this concept revolves around the fear of the "Other", which is reflected on the face of Al Qaeda and terrorists in general. The post-apocalyptic setting is an analogy between *The Walking* Dead and the post-9/11 word. In that setting, the Gothic double addresses this kind of fear by drawing the analogy between the "Other" of the series (that is to say, the zombies and the human antagonists) and the "Other" of the post-9/11 consensus. The "Other" is manifested in the face of the Doppelgänger figures in the text in two distinct ways. First, the zombies are used as the protagonists' double to signify their transformation into 'monsters'. At the beginning of the series, the zombies are the most intimidating creatures, but as the plot progresses, our protagonists become more and more scary, often resembling zombies themselves. Not only does the series use the zombies as the protagonists' doubles, but their human antagonists are such doubles as well. The antagonistic groups, which in many cases resemble zombies themselves, function as the Doppelgängers of Rick's group and reflect the dark aspects of that group's soul. The antagonists as such mirror the protagonists' dark aspects and display the kind of creatures they have become, or are slowly becoming.

In addition, the antagonistic groups confirm the doubling between zombies and humans. Firstly, in terms of their own behaviour, when they become zombie-like creatures that eat human flesh or live as zombies among the hordes, and, secondly, as one of the causes of Rick's group's transformation into 'monsters'. Rick's group is seen performing brutal acts so as to prevent their antagonists' brutal actions. This narrative fits the post-9/11 reality, where under the guise of responding to terrorist attacks the 'good' guys must do bad things to stop the 'bad' guys. However, the series can be read as a critique of that consensus since it promotes the notion that people should not be afraid of any 'monstrous Other', but rather of their own monstrous selves (Bishop, "How Zombies Conquered Popular Culture" 78). Just as the walking dead unlock a monstrous zombie-like quality in Rick and other survivors, 9/11 terrorist attacks unlocked a certain 'terrible' evil in Western society as well.

The tension that arises from these doublings is influenced by the series main code, one determined by the post-9/11 identity crisis. The characters of the series undergo torment in negotiating the space between what they used to be and what they now tend towards or have already become. This inner struggle of the characters between good and evil is in fact an expression of an identity crisis and, therefore, resembles the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era. Just like the protagonists of *The Walking Dead*, Americans faced not only mortality and terror but also the fear of losing one's world, as explained in Dunkel's argument. Therefore, like the subjects of Dunkel's studies, the protagonists of the series engage in an identity exploration as well as identity commitment. Specifically, the characters struggled to define themselves and their place in the changed world, where zombies and antagonists function as their doubles and reflect the dark aspects of their new identity.

2. "You Probably Think I'm a Lunatic": Insanity and Identity Crisis

"You see that? Pretty fucking crazy shit, huh? You probably think I'm a lunatic. Now let's figure out what to do with you"

(*The Walking Dead* Vol 18)

At one point, Carl, Rick's son, ends up with Negan, one of the lead antagonists in the series. Negan takes Carl with him and shows him the everyday life of his group, which includes tortures, killings, blackmailing, and other extreme practices. After their "tour", Negan addresses Carl and concludes that he probably thinks of him as a lunatic. The series often presents main characters doing insane things and deals with insanity as a main theme. As seen in the previous chapter, the characters undergo a continuous identity crisis and mental struggle. This mental struggle often leads them to actions of despair and mental break-downs. Thus, we assume that the series' content is determined by another popular Gothic trope, insanity. In the series, insanity is used to portray post-9/11 reality and in that context can be linked to the anxiety produced by terrorism. This anxiety is, according to this study, a result of the terror salience described in Dunkel's study. As also explained by Dunkel, terrorism salience was far more intimidating than any other realisation of mortality due to its sudden and violent character. Americans after the attacks had to confront the new status quo, which was characterised by the fear of mortality and the loss of one's identity as a result of terrorism. Thus, this chapter will examine the way insanity is presented in *The Walking Dead* comic-book series as well as its relation to the identity crisis that characterised the post-9/11 era.

As with the previous chapter, this one will also explore the issues involved in two ways. First, an analysis of insanity as a literary device will be provided. Particularly, the chapter will focus on the ways in which over the last two-hundred-and-fifty years insanity has imbued the

Gothic . After establishing the relationship between literary madness and post-9/11 reality, the chapter will continue with the textual analysis of *The Walking Dead* in an attempt to recognise the ways in which insanity is presented, and the connection between its use in the series and the post-9/11 context. The chapter will define how insanity functions as an expresion of the identity crisis that followed the 9/11 terror attacks in a post-apocalyptic fictional setting. Moreover, the chapter will discuss the role of insanity as a Gothic trope in the linking of the series' elementary elements to its general arthrology.

According to Jonathan M. Metzl, "psychology and popular culture have long been inexorably linked" since both of them use language and representation so as to "anatomise inchoate communal anxieties and desires" (Metzl 1), insanity is a theme that troubles writers. As argued by Scott Brewster, literary madness is closely linked to readers' own delusions and anxieties and, therefore, critical interpretation of textual madness cannot be done without recognising those anxieties (Brewster 481-2). Consequently, the audience's mentality affects the interpretation of textual madness. In addition, contemporary assumptions about mental illnesses influence the representation of madness in popular culture, since, according to Mary Hellen Snodgrass and Scott Brewster, representations of madness in novels adapted to shifting conceptions of mental health (Snodgrass 189, Brewster 482). Hence, it can be assumed that textual madness somehow reflects actual insanity or otherwise social delusions and anxieties.

Even though textual insanity is not an exclusively Gothic trope, it is in Gothic texts that madness is best manifested and played upon. Specifically, Brewster suggests that since Gothic writing is one of excess, "then madness is thoroughly a Gothic concern" (482). Indeed, Snodgrass argues that insanity is a major trope of the Gothic, "in part as a retreat of the mind from sensational or macabre events and apparitions that overthrow reason" (Snodgrass 189). To her, one of the first examples of gothic insanity can be found in Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor,* which was published in 1819. Among other ninetieth-century

novels that depict insanity, Snodgrass lists “the trauma-induced” *Nick of the Woods* by Robert Montgomery Bird (1837),“the psychotic love obsession” in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and many of Edgar Allan Poe’s works, which were filled with “clouded reasoning and uncontrolled perversions of insane protagonists” (189).

To Snodgrass, Gothic writers are highly interested “in the peculiarities of the insane” and, therefore, they elaborate on the aspects of madness through their characters (189). She particularly suggests that Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) provides a great description of “the collapse of mental faculties” (189) in a speech by the diabolic wanderer, who claims that an insane person “will echo the scream of every delirious wretch, (…) will pause, clasp his [your] hands on his [your] throbbing head, and listen with horrible anxiety whether the scream proceed from him [you] or them” (Maturin 56). However, according to Brewster, Gothic writers do not only “transcribe disturbed (…) or horrifying worlds”, but also provide structures and voices that “intensify the apparent madness they represent” (Brewster 482). In other words, Gothic writers elaborate upon fictional insanity, so as to explain the actual insanity that it represented. Snodgrass also argues that in ninetieth-century Gothic novels, writers provided an image of “otherness” through the identification of characters that are mentally unstable, which “elicits pity and compassion and elevates the humanity of the social situation” (189).

As said above, the representation of insanity in Gothic fiction is influenced by shifting conceptions of mental health. According to Jacqueline Howards, in the early ninetieth century, the psychological focus was on nervous disorders, such as melancholia, hypochondria, and hysteria, which were hotly debated (Howards 102). Hence, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”, which portrayed all of these disorders, is an example of the ways in which Gothic literature adapts to the contemporary views about mental illnesses. Similarly, Victorian Gothic literature, Snodgrass argues, “introduced studies of gendered diagnoses of mental

illness and unusual treatment of female patients" (Snodgrass 190). A typical example of that kind of adapting representation of insanity can be found in Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). In that short story, the female protagonist is the subject of madness, and is under the supervision of her husband-doctor while suffering from a kind of hysteria. The text narrates the mental break-down of a female character, criticizing its era's obsession with female hysteria as a mental illness. Finally, Snodgrass argues that twentieth-century Gothic fiction offers "more sophisticated glimpses of psychosis and its causes" since psychology made a significant progress (Snodgrass 190). To her, H.P Lovecraft's representations of insanity are a typical example of the twentieth-century textual insanity and the sensitivity with which mental illness is now treated by authors.

Therefore, psychology and literature have long been linked and insanity has been a popular literary device for centuries. From *Ophelia* to *Don Quixote* and modern fiction, literature has been using textual insanity as a means to comment on contemporary social situations. However, Scott Brewster argues, textual madness is, more than anything else, a Gothic concern (Brewster 482). Indeed, insanity has been excessively used as a major theme in Gothic texts, which throughout the years have adapted to the shifting perceptions of mental illness. First, Gothic texts saw mental illness as mere madness. Later, though, Gothic writers dealt with insanity in a more sensitive way influenced by their era's conceptions of mental illnesses. Specifically, in the early nineteenth century, when the psychological focus was on nervous disorders, Gothic texts provided instances of insanity that fitted the canon. Similarly, Victorian Gothic fiction played upon female hysteria, which was a popular mental disorder of the time. Finally, the twentieth-century Gothic grew even more sensitive towards mental illness and its complexity, reflecting the era's sensitivity towards insanity as well as the progress in psychology.

According to Brewster, Gothic textual insanity plays upon readers' own delusions and anxieties (Brewster 481) and intensifies "the apparent madness" it represents (482). Likewise, Gothic texts in the twenty-first century also elaborate on contemporary insanity issues, play upon audience's delusions and anxieties, and reflect the "madness" of the era in which they emerged. Of course, the twenty-first century is heavily influenced by the 9/11 terror attacks, which led to the culture of the "terror madness" as a result of mortality salience and the fear of losing one's world and identity. Indeed, the aftermath of the 9/11 saw the birth of the "War on Terror", which was actually a metaphorical war to represent the Western world's efforts to contain terrorism in a post-apocalyptic fictional setting. This war despite its political significance, is also related to identity commitment. Specifically, the war was an ideological conflict as well; a conflict between the Western world, which was under attack, and the East. As explained on the introduction, the attacks led Americans to an identity crisis and the need to defend the established Western worldviews through identity commitment. Many scholars, such as Richard Jackson, claim that ultimately, the War on Terror was triggered and justified by the terror madness, which overwhelmed American society and culture after the 9/11 attacks (Jackson 1). To Jackson, the War on Terror "is simultaneously a set of actual practices (…) and an accompanying series of assumptions, beliefs, justifications, and narratives" (8). All these things that accompanied the actual military practices of the War on Terror can be characterised as components of identity crisis, which characterised the post 9/11 era. Therefore, insanity as a theme of Gothic texts in the twenty-first century can be said to reflect its era's delusions and anxieties, which were often relevant to the terror madness.

Indeed, *The Walking Dead* comic book series, as a Gothic text of the post-9/11 era, focuses on insanity while offering a criticism on the terror madness as well. A striking parallel between *The Walking Dead*'s textual insanity in the post-apocalyptic setting of the series and the post-9/11 reality of terror madness can be seen at the very beginning of the series, when

survivors left the big cities to seek shelter in the countryside or in the woods. Not only does the series depict the mass abandonment of big cities, but also displays survivors' debates about whether to flee the big cities or not. The debates are usually a result of characters' own fears and anxieties that are seen to have overwhelmed their minds. In Volume 1, for instance, Rick argues that the group should leave the camp, which was set at the outskirts of the city, and move to another location away from the city so as to avoid zombies. Specifically, Rick suggests that they should leave immediately saying "Right now…let's just get away from the city—find someplace safe!" (TWD Vol 1:129) (Fig. 7). However, Shane disagrees and the two men argue, ultimately dividing the group and driving Shane insane. The previous panels that led to the argument depict the post-apocalyptic world as one filled with dangers and explain how the loss of one's world and, consequently, one's identity can lead to insanity.

Of course, this is not the only time that the series reflected on the post-9/11- related insanity. Particularly, *The Walking Dead* extensively elaborates on insanity and uses it as main theme. From the beginning of the series until current issues, the storyline is filled with stories of main characters that lose their minds as a result of the loss of a person close to them or due to the insane nature of the post-apocalyptic world. The first ever main character to experience a mental breakdown is Shane, who in volume one ends up trying to murder his best friend, Rick. Shane has been heavily influenced by the aftermath of the zombie apocalypse, where everything he knew changed. First of all, society as he knew it is destroyed, his everyday life has radically changed, fear is part of his reality, and he lost his best friend in the process. All these cradled his worldviews and, therefore, his identity. While at the camp, Shane and the rest of the group attempt to build a small society and create a new, peaceful life. He also tries to make a family by protecting Rick's widow and orphan son and he ultimately also has an affair with her. His attempt to construct a copy of the world he knew before the apocalypse is a kind of identity commitment. However, when Rick proves to be alive and takes up his place

as the husband, father, and protector of his family, Shane's life and reality changes again. This kind of instability and the fact he has no control over his own life leads him to a massive breakdown, during which he attempts to murder Rick.

Another main character that has a mental breakdown is Morgan. His breakdown is mostly a result of his son's death and reanimation into a zombie. The loss has made Morgan mad. He keeps his zombified son in the house and sets ambushes for other survivors so that he can kill them and feed them to his zombified son (Fig. 8-9). Morgan even fails to recognise Rick when they meet again and tries to kill him with a shovel to feed him to his son. Then Rick suggests that Morgan should join their group and leave the rest behind. Even though Morgan agrees, his attitude becomes more and more insane. On their way to find the rest of the group, they stop at a gas station, where Morgan smacks his head against the wall in an emotional outburst, as he remembers that he had been there with his son a year before. Morgan's mental condition does not get any better during the following volumes. In Volume 14, for instance, he runs a fever, during which he takes Carl to be his own son and advises him to be strong after his father, Morgan, dies (Fig. 10). At some other point in the same volume, Morgan also refers to his wife's death. It is obvious that the loss of his family affected his mental health and readers witness his struggle with insanity. Obviously, Morgan defined himself through the established Western worldviews and his relation to his family. When he lost them, he also lost his own self. His inability to adapt to the new status quo and to engage in an identity exploration costs him his mental health.

Throughout the series, loss is something which influences the characters' mental states. The series present not only Morgan's mental struggle after the loss of his family and his idenoty as he used to know it but also the struggles of Michonne, Rick, and Andrea. Michonne's boyfriend has died during the apocalypse but she still talks to him so that she can cope with the pain. Similarly, Andrea loses her mind after Dale's death and starts talking to her hat. Shortly

after, though, she realises what is going on and convinces herself that she is not going to talk to a hat anymore (Fig. 11). Finally, Rick experiences a mental breakdown after the loss of his wife and their baby girl. Specifically, Lori and Judy are shot dead while the governor tries to take over the prison. Volume nine depicts Rick's mental deterioration after their loss. Particularly, Rick is seen speaking to someone on the phone, arranging a meeting with other survivors, and explaining his and his son's situation. However, readers are well aware that there is no phone connection after the zombie apocalypse and understand that Rick is probably hallucinating. Indeed, after some phone calls, Rick thinks that he is talking to his wife, whom he considers to be alive (Fig. 12). In his hallucination, he hears Lori explaining that it was not his fault that she and their daughter died. In that stage, Rick is completely detached from reality and lives in his hallucinations, which refer to his life before the apocalypse. Michonne understands what is going on and comes closer to Rick so that she can help him. Specifically, she explains to him that he is hallucinating and she confides in him that she also used to talk to her dead boyfriend. Finally, Rick gets better and takes up his role again as the leader of the group. Unlike Morgan, Rick managed to adapt to the new reality and managed to define himself and his place in the new world. In a way, we can claim that Rick, despite his inner struggles throughout the series, manages to overcome his identity crisis.

Loss is one of the main reasons why characters in *The Walking Dead* are losing their minds. At a certain level, one can argue that the terror madness of the post-9/11 era was a result of the collective loss that American society had to undergo after the attacks. Not only did people lose close friends and relatives, but they also lost the feeling of security as well as the reality they used to live in. Indeed, after the attacks, everything changed in the United States and indeed worldwide. Reality was never truly the same and the shadow of terror salience covered people's lives. The War on Terror and all the assumptions that accompanied it influenced America's home and foreign policies, economy, society, and culture. After the attacks,

Americans, just like the characters in *The Walking Dead,* found themselves in a hostile world, in which they had to "defend" their values and worldviews. The post-apocalyptic setting of the series resembles the post-9/11 world, where people are losing their minds in their struggle to adjust to the new status quo, being overwhelmed by constant fear and loss. Characters in the series are struggling to survive both literally and metaphorically in the new, changed, world. That struggle is so intense that it affects their mental health. Hence, the series uses insanity as an allegory for the identity crisis that took over Americans' minds after the 9/11 attacks.

Nevertheless, insanity as a main theme of *The Walking Dead* does not only reflect identity crisis of the post-9/11 era but it also discusses its effects. Indeed, in the series characters experience different kinds of mental breakdowns. What matters, though, is that the series also depicts the fatal results of characters' mental deterioration for their own survival, as well as for the survival of the whole group. When Shane loses his mind, he does not allow Rick to take the group away from the city to avoid the zombies. As a result, their camp is attacked by a zombie horde that kills several members of the group. Later, Shane gives a gun to the seven-year-old Carl. It is with that gun that Carl kills Shane at the end of Volume 1. It is obvious that Shane's mental health influenced both his own fate as well as the lives of the rest of the group. Similarly, Morgan's struggle with insanity also plays a role in the survival of the group. He not only harms himself when he smacks his head on the wall, but he also kills other survivors to feed his zombified son. Thus, his insanity makes him dangerous and leads him to monstrous acts.

Rick's breakdown, though, is considered one of the most dangerous for the group's survival since Rick was the most stable and rational member of the group. This was the reason why everyone trusted him to be the leader. When he loses his wife and baby daughter, he slides into a deep depression and starts using heavy tranquilisers. After taking the pills, he falls into

a coma-like sleep. At first, Carl thinks that Rick is dead and almost shoots him to prevent his reanimation. Thankfully, he soon realises that Rick was just sleeping and tries to wake him up. Nonetheless, Rick cannot wake up and Carl has to wait. After a couple of days, a small horde of zombies finds them and try to get into the house they are hiding. Rick is still unconscious and Carl has to find a way to take the zombies away to save both his life and the life of his father. Finally, Carl kills the zombies and Rick wakes up some days later. Soon, he starts talking to the phone, even though the phone network is down. His obsession blurs his mind and judgment. He wants to remain in the house with the phone even though it endangers his son's life. Even after they reunite with the rest of the group, Rick is so absorbed by his loss and hallucinations that he cannot lead the group. At that point, the group is very vulnerable and its survival is endangered. Generally, the insanity resulting from identity crisis in *The Walking Dead* is presented as fatal for the fate of the group. In a way, *The Walking Dead* considers an identity crisis to be a dangerous shadow that overwhelms American society and might endanger the future of the United States. In general, the characters that failed to adapt to the new world and define their place in it, became dangerous for both themselves and the rest of the survivals. Consequently, for the series, identity crisis is an important issue that can be proved determinant for humanity's future if not treated with much attention.

To sum up, textual insanity, which is one of the codes that determine *The Walking Dead*'s content and arthrology, has been used in many literary texts from antiquity until today. Even though there are plenty cases of literary representations of insanity, Scott Brewster argues that madness is mainly a concern of the Gothic (Brewster 482). Not only do Gothic texts use insanity as a main theme, but they also adjust their representations of mental illness to their era's conceptions of it. Therefore, the twenty-first Gothic texts use insanity in a way that reflects the post-9/11 status quo and, especially, the identity crisis resulting, which overwhelmed American politics, society, and culture. In *The Walking Dead* characters lose

their minds due to the lack of security, constant fear, and the loss of the established worldviews, which constitute one's identity basis. All these lead to an identity crisis that resembles the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era. Shane, for instance, experiences a breakdown in his struggle to adjust to the new reality through identity commitment. Morgan also has a mental breakdown as he loses his family, through which he defined his own self. In addition, Michonne, Andrea, and Rick hold conversations with either dead people or soulless objects. The series does not only depict insanity as a result of the zombie apocalypse, but it also focuses on its fatal consequences. Characters that undergo a mental breakdown in the series put both themselves as well as their groups in danger. Similarly, the identity crisis as a mental struggle can endanger Americans' own future if it is not sufficiently attended to. Therefore, in *The Walking Dead*, Gothic insanity, as one of the codes that determine the arthrology, the plot and the visual elements of the series, links the sub-codes to the broader concept of identity crisis. Not only this, but it interrelates with other vital codes that run throughout the series, such as the Gothic double. Particularly, insanity can be seen as the result of the tension that is represented in terms of duality. In other words, the inner battle of the characters, which is projected on the face of their doubles, eventually leads to insanity. Hence, Gothic double and insanity regulate the arthrology of the series so as to serve the general narrative both individually and combined. Ultimately, they both interrelate with the third main code of the series, Gothic decay, which will be discussed on the next chapter.

3. "A Pile of Dry Bones Rotting": Reminders of Identity Loss

"She's a pile of dry bone[s?] rotting on the fucking floor... my wife... because of me"
(*The Walking Dead* Vol 28)

In issue #164 of *The Walking Dead* Comic book series, Negan, one of the major antagonists, reveals that his wife had reanimated into a zombie and that her body is now nothing more than "a pile of dry bones" (TWD 164:15). He, specifically, argues that he could not kill her reanimated body because he could only see his wife and not the "kind of perversion of who she was... an abomination" (TWD 164:15). Finally, he explains that what was left now is only a heavily decomposed body. This scene elaborates upon a major Gothic theme, that is, the decay or else degeneration, here in terms of Negan's wife's decomposed body. The scene creates a double imagery, where the readers can see, one the one hand, a recently deceased person's body and, on the other hand, a decayed one. The two images detail the process of dissolution that occurs when a person dies, by showing the reader both the first and the last stage of this process, allowing the readers to imagine the in-between stages. To many scholars, such as Patrick McGrath, the biological decay in Gothic texts is often linked to moral, ontological, and psychic decay (McGrath 154). Often decay is linked to the "unmaking" of the self. Specifically, as we have seen, McGrath suggests that death is the ultimate identity loss and argues that the Gothic speaks of death as it questions the "essential identity" by understanding that everything, including the self and the world, can change (McGrath 156). In the context of the post-9/11, mortality salience is also seen as threatening the self and, therefore, identity crisis revolves around decay. Generally, decay is used as a main theme in the series, confirming its Gothic character, but it also links the series' content to the broader post-9/11 context, which is usually characterised by a sense of decay in terms of economy, morality, society, and identity. Hence, this last chapter will focus on the use of decay as main theme in

the series and will examine the ways in which it links itself as well as other elementary elements of the series to the rest of vital codes and the broader narratological code.

As in the two previous chapters, this one will also be developed in two main parts. First, an account of decay as a fictional trope will be given. The chapter will offer some examples of fictional degeneration and will examine the way biological or architectural decay functions as a representation of moral, societal, or identity deterioration. Specifically, the chapter will focus on the connection between decay and the Gothic genre and will explain why it is a prominent Gothic trope, as well as the ways in which the use of decay links Gothic to the specific context of different eras. Next, the chapter will focus on the content of *The Walking Dead* comic book series to examine how decay as a Gothic trope is elaborated upon. Particularly, the chapter will analyse the representations of decay in the text to find out the forms that it takes and, then, it will draw parallels between the textual decay and the post-9/11 era and, especially, identity crisis.

According to Patrick McGrath, two main themes characterise the Gothic: transgression and decay (McGrath 154). He, specifically, argues that "the Gothic displays its tendency to subvert any and all established structures" and questions the "essential identity" by understanding that everything, including the self and the world, can change reflecting the readers' perspective and the context against which the reader stands (156). He also adds that "the Gothic has always been fascinating at [fascinated by? Fascinating about?] the prospect of undoing the human" (155). Of course, the use of decay in Gothic texts adds to that consensus, where established structures are questioned. To him, "it becomes more and more apparent as one digs deeper into the obsessions of the genre that this theme of regression and breakdown- of collapse into less complex forms of organization- is almost invariably present in the Gothic" (154). He specifically argues that the Gothic's tropes and motifs revel "in ruin", which can be either physical or mental, and "every manifestation is emblematic of death". Indeed, McGrath

suggests that based on Freud's psychoanalytical theories individuals are characterised by a tendency to slide back toward a state of "nonbeing", to lose their identity, to die (154). The Gothic, therefore, is a genre that seeks to speak of death, whether it is represented by ruined mansions, bestial murderers, grotesque situations, rank jungles, broken-down minds, fevered dreams, or even hallucinations. Finally, McGrath explains that the Gothic's popularity is a result of a prevalent perception that civilisation and "social structures are breaking down" while "the normal inhibitory mechanisms" cannot prevent this degenerative process (153).

Decay is, thus, a popular theme in the Gothic, which according to many scholars, such as Andrew Smith, was connected to the degeneration theory (Smith 175). Indeed, according to Glennis Byron, degeneration theory was expressed as a process during which Western civilisation and human race are in decline (Byron 186). As explained by both Daniel Pick and Andrew Smith, degeneration theory first emerged in France (Pick 97, Smith 175). Smith particularly suggests that the theory has its roots in the work of the famous French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel, “who published widely on the topic in the 1840s and 1850s” (175). Additionally, Smith argues that degeneration theory, which is connected to social, moral, and financial decay, "took place in (…) contexts of political upheaval such us Italy in the 1870s (…) and in Fin-de-Siècle Britain" (Smith 175). Similarly, Gothic narratives are also connected to social unrest. John Beck suggests that, according to the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, "it is in war, famine, and epidemic that werewolves and vampires proliferate", meaning that the Gothic becomes more relevant in contexts that are characterized by crisis (Beck 177). Therefore, decay as a Gothic trope is closely connected to the degeneration theory, which also thrived in eras that are defined by crisis. We assume that the eras defined by crisis bring anxieties about mortality into greater prominence and people tend to feel that their worldviews are in danger. Consequently, they feel that their own identity is in danger, since decay might also represent identity’s deterioration.

The most distinct era in which the Gothic was intensively influenced by degeneration theory is the British Fin-de-Siècle. The ‘Fin-de-Siècle’ is, according to Talia Schaffer, the French term for the English 'turn of the century' and it usually describes the shift from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, a period that was widely believed to be a period of degeneration but a period of hope and new beginning as well (Schaffer 3). Indeed, Max Nordau in *Degeneration*, one of the quintessential Gothic texts from the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle, claimed that "one epoch of history is unmistakably in its decline and another is announcing its approach" (Nordau 5-6). Glennis Byron argues that Nordau's work "has a tantalizing Gothic suggestiveness" and can be read as a "prelude to the arrival of some Gothic horror” (Byron 186). Byron adds that in Victorian Britain this horror was the collapse of the British Empire. She particularly explains that Nordau's degeneration theories "had a particular resonance for late Victorian Britain" since the country's imperial power was in decline and threatened by the rise of other imperial forces (Germany and the United States) and the "growing unrest in the colonies" (Byron 186). The country, to Byron, had to face the effects of the Industrial Revolution and "became all too aware of the dark side of progress" (186).

It was in that unsettled context that degeneration became, according to Daniel Pick, "a recurrent concern" in English language fiction (Pick 155). To him, literary degeneration was not only manifested in novels but it was also interrogated and questioned (155). However, the most striking examples of novels that elaborated upon this theme tend to use degeneration as a terror factor. The *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, for instance, is, according to both Byron and Pick, one of the most typical novels of the degeneration era (Byron 187, Pick 156) and the horror it explores "is the horror prompted by the repeated spectacle of dissolution- the dissolution of the nation, of society, of the human subject itself" (Pick 156). In fact, Dr Jekyll undergoes an identity crisis, which is reflected on the decay of the city of London. Also, Byron argues that in the novel the description of London as a city in decay implies that the danger

faced by the British society and nation comes from within rather than from outer forces, such as the colonies or other imperial powers (Byron 188). In general, to him, the city is a "primary Gothic landscape", "which is regarded by many as the locus of cultural decay" (188). One other example of the Fin-de-Siècle Gothic that uses London as a means to present the dangers posed to the British civilisation is Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* Indeed, Byron suggests that Wilde describes London and its people as really grotesque giving a sublime image of the 'ruined' city without the actual presence of ruins (188).

In general, the fear of the collapse of civilisation as people used to know it was a recurring theme of degeneration, and Byron claims that if the city was the primary Gothic landscape of the degeneration era, then the primary figure was the scientist. Specifically, she explains that science in Victorian Britain "bore much of the responsibility for challenging the stability and integrity of the human subject" (189). To her, one of the Gothic texts that played upon the fears prompted by Darwinian theories (that something can both evolve and devolve) is H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. In Well's novel, Dr. Moreau, a scientist, tries to create humans out of beasts by imitating the evolution process. However, he only faces degeneration. Additionally, at the beginning of the novel, humans are seen practicing cannibalism as an ultimate sign of the decline of the human civilisation. To Byron, Wells' novel "offers the vision of society and the individual in decline" (189). As such, not only is the world in decline, but science played a major role in it. Thus, Wells reflects the contemporary fears of the degeneration theory that promoted the harmful role of science and the danger of humans losing their selves and turning into monsters.

Nonetheless, degeneration theory is not only present in Victorian Britain but more recently as well. Michael Heffernan, for instance, traces a kind of "syndrome" in the Christian world that is about the future destruction of the world as described in the Bible (Heffernan 31). The "Syndrome of the Fin-de-Siècle", as he describes it, can be also traced in the millennial

era. Specifically, we can claim that the twenty-first century, which nearly completely consists of the post-9/11 era, is a whole new era of degeneration. Indeed, like Italy in the 1700s and Victorian Britain during the Fin-de-Siècle, the post-9/11 era is also characterised by societal unrest, which, as said before, favours the proliferation of fears concerning the destruction of the world and, ultimately, of losing one's self. Indeed, as explained throughout this study, the terror of losing one's world is connected to identity loss and, consequently, the destruction of the World Trade Centre towers produced a reminder that the world and even the self as we know it can change at any time. This concept can be widely seen in works of art that deal with the end of the world and Western civilisation. Post-apocalyptic narratives, therefore, reflect this cultural tendency towards decay.

The Walking Dead, as part of both the post-9/11 and post-apocalyptic narratives, also deals with degeneration in terms of decay. Specifically, the series, being a post-apocalyptic narrative, addresses those fears of degeneration that usually proliferate within contexts that are described by non-stability. The post-9/11 context can be definitely read as such since the 9/11 terror attacks have radically changed the way people perceive themselves and the world around them. As also said in previous chapters, the post-9/11 era is characterised by the fear of the collapse of the Western civilisation and *The Walking Dead* reflects those fears. In addition, the fact that the destruction of the world in the series has been caused by a virus contamination, which was the result of scientific experiments, draw even more parallels between the text's degeneration and that of the Fin-de-Siècle. The devolution of Western civilisation is expressed in *The Walking Dead* through the concept of decay, which is unfolded in two main levels, namely the decay of civilisation and the physical decay of the human body. Both cases, though, function as reminders of a possible identity loss.

First of all, *The Walking Dead* comic book series, as with every post-apocalyptic narrative, presents a world that has collapsed. The reality of the series takes place in a ruined

world taken over by zombies, and humans have to survive in this world. Particularly, Rick, the protagonist, wakes up from a coma and soon realises that the world is not the way he used to know it anymore. The series invests a lot of space and several panels in depicting the decayed setting. In this sequence of panels, Rick remains almost silent and there is little textual information. Thus, decay is manifested in the visual elements of the frames whereby the effects of apocalypse become more intense. Everything is abandoned, the hospital that he is in seems empty, and there are no signs of human life. Soon, though, he encounters the zombies and the first signs of civilisation's struggle to resist. This struggle is seen when Rick reaches a door of the hospital cafeteria, which someone has blocked by placing a piece of wood between the handles. Rick opens the door and discovers dozens of zombies trapped there. In the panel where Rick encounters zombies for the first time, the most striking element is a zombie, the first ever zombie to be depicted in the series (Fig. 13). On a first glance, this zombie, which used to be a man, is not seen to be decomposed. However, a closer look reveals some hints of decay but, most of all, the lack of consciousness. This lack of consciousness implies the absence of identity and, therefore, readers get a reminder that in post-apocalyptic settings, where the world as humans know it is ruined, individuals run the risk of losing their identity too. In the panel sequence, where Rick finds out about the zombies, the fact that someone blocked the door to trap the zombies inside can be read as a sign of civilisation’s efforts to keep the danger away. However, as soon as Rick gets out of the hospital it becomes obvious that humanity has not managed to repel the devolution, which is projected on both zombies and the ruined city.

Nonetheless, the story does not begin the moment Rick wakes up from the coma. Instead, the series opens with a scene from the world before the zombie apocalypse. Specifically, Rick and Shane, two police officers, are seen in the middle of a gun fight. This scene functions as a symbol for the pre-apocalypse world and is compared to the post-apocalyptic reality that starts in the next pages of Volume one. Hence, the post-apocalyptic

world appears even more scary and intimidating. Although the scene from the pre-apocalypse world is brutal and depicts dark aspects of Western civilisation, the post-apocalyptic world is even worse. The comparison creates a tension and when readers witness the post-apocalyptic setting of the series they can actually compare it to the world they live in, which is presented in the pre-apocalypse scene. Therefore, the fear of the devolution of Western civilisation becomes more relevant to the readers, since the pre-apocalypse world resembles the world as they know it. The fact that the one moment Rick is seen living in the pre-apocalypse world, and the other moment finds himself in the middle of the post-apocalyptic reality plays upon the fear that Western civilisation can collapse under the weight of terrorism at any moment.

The series depicts the decay of Western civilisation through the decay of the city. The post-apocalyptic reality of the series offers a setting that is characterised by ruins and abandonment. Specifically, the series takes up several places as symbols of the Western civilisation and presents them through the scope of decay. The first of these places is the hospital. Rick wakes up and goes out of his room only to find that the hospital has been abandoned. His first reaction is to wonder if "everyone just decide to take a break at the same time" (TWD 1:14). When he moves to the cafeteria, though, he opens the blocked door and finds the place filled with zombies and in a state of ruination. The tables are broken or turned upside-down, the furniture is on the floor, chairs are covered with blood, and several everyday objects, such as scissors and pencils, are left also on the floor. Again, all these details are given exclusively through images and the first textual information does not appear before Rick's fight with one of the zombies. The text in this panel consists entirely of Rick's exclamation sounds and function as a reminder of fear as well. Finally, Rick leaves the hospital and the next scene finds him right in front of the hospital entrance. The series provides a panoramic-like view of the hospital being abandoned and only the sign in the front saying "HARRISON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL" reminds the readers of what this place used to be.

Not only can decay be seen in the hospital, but in other places as well. Rick's own house is one of them. His house represents everyday life as well as family, central as it is to Western civilisation. Rick finds a bike and rides to his home. As soon as he gets to his neighbourhood, he sees it also is abandoned and ruined. Papers and garbage are on the streets, a sofa is outside, some pillows are next to it, and part of doors and windows are also left on the street (Fig. 14). His own house is also partly destroyed, with windows hanging and doors broken. The interior of the house is also ruined. On the wall, though, readers can see a picture of Rick's family, reminding them of two things. First, that this house is a symbol of the family and that family as an institution has collapsed just like the house did. Second, that this house was not always like this, but used be a house full of life like those we currently live in. Once more a comparison is drawn between the pre-apocalypse and the post-apocalypse world that intensifies the fears that the world we inhabit can collapse at any moment. Additionally, Rick's house and family, being part of who he was, can be read as symbols of losing one's identity as well. Knowing how the series develops, we assume that the moment Rick enters his house is the moment, when his identity crisis begins. Indeed, the loss of his wife and daughter is the event that causes his mental breakdown later in the series.

Some pages forward into Volume 1, Rick goes to the police station where he used to work. Just like the hospital and his house, the police station has been abandoned and ruined. Rick takes Morgan and his son to the police station so that they can find weapons and vehicles. Of course, they find the place abandoned. Nevertheless, this scene makes an interesting point: that is, Rick cannot believe that this is the end of the world and hopes that everything will go back to normal. The proof is that he wears his uniform as if it had any meaning in the post-apocalypse world and he still feels that he needs to do his job to "protect and serve" (TWD 1:30). The irony is that his job is part of Western civilisation and both that civilisation and the job itself do not exist anymore. This whole thing can be read as a critique on the attitude of

people in Western societies of the post-9/11 era and their failure to recognise the problem, which probably is not terrorism but their own actions. Just as Rick fails to understand the circumstances, people in the post-9/11 era cannot understand the new status quo and the consequences of their actions. Of course, much more than these, the scene addresses identity commitment and the embracement of conventional worldviews as a means to cope with identity crisis. Rick, being threatened of the effect of apocalypse and the fact that the world has collapsed, displays identity commitment and acts as if the apocalypse never happened.

The decay of places that symbolize Western civilisation can also be seen later on in the series. Volume 3, for instance, opens with Rick's team approaching a prison. Rick thinks that the abandoned prison will be an ideal shelter for them. Not only does the decay of the prison symbolise the decay of the Western civilisation, but its use as a shelter presents the breakdown of Western society's existing norms. The prison, which is normally a place that people avoid and consider to be hostile, is now a place that the series' characters think of as being safe. Not only this, but the prison is the second-longest lasting location Rick's group remained in. This reversed imaged of the prison indicates that in the same way things changed completely in the post-apocalypse world, things have also changed completely in the post-9/11 reality. Things that are considered to be safe are now considered to be dangerous and vice versa. After all, according to Patrick McGrath, the Gothic tends to question essential identity by subverting established norms. Hence, the fact that the prison is no longer what it used to be before the apocalypse represents the shift of identity that accompanied the deconstruction of the established norms.

As said before, devolution in *The Walking Dead* comic book series is explored through the decay of civilisation and of the human body. The decay of the human body is clearly projected on the zombie figures. In the reality of the series, humans are contaminated by a virus that enables a dead person's body to reanimate into a non-conscious being that is driven by its

appetite for human flesh. However, the reanimated body does not stop decomposing and, therefore, zombies are like moving corpses. Indeed, as the series progresses, zombies are not portrayed in the same way. Instead, zombies become more and more decomposed from one volume to the other. In Volume 1, for instance, the first zombie ever seen looks like a normal person with the only exception that his posture is strange (Fig 17). On the other hand, in issue #164, which was first published in February 2017, zombies do not resemble humans anymore. Specifically, the creatures have no hair, they're missing teeth and body parts, and their cloths are mere rags (Appendix 18). Taking into account that according to many scholars, zombies represent humanity, it can be maintained that the decay of the zombies' bodies symbolises the decay of humanity. Not only do humans turn into zombies due to the virus outbreak, but their bodies decay even more within the post-apocalypse setting. Likewise, humanity changed into something else since the 9/11 attacks and it devolves more in the post-9/11 era. On the other hand, the zombies in all stages of decay, whether at the beginning of the series or towards the more recent issues, share a common trait. All of them lack identity and this absence is seen as an effect of the decay of the body. Again, the series conveys that the decay of the things that people used to know leads ultimately to an identity crisis, which transforms them into monsters.

Furthermore, the series presents the decay of the human body in non-zombified humans as well. Throughout the series a lot of characters have lost parts of their bodies. Hershel, for instance, is bitten in prison by a lurking zombie and Rick decides to mutilate his leg so as to stop the infection. Also, later in the series, Rick loses his own hand. Particularly, in Volume 5, Rick encounters the Governor for the first time and they get in a fight, which ends with the Governor cutting off Rick's hand (Appendix 19). The Governor's body is also depicted in a state of decay when Michonne tortures him. She cuts off his hand, gouges out his eye, cuts off his penis, burns him, and even drills holes in his body. After that, the series offers a page-length image of Governor's body, which has been ruined (Appendix 20). Finally, Carl loses his eye

and almost half of his upper head during a gunfight. The decay of non-zombified human bodies implies that humanity is in danger even when it is not so obvious, as is the case when zombies are nearby. Thus, the series promotes the belief that in the post-9/11 context, humanity is prone to decay even when people think that they are safe.

In conclusion, decay is a main Gothic trope which, according to Patrick McGrath, revels "in ruin", physical or mental, and "every manifestation is emblematic of death" (McGrath 154). To him, Gothic's obsession with decay and death aims at the subversion of established structures and norms and ultimately of the self (156). In *The Walking Dead*, it is one of the three main codes that link the elementary elements of the series to the main narrative. Specifically, the series, being a post-apocalyptic narrative, addresses those fears of degeneration that usually proliferate within contexts that are characterised by non-stability. The post-9/11 context can be read as such, since the 9/11 terror attacks have radically changed the status quo of Western societies. As also said in previous chapters, the post-9/11 era is characterised by fear and identity crisis. The concept of decay describes the collapse of the world as we know it and, therefore, provides a reminder that identity can be subverted too. Consequently, the depiction of decay in the series can also be read as such and is mostly expressed in two main ways: the decay of civilisation and the physical decay of the human body.

The series depicts the decay of Western civilisation through the decay of the city. The post-apocalyptic reality of the series offers a setting that is characterised by ruins and abandonment. Specifically, *The Walking Dead* portrays several places as symbols of Western civilisation and presents them through the scope of decay. Among those places are the hospital, the police station, Rick's house, and the prison. These ruined places remind the readers that the world as they know it can devolve rapidly at any time and, therefore, the series, as a Gothic text, manages to subvert established structures. The hospital and Rick's house in pre-

apocalypse times were safe places, while the prison was not. In the post-apocalypse world, though, the prison is the safe place and the others are not. These reversed images underline the fears that Western civilisation is apt to change in the post-9/11 context. Moreover, decay is also projected on zombies, which are reanimated human bodies. Nonetheless, after the reanimation the bodies continue to decompose, as a dead body is apt to do. Nonetheless, all zombies share the absence of consciousness, which signifies the lack of identity. Characters' fears that they might turn into zombies, henceforth, represents their fear of losing their identity. Decay works as a reminder of losing one's identity and, along with the use of the Gothic double and insanity, contributes to the linking of the sub-codes to the main code of the series that regulates its arthrology. We could argue that decay (the reminder of identity loss) combined with the Gothic double (the reflection of one's shifting identity) lead to insanity. Thus, all the main codes relate to each other and regulate the sub-codes so that they can all fit the general arthrology, which is dictated by the main code, that is to say, identity crisis.

Conclusion

If we take the arguments of the previous chapters to be correct, this study proves that *The Walking Dead* comic book series ultimately talks of the identity crisis that arouse as a result of the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, the study regards Gothic as a catalytic force in the establishment of this engagement with 9/11, basing itself in three main Gothic tropes in relation to the broader question. Specifically, in reference to the contemporary theories concerning the analysis of comics, the study defines the Gothic double, insanity, and decay as three of the main codes that determine the series' content and lay-out. Not only do these elements regulate the sub-codes of the series but they manage to connect them to its broader and more vital code, the identity crisis. Thus, the study is developed in three chapters with each of them taking up the analysis of one of the three Gothic tropes in relation to the identity crisis.

Particularly, this thesis has employed Gothic and comic book analysis to prove that *The Walking Dead* actually confronts this same identity crisis. Basically, this study employs close reading, which conforms to the current theories concerning comic book criticism. For this study, the most influential concept of the comic book criticism is the cognitivist approach, which, according to Kukkonen and Forceville, is the most fruitful way to analyse comics (Kukkonen 14, Forceville 89). Particularly, Forceville argues that the cognitive approach in comic book analysis derives from linguistics and focuses on "the systematicity and pattern-finding" that is related to the meaning-making process (Forceville 90). He also adds that as far as it concerns comic book analysis, the cognitive approach is interrelated with culture and ideology and, therefore, narrative and language theories contribute to the better understanding of comics, even though comics is a non-verbal or partly verbal art form (90-91). To him, cognitivist-oriented comic book analysis is mostly influenced by conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory as well. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is the attempt to "conceptualise abstract and complex phenomena by *systematically* understanding them in terms of concrete

phenomena" (91). Even though Conceptual Metaphor Theory entails hybridity, "there are many other forms of hybridizing" that can be better capture by Blending Theory (93). Blending Theory "postulates that different semantic domains (…) merge to create a new 'blended space' (…), which combines selected elements from the input spaces and as a result yields new, emergent meaning that was not present in either of the input spaces" (93). In other words, two sides are combined and provide an implied meaning. Finally, Forceville suggests that both Blending Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory "rely on mental structures known as "image schemas": the patterns that function as the abstract structure of an image, which connects different experiences to a central recurring structure" (94).

Thierry Groensteen also supports that comics function as a system, whose parts conform to central recurring structure, also known as "codes" (Groensteen 7). To him, comics are primarily a language, "an original ensemble of productive mechanisms of meaning" and, hence, should be analysed in terms of cognitivism and not "through a grand theory, such as structural analysis or narrative semiotics" (2). He specifically argues that comics should be seen as a system of codes, either visual or narratological, and should be analysed both in terms of smaller units and broader codes. Particularly, he suggests that "at certain analytical moments, we move to the interior of the panel" to explore "certain component elements (…) with reference to the codes (…) that determine these components" (7). In addition, the code system of a comic is ruled, to Groensteen, by a spatio-topical code, "which organises the co-presence of panels" and "governs the framing relations" between the visual and the narratological elements (6).

Not only does Groensteen argues for the interpretation of comics as a system, but he also claims that the comic book analysis should be analysed in terms of 'elementary relations' (which is a form of restricted arthrology focusing on the sequence of panels, frames, and codes) and 'general arthrology' (which is the network that links the elementary elements) (22).

Furthermore, page lay-out and breakdown, as parts of arthrology, "mutually inform one another" and contribute to the analysis of comic books (143). Specifically, the lay-out involves the arrangement of the panels in one frame and the breakdown with the sequence of the frames within a comic book. As said before, the broader narrative of a comic book determines these elements and, henceforth, the analysis of lay-outs and breakdowns is able to reveal the nature of the comic's main narrative.

Therefore, this study treats *The Walking Dead* as a whole, while analysing it in terms of both narrative and image. As in every comic book, there are some major narratological codes that determine the smaller units of *The Walking Dead* too. This thesis considers the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era as the major concept that runs throughout the series and determines its arthrology. Specifically, readers can make sense of *The Walking Dead* based on Kukkonen's methods, which address cognitive meaning-making. As part of the wider literature of the post-9/11, *The Walking Dead* draws elements from its contemporary cultural memories, which for the best part are influenced by the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath. As said above, the identity crisis as an issue of the post-9/11 era runs through *The Walking Dead* and influences its elementary relations, including visual and narratological codes, frames, and panels. This study, which explains how *The Walking Dead* as a Gothic text deals with the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era, regards the code system of *The Walking Dead* as consisting of three main sub-codes/narratives. These codes are the three main Gothic tropes that have been discussed in the previous three chapters respectively. Particularly, the thesis focuses on the Gothic double or else the Doppelganger archetype, insanity, and the Gothic decay as the three main Gothic tropes, which function as main codes in *The Walking Dead*. Consequently, Gothic influences somehow the way the series seems to deal with the broader code, which is the post-9/11 identity crisis. Every single trope of these determines the series' lay-outs and breakdowns and interferes in the meaning-making process; that is to say the way readers make sense of the series' codes.

Particularly, the first chapter discusses the Gothic double as a traditional Gothic trope and identifies the ways in which it is developed in *The Walking Dead* comic books series. Moreover, this chapter regards the Gothic double to be one of the major codes that runs throughout the series and links it to the concept that zombies represent humanity. This concept links the Gothic double to the main narrative, which, at least for this study, focuses on identity crisis. In the series, the Gothic double addresses the fear of losing one's identity by drawing the analogy between the "Other" of the series (that is to say, the zombies and the human antagonists) and the "Other" of the post-9/11 consensus (Al-Qaeda). The "Other" is manifested in the face of the Doppelgänger figures in the text in two distinct ways. First, the zombies are used as the protagonists' double to signify their transformation into 'monsters'. In addition, the series uses the protagonists' human antagonists are such doubles as well. The antagonists as such mirror the protagonists' dark aspects and display the kind of creatures they have become, or are slowly becoming. The tension that arises from these doublings is influenced by the series' main code: that is, the post-9/11 identity crisis. The characters of the series undergo a torment between what they used to be and what they tend to or have already become. This inner struggle of the characters between good and evil is in fact an expression of identity crisis and, therefore, resembles the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era. Just like the protagonists of *The Walking Dead*, Americans faced not only mortality and terror salience but also the fear of losing one's world, as explained in Dunkel's argument. Therefore, similarly to the subjects of Dunkel's studies, the protagonists of the series engaged in an identity exploration as well as identity commitment. Specifically, the characters struggled to define themselves and their place in the changed world, where zombies and antagonists function as their doubles and reflect the dark aspects of their new identity.

As seen in the first chapter, the characters undergo a continuous identity crisis and mental struggle. This mental struggle often leads them to actions of despair and mental break-

downs. Thus, we assume that the series' content is determined by another popular Gothic trope, insanity. In the series, insanity is used to portray post-9/11 reality and can be linked to the terror madness. We can define the culture that develop around the fear of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks as inducing a terror-induced madness, one that shaped American politics, society, and everyday life. The terror madness is, according to this study, a result of the prominence accorded to terror as described in Dunkel's study. Americans after the attacks had to confront the new status quo, which was characterised by the fear of mortality and the loss of one's identity as a result of terrorism. In *The Walking Dead*, characters lose their minds due to the lack of security, constant fear, and the loss of the established worldviews, which constitute one's identity basis. All these lead to an identity crisis that resembles the identity crisis of the post-9/11 era. Characters in the series are depicted engaging in identity exploration and identity commitment as a way to cope with the terror salience produced by the post-apocalyptic situation. Nevertheless, when they fail to do so, they experience mental break-downs that can be proved fatal for their own and their group's survival. In that sense, the series regards identity crisis a major issue that needs to be treated as such for the survival of individuals within Western societies. Particularly, insanity in *the Walking Dead* can be seen as the result of the tension that is represented in terms of duality. In other words, the inner battle of the characters, which is projected on the face of their doubles, eventually leads to insanity. Hence, Gothic double and insanity regulate the arthrology of the series so as to serve the general narrative both individually and combined.

These two Gothic tropes, which are linked to each other and to identity crisis, are also combined with the Gothic decay. This last Gothic trope that influences the series' arthrology is discussed in the third chapter. To many scholars, such as Patrick McGrath, the biological decay in Gothic texts is often linked to moral, ontological, and psychic decay (McGrath 154). Often decay is linked to the "unmaking" of the self, of the identity. To McGrath, Gothic's

obsession with decay and death aims at the subversion of established structures and norms and ultimately of the self (156). *The Walking Dead*, being a post-apocalyptic narrative, addresses those fears of degeneration that usually proliferate within contexts that are characterised by non-stability. The post-9/11 context can be read as such, since the 9/11 terror attacks have radically changed the status quo of Western societies. As also described in previous chapters, the post-9/11 era is characterised by fear and identity crisis. The concept of decay pertains to the collapse of the world as we know it and, therefore, provides a reminder that identity can be subverted too. Consequently, the depiction of decay in the series can also be read as such and is mostly expressed in two main ways: the decay of civilisation and the physical decay of the human body. The series depicts the decay of Western civilisation through the decay of the city. The post-apocalyptic reality of the series offers a setting that is characterised by ruins and abandonment. Specifically, *The Walking Dead* portrays several places as symbols of Western civilisation and presents them through the scope of decay. Among those places are the hospital, the police station, Rick's house, and the prison. These ruined places remind the readers that the world as they know it can dissolve rapidly at any time and, therefore, the series, as a Gothic text, manages to subvert established structures. Moreover, decay is also projected on zombies, which are reanimated human bodies. Nonetheless, after the reanimation the bodies continue to decompose, as a dead body is apt to do. Nonetheless, all zombies share the absence of consciousness, which signifies the lack of identity. Characters' fears that they might turn into zombies, henceforth, represents their fear of losing their identity. Decay works as a reminder of losing one's identity and, along with the use of the Gothic double and insanity, contributes to the linking of the sub-codes to the main code of the series that regulates its arthrology.

Therefore, this study regards identity crisis of the post-9/11 era as the main code that runs throughout *The Walking Dead* and regulates its arthrology. Gothic plays a major role in this process and three main Gothic tropes are used in the series as vital codes that facilitate the

connection between the elementary relations and the general arthrology. We could argue that decay (the reminder of identity loss) combined with the Gothic double (the reflection of one's shifting identity) lead to insanity. Thus, all the main codes relate to each other and regulate the sub-codes so that they can all fit the general arthrology, which is dictated by the main code, that is to say, identity crisis.

However, this study comes with several limitations as well. First of all, the thesis's main focus is *The Walking Dead*, which is an ongoing comic book series. Hence, we do not know how the series progresses towards the end and if identity crisis will remain a central issue later on. Taking into account the series' development and the possible endings, the elementary relations and the general arthrology that has been discussed in this study might turn out to be insignificant or related to some other cause rather than identity crisis. Furthermore, the role of the three Gothic tropes analysed in the previous chapters, might also not be as essential as it is now. Hence, we should keep in mind that the conclusions of this study can be applied to the course of *The Walking Dead* spanning from Volume 1 to Volume 27. Secondly, the study claims that the Gothic functions as a catalytic force in the connection of the elementary parts of the series to the general arthrology, but for lack of space concentrates only on the three most striking according to the writer's opinion. Nevertheless, the series is filled with Gothic tropes that facilitate the connection between the main code and the sub-codes and some other scholars might find them more interesting than those analysed in this study.

In any case, *The Walking Dead* in relation to the post-9/11 era is a fruitful field of research and a lot of progress can be expected so that we can better understand the relationship between popular culture and post-9/11 American culture and society. Not only this, but further research might establish comic books' importance in the meaning-making process of contemporary culture. The study of comic books, such as *The Walking Dead*, can also reveal how popular culture is shaped by and shapes politics. Finally, a lot of further research can be

done to define the ways Gothic has adapted to new art forms, such as comics books, so as to keep its content relevant to contemporary contexts.

Appendix

Figure 1: Rick finds "zombified" Shane (TWD 3:67)

Figure 2: Rick comes across the first zombie horde ever seen in the series (TWD 1:44)

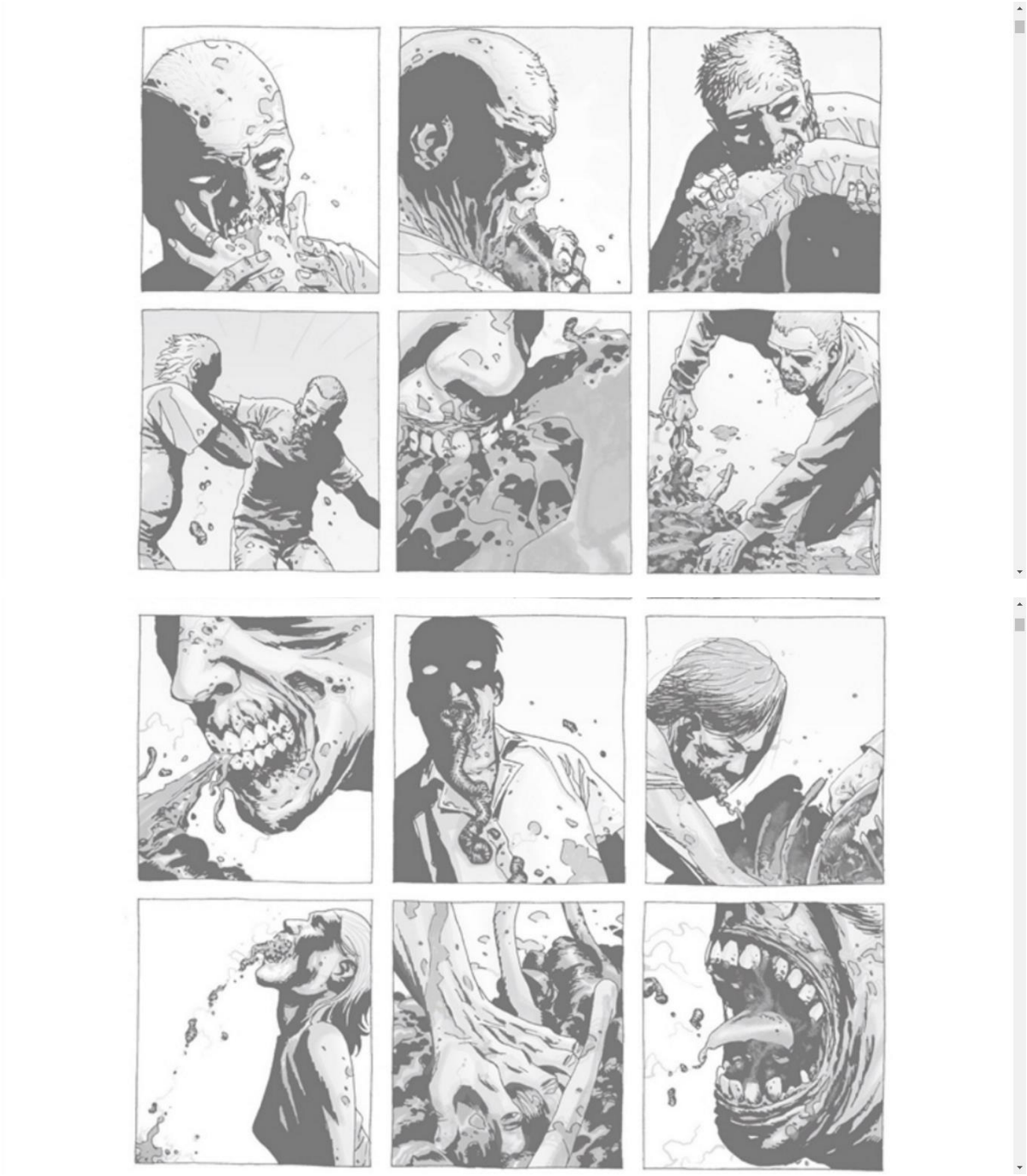

Figure 3: A 12-image sequence depicting a zombie devouring a human body (TWD 5:2)

Figure 4: Michonne acts like a zombie herself, while she tortures the Governor (TWD 6:50)

Figure 5: The Whisperers wear zombies' skin to survive, resembling in that way the monsters (TWD 22:141)

Figure 6: Rick's group decides to mutilate the Hunters as a revenge (TWD 11:113)

Figure 7: Rick and Shane fight as to whether they should live the city or not (TWD 1:129)

Figure 8: Morgan keeps his zombified son in the house as he cannot accept his death (TWD 10:87)

Figure 9: The bones of the people Morgan has fed his son with (TWD 10:87)

Figure 10: During a mental breakdown Morgan takes Carl to be his son (TWD 14:88)

Figure 11: Andrea decides that she will not talk to Dale's hat again (TWD 16:16)

Figure 12: Rick's hallucination. He holds a phone conversation even though there were no phone networks (TWD 9:55)

Figure 13: The first zombie scene of the series (TWD 1:16)

Figure 14: Rick finds his town in decay (TWD 1:22)

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