

Zombie: I Am More Than A Grave Revival; Modern Day Slavery Is My Rhetoric

Amy Wilentz's "A Zombie Is a Slave Forever"

Most people think of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video when they think about zombies; a scary, rotting corpse unearthed from its' grave--coming to eat you. That's all hoopla for Halloween, according to Amy Wilentz and her Essay entitled, "A Zombie is a Slave Forever". Wilentz establishes credibility with a bio of her credentials and a background on zombies before her essay. Then, with mostly logos and pathos, Wilentz brings her uniformed audience closer to understanding how zombies really do fit into today's modern culture. Wilentz writes an educational essay for her uneducated zombie audience about the history of zombies and how zombies are a logical offspring of today's New World Slavery.

Wilentz begins her essay with background information on zombies, which boosts her credibility regarding how zombies are incorrectly thought about in modern-day society. The audience is fed information about how zombie culture is everywhere—in books, movies, t.v., and video games. According to Wilentz, the U.S. Government even had a humorous guide in 2011 for responding to a zombie apocalypse. Wilentz cites Halloween as a perfect example of how we incorrectly feed into the idea that a zombie is just the walking dead. Wilentz is setting the stage to debunk our cultural beliefs about what a zombie truly is when she continues with a well-informed history lesson about zombies within the body of her essay.

Wilentz begins where it all began—Africa and Haiti. She does a great job explaining how this new world phenomenon arose from both African religious beliefs and the slavery of French-run Haiti in the 1600 and 1700's. She focuses on Haiti because the idea of a zombie came from Haitian slaves who wanted to commit suicide to free themselves from slavery. Wilentz paints a picture of a terrible life as a slave who would rather kill themselves than work another day. Wilentz writes "hunger, extreme overwork, and cruel discipline were the rule—using words to evoke emotion. Slaves often could not consume enough calories to allow for normal rates of reproduction; what children they did have might easily starve". The audience is left feeling sad for the soon to be zombie or modern-day worker.

Wilentz further explains the history of the zombie by explaining further how committing suicide was connected to becoming a zombie--"To become a zombie was the slave's worst nightmare; to be dead and still a slave, an eternal field hand". Wilentz really helps the audience to remember the idea behind zombies with her use of emotional wording. "In Voodoo belief, you could be stopped from going to heaven after dying by Baron Samedi, the lord of the cemetery. If you offended Baron, he could keep you from going to heaven and, thus, you would remain a zombie", according to Wilentz. She continues to build her analogy between a zombie and, perhaps, current day fascism.

Wilentz skips ahead in time and brings into play a fascist dictator, named Francois Duvalier, who controlled Haiti in the 60s and 70s. She is using pathos to bring about sympathy for the zombie under control of a dictator, which she will soon enough use through an analogy in her conclusion. Duvalier dressed like Baron and whispered like him too. Wilentz brings us

closer to the analogy between the zombie and modern-day slavery when citing how even the police seemed to be zombies under the control of the dictator. Sound familiar?

Finally, in the end of her essay, Wilentz brings it all together and analogize zombies and current day fascism. She writes:

He's the living dead, but he's also the inanimate animated, the robot of industrial dystopias. He's great for fascism. The zombie is devoid of consciousness and therefore unable to critique the system that has entrapped him. He's labor without grievance. He works free and never goes on strike. You don't have to feed him much. He's a Foxconn worker in China; a maquiladora seamstress in Guatemala; a citizen of North Korea; he's the man, surely in the throes of psychosis and under the thrall of extreme poverty.

The analogy works. We can see how a zombie really does fit into many slavery-type circumstances in today's world. Wilentz gave us a better understanding of what a zombie is and why it's so relevant today. It's not just about a scary body rising from the dead, ready to eat the first human it sees.

Wilentz uses humor to end her essay, explaining how we should give salt to the next zombie we see at our door for Halloween. You see, Wilentz explained earlier that eating salt was the only way a zombie could have his will and soul returned to him, citing how the literacy primer put out by the Roman Catholic Church in Haiti was called, "A Taste of Salt".

In the end, there could have been more in-depth analogies between the definition of a zombie and how it relates to the feelings of people today. Why do we feel like zombies? What keeps us from eating salt? Why do we give in to dictators? These questions still go unanswered. Wilentz's analogy, in the end, lacks depth and is cut too short leaving the audience wanting more—perhaps just like a zombie.

References

Wilentz, A. (2018). *A zombie is a slave forever*. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's