



ENGL 1102: "THE DEAD AND THE UNDEAD"

Course Description: We are at a point in our evolution as a species where we've become not quite living not quite dead. With the advent of virtual bodies (in video games, chat rooms, online profiles, etc.), cloning, cyborg technology, and even the cell phone, we are seeing ourselves become more and more disembodied. This feeling of disembodiment is why we've become so obsessed in our entertainment media with bodies, dead and otherwise--with cadavers, crime scenes, bodily mutilation, and torture. We crave a truly visceral experience of the body--of bodies torn apart and reassembled, bodies breathing and being stopped of breath, bodies scrutinized post-mortem, and bodies (no matter how gruesome) as aesthetically viable objects. The zombie is part and parcel of this cultural obsession, but it is also the antidote. The zombie threatens to deconstruct us (to eat us), but in an altogether different way from the machine. Whereas machines devour our flesh, the zombie just chews, turning *us* into zombies, which are the epitome of flesh. Machines take our flesh away. Zombies proffer it back.

In this course, we will examine a multimedia array of texts that explore the zombie and its literary and figurative precursors, including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Mary Roach's *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, and Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*. We will also ask larger philosophical questions about what it is to be "human," what it is to be "living," and what it is to be "dead." In addition to working on a multimodal research-intensive project over the course of the semester, students will engage in activities/assignments that consider the material and immaterial nature of composition itself. What constitutes the flesh of an essay? Does a word have flesh? And, similarly, the zombie demands that we consider the flesh of media: Does film have flesh? Do interactive texts have flesh? And to what extent do they engage us at the level of flesh?

**SPRING
2011**

Instructor

Jesse Stommel

**P3 (MWF 1-2)
L1 (MWF 2-3)
M1 (MWF 4-5)**

Note: The subject will lead us through difficult terrain (death, corpses, embalming, decay, cannibalism). We will have to sludge through some gore along the way. If you are squeamish you would prefer another section of this course.