

himself with another player. This lack of engagement follows him into adulthood and leaves him ill equipped to deal with the lump in his wife's breast and the suicide of his drinking buddy Del.

As a narrator Henry is observant, with an eye for detail. He analyses situations, the people around him, and rationalizes his own behavior in a self-deprecating, often witty and comic way. But he can't seem to act, even when he knows what to do. After his wife Cheryl insists that he feel the lump in her breast and senses his repulsion he thinks: "Right then she needed me to give her a big hug. Tell her everything would be alright. I'm not an idiot. I knew that much. But I didn't do it. That kind of thing has never been my specialty."

In *Henry's Game*, David Elias has given us a flawed, entertaining narrator who can't cry over his wife's cancer or his friend's suicide, yet is brought to tears by the music of Chopin. He provides us with painful insights into the real struggles men have with dealing with their emotions and the games they play to avoid revealing or sharing them.

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Corey Redekop, *Husk*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2012. Pp. 307. Softcover, \$18.95.

For his sophomore novel (his first, *Shelf Monkey*, was an irreverent, literary take on the murder-mystery genre) Corey Redekop takes on an area of fiction also steeped in a long history, though its provenance in pop culture dates back only a few decades – the zombie story. However, Redekop takes a slightly different approach from that of the George Romero/AMC sagas of beleaguered protagonists fighting for survival against ominous (and ravenous) hordes of the undead. In *Husk*, the *protagonist* is a zombie, and we are forced into comically rethinking the zombie apocalypse from an insider's perspective.

*Husk* opens with the awakening of Sheldon Funk with an exclamatory "Jesus Christ," which (as an acutely self-aware narrator) he remarks is "a resurrection joke." Then, in a lengthy sequence, he grapples – in sometimes excruciating detail – with the physical problems posed by his new existence. Sheldon is (was?) an actor, and the central dramatic conceit of the story is that he is able to coerce his way onto the set of a horror film, where, despite his "condition," he is able to impress both directors and audiences with his "naturalistic" ability to be terrifying. Of course, happiness cannot last for a protagonist in any novel, let alone one whose insides are only loosely kept inside his jacket.

Redekop is not shy about one of the foundational intertexts for this creature – the “monster” in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Much like her creature, Sheldon (or “Shelley” to his friends...) must learn how to exist in the world, how to eat, move, and – most crucially, how to speak. This sequence, like quite a few others, is rendered in painstaking detail, and, like many of these lengthy descriptive passages, dilutes the strength of the narrative:

I can propel my muscles to achieve movement, but they respond sluggishly, as if they have been kept in cold storage and have not thawed completely. My tongue, that most powerful rope of fibrous tissue, must be exercised regularly to remind itself of the positions and routines necessary for verbal communication lest the words become mushy and unintelligible, a dancer who has forgot his steps, a singer who’s forgotten the tune. (123)

And so on. This might be the central difficulty that readers encounter in this novel: Redekop has clearly thought a great deal about the physical, mental, and existential problems that his protagonist faces, and is intent on squeezing as many of these observations as possible into the text. The result tends to be a melange of observed details from the perspective of a hyper/meta-aware Sheldon who often stops the action for long periods to make observations about his thoughts and feelings. While this is a central problem with *Frankenstein* as well (All those books that must be discussed! All those pedagogical philosophies debated!) Shelley’s novel had the benefit of two sympathetic central characters. Sheldon Funk, on the other hand, is an unpleasant, narcissistic anti-hero (at least Victor Frankenstein had dreams of helping the world), and is unable to evoke much sympathy, even as he is placed in great danger in the latter portions of the book. A scene in which he appears to save the world from great evil comes too late and is too foreshortened to redeem the previous 250 pages.

For the latter half of the novel Redekop seems content to let another non-zombie intertext take over the mood of the book, as it swings into high action gear reminiscent of James Bond at his most caricatured “Dr. No/Dr. Evil” stereotype. This reflects what seems to be his sheer enjoyment of placing the indestructible zombie soul in harm’s way and seeing what happens. In the end, it is quite a ride, though a more determined editing might have tightened up the action so there was less telling and more showing throughout the story.

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