Additional Reading

RHETORIC OF THE LIVING DEAD: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF SHAUN OF THE DEAD ABSTRACT

The 2004 British film Shaun of the Dead, while obviously fictional, reversed the trend of many British texts by displaying a domestic attack on British soils, rather than a colonial dominance abroad. This essay will analyze Shaun's deviant representation of the British culture to elaborate on any ideological messages contained within the unorthodox narrative. The film in question follows a small band of average Britons as they escape to the security of the neighborhood pub amidst a debilitating zombie invasion. A postcolonial analysis was selected as the method for studying the film, primarily because the method is rarely if ever used to monitor contemporary British culture. Postcolonial analyses are typically used to examine texts from previously colonized cultures as a means of uncovering traces of the dominating European presence that remain on the recovering society. However, contemporary Britain is undergoing the process of imperial recovery along with its former colonies. The resolute stubbornness and independence of the imperial British national identity worked well in the past, but is damaging the nation in the contemporary realm of political cooperation and interconnectivity. Therefore, a postcolonial analysis of Britain's imperial identity is a justifiable endeavor. The analysis of the film exposed how the typical literary heroism of British narratives has eroded since the heyday of the Empire. This postcolonial analysis compared the anticipated characteristics of British texts to the contemporary antithesis embodied by the title character, Shaun, and his band of fellow survivors. The analysis exposed five key messages: contemporary Britain must abandon predominantly male characteristics and adopt feminine connective traits; the contemporary materialism of British culture has hindered social advancement; Britain has developed a social reliance on alcohol for security; postcolonial literature and zombie cinema both require similar models of xenophobia; and Britain can no longer stubbornly rely on a militaristic national identity. The following study explains several ideological messages uncovered in this unconventional postcolonial analysis of an unconventional representation of British preparedness.

INTRODUCTION

Shaun of the Dead emerged in 2004 as both a savvy commentary on British society and a reminder of what low-budget horror films could actually achieve. Cheaply-produced squeamish bloodbaths identified by film critics as “torture porn” (Brodesser-Akner 3) have dominated the cinematic horror genre during the 2000s, but the bloody low budget zombie film Shaun of the Dead reverses this trend. A brief overview of the film exposes a library of rhetorical content and proves that this film far exceeds the typical products of the horror genre. Shaun is overflowing with observations about the state of British society in the postcolonial world and is therefore an appropriate venue for researching the national identity of modern-day British citizens. This study is beneficial to communication scholars by taking an uncommon approach to postcolonial criticism. Shome and Hegde noted that postcolonial critics should ideally be concerned with a culture’s “transformative state” (250). Just as most previously colonized cultures are adapting to their freedom from the Europeans, Britain is also transitioning from a European “colonizer” and becoming more like its autonomous ex-subjects. While previously colonized nations have gained status in the global community over the past decades, the British influence has dwindled (Orde 71). British culture is therefore adjusting, transforming, and adapting to its new status as a simpler nation, and the texts of the culture should reflect this transition. The following study will encourage readers to consider postcolonial criticism in unexpected and innovative ways by analyzing the effects of colonialism on the colonizers. Shaun of the Dead was selected as the primary resource for analyzing modern British society. The film will be analyzed from a postcolonial perspective. Postcolonial criticism allows the researcher to analyze cultural changes endured by any groups marginalized by a more powerful force (Howard 7). Postcolonial methodology searches for the influences of imperialist culture that remain on colonized societies long after the dominant power has abandoned its control (Howard 7). Rhetoricians construct their messages within patterns and frames that the audience recognizes, and an understanding unders of the audience’s culture and environment is imperative (Brummett 68). The postcolonial critic’s job is two-fold: first, he or she must demonstrate the way a text supports the “status quo” of the powerful faction, and second, the rhetorician must also identify how the text undermines the “arrangement of power” of this dominating presence (Hart and Daughton 322). Shaun of the Dead is an appropriate venue for enacting a postcolonial critique as it presents a mediated account of British society from a colonized perspective. Also, the film’s co- writer Simon Pegg claimed that “‘an awareness of the postmodern condition is still the intellectual bedrock’ of his comedic method” (qtd. in Cadwalladr par. 12). Pegg’s attention to and awareness of ideological details in his comedy strongly indicate that his first feature film, Shaun of the Dead, will be embedded with rhetorical content. It is important in the contemporary world to understand the ideological status of powerful nations in world affairs. It is thus significant to examine British society from a domestic perspective to understand how citizens view the culture at its most basic level. The following unique enactment of postcolonial criticism will analyze how two British filmmakers interpret the state of their society and will also begin to lay the foundation for a greater understanding of the nation as a whole.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study examines Shaun of the Dead from a postcolonial perspective to discover and present any general messages regarding British society in the era after imperialism. The following review of relevant literature will help lead to a greater understanding of the key factors involved with this study. Three major areas of literature relate closely to the research: rhetorical criticism, cultural studies, and zombie cinema.

Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism is the identification of texts, more commonly called “rhetorical artifacts” (Hart and Daughton 2), and the assessment of these texts’ persuasive elements. Foss has argued that rhetoric is simply “the human use of symbols to communicate” and criticism is the process of uncovering the messages within that communication (4). As symbol-usage is a conscious decision, every deliberate communicative attempt has the potential to be analyzed (4). The rhetorical critic, therefore, must determine what “the speaker seeks to achieve by directing the audience’s attention to specific aspects of subject matter” (Leroux 35) and simultaneously away from others. While the content of the message is important, the cultural environment that produced the act or object is far more essential to understanding the artifact (Brummett 38). To maximize persuasion, rhetoricians must adapt their messages to their desired audiences and the greater social contexts surrounding their audiences’ environment (Brummett 68). Ideological Criticism Ideological criticism, a subset of rhetorical criticism, focuses on what a message “suggests about [the] beliefs and values” (Foss 239) of the rhetorician. An ideology, as described by Foss, is “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (239). Ideologies are neither true nor false, but merely a reflection of a social context (Kieran 82). An ideological critic’s job is to search for and expose the dominant messages in a text while discovering what marginalized ideologies are being “muted” (Foss 243). Ideological criticism demands that the reader explore whatever he or she finds interesting within a text “whether or not it coincides with the author’s intended interpretation” (Hart and Daughton 312). Ideological criticism thus depreciates the dominant messages in a text while concurrently exposing the suppressed messages (Hart and Daughton 312). Postcolonial Criticism Postcolonial criticism searches for traces of the imperialist culture that remain in colonized societies long after the dominant power has abandoned its control (Hart and Daughton 329). As Hart and Daughton stated, postcolonial criticism highlights “the ways in which established forms of thought and action have colonized people’s minds” (329). With this in mind, Nicholas Harrison recognized this cultural background and stated that postcolonial critics must analyze a text through “the socio-historical context from which it emerged and in relation to which it needs … to be understood” (2). In today’s system of “globalized” capitalism (Hart and Daughton 330), the dominant Western culture and its associated lifestyle has limited the diversity of world cultures and thus created a “heterogeneous other world” (Chambers 209), requiring continuous colonization to preserve Western progress. Essentially, the only way for the West to stay in power is to continue influencing all other societies (Chambers 209). Therefore, postcolonial critics search texts for any reinforcement of the Western status quo while also finding ways to expose the minority ideologies obscured in the text (Hart and Daughton 322). Johnson wrote, “Postcolonialism . . . is concerned with the location of power and is intensely ideological” (97). The goal of postcolonial studies is to undermine the powerful ideology, which in this case is British imperialism, and to examine how the colonized are presented with “a sense of inferiority” (Johnson 93). Ideally, postcolonial criticism should overturn the present social structure and move the European perspective “from the top to the bottom” (Johnson 96) by analyzing suppressed perspectives.

Cultural Studies

Despite the overwhelming span of recorded history, many scholars have still attempted to define cultural studies. For example, Stella Ting-Toomey stated that culture “refers to a group of interacting individuals within a bounded unit who uphold a set of shared traditions and way of life” (18). This vague definition references the diversity within cultural studies and makes it imperative to narrow the cultural focus to a specific time and place in order to construct a thorough cultural criticism. National Identity National identity is a conception completely reliant on cultural studies for its definition (Orchard 420). Bernhard Peters divided the concept of national identity into a trio of concise elements he named, “ethnic-cultural-civic distinctions” (5). This classification system covers the background of a society (ethnic), its beliefs (cultural), and its politics and traditions (civic) (Peters 5). Ideally, all three distinctions would have an equal impact on national identity, but scholars recognize that in actuality, one concept often dominates the others (Peters 9). Often, the national identity is controlled by a powerful hegemon, which James Arnt Aune defined as “the persuasive domination of the masses by the ruling class” (543). “Britain was,” as Robert Pahre recorded, “a hegemon from the Napoleonic Wars to World War I,” which strongly affected its contemporary national identity (462) Edwar Al-Kharrat stated that national identity is not “irrevocable” but rather is “a dynamic … concrete reality to be continuously moulded, forged, developed, and shaped” (23). Anything that impacts a culture also has the potential to impact the culture’s collective identity. Al-Kharrat asserted, “National identity can only gain its viability … from a capacity to evolve and to react to historical, socio-political and cultural data” (23). Just as reality is dynamic, national identities are dynamic and must adapt to any changes or threats to the culture as a whole. The flexibility of a national identity, therefore, ensures its survival (Al-Karrat 23). British Cultural Studies As Salman Rushdie presented in The Satanic Verses, “[British] history happened overseas, so [the British] … don’t know what it means” (qtd. in Baucom 3). So much historical literature is devoted to British imperialism and so many postcolonial analyses are dedicated to the British colonies that relatively little research is dedicated to understanding the British cultural identity of current domestic citizens (Baucom 3). As Baucom presented, “the empire… is less a place where England exerts control than the place where England loses command of its own narrative and identity” (3). Baucom therefore presented the idea that Britain’s national identity relies on its history as a colonial superpower, even though Britain has not possessed this power for several decades. As a result, the main way to analyze British identity is “from without, situating Britain in a postcolonial world” (Stratton and Ang 385).

Horror Cinema

Horror cinema is “one of the most enduring film genres” (Maddrey 1) because the fears of the public always change with the times. As Maddrey wrote, there may be recurring characters and formulae in horror films, “but the monsters themselves shape-shift from decade to decade as the fears of the popular audience change” (2). These monsters will always take the form of “the Other” (Sharrett 253), representing the fear of the unknown, while also correlating with the xenophobic other of postcolonial literature. Zombie Cinema From the first prominent member of the genre in 1968, George A. Romero’s Night of the Living Dead, zombie cinema has been a haven for symbolic social commentary (Gleiberman par. 2). Romero’s Night of the Living Dead “gave rise to a hundred metaphors” (Gleiberman 52) by using its characters to explore racism and class differences (Newitz 114), sexism in American society (Grant 203), and even “the madness of Vietnam (Gleiberman 52). Gilbert Cruz noted that “great zombie stories have never been solely about walking corpses. There’s always a great metaphor at their core” (98). Zombie films have also examined contextual fears ranging from overpopulation to old age, bioterrorism, medical technology, cancer, AIDS, and even acne (Dendle 11-15). Although the more general fears presented above may also appear in other sub-genres of horror cinema (Dendle 11-15), zombies create a truer sense of terror due to their resemblance to and hunger for humans (Paffenroth 8). Zombies possess no special powers and are simply “dimwitted” humans (Dendle 14). The resemblance between zombies and humans makes films of the genre frighteningly uncomfortable for two reasons: watching zombies attack humans is gory, but watching humans destroy zombies is unsettling (Paffenroth 10). If the only thing separating humans and zombies is consciousness, the humans must make the moral decision to abandon their consciousness in favor of survival (10). By destroying zombies, the human characters essentially become as morally bankrupt as their pursuants (10). This “reverse prospect” (11) causes dehumanization among the survivors. The relentless zombies eliminate all opportunity for the human characters to experience essentially human concepts, such as “grief, mortality, or sacredness” (13). To worry about these sentiments would be to jeopardize one’s own safety. The fear of zombies, then, is the fear of dehumanization and losing hold of those qualities which separate humans from all other life forms on Earth (13).

Shaun of the Dead

Wright and Pegg, both self-described “massive fans of George Romero’s original Living Dead trilogy” (Kehr par. 13), followed in Romero’s footsteps by producing a zombie film of “darkly comedic proportions” (Loudermilk 92). Although the film is billed as a zombie comedy, it never mocks the zombie genre, but rather reveres it, instead finding its humor in the complacently sluggish lifestyle of modern Britons (Gleiberman par. 2). Although the film’s title clearly references Romero’s Dawn of the Dead, co-writer Wright viewed the film as more of a “companion film—that is, if Dawn of the Dead is happening in Pittsburgh, [Shaun] is what’s happening in North London” (qtd. in Kehr par. 5). The movie is therefore an addition to the rhetorically ripe zombie genre rather than a mockery of it, with a distinguishing emphasis on its location (Kehr 5). Setting in Shaun of the Dead Wright, Pegg, and several film critics referenced how the setting of Britain impacts the storyline of Shaun and enhances its “100% English tone” (Elley par. 8). Kehr commended Shaun for merging both “grandly-scaled horror-movie carnage and low-key comedy,” all while “grounded in closely observed details of everyday life in England” (par. 1), which Baucom stated is badly needed for the British national identity (3). Wright intended to avoid London film clichés in his film and rather focus on the city from the perspective of its six million residents (Kehr par. 18). This unexpectedly normal setting not only promotes an accurate British cultural identity, but also allows for the rise of an accurate British personality in the title role of Shaun. Once he finally takes note of the zombies, Shaun “must rise, imperfectly and hilariously, to try to save the human race” (Paffenroth 16). However, none of Shaun’s traits make him a shining candidate for savior of humanity. Shaun is far from the ideal British hero, and is much more a representation of the average British citizen. However, Shaun of the Dead’s “survival of the un-fittest” (Paffenroth 16) theme is a symbolic celebration of the common man, demonstrating that the domestic population of Britain must individually reinvent itself in order to reanimate its culture from a lethargic consumerist wasteland to a reborn enriching civilization (Johnson 214).

ANALYSIS

Shaun of the Dead was released in the United Kingdom on April 9, 2004 (Collis par. 1). The immensely successful project, filmed on a budget of $6 million, grossed over twice that amount in Britain alone (Collis par. 1). By the end of its theatrical run, Shaun collected $12.8 million at the British box office (Mohr par. 14) and $27 million worldwide (D'Alessandro A4). The film is set in the innermost suburbs of North London and populated by eight primary characters. Shaun, the title character, works a dead-end job in an electronics store and comes home each night to settle disputes between his clashing flatmates, Pete and Ed. Pete is a stereotypical British businessman with a compact car and a collection of nice suits, while Ed is unemployed, overweight and spends each day playing video games and making drug deals over his cell phone. Shaun has been dating Liz for three years, although each date ends at the Winchester Pub along with Ed and Liz’s flatmates Di and David. Di is Liz’s “failed actress” best friend (00:15:19) 1 . David, although dating Di, has developed an unreciprocated obsession for his flatmate Liz, and a subsequent deep dislike for Shaun. After three years, Shaun finally introduces Liz to his mother Barbara as they collectively escape the zombie invasion. Barbara’s second husband and Shaun’s loathsome step-father, Philip, also joins the traveling party. 1 All film quotes retrieved from: Shaun of the Dead. Dir. Edgar Wright. Perf. Simon Pegg, Nick Frost. Rogue Pictures, 2004.

Shaun of the Dead begins with an end to Shaun and Liz’s relationship, prompted by Shaun’s unreliable and static personality. Ed reacts by taking his pal Shaun for a long night of drinking and comforting at the neighborhood pub, the Winchester. By the time the two recover from their respective hangovers the next morning, London is under a zombie invasion, although Shaun and Ed are still too “drunk and/or self-absorbed” to notice (Paffenroth 15). Shaun and Ed soon recognize the danger of the situation and head out to rescue the remaining characters as Pete, now a zombie, stumbles out the front door after them. On the way to the Winchester, Philip too succumbs to his zombie-inflicted wounds, causing the group to panic and abandon Philip, the car, and all of their weapons trapped inside. Once inside the Winchester, the group waits for help. After several more attacks, Barbara converts into a zombie and Shaun must shoot her between the eyes to preserve the group’s safety. Soon after, David walks too near the windows and the awaiting zombies quickly disembowel him. Di runs out into the zombie crowd to save David and is not seen again. Ed, too, succumbs to a bite inflicted by the zombie of his flatmate Pete. Shaun and Liz discover an elevator lift in the cellar of the pub and barely depart the Winchester alive. Once outside, military vans arrive and dispatch the zombies, thus saving Shaun and Liz and ending the movie. Although the film may appear to be just another bloody horror movie, it represents an ideal venue for postcolonial criticism. Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg have stacked their debut feature film with countless postcolonial messages. Throughout the film Shaun of the Dead, there are five main categories of postcolonial artifacts: feminine traits in masculine characters, the negative consequences of materialism, correlations between the pub and security, the supposed dichotomy from the zombies, and the use of nontraditional weapons. Feminine Traits in Masculine Characters Shaun of the Dead begins with an end to Shaun and Liz’s relationship, prompted by Shaun’s unreliable and static personality. Ed reacts by taking his pal Shaun for a long night of drinking and comforting at the neighborhood pub, the Winchester. By the time the two recover from their respective hangovers the next morning, London is under a zombie invasion, although Shaun and Ed are still too “drunk and/or self-absorbed” to notice (Paffenroth 15). Shaun and Ed soon recognize the danger of the situation and head out to rescue the remaining characters as Pete, now a zombie, stumbles out the front door after them. On the way to the Winchester, Philip too succumbs to his zombie-inflicted wounds, causing the group to panic and abandon Philip, the car, and all of their weapons trapped inside. Once inside the Winchester, the group waits for help. After several more attacks, Barbara converts into a zombie and Shaun must shoot her between the eyes to preserve the group’s safety. Soon after, David walks too near the windows and the awaiting zombies quickly disembowel him. Di runs out into the zombie crowd to save David and is not seen again. Ed, too, succumbs to a bite inflicted by the zombie of his flatmate Pete. Shaun and Liz discover an elevator lift in the cellar of the pub and barely depart the Winchester alive. Once outside, military vans arrive and dispatch the zombies, thus saving Shaun and Liz and ending the movie.

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The three main male characters in Shaun of the Dead—Shaun, Ed, and David—are all incredibly flawed beings seemingly incapable of achieving success. These characters, therefore, represent Clare Midgley’s “‘feminised representations of colonised men’” (qtd. in Johnson 126). Midgley noted that postcolonial studies often neglect “‘the gender metaphors which are so central to imperial discourse’” (qtd. in Johnson 126), but the three male characters in Shaun make it difficult to ignore these evident colonial metaphors. The Consequences of Materialism Even though the British Empire was exceedingly affluent, critics still argued that “the debilitating effects of luxury and wealth . . . would sap the warlike and manly vitality of the British race” (Johnson 214). These critics referenced the Roman Empire’s demise, claiming the society grew weaker as the public grew more opulent (Johnson 214). As such, “Materialism was condemned” (Johnson 214) throughout colonial British texts. Shaun of the Dead, as a postcolonial text, naturally reverses the colonial British trend of denouncing materialism. The characters, namely Ed, radiate self-indulgence and worship materialism throughout the film. This fits neatly with the conclusion that characters in zombie movies usually display a “self- destructive materialism” (Paffenroth 19-20). The avarice of postcolonial Britain is represented primarily through Ed’s gadgetry and greed and naturally results in dire consequences.

Throughout the film, Ed appears grossly materialistic. Firstly, he seizes the opportunity to upgrade his transportation by intentionally crashing Pete’s car into a telephone pole, leaving no option other than to drive Philip’s luxurious Jaguar (00:44:12). Ed quickly adopts the car as his own, chastising Shaun for stepping on the leather, even though Philip is bleeding profusely from the neck in the backseat (00:45:41). On top of all this bad behavior, Ed commits an egregious display of materialism by driving right past the road leading directly to the Winchester, claiming he knows a “short cut” (00:49:27) when in actuality he just wants to continue driving the Jaguar. During this unnecessary extravagance on Ed’s part, Philip succumbs to his wounds in the backseat and the surviving characters are forced to abandon all their weapons inside the car. Ed’s selfish actions force the group to travel by foot, which leads directly to Barbara’s potentially avoidable and definitely fatal attack en route to the Winchester (00:56:16). Ed fails to learn from this lesson, and continues threatening the group’s safety in a later scene when he answers his cell phone amidst a horde of zombies (00:50:43). At this point in the film, the traveling party has just reached the Winchester pub by impersonating zombies and crossing through a long crowded street to reach the front doors. However, the doors are locked and a mild panic sets in, broken only by the jingle of Ed’s ring tone (00:59:41). By the time Shaun slaps the phone into the street, the zombies have taken full notice of the human targets against the walls of the locked pub, and Shaun selflessly throws himself into the crowd of zombies as a distraction to save his friends (01:00:54). After almost reaching the threshold of safety, Ed’s material desires nearly killed every character for the second time in the film. The last and most severe example of Ed’s material greed occurs inside the Winchester. When the power comes back on, Ed is immediately transfixed on his favorite slot machine at the pub. Ed overlooks Liz’s recommendation that “we’ll just have to be extra quiet” (01:06:59) and shatters the silence by slipping a winning coin into the slot machine, unleashing a torrent of lights, sounds, and tumbling coins (01:07:18). By the time Shaun unplugs the cord, hundreds of zombies have already staggered up to the windows on all sides of the pub. Over the next thirteen minutes, Ed’s racket leads to the violent disembowelment of David, the disappearance of Di, and to his own demise at the hands of the zombies. Essentially, Ed sacrificed the survival of the group in order to temporarily entertain himself with his favorite arcade game. While a true Briton in a colonial text would have easily avoided such diversions, Ed was unfortunately incapable of refraining from his material desires. His character clearly evidences “the debilitating effects of luxury and wealth” (Johnson 214) presented as dangers to imperial power earlier in this section. Although most Britons of the imperial era were unaware of sports cars, cell phones, and slot machines, the colonial texts which shaped their culture would have prevented similar selfishness and materialism. The Human/Zombie Dichotomy The method of postcolonial criticism requires the presence of a symbolic “other” in every text it analyzes.

As discussed in the review of literature, the other is both an essential component to cultural imperialism (Harrison 22) and the primary fear exploited by horror films (Sharrett 253). The other is an especially strong theme throughout the zombie genre, as each survival story includes a dominating presence and a minority faction desperately trying to avoid conversion into the majority (Paffenroth 5). Shaun of the Dead uses othering to create a well-structured bridge between postcolonial literature and horror cinema. The collective other of zombie films display a strong advantage over the humans, as they represent an all-accepting union (Paffenroth 18). The zombies make a neat, compact unit as “a multi-ethnic mob whose violence is always directed outwards” (Paffenroth 18). Zombie do not discriminate against their victims—“zombies are,” as Lisa Schwarzbaum comically phrased, “true equal-opportunity destroyers” (60). The human protagonists in zombie films often bicker over their differences while the homogenizing other persistently attempts to bring the characters to an equal level (Paffenroth 18). The characters in Shaun of the Dead audibly attempt to separate themselves from the zombie hordes at several instances in the film by referencing the supposed dichotomy between themselves and the zombies. The characters Pete and Philip try to separate themselves from the zombie hordes by attributing drugs as the impetus for the invasion. When Ed asks Pete about the bite wounds on his hand, Pete plays down his injury, assuming he merely “got mugged on the way home from work [by] some crackheads” (00:22:57). After Philip is bitten, he too frames the invasion as “overblown nonsense, [just] a lot of drug nuts running wild” (00:42:29). Both characters adopt a sneer of superiority when delivering these lines, as though they are better than their attackers and thus will avoid the same consequences.

However, Paffenroth dictated that “the distasteful and horrible aspects of zombies cannot really be discounted as inhuman, but are rather just exaggerated aspects of humanity” (11). Thus, zombies remain representations of humanity and, as a collective unit, are impossible to separate from humans (Paffenroth 11). In Shaun, Pete and Philip established a clear, although groundless, division between themselves and the other as a demonstration of colonial literature. Correlations between the Pub and Security According to Schwarzbaum, the “average British pub” in Shaun of the Dead reflects “an almost normal hell on earth of our own human making” and thus “lends itself irresistibly to political commentary” (60). The Winchester Pub is the primary setting in the film, hosting both the introduction and the climax of Shaun of the Dead. The pub is an integral part of the film, just as it is an integral part of British society (Hadfield 125). “Young Britons,” as Hadfield noted, “are socialized into a culture that exhibits a considerable degree of ambivalence toward alcohol” (125). In 2003, the British government authorized the Licensing Act, which eradicated time constraints on alcohol sales and allowed each establishment to decide its own “times of sale,” thus generating “the potential for up to twenty-four-hour opening, seven days a week” (Hadfield 42). Britain essentially hoped to increase a social sense of security by increasing crowds at all hours but in fact only increased the average Britons reliance on the local pub. Even during those few scenes when the characters are not physically present at the Winchester, the dialogue is still enveloped in the qualities and characteristics of the pub. Shaun’s obsession and reliance on the Winchester qualifies him as a “regular,” which Katovich and Reese defined as a patron who “remains socially integrated by being emphatically present in spirit, even when absent” (309). Throughout the film, the Winchester serves several purposes for the title character in Shaun of the Dead. David comically references the pub’s significance to Shaun, describing him as “A man whose idea of a romantic nightspot is also an impenetrable fortress” (01:02:42). But, in Shaun’s calculated reasoning, the Winchester pub is a “safe,” “familiar,” and smoker-friendly (00:36:17) location to wait out the zombie invasion. As Hadfield presented, “An Englishman’s pub is his castle” (87), thus justifying why the Shaun equates the Winchester pub with safety. Shaun feels protected in the Winchester because his years of patronage have supplied him with a sense of security and territoriality. “The traditional English pub,” according to Hadfield, “has often been characterized as a facility which serves largely static or geographically-confined communities” (85). Shaun, as a static and geographically-confined client, thus experiences the pub as a second home, even to the point that the Winchester has become part of his identity. Liz and the other characters do not experience the pub in the same way, and thus cannot understand Shaun’s sense of security or his attachment to fellow regular clients such as Ed.

According to Katovich and Reese’s analysis of pub culture, Shaun must remain loyal to Ed to preserve his own status as a Winchester regular (310). Despite Pete and Liz’s constant requests that Shaun abandon Ed and move on with his own life, the duo remain loyal due to their Winchester ties. Shaun recognizes Ed’s ineptitude when he finally snaps at Ed, in a scene conveniently set at the front doors of the Winchester. Ed answers his cell phone amidst a horde of zombies, which jeopardizes the safety of the group and leads Shaun to rant “I’ve spent my entire life sticking up for you and all you ever do is fuck things up and make me look stupid” (01:00:04). Shaun’s outburst fits neatly with Katovich and Reese’s claim that the regular will always find security at the pub, unless the regular “becomes a traitor and chooses personal gain at the expense of the group” (310). Essentially, Shaun turns to the Winchester because it his last option. His home is no longer safe, but he recognizes that, as a pub regular, he “always has a place to go” (Katovich and Reese 310) at the Winchester. According to Katovich and Reese, “the bar is associated with an emphasis on what some observers term ‘turf protection’” (310). Hadfield explained the defensive reactions of regulars by stating that “the home territory character of any bar is dependent upon the indigenous population’s ability to control the presence of outsiders” (88). However, “Under certain circumstances, the indigenous group’s attempts to exercise territoriality may break down due to the ‘swamping’ of the venue by outsiders whose actions cannot be effectively controlled” (Hadfield 88). This notion wholly correlates with both the events in Shaun of the Dead and the indigenous uprisings of the colonial era. Shaun successfully brings his traveling party to the Winchester pub, where the group remains safe up until Ed’s critical gaff with the slot machine. Soon enough, the group is “swamped” by non-regulars as zombies pour through the open door and shattered windows surrounding the pub.

The indigenous populations encountered the same overwhelming loss of territoriality when the superior British forces overwhelmed their regular establishments. Britain’s superior military allowed the nation to march through most of the less developed nations that would later become British colonies. In the same sense, the crowds that overwhelm pubs are usually wealthier than the blue-collar regulars, and thus have more money to spend (Hadfield 88). The zombies in Shaun reflect the same dominance. Therefore, by setting the conflict in Shaun of the Dead at the Winchester pub, Wright and Pegg are framing the pub as a colony. In this case, the zombies are the colonizers and the survivors are the natives of the untamed pub. The zombies, as colonizers, desire to dominate the survivors and assimilate them into the colonizing culture. Much like in the imperial era, the pub is secure, and only representational of security, so long as the group of survivors can keep the colonizing power off of its territory. The Use of Non-traditional Weapons The characters in Shaun of the Dead are resourceful in their battle with the zombies, but completely inept when presented with the advantage of an actual weapon. On the contrary, British colonists had the advantage of superior weapons, which allowed them to conquer their subjects readily (Harris 169). The colonized natives were much more reliant on their own environment and ingenuity to provide resources and weapons in their conflicts with the colonists (Harris 169). Once again, the characters in Shaun parallel the colonized entity of traditional British texts far more than the traditionally dominant imperialists. The characters in Shaun of the Dead are woefully inept at weaponry in spite of their culture’s military background. It quickly becomes obvious that the invading zombies are encroaching on the characters’ territory and instilling fear, thus equating the zombies with imperial control (Harris 169). The survivors, now the colonized, respond by fighting back with whatever means necessary. The embarrassing selection of weapons provided throughout the film demonstrates the survivors’ underhanded chances of survival against the dominant zombies.

The range of weapons includes household items (ashtrays, toasters, laundry baskets, and fire extinguishers) and sporting equipment (cricket bats, golf clubs, pool cues, and darts), as well as outdoor equipment acquired on their travels (shovels, logs, lawn furniture, and tetherball poles). By the time the group finally obtains the rifle above the bar at the Winchester, they realize they have no collective firearms experience. Ed once accidentally “shot his sister in the leg” (01:10:46), while David claims to be a pacifist (01:10:43), leading Shaun to the conclusion that “no one has any experience” (01:10:53). Di informs Shaun to turn off the safety on the gun, as that “happened to [her] on stage once” (01:12:28). Since the group can not elect an expert, they devise an absurdly inefficient method requiring four characters to operate one gun; one to reload, one to shoot, and two to help aim. David, Di, and Ed assist Shaun by directing his attention to certain areas of the room with undecipherable instructions like “three o’clock,” “quarter to twelve,” and the identical direction “eleven forty-five” (01:12:40-51). The resulting confusion leads Ed to change his directions to a much simpler “top left,” “reload,” and “nice shot” (01:12:54-58). The dialogue identically resembles an earlier pre-zombie scene in which Shaun offers the same helpful advice of “top left,” “reload,” and “nice shot” (00:05:25-31) to Ed while he plays a video game at the flat. Essentially, the group’s collective weaponry experience is a slight compilation of accidents, props, and video games. The group’s weaponry ineptitude is displayed quite obviously when the zombies finally breach the barriers surrounding the Winchester. The operation of one gun by four people proves as inefficient as expected, when Shaun is only able to kill four zombies. The group can only fire fifteen of their twenty-nine shells before Shaun accidentally lights the rest on fire (01:20:54).

The remaining shells quickly explode and kill three more zombies, demonstrating that complete chance was almost as efficient as Shaun and his companions. This sad realization continues a trend in which the under prepared characters find more success by quickly snapping up their surrounding resources instead of utilizing actual weapons. As such, the characters represent a colonized entity. They rely on resourcefulness while being controlled through fear by a dominant presence which only displays power but does not, in fact, possess it (Harris 169).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine Shaun of the Dead from a postcolonial perspective and to display how the film demonstrated the stagnant nature of post-imperial British society. The results demonstrated that the seemingly unrelated genres of colonial literature and zombie cinema in fact paralleled each other across several categories. The following section will conclude the study by discussing the major conclusions, the implications of these findings, and recommendations for future research. Major Conclusions This rhetorical study discovered five key connections between postcolonial theory and the film Shaun of the Dead. First, the male characters in Shaun more closely represent the traditional colonized people than the British colonizers anticipated by audiences. Second, materialism correlates with death in the film. The third point justified Shaun’s attachment to the pub and discussed the implications of this security for British society. The fourth conclusion exposed the methods used in the film to dichotomize the survivors from the colonial “other.” Finally, the characters’ inexperience with weaponry associated them with traditional colonized characters. Each of these conclusions connected Shaun of the Dead to postcolonial studies and examined these rhetorical messages for implications to contemporary British society. Connecting Gender in Shaun to Colonization While the typical British hero in colonial texts is primed for any obstacle and motivated for action, Shaun seems grossly unprepared and delays significantly before making a conceivable plan. However, Shaun develops while Ed and David succumb to reluctance and meekness and, consequently, fail to survive the film. The men of Shaun, emasculated by their inability to conquer the zombies, parallel the feminine representations of colonized people in imperial texts. The ideology of the colonial era is thus reborn through the film, which encourages the British population to reclaim the preparedness and activity of colonial male figures. If the film shows that masculine characteristics are ineffective and absent, then feminine characteristics must be subtextually endorsed. Thus, the hidden ideology demonstrates that Britain has remained stubbornly independent as an unfounded masculine presence, but the nation could flourish if it adopted positive feminine traits like connectivity.

Connecting Materialism to Colonization Even though Western culture is undeniably materialistic, imperial texts paradoxically denounced individual materialism for distracting British citizens from the collective goal of world domination. Of the survivors in Shaun, Ed primarily misrepresented the typical British character. Ed’s egotism and negligence displayed how putting self-interest above the greater society will invariably affect the entire group negatively. The film subtly correlated selfishness and inattention with death, thus necessitating that group-mindedness and social activity will result in survival. While Ed callously prioritizes cell phones above survival, Shaun represents the potential success of avoiding material distractions by focusing on a goal, ascending to a leadership position, and surviving the film. Connecting Alcohol to Security Wright and Pegg grew up in a culture where “drinking to intoxication is widespread and often regarded as a socially acceptable, legitimate, and pleasurable activity” (Hadfield 125). By equating the pub with security and territoriality, Wright and Pegg seem to display their political leanings towards the Licensing Act of 2003, which increased serving hours at drinking establishments as a way to increase crowds and decrease crime. The Winchester is framed as a secure spot, supporting the hidden ideology that increased licensing hours lead to public safety so long as drunkenness is controlled. The zombies demonstrate that public disobedience is the only threat to everyday pub culture, and consequentially to everyday British society.

Connecting Zombie Films to Postcolonial Studies The correlation between colonial literature and zombie cinema is most obvious through the context of othering. Both textual genres require the presence of another ideology or collective unit, labeled the “other.” Shaun deftly illustrates the characterization qualifications of both. Despite its unorthodox approach, Shaun still fits the postcolonial genre because the British characters remain richly-defined, while the other entity remains a relatively nondescript homogenous crowd. The general British population embodies the other, fulfilling a hidden ideology of the film that labels contemporary British citizens as unconscious and unaware. Connecting Resourcefulness to Colonization The survivors in Shaun represent the colonized, based on the success the characters find in their surroundings. Once the survivors acquire a gun, however, they are woefully inept and spoil their opportunity to defeat the zombies. Thus, the hidden ideology in the film praises the common man and debilitates the imperial mindset. The rifle, representative of military strength and practical problem-solving, is an artifact of the past. The Winchester rifle is as useless to the surviving characters as an imperial national identity is to contemporary British citizens.

Implications of Research Findings As previously discussed, the messages in Shaun serve two functions for the writers: to expose the lethargic nature of British culture and to suggest the need for active engagement to overcome it. Wright and Pegg stated in interviews that they were both committed to displaying a real image of London, and not the type usually seen in comedic domestic films. The entire film takes place in a small suburb of London, and refuses to feature any stereotypical London imagery such as Big Ben and beefeaters. Thus, the zombie invasion and Shaun’s reluctance to handle the situation represent genuine British society, still enveloped in a colonial national identity. Wright and Pegg advertised the underachieving national identity of postcolonial British culture. Scholars agree that Britain has remained staunchly independent even as the world has grown increasingly interconnected. It is difficult for the British national identity, once founded on the principle of world dominance, to acclimate itself to the current multinational state of politics and government. However, Britain has potentially missed several opportunities to improve itself due to its national stubbornness and individualistic self-absorption. Wright and Pegg admit some advantages to an imperial identity, such as physical strength, but argue for an updated embrace of feminine qualities like interdependence and connectivity. Wright and Pegg also demonstrate that Britain has the potential for success if it can adjust to postcolonial realities, and that Britain must simply explore the options located beyond its present social habits. Recommendations Nearly all postcolonial studies address Europe’s imperial impact on marginalized territories and rarely, if ever, is a postcolonial analysis dedicated to a colonizing culture.

However, European cultures are just as in need of redefining a post-imperial national identity as any previous colony. European texts possess a wealth of uncharted rhetoric, which scholars must examine through the postcolonial method to illustrate how a nation can analyze its own strengths and weaknesses. Shaun of the Dead ends six months after it starts, with the two surviving characters discussing another night at the pub. Thus, British culture survives the film and endures through the pub, where citizens form their own collective societies to facilitate in the foundation of the future European community.