

Monstrous reflections: Crisis, Escape, and Cultural Anxieties in *All of Us Are Dead*

Muhammad Shoaib^a, Sonia Salam^b and Dr. Shaheena Ayub Bhatti^c

^{a-c} Foundation University, Islamabad – Pakistan

^b English Department, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda – Pakistan

Keywords: Crisis, societal impact, identity, resilience, transformation, horror

Article Information			
Received	22 th Mar 2026	Accepted	15 th Jun 2026
Published	30 th Jun 2026		

Abstract

This paper examines the 2022 Korean drama *All of Us Are Dead*, directed by Lee Jae-kyoo and Kim, through the lens of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Monster Culture framework. Set in an apocalyptic world devastated by zombie attacks, the drama serves as a fertile ground for exploring cultural fears and anxieties. The analysis focuses on three of Cohen's seven theses: The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body, which demonstrates how monsters embody collective cultural fears; The Monster Always Escapes, suggesting that monsters are never fully eliminated but reappear in new forms, symbolizing evolving societal anxieties; and The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis, highlighting how monsters challenge conventional boundaries and norms. Employing Catherine Belsey's textual analysis method, this study critically investigates how these thematic elements are depicted in the series. The findings reveal that *All of Us Are Dead* not only reflects contemporary cultural fears surrounding epidemics and societal collapse but also exemplifies the ongoing presence and adaptability of monsters within cultural narratives. Through Cohen's framework, the drama is positioned as a mirror of the collective unconscious, illustrating the enduring relevance of monster symbolism in understanding societal anxieties in modern media.

Introduction

Korean dramas are gaining popularity worldwide and the consumption of Korean content extends beyond popular platforms like Netflix to include audiences comfortable with English dubbing or subtitles, as well as Pakistani viewers, with Urdu dubbing available on various apps and YouTube. Shows like *The Great and Lonely God* (2016), *Crash Landing on You* (2019), and *Penthouse* (2020) are accessible on channels like LTN Family and Urdu. "Pakistanis have been swept up in the tide of the Korean Wave, slowly but surely becoming enamored with the world of K-content" (Ejaz, 2023). On Netflix, K-dramas like *Vincenzo* continue to dominate, even two years after their release (Ejaz, 2023). This rising popularity has led to the release of their concert movie, *BTS*, set to hit Pakistani cinemas in February 2023, with fans lining up to gush over their idols (Ejaz, 2023). This is just one example of the growing popularity of Korean dramas in Pakistan.

The Korean media, including series and films, reflects complex societal issues, extending beyond mere entertainment to explore profound themes such as the causes and implications of zombie outbreaks. These narratives often highlight human sins, particularly the misuse of scientific inventions and technological advancements, as primary catalysts for the emergence of zombies. A good example is that of the Korean series *All of Us Are Dead* (2022), directed by Lee Jae-kyoo and Kim Nam-su. The drama is set at Hyosan High School. It exemplifies this critique by depicting a virus engineered by the science teacher, Lee Byeong-chan, intended to combat bullying that inadvertently transforms individuals into zombies. This storyline highlights critical

social issues, such as student bullying a significant problem in South Korea and critiques the ethical boundaries of scientific experimentation. The series vividly portrays how such scientific misadventures can escalate into societal crises, with the virus spreading from the school to engulf the entire town, forcing characters into life-or-death survival situations. Overall, these media productions utilize the horror genre as a platform to reflect societal anxieties and prompt reflection on the ethical responsibilities that accompany scientific progress.

Monsters have played a crucial role in the myths and folklore of various countries for centuries, making them a staple of literature since ancient times. The ancient classic *Beowulf* portrays monsters as external threats. On the other hand, *Frankenstein* is about social rejection and the dangers of scientific experimentation. In modern times, monsters are more a part of society, as seen in films such as *American Psycho* (2000) and *Hannibal* (2013). Like other sub-genres, monsters have evolved with time. This study examines *All of Us Are Dead* from the perspective of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's thesis on monster studies. His book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996) delves into the relationship between society and monsters. According to him, a monster is a metaphor for "cultural bodies". Monsters serve as a potent metaphor for the other, challenging societal norms and instilling fear in humans. The primary source for this research paper is the Netflix English subtitled series *All of Us Are Dead*, released in 2021. The series consists of 12 episodes, each lasting 52 minutes. This study will also investigate how these monsters represent the more profound fear that Korean societies harbour e.g. how does a monster escape to reappear again to describe something? The researchers will also examine how a monster cannot be categorised.

This study focuses solely on the first season of *All of Us Are Dead* and limits its analysis to Cohen's three initial theses of monster culture. It does not consider subsequent seasons or other theoretical frameworks.

It is significant because it will help readers understand monsters as cultural creations that embody diverse fears and social anxieties. It also highlights how monsters constantly appear and reappear and that they cannot be categorised. This makes the study valuable in understanding how monsters in popular media reveal deeper cultural tensions. Analysing these monsters through Cohen's Monster Culture framework enables us to better understand the cultural significance of *All of Us Are Dead* and provides a new perspective on popular monsters in TV series.

Review of the Literature

The literature review section examines previous studies and literature surrounding the Korean Netflix series *All of Us Are Dead* examined from the perspective of Cohen's theory of monsters. The first section of the literature review focuses on studies of *All of Us Are Dead*. In the second section, the research focuses on articles and books related to the theory.

The first zombie film from South Korea, *Train to Busan* (2016), adapted the zombie genre to symbolize the Sewol ferry accident on April 16, 2014. In Yun's (2022) study, which analyzes the representation of national trauma in *Train to Busan*, a semiotic approach is used. Elements such as character setup, narrative, symbolic meaning of the zombie's body, mise-en-scène, and cinematography reflect the national trauma of the Sewol ferry disaster. This film was the first Korean blockbuster adaptation in the zombie genre. The portrayal of zombies in South Korean media has expanded into broader cultural discourse, with zombies now recognised as global icons (Yun, 2022). In the train, passengers are trapped and fighting to survive as they turn into zombies after being bitten. *Train to Busan* depicts a national tragedy in which only seventy-five students out of 325 young students from Danwon High School survived; however, the ferry had carried a total of 476 passengers on a field trip. The incident resulted in 304 deaths, with others missing, leaving only 172 survivors. Through a semiotic analysis, the researcher highlights key features of the zombie genre, such as tracks, shots, locations, attitudes, and characters. This study is expected to highlight the significance of Korean seasons/series as a sub-genre and to acknowledge zombies as part of global cultural identity.

The myth of zombies in *All of Us Are Dead* explores not only deeper themes of survival in chaos, societal pressure, and human nature but also serves as a compelling narrative device that highlights the outbreak of the virus. The study conducted by Rahmawati and Atinia examined the zombie myth in South Korea, using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory to analyze the zombie characters in *All of Us Are Dead*, and employing a descriptive qualitative method to gather data for the study. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction is also used to develop the discussion section of an article by Rahmawati & Atinia (2023) on binary oppositions and the deconstruction of zombies. The study's findings reveal how the zombie myth is represented in the series, how it is deconstructed through human emotions, and how the roles of humans and zombies are inverted.

Several reviews highlight the series *All of Us Are Dead*, which combines action and horror to reveal the characters' vulnerability and resilience. Reviews mention *All of Us Are Dead* as a popular Netflix drama in which high school students are trapped at school due to a sudden, deadly outbreak of a zombie virus. The review by Framke (2022) states that as the situation becomes more complex and tension escalates, high school students not only navigate the threat of being turned into zombies but also face changes in their relationships and personal growth. The drama highlights how terror and fear can bring out both the worst and the best in people's emotional connections, utilising both action and horror elements throughout the series. Through constant survival struggles, the students undergo significant growth, revealing the importance of teamwork and resilience in overcoming challenging situations. The drama's narrative effectively highlights the challenges of adolescence, providing the audience with thrilling entertainment throughout.

Sherry Osborne (2021) praises *All of Us Are Dead* as the best zombie series she has seen, highlighting its fast-paced storytelling, emotional impact, and increased suspense. Stuart Heritage suggests that *All of Us Are Dead* serves as a metaphor for the viral chaos that has affected the world in recent years, comparing the show to the COVID-19 pandemic in his review. He points out that featuring high school students raises the emotional stakes and provides a more youthful view as it explores fear, loss, and survival. Heritage praises the show's character development and its ability to keep viewers engaged, even with familiar genre clichés, while criticising the repetitive nature of long-form zombie stories. By referencing films like *Train to Busan* and *Hellbound* as part of the same successful storytelling tradition, he places the series within South Korea's broader excellence in zombie fiction (Heritage, 2022).

All of Us Are Dead has become an international hit on Netflix, reflecting the global appeal of Korean dramas during the pandemic. According to Merican (2022), the series melds high school horror with survival drama, creating an intense emotional atmosphere. However, its reliance on familiar zombie genre tropes may limit its originality. The series explores themes of moral dilemmas, love, and friendship among students trapped in a school during a zombie outbreak; however, some character decisions feel inconsistent or implausible, which may frustrate viewers. While the show emphasizes clever escape plans and emotional bonds to keep audiences engaged, these moments sometimes sacrifice realism for drama, thereby risking the suspension of disbelief among viewers. Visually, the series employs impressive cinematography and sound design to heighten tension, but it frequently resorts to typical horror clichés, which diminish its impact. While it employs emotional depth alongside visual spectacle, the series's heavy reliance on genre conventions and questionable plot choices suggests that it might benefit from deeper character development and originality.

Elsie Pak (2023) employs Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's framework of "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" to examine how fairy tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Little Mermaid* reflect cultural anxieties and societal norms. Pak posits that the monstrous characters in these narratives, such as the wolf and the sea, symbolize societal fears, desires, and violations. By analysing different adaptations of these tales, she illustrates how the depiction of monsters evolves in response to shifting cultural values and the changing perceptions of the 'Other' within society. Pak's (2023) examination reveals that fairy tales are not fixed stories but dynamic

cultural artefacts that evolve to mirror societal transformations. From a Monster Theory perspective, she emphasises how these narratives employ monstrous figures to question and redefine cultural boundaries, offering valuable insights into collective consciousness and the processes of inclusion and exclusion in society. Her research highlights the significance of fairy tales as a means of understanding cultural identity and the representation of the monstrous in literature.

In *No Country for Old Men*, Anton Chigurh represents Jeffrey Cohen's "monster theory," manifesting societal fears through unpredictable violence and moral detachment. Chigurh's reliance on coin flips to determine his victims' fates exemplifies his arbitrary sense of justice, aligning with Cohen's concept of monsters as entities that challenge cultural norms (Callan, 2023). His lack of a clear motive and backstory further distances him from human rationality, reinforcing his status as a monstrous figure in the narrative. As Callan (2023) notes, "Chigurh represents both the fear and desire of our societal norms by rejecting all humanity via his brutality. "Although Chigurh possesses inhuman characteristics, he occasionally displays unsettlingly normal behaviour, such as consuming milk from a victim's refrigerator, complicating the distinction between monster and human. This duality amplifies the horror he represents, implying that monstrosity can exist within the realm of the familiar. By the novel's conclusion, Chigurh's ability to evade justice challenges conventional crime fiction narratives, leaving readers with the disturbing notion that such monsters may persist without consequence. This resolution highlights McCarthy's critique of the decline of moral order and the widespread presence of violence in modern society (Callan, 2023).

Based on the resources available to the researcher and after reviewing the existing literature on *All of Us Are Dead*, the researcher concluded that there is a dearth of research on analyzing this series through the lens of Cohen's monster culture theory. This study will address this gap by examining *All of Us Are Dead* from the perspective of Cohen's monster culture.

Methodology

This chapter will deal with the theoretical framework and Research method. The first part will address the theoretical framework, followed by the research method.

❖ Theoretical framework

The prominent scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is recognised for his significant contributions to cultural theory, medieval studies, and the study of monsters. Cohen, as a professor, editor, and author, has played a substantial role in shaping the discourse surrounding the concept of the "monster" and its implications for culture and philosophy. This study examines the relationship between monsters and society, revealing how these entities serve as potent metaphors for the 'Other,' challenge societal norms, and illuminate the anxieties and desires inherent in human culture. In his influential work, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), he examines the realm of monstrous beings, the essence of the monster, and its significance across various cultural contexts. The book presents insights into how monsters reflect societal norms and symbolise fear and fascination. Jerome Cohen's introduction to the concept of the monster and the field of monster studies lays the groundwork for these inquiries, providing a basis for understanding monsters as dynamic symbols that go beyond conventional classifications. This book remains a key reference in academic discussions regarding monsters and their cultural implications.

Cohen's other books include *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (2006), *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (2015), *Beowulf* (2020), and *Prismatic Ecology: Eco Theory Beyond Green* (2013). Cohen's research has significantly deepened readers' comprehension of medieval literature and culture while also broadening the scope of interdisciplinary studies by examining the contemporary fascination with monsters. This theoretical framework will outline Cohen's academic background and highlight the key themes that define his work, paving the way for a more in-depth investigation of his contributions to the study of monsters and culture.

Thesis I: The monster's body is cultural

The monster appears at a "metaphoric crossroads" (Cohen, 1996), symbolising societal anxieties attached to a specific time in a culture. In other words, the monster is a product of the culture in which it appears. According to Cohen, the monstrous body is pure culture, a construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrous is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns." (Cohen, 1996). In this way, whatever anxieties, fears, desires, or fantasies a culture has, monsters represent it. It changes hidden tensions into physical horror. "Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again" (Cohen, 1996).

Thesis II: The monster always escapes

The monster always escapes, meaning the beast is never genuinely defeated. According to Cohen, a monster "turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else" (Cohen, 1996). Each time it returns, its form changes, carrying new meanings shaped by evolving societal anxieties. In each of these vampire stories, the undead return in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social movements or a specific, determining event: la decadence and its new possibilities, homophobia and its hateful imperatives, the acceptance of new subjectivities unfixed by binary gender. In this way, every time it is repaired, it takes on a new meaning or represents something new within that culture.

Thesis III: The monster is the harbinger of category crisis

The monster is a harbinger of a category crisis, meaning that categorising a monster is challenging. In other words, monsters resist categorisation. According to Cohen, "This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things'" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. Thus, the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threaten to smash distinctions." (Cohen, 1996). Cohen states that "scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumbles" (Cohen, 1996) in the monster's existence because it cannot be categorised. In this way, monsters refuse to be part of any categorisation.

The study will employ the textual method outlined by Catherine Belsey, who emphasises that "textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself" (Belsey, 2013), highlighting the importance of engaging directly with the text to understand its deeper meanings. This approach aligns with the techniques developed by both Belsey and Alan McKee, who advocate for a detailed examination of texts within their social, cultural, and historical contexts to elucidate their significance. McKee particularly emphasizes that "textual analysis is a crucial tool for uncovering how texts shape and are shaped by social forces" (McKee, 2003), suggesting that the interpretation of a text is inherently linked to its broader societal influences. Textual analysis can be approached in many ways; in this study, it involves analysing the selected series to understand its underlying messages and cultural implications. The textual method is particularly suitable for this study because it enables a detailed, nuanced interpretation of the series, accounting for the social, cultural, and contextual influences that shape both the text and its reception. The application of Belsey's textual analysis method specifically to the series *All of Us Are Dead* allows for a close examination of its themes, messages, and cultural significance, revealing how the series reflects and influences societal perceptions.

❖ **Technique of analysis**

The researchers employed Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theory to read the Korean drama *All of Us Are Dead*. Cohen's theses provide critical tools for understanding how the monstrous figures in the series reflect deeper societal fears. The analysis follows Alan McKee's textual analysis to examine the key scenes, dialogues, and character transformations. By combining Alan McKee's textual analysis with Cohen's theoretical insights,

the researcher will look at how *All of Us Are Dead* turns the zombie outbreak into a critique of institutional failure.

Analysis

❖ Thesis I: The monster's body is cultural

In Cohen's words, the monster's body is pure culture. In the series *All of Us Are Dead*, episode 1, the science teacher, Lee Byeong-chan, creates a virus to make his son stronger, but the experiment goes wrong, and his sons turn into a zombie. In the process, he bites his mother and she turns into a zombie. When he realises that he cannot cure his son, he tells him, "I am sorry, Jin-Su" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 5:17) and kills him by hitting him on the head with a book. In this way, the virus represents unchecked emotion and bullying in the school. It also represents the failure of the institution to protect its students from such social evils, as Lee Byeong-chan informs the police officer in episode 4, "My son was bullied for a very long time" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 27:40). Byeong-chan only learns about this when his son tries to commit suicide. When he reports this incident to the principal, he tells him, "They were just fooling around" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 29:14). The principal also tells him that these are just kids and we cannot punish them. He was also reminded of the favour the principal had done him by offering him a job when he was jobless. In this way, the institution failed to address a grave issue, leading Lee Byeong-chan to create the deadly virus to strengthen his meek son against bullying. The virus metaphorically embodies how ungoverned violence and social neglect turn into something deadly and dangerous.

❖ Thesis III: The monster is the harbinger of category crisis

In episode 6 of *All of Us Are Dead*, a zombie bites Choi Nam-ra, but she does not turn into a zombie. When her friend sees that she has been bitten, they urge her to leave the classroom, but Su Hyeok and Nam On-jo want her to stay. Others disagree, as they have already lost many friends. Su-hyeok demonstrates his unwavering trust in Nam-ra by physically tying himself to her with a piece of cloth. When she asks him, "What are you doing?" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 44:39) he replies, "Tying our hands together" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 44:39), telling his friends that if she turns into a zombie, she will get him before she gets them. Although Choi Nam-ra remains human, she feels an overpowering urge and attempts to bite Su Hyeok. She also tells her, "I feel weird, I am hungry" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 38:36) and asks, "Why do you smell so good?" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 38:45). This happens as the virus kicks in her body and her eyes turn red, which means she is hungry for blood. She tries to bite Su Hyeok as well but she only loses control of herself when she is hungry for blood. In episode 11, Nam-ra loses control of herself, and her inner voices tell her, "Eat him" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 22:01), but instead of biting him, she bites herself. In this way, she is neither a zombie nor a human, resisting easy categorisation and blending the boundaries between humans and zombies. At the end of season one, Nam-ra leaves her friend and lives in isolation. Cohen posits that monsters are "disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration." This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" makes them dangerous, as they exist in a liminal space that challenges established norms and binaries. Nam-ra embodies this notion by existing between the categories of human and monster. Her blend of nature challenges easy classification, leading to fear and unpredictability among her friends. By isolating herself, Nam-ra admits the societal discomfort her existence causes and attempts to prevent further disturbance. Her withdrawal highlights the challenges faced by those outside standard categories, reflecting Cohen's assertion that such beings "demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality" (Cohen, 1996).

Another character who blurs the boundaries between what it means to be human and to be a zombie is Min Eun-ji. She is bullied and decides to end her life by walking right into bloodthirsty zombies; the zombies bite her, but like Nam-ra, she remains a human being. In episode 9, she attacks her friend for not stopping her from walking right into the zombies. "You let me go knowing I would die" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 09:02). His friend Kim Cheol-soo offers her food, but instead of eating the food, she tells him, "I want to eat you" (*All*

of *Us Are Dead*, 2022, 10:16), thus attacking and killing her friend. In this process, she becomes the aggressor instead of the victim. Her condition highlights the deep psychological trauma caused by different factors, like extreme bullying, sexual assault at school and injustice faced by students in Korean society. It also reveals the deep-seated resentment in the student, which is a result of helplessness. After becoming a hambie (a half-zombie, half-human hybrid), she seeks revenge against her classmates and society. Eun-ji's character highlights the idea that cruelty and neglect can force someone towards violence. The incident also creates chaos in the quarantine camp led by the army as they learn that the virus is unpredictable as the commander of martial law Jin Seon-mu says "She has a disease but there was no way to tell she is affected" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 23:48). She also blurs the boundaries between what is normal and what is not, thus refusing to be categorized. Eun Ji's actions after she turns into a half-bie, including taking vengeance against her tormentors and ultimately isolating herself, reflect a complex interplay between victimhood and agency. Eun-ji's journey highlights the catastrophic effects of systemic indifference and the human capacity for resilience and retribution in the face of dehumanisation. Eun-ji's transformation into a halfbie, a being neither fully human nor fully zombie, places her in a liminal space that defies categorisation. Her existence challenges societal norms and highlights the discomfort with entities that do not fit neatly into established categories. Cohen posits that such monsters "refuse to participate in the classificatory 'order of things'" (Cohen, 1996) and thus become embodiments of cultural unease.

❖ Thesis II: The monster always escapes

Another thesis that Cohen discusses is that monsters always escape. In the series *All of Us Are Dead* episode 11, the government orders the bombing of the Hyosan school. They lure all the zombies to one place by using sound drones. As the head of the military, Jin Seon-mu orders the bombing of the school. "Execute" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 25:04). He thinks that by bombing the school, he will kill all the zombies and save the city, and afterwards, he kills himself. As the narrative progresses, the audience learns that the virus has spread beyond the city and is uncontrollable. In episode 12, the surviving student reencounters the zombies (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 39:37). Nam-ra further tells them that zombies are "Everywhere" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 39:30), showing that even after bombing the city, the monster still managed to escape, and the virus spread beyond the city.

In the movie's final scenes, all the students meet Nam-ra on the rooftop. She tells them that she cannot come to live with them, since "I still have things to do here" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 44:02). These lines suggest that, "There are some others like me" (*All of Us Are Dead*, 2022, 44:09) indicating that the virus is still alive in some form even after bombing the entire city. In this way, the monsters cannot be fully killed; they always escape, as seen in many zombie movies and series, including *All of Us Are Dead*. According to Cohen, the monster "turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear someplace else". Whenever they appear again, they represent something like a phobia or a fear that society otherwise hides or does not want to talk about. The virus in *All of Us Are Dead* represents the bullying, injustice, discrimination, helplessness and academic pressure faced by students in Korean society, and the zombies are a metaphor for all these unchecked emotions. The virus also shows the fear that ignored suffering will slowly consume Korean society. This aligns with Cohen's idea that monsters always return, manifesting societal agitation, such as the repercussions of bullying and injustice, which cannot be eradicated by force and persist in new forms. This is evident in the series *All of Us Are Dead* through the characters of Nam-ra and Eun-ji. Metaphorically, the "monster" represents the societal issues and traumas that the virus symbolises, such as bullying, marginalisation, and institutional failure. These underlying problems are not resolved by the end of the series, suggesting that the actual "monsters", the systemic issues, remain unaddressed and continue to "escape" containment.

Conclusion

The Korean drama *All of Us Are Dead* presents a compelling narrative that intertwines the struggles of students with the monstrous transformations they undergo, offering a rich framework for critical analysis

through Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Seven Theses of Monster Culture. This analysis not only deepens the understanding of the show's thematic elements but also situates it within broader cultural discourses about fear, societal failure, and the limits of human morality. By examining the zombies and infected individuals as metaphoric monsters, the study underscores how these creatures embody more than mere threats; they serve as symbols of internal and societal anxieties. For instance, these monstrous beings reflect fears surrounding youthful vulnerability, unchecked corporate and governmental failures, and the breakdown of social cohesion. Through Thesis I, "The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body," the infected students symbolize repressed traumas such as bullying, neglect, and institutional failure, highlighting how societal neglect manifests physically in the form of infection and chaos.

Thesis II, "The Monster Always Escapes," is exemplified in the final episode, when Nam-ra warns the other students that zombies are omnipresent. This signifies that the monster, representing unresolved societal issues and internal fears, continually resurfaces, emphasizing the persistent threat. It suggests that such issues cannot be fully eradicated but must be continuously managed, echoing real-world challenges of societal trauma.

Thesis III, "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis," is vividly illustrated through characters like Eun-ji and Nam-ra, who blur traditional distinctions between good and evil, human and monster. Their ambiguous moralities challenge binary thinking and evoke questions about what it means to be human. This complexity reflects contemporary anxieties about identity, morality, and otherness.

This analysis reveals how *All of Us Are Dead* aligns with Cohen's other theses, such as the idea that monsters provoke societal reflection (Thesis IV) and serve as warnings about future dangers (Thesis V). The show acts as a mirror to current global issues like pandemics, governmental responsibility, and social inequality, making it highly relevant for academic discourse.

Analysing *All of Us Are Dead* through Cohen's Seven Theses of Monster Culture offers fresh insights into how popular media functions as a site for cultural critique. It demonstrates that monsters in contemporary TV are not merely sources of entertainment but are deeply embedded in social commentary and collective anxieties. This perspective contributes valuable understanding relevant to media studies, cultural studies, and sociology, positioning this analysis well within academic discourse suitable for submission to journals in these fields.

References

- Belsey, C. (2013). Textual Analysis as a research. *Research methods for English studies*, 160-163.
- Bhandari, P. (2020). What is qualitative research? Methods & examples. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-research>
- Callan, W. (2023). "The New Law of the Land: The Monster in No Country for Old Men." *Digital Literature Review*, 10(1), 86-94.
- Cohen, J. (1996). ProQuest Ebook Central. University of Minnesota Press. https://www.homeworkforu.com/static_media/uploadedfiles/1699995466_5116653_502...pdf
- Ejaz, X. (2023). Pakistanis and Korean content: fascination with the other or the familiar? *Images*. <https://images.dawn.com/news/1191783>
- Framke, C. (2022). *All of Us Are Dead*, Netflix's inventive New Korean drama, strands zombies in high school: TV review. *Yahoo! Entertainment*. January. <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/us-dead-netflix-inventive-korean-165132731>.
- Heritage, Stuart. (2022). *All of Us Are Dead*: Netflix's Korean Zombie show will blow you away. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/jan/28/all-of-us-are-dead-netflixs-korean-zombie-show-will-blow-you-away>
- Lee, Jae-kyoo, director. *All of Us Are Dead*. 2022. Studio Dragon; Netflix.
- Marsden, Adam J., and William N. Nesbitt. (2018). The monsters that make us: things that go bump in the mind. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/myth-on-the-mind/201803/the-monsters-that-make-us-things-that-go-bump-in-the-mind>
- Merican, S. (2022). *All of Us Are Dead* review: Netflix's latest Korean zombie thriller takes the genre to new places. *The Verge*. <https://www.theverge.com/22904587/all-of-us-are-dead-review-netflix>
- McKee, Alan. (2003). *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*. SAGE.
- Osborne, Sherry. (2021). "*All of Us Are Dead* review (Spoiler-Free!) – by Sherry Osborne: Korea.net: the official website of the republic of Korea." *Korea.net*. <https://www.korea.net/Events/Overseas/view?articleId=13720>
- Pak, E. (2023). Fairy tales in relation to monster theory: stories defining the transformation of culture.
- Rahmawati, R., and A. Hidayah. 2023. *Zombie Myth in All of Us Are Dead Series (2021)*. *Culture, Literature, Linguistics, and English Teaching (CLLiENT)* 5 (1): 53–68. <https://ojs.unsiq.ac.id/index.php/clients/article/view/5763>
- Williams, W. C. (2011). "You don't know if you're creating a monster." On apichatpong weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and *Phantoms of Nabua*, Camille Roy, Jacques Derrida, Xenia, Domestication and Writing, Being Possessed." *Big Other*. <https://bigother.com/2011/01/21/%E2%80%99Cyou-don%E2%80%99t-know-if-you%E2%80%99re-creating-a-monster-%E2%80%9D/>
- Yun, J. (2020). Representation of the national trauma in *Train to Busan*: based on a semiotic approach. Master's thesis, Brigham Young University. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/67fod685d70234fa5fced9b7cca888bc/1?pq->

Article Information and Declarations

Declarations

Authors' Contribution:

- All Authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions, Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

Conflict of Interest: NIL

Funding Sources: NIL

Correspondence:

Dr. Shaheena Ayub Bhatti

shaheena.ab@fui.edu.pk

How to Cite:

Monstrous reflections: Crisis, Escape, and Cultural Anxieties in All of Us Are Dead. (2026). Wah Academia Journal of Global Religions, 2(2), 58-63. <https://doi.org/10.63954/rgsdmh40>

Open Access: Publication is Open Access

Licensing: Creative Commons Attribution License - CC BY- 4.0

Copyrights: The author retains unrestricted copyrights and publishing rights