Revenant Landscapes in The Walking Dead


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Abstract

This paper considers The Walking Dead comic (Kirkman, Moore and Adlard, Image 2003-present) and television series (AMC, 2010-present), arguing that although the two series rely on similar imagery they are distinct in their use of space. This contradicts established industry, audience and creator discourses surrounding this text and offers a counter-argument to the popular perspective that comics can be used as simple storyboards for their television adaptations. Firstly, geographies of the urban gothic and themes such as inversion and decay are used to interrogate paratextual claims of fidelity between the two texts. The paper compares key scenes and settings and goes beyond aesthetics to show that in both versions the functions of urban spaces are inverted (the highway, prison, farm, etc). It argues that the zombies’ decaying flesh echoes the disrepair of the landscape and the protagonists’ own bodily fragmentation through injury and violence is mirrored in the destruction of the places they encounter. These claims are then reconsidered using the space of the comics page, applying the work of Thierry Groensteen and critical theories of gothic narrative structure. This demonstrates that comics’ mono-sensory narratives allow depictions to be thematically linked with an emotive use of space to engage readers, and that this contributes to a gothic architecture of the page. The paper concludes that the critical discourse of fidelity that surrounds The Walking Dead is superficial and that each version’s spaces are medium-specific and distinct in their affect on the reader/viewer.