**Stacey Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse: Vampires and Zombies in the 21st Century*.** Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016. 208 pp. £70.00 (hbk).

In 2018, zombies and vampires are everywhere. And, like the late capitalism they embody, it is often difficult to image how popular and academic discourse can ever escape their looming shadow. Over the past thirty years, a seemingly endless series of books and articles has focused on the ethics, politics, and configurations of the zombie in popular culture, and the vampire has an even more extensive history. This is what makes Stacey Abbott’s *Undead Apocalypse* sucha timely and valuable text. Abbott’s main thesis is that, in twenty-first-century popular culture, ‘the vampire and the zombie are increasingly integrated and intertwined’ (p. 4). At first this might seem like an obvious statement, given the contemporary commodification (and resulting homogenisation) of these kinds of subcultural symbols, but Abbott brings these two figures together in a way that reinvigorates otherwise stale debates. Tracing the vampire/zombie hybrid back to Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (1954; p. 9), Abbott convincingly argues that despite their historical differences, in contemporary culture these undead figures have more in common than ever before.

Abbott argues that the union between vampire and zombie is predicated partly on the medicalisation of the monster narrative, and partly on the politicisation of the sympathetic monster in twentieth-century film, television, and literature. Where the former point has been made numerous times in zombie and vampire criticism, Abbott effectively demonstrates how this medicalisation narrative paves the way for the fresh mutation and hybridisation of these otherwise hackneyed figures. With regards to vampire film and television, Abbott illustrates how ‘the vampire has become the subject of the medical gaze’ (p. 39), highlighting the way the vampire transformation has been rewritten through the imagery of the hospital and the laboratory. She points, for instance, to the liberal use of ‘the CSI shot, in which a virtual camera penetrates beneath the skin to explore the inner workings of the body’, revealing blood cells, tissues, and internal organs transformed by the vampire ‘virus’ (p. 39). Abbott draws examples from across contemporary film and television, including the *Twilight* film series (2008–2012; in particular the birth scene from *Breaking Dawn*) and *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009–2017). These texts reframe the vampire as a mundane, medical subject as well as a supernatural one. In doing so, they tap into contemporary discussions of medical ethics and the tissue economy, in which the body becomes a commodity that can be bought, sold, and marketed (p. 59).

Unlike the vampire, which can often claim Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula* as a touchstone, for Abbott the zombie film has no single, clear antecedent (p. 64). It is, however, a figure long associated with capitalism and the tissue economy. In particular, Abbott focuses on the ‘return’ of the zombie film at the new millennium, following its initial popularity in the 1960s and 70s. Here she reiterates the popular argument linking the rise of post-millennial zombie fiction to the 9/11 attacks, but suggests that in practice the cause for this resurgence is not so easily determined, or so easily separated from the vampire craze a decade earlier (p. 68). Through an analysis of *28 Days Later* (2002), *Resident Evil* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), and *World War Z* (2006), Abbott comments on some of the political and psychological implications of the post-millennial (and post-apocalyptic) zombie ‘outbreak’, ruminating on the potential of the ‘open-ended’ plague as a narrative device (p. 90). She also points to some of the ways the zombie outbreak in fiction has been directly influenced by the increasingly dramatic tone of epidemic and disaster reporting. Zombie fiction frequently plays on the ‘viral’, clickable nature of online content more broadly (p. 74).

Abbott uses this discussion to unpack the phenomenon of the sympathetic undead, tracing this figure’s evolution from the too-friendly vampires that preceded Stoker’s *Dracula* to the self-aware zombie Every(wo)man of contemporary television (p. 142). She begins with the vampire, taking key examples from the Swedish film *Let the Right One In* (2008), *Interview with the Vampire* (1995), *Angel* (1999-2004), *Byzantium* (2012), and *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013), and continues to the zombie through *Z-Nation* (2014–), *Warm Bodies* (2013), and *In the Flesh* (2013–2014) – all narratives where the vampire or zombie is presented as a narrator, and as a victim of commodity culture. In particular, Abbot argues, first-person perspective and self-disclosure emerges in the 1970s and 80s as a strategy for rendering the monster more relatable, turning it into a particularly effective vehicle for the articulation of marginalised perspectives and identities (p. 152). ‘Where the vampire was originally a metaphor through which the outsider was punished,’ writes Abbott, ‘it gradually became the means through which the outsider found his or her voice’ (p. 149). Where once the monster’s abnormal body was sold to titillated audiences, now the monsters sell themselves, through their own personal narratives.

Where this first part of the book treads familiar ground in monster studies (albeit in novel ways), in the second part of the book Abbott demonstrates how the vampire and the zombie are uniquely intertwined in contemporary popular culture. She also suggests that the implications of this union are particularly relevant to twenty-first-century identity politics. Innovatively, Abbott here explores several vampire texts that do not overtly include zombies at all, but that draw on some of the zombie’s more recognisable characteristics and connotations. Most frequently, the allegory is one of class politics. For instance, Abbott cites the case of the healthy, middle class vampires versus the starving, feral ‘subsiders’ in *Daybreakers* (p. 185). In the chapter’s final section, Abbott also makes a case for the ‘fundamentalist’ vampire film, replacing class distinctions with religious ones (p. 191). These monster apocalypses pit a humanised ‘us’ versus a monstrous ‘them’, but the distinction between the two parties (like that between the vampire and the zombie) is no longer clear-cut. This ‘common’ monstrosity is re-politicised in the apocalypse narrative, with one group fighting to maintain their relative humanity against an immoral ideology, or against inhumane inequality – often depicted as having zombie-like qualities. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), specifically Buffy’s resurrection in season six, offers another example of this technique*.* Here the zombie works as an ‘extended allegory’ for Buffy’s passage into adulthood (p. 110), and as a metaphor for the increasing commodification of adult bodies and labour. Buffy’s zombification also renders her sympathetic in a way that is more commonly associated with the show’s vampire characters.

Along similar lines, chapter five focuses on ‘The Hybrid Hero’, a figure who is both monster and hero, human and monster, breaking down various stereotypes of selfhood and otherness (p. 120). Abbott cites the dhampir (half-vampire, half-human; see the *Blade* and *Blood Rayne* film franchises) as an early example of this figure, but moves on to examples of the human/zombie (*iZombie* and *Warm Bodies*) and the vampire/werewolf (the *Underworld* series), as well. Where the vampire, but especially the vampire hunter, has historically been ‘a white male patriarchal figure’ (p. 125), in *Blade*, *Underworld*, and *Resident Evil*, for instance, the hybrid heroes contradict this stereotypical image. These heroes also defy the notion that one must be physically ‘pure’ to be strong, as in each case it is their racial hybridity (part monster, part human) that enables them to triumph. Crucially, these characters display a hybridity of body, but not of mind or ‘soul’, where they *are* resolutely ‘pure’, ‘human’, and moral (p. 123).

Ultimately, the implications of this blurring between zombie and vampire (and between hero and antihero) are twofold. As Abbott concludes:

This engagement with the undead across popular culture, including film, television and literature, highlights a cultural fascination with the undead and the threat of apocalypse that is a response to an unsettling cultural climate in which we are bombarded by the threat of annihilation – something that is played out and critiqued by the many texts I have discussed in this book. It however, also stands as evidence of a cultural appropriation of this apocalyptic threat. (p. 201)

In other words, the slow merger of the vampire and the zombie into a single undead figure still embodies twenty-first-century popular culture’s many anxieties about race, class, and other kinds of identity politics, but it also reflects our ongoing attempts to commercialise, domesticate, and exorcise those fears. The vampire/zombie hybrid represents a key, emerging site within this struggle.

Abbott’s study encompasses an impressive range of texts across film, television, and literature. Most have already been the object of extensive academic scrutiny (with several notable exceptions), but Abbott very successfully builds on this existing work to construct fresh and highly nuanced readings. Though its complex analysis of the place of the undead in popular culture is likely most rewarding for monster scholars or horror fans, it is written in a way that is also accessible to less engaged or specialised readers. It offers a valuable introduction to the sympathetic zombie/vampire in twenty-first-century popular culture, and a fascinating vision of where this figure might be headed in the decades to come.