Rape Culture and the Zombie Apocalypse: Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*

Gwen Bergner

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 70, Number 4, Winter 2024, pp. 609-632 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2024.a950445

Rape Culture and the Zombie Apocalypse: Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*

Gwen Bergner

Abstract: This essay considers how the sexual violence in Matheson's iconic post-apocalypse novel dramatizes social tensions arising from Cold War "containment" policies that corralled affluent, white families in the suburbs to prevent socio-political unrest. Neville, the last man, must defeat a horde of zombie-vampire women and capture the lone woman survivor to restore the nuclear family and ensure human survival. Neville's rationalized gender violence recalls "wife-capture" tropes in earlier prehistoric fictions and anticipates recent zombie apocalypse texts that also naturalize sexual violence as necessary to reproductive futures, thus revealing the social logic of "rape culture."

With the recent zombie craze in US and global media, critics have revisited Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend*, a staple from science fiction's "Golden Age" credited with founding the zombie apocalypse narrative.[1] Set in future 1970s Los Angeles, the novel opens after a bacterial plague, triggered by military bombings, has wiped out all human civilization except for one man, Robert Neville. The narrative recounts Neville's fight for survival against the plague victims he calls

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 70, Number 4, Winter 2024.

vampires, although they resemble the dull-witted and voracious "living dead" (Matheson 37) we know as zombies.[2] Science fiction critics and zombie theorists note that Matheson's novel, like many 1950s science fiction works, allegorizes tensions in postwar US culture, including the fear of Soviet communism and nuclear apocalypse, the alienating effects of suburbanization, and the threat to Western culture posed by the ascendance of mass culture.[3] No doubt the novel incorporates these concerns, but what of its pervasive sexual and gender violence? Are the explicit scenes and intimated themes of femicide, necrophilia, rape, bondage, kidnapping, and torture just incidental to its meaning? I contend, rather, that Neville's obsessive violence against the women vampires drives the narrative and structures its exploration of midcentury social anxieties. In this post-apocalypse landscape, human survival depends on whether the Last Man can stabilize normative sex and gender relations to restore the nuclear family—and violence against women serves that end. In figuring sexualized gender-based violence as necessary to organizing family structures, *Legend* reaches back to wife-capture tropes in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century prehistoric fictions that imagined the origins of modern marriage. It also anticipates recent zombie apocalypse texts that conflate rape and reproduction as part and parcel of rebuilding human society. *Legend* thus exemplifies a broader discourse that naturalizes sexual violence as essential to reproductive futures. More succinctly, it reveals the social logic of rape culture.

I propose that *Legend*'s conflict between Neville, the last family man, and the alluring but lethal women vampires surrounding his suburban home allegorizes the ideological contradictions of sex and gender arrangements shaped by the Cold War policy of containment. As Elaine Tyler May documents, federal law, public policy, professional opinion, and popular media in the postwar period sought to contain the white and affluent nuclear family in the newly created suburbs as a bulwark against external threats of Soviet communism and internal threats of "racial strife, emancipated women, class conflict, and familial disruption" (9). *Legend*'s apocalypse scenario realizes these threats by supplanting Neville's suburban family with "the lustful, bloodthirsty, naked women flaunting their hot bodies at him" (Matheson 22). This vision of destroyed families, loose women, and sexual chaos parallels professional concerns about public health at the time. Charles Walter Clarke, a Harvard physician and executive director of the American Social Hygiene Association, warned in 1951 that because nuclear holocaust would separate families, public health professionals must formulate disaster plans to ensure "vigorous

repression of prostitution, [as well as] measures to discourage promiscuity, drunkenness, and disorder" (qtd. in May 90). Clarke's warning, fictionalized by Matheson's story, indicates the Cold War era's reliance on the heteronormative nuclear family to regulate Americans' sexual behavior, guarantee social order, and protect national security. Yet Neville's ambivalent desire for and fear of the seductive women outside his home suggest the tension between containment policy's prescribed sexual and gender norms and Americans' more varied practices and predilections—as the Kinsey reports of 1948 (on men's sexual behavior) and 1953 (on women's sexual behavior) revealed.

In this essay, I first explore how the conflict between Neville, the last suburban family man, and the women vampires represents the ideological conflicts of sex and gender in Cold War containment culture. I next consider how Neville's forcible capture and confinement of a woman survivor, not unlike his earlier capture and confinement of a dog, resembles the wife-capture of prehistoric fictions. Neville entraps the woman, Ruth, with the intention of "becom[ing] husband and wife, hav[ing] children" (Matheson 127), thus ensuring a human future—ends that ostensibly rationalize his violent means. This rationalization of violence for reproductive necessity within the nuclear family framework harkens back to nineteenth-century speculation that modern marriage originated from wife-capture. Derived from Victorian anthropology and popularized in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century prehistoric fictions, wife-capture theorized that men in prehistoric times acquired "wives" by kidnapping—and implicitly raping—women from rival hordes. In this way, human organization was supposed to have progressed from internally polygamous hordes to exogamous nuclear families and monogamous marriage. By placing *Legend* in this tradition, I posit that some speculative fictions also represent such sexual violence as a structuring fantasy of social organization. In other words, they imagine sexualized gender violence as necessary to social organization while veiling the violence in civil institutions of marriage and the honorifics of husband and wife.

In the essay's final section, I connect the wife-capture trope, as foundational myth of modern marriage, to the concept of "reproductive futurism," Lee Edelman's term for the ideology through which society reproduces itself. Edelman explains that our political regime rationalizes itself by claiming to benefit a symbolic, sentimentalized Child of the future. He argues this symbolic logic of the future (for the) Child enforces a heteronormative reproductive system that excludes the nonreproductive queer from the social and political order. I build on Edelman's idea and subsequent feminist critiques to show

how the logic of reproductive futurism invokes the symbol of Wife to compel women's participation in the heteronormative reproduction of the Child and thus the future. By reading *Legend* in relation to feminist and queer theories of futurity, I aim to advance critiques of our reproductive regimes and propose that we attend to the gendered dimensions of reproductive futurity in zombie apocalypse texts.

Swinging in the Suburbs

Sex and the Single Man

Though a work of speculative fiction, *I Am Legend* presents a realist setting—apart from the vampires—consistent with the rapidly suburbanizing and segregated Los Angeles that Matheson would have found when he moved there in 1951.[4] The novel opens from Neville's point of view as he wages a monotonous battle against the vampires. Each night, he barricades himself in his suburban house while the undead circle hungrily outside. He spends his days fortifying his home, driving the LA streets to gather supplies, and going from house to house to kill the vampires who sleep by day. Eventually, he undertakes a scientific research program to determine the plague's cause and learns the vampires comprise two types: the walking dead and the living infected. All the while, he misses his wife and daughter, who both died in the pandemic. These sections of the narrative concentrate on Neville's suburban home on Cimarron Street and his errands into LA's commercial districts by car. Forced to revert to bachelor habits at home, Neville putters in the yard but leaves the housework undone because "he was a man and he was alone and these things had no importance to him" (3). Before heading out to procure supplies at Sears and kill vampires, he packs a lunch and checks his to-do list. He then backs the station wagon out of his detached garage and down the driveway, heads up Compton Boulevard, stops for gas, and then turns toward Inglewood. He kills a few sleeping vampires while stopping at a market for water before continuing on to Sears. Mundane suburban routine combines with startling apocalyptic violence. Additional details of suburban life materialize in pre-apocalypse flashbacks—Neville's wife, Virginia, cooking him breakfast before his daily carpool commute to "the plant" (40) with his neighbor, Ben Cortman.

The novel's suburban setting reflects the massive postwar demographic shift in the US toward segregated suburbs, nuclear family structures, and consumerist lifestyles. The US government promoted

this shift as part of containment policy and fostered suburbanization materially, with a "massive infusion of federal funds into the expansion of affordable single-family homes in suburban developments" (May 9), and ideologically, "in the propaganda battles that permeated the cold war era" (8). Suburban home ownership helped generate a broad middle class whose consumerist lifestyle and material comfort were supposed to prove capitalism's superiority over communism, but people of color were barred from the suburbs by government and industry policies of segregation.[5] As young white couples moved to the suburban single-family tract housing, extended families and ethnic city neighborhoods gave way to the homogeneous and isolated nuclear family. Mass media, public policy, politics, and government discourses promoted strict gender roles for this white suburban nuclear family, which included confining women to marriage and homemaking because "men in sexually fulfilling marriages would not be tempted by the degenera[t]e seductions of . . . pornography, prostitution, 'loose women,' or homosexuals" (May 94) that might render them susceptible to communist influence or weaken the social fabric. Women's sexual availability was thus considered both a threat to and safe harbor for men's normative sexual practices; housewives would keep men happily contained in the home, but unmarried, sexually active women posed a threat to the social order. Thus, containment policy used suburban space to organize and regulate—that is, to contain—white Americans' family structures and sex/gender practices.

In managing suburban space to demarcate populations and social practices, containment ideology dovetails with the zombie apocalypse narrative's spatial structure, in which, as Dan Hassler-Forest observes, survivors navigate between safe interiors and threatening exteriors in their attempts to escape zombie predations. This inside/outside structure spatializes ideological contradictions with plots that revolve around survivors' attempts to maintain binary distinctions by reinforcing spatial boundaries and their failure to do so when those boundaries are breached. *Legend* adheres to this inside/outside structure in Neville's navigating between his home's safe interior and the threatening exterior inhabited by the walking-dead vampires who behave like a zombie horde. Thus, *Legend* uses the zombie apocalypse narrative structure to spatialize the ideological contradictions of sex and gender inherent in Cold War suburban containment, itself a spatialized biopolitical strategy.[6] In fact, *Legend*'s inside/outside structure spatializes two intersecting dialectics of gender: One sets suburban dad and husband Neville against the streetwalking women vampires outside, an opposition that also figures humanism's rational Man

against woman as embodied Other. The second dialectic spatializes women's dual potential (according to Cold War containment discourse) as subversive threat or domestic helpmeet by dividing them between the seductive women surrounding Neville's home and the wholesome housewife (formerly) located in his home. Yet Neville and the women continually breach the boundary between home and streets, proving that the binary between human(ist) Man and not-quite-human woman, as well as between safe and unsafe women, is unsustainable. This sex/gender dialectic uncovers the tension between containment policies that aimed to confine sex within marriage and countervailing forces working to liberalize US sexual culture, as exemplified by *Playboy*'s debut in 1953.[7] As May writes, "Ideology and conduct were at odds" (114).

Midcentury domestic details establish Neville's home as suburban refuge. After fortifying his home's exterior in anticipation of the vampires' nightly siege, Neville selects his dinner of "two lamb chops, string beans, and a small box of orange sherbet" (Matheson 5) from his giant freezer. After dinner, he mixes himself a "whisky and soda at his small bar" (6) and listens to the sounds of Schönberg playing over his speakers while reading a "physiology text." When the vampires arrive, he is safely ensconced inside with his masculine leisure pursuits yet besieged by desire for sex with the women outside. His thoughts are compulsively drawn to the women he knows are "striking vile postures in order to entice him out of the house" (7). "It was the women who made it so difficult," he thinks, "the women posing like lewd puppets in the night on the possibility he'd see them and decide to come out." Just hearing their snarls elicits an involuntary response: "A shudder ran through him. Every night it was the same. He'd be reading and listening to music. . . . then he'd think about the women." Neville is furious that he cannot control his sexual response to the women vampires: "Deep in his body, the knotting heat began again, and he pressed his lips together until they were white. He knew the feeling well and it enraged him that he couldn't combat it." Each night, he tries to distract himself with books and music, but "all the knowledge in those books couldn't put out the fires in him; all the words of centuries couldn't end the wordless, mindless craving of his flesh" (8). Neville considers sex "a natural drive," but without an "outlet" for it at home, he is nearly powerless to resist outside temptation, regardless of the potential danger: "He actually found himself jerking off the crossbar from the door. Coming, girls, I'm coming. Wet your lips, now" (22). Neville's battle to control his own sexual urges reflects postwar norms that generated the "expectation

for erotic fulfillment in marriage" (May 111) while maintaining the taboo on extramarital sex, in part by linking "out-of-control sexuality with the insecurities of the cold war" (90).

At stake in Neville's battle to control his sexual desire is the very definition of manhood itself. He considers the urges natural yet feels "sick" (Matheson 8) that he cannot stop them because "there was no outlet for it [anymore]." He finds the situation "an insult to a man" and blames the women for his frustrated sexual desire, saying, "They'd forced celibacy on him." He resolves to activate his mind to surmount his bodily desire: "You have a mind, don't you?" he asks himself. "Well, *use* it!" In surmounting his sexual desire with rational thought, Neville exemplifies the mind/body dualism characteristic of Western culture. That is, he perceives his embodied desire as antagonistic to his true, rational self. Accordingly, he channels his desire first into methodical killing and then into "research" (27) on the plague's origin and the vampire's physiology (how they react to sunlight, garlic, crosses, and stakes through the heart). But he targets only the women for sexualized and cruel experiments he rationalizes as "logic[al]" (16) because "things should be done the right way, the scientific way" (15). By privileging mind over body, Neville distinguishes his own humanity from that of the monstrous women for whom "need was their only motivation" (11). In so doing, he projects the Enlightenment's mind/body split onto the human/vampire dichotomy. Moreover, by focusing predominantly on the women, whom he describes as mindless creatures of sexualized appetite, the narrative "[casts women] in the role of the body" (Bordo 5) in contrast to Neville, "the ideal post-Enlightenment humanist" (Hassler-Forest 127). The narrative thus genders the human/vampire dichotomy by defining human as rational Man and woman as embodied Other.

Without the sanctioned outlet of marriage, Neville's sexual impulses propel a vengeful misogynist violence he rationalizes as self-defense and scientific experiment. But Neville barely sublimates—and more often stimulates—his sexual urges while torturing and killing the "living" women (those infected but not dead) in pursuing his research. As he drives a stake through one sleeping woman's heart, he thinks, "It was always hard when they were alive; especially with women. He could feel that senseless demand returning again" (Matheson 15). Killing her is difficult not so much because she is one of the living, but because he feels aroused while doing so. In another instance, to test the effects of sunlight on the living vampires, he finds a young woman sleeping in bed, and "without hesitation, he jerked back the covers and grabbed her by the wrists. She grunted as her body hit

the floor, and he heard her making tiny sounds in her throat as he dragged her into the hall and started down the stairs" (28). With her eyes still closed, she begins to struggle: "Her hands closed over his wrists and her body began to twist and flop on the rug." But Neville is seized with an "experimental fervor" and ignores her distress. He "tore out of her grasp with a snarl and dragged her the rest of the way by her hair." Although he "shuddered at the strangled sound of horror she made when he threw her on the sidewalk outside," he watches intently while "she lay twisting helplessly" in the sunlight. Although Neville feels a "twinge" at the woman's suffering because the living vampires are the same as he "but for some affliction he didn't understand," he justifies her painful death as self-defense. She would "kill me gladly if she got the chance," he reasons. But even his slight compunction about her gruesome death is not enough to prevent his "notic[ing] her figure" (29) when he sees her lifeless body on the sidewalk.

The pattern of experimentation as sexual assault continues with his next test subject, another young sleeping woman: "Flipping her over, Neville pulled up her skirt and injected" (49) a garlic compound "into her soft, fleshy buttock, then turned her over again and stepped back. For a half hour he stood there watching her." When he selects yet another young woman, he "pretend[ed] not to notice the question posed in his mind: Why do you always experiment on women?" (49–50). He reacts defensively to this prick of conscience:

> For God's sake! he flared back. I'm not going to rape the woman!
>
> Crossing your fingers, Neville? Knocking on wood?
>
> He ignored that, beginning to suspect his mind of harboring an alien. Once he might have termed it conscience. Now it was only an annoyance. Morality, after all, had fallen with society. He was his own ethic. (50)

Neville's internal conflict between civility and science on the one hand and sexual assault on the other leads him to "suspect his mind of harboring an alien." But the passage leaves ambiguous whether the alien element is the vestigial trace of conscience left from the morality that "had fallen with society" or the barely sublimated urge to rape that he redirects into sexualized gender violence. Leaving his internal debate unresolved, Neville ties the sleeping woman up in his garage to observe her but cannot "let himself pass the afternoon near her" for fear he will rape her; after all, she's wearing "a torn black dress and too much was visible as she breathed." When the woman awakes, Neville shoves a cross in her face and watches as she recoils,

gasps, and writhes in terror. He grabs at her, but she bites him. In response, he "smash[ed] her across the cheek and snapp[ed] her head to the side" (51). After an interval when, it is implied, he beats her unresponsive, he tosses her body out the door for the other vampires to cannibalize.

The narrative falls short of sanctioning Neville's sexualized gender violence but suggests it is the natural consequence of his frustrated sex drive. In other words, Neville's internal debate over the morality of rape, followed by the explicit sexualized violence he rationalizes as scientific experiment, conveys his failure to surmount bodily need with rational thought. This failure, which Neville never fully acknowledges, undercuts the humanist ideal of Man as rational being and instead advances the narrative's Cold War pessimism that social structures barely contain man's violent nature and sexual impulses. Yet the narrative's critique of humanism's rational Man preserves the logic of patriarchal masculinity by contrasting Neville's pre-apocalypse role as head of household and protector of his family to his post-apocalypse role as "aggressive, dominative man who desires sexual capture of women" (Young 4). Iris Marion Young explains that these masculine roles of protector and aggressor are interdependent: the "logic of masculinist protection" makes sense only if "we assume that lurking outside the warm familial walls" is "the selfish aggressor who wishes to invade the lord's property and sexually conquer his women." *Legend* reveals through Neville's duality how the masculine protector and masculine aggressor are two sides of the same coin without suggesting we exchange our currency of gender.

The Alien in the House

If the novel's zombie apocalypse structure sets up and deconstructs binaries between Neville as rational Man (inside) and women as embodied Other (outside), as well as between Neville's two masculine aspects as benign suburban patriarch (inside) and sexual predator (outside), then it also spatializes a dialectic within femininity by setting the 1950s suburban housewife (inside) against the seductive women vampires (outside). Neville's wife Virginia, already dead at the novel's start, provided companionship and a sanctioned sexual "outlet" (Matheson 8). By contrast, the vampire women walk the streets, "their dresses open or taken off, their flesh waiting for his touch, their lips waiting for— My blood, my *blood*!" (21). In this Madonna/whore or Virginia/vampire dialectic, the good wife embodies a sanctioned sexuality, while the vampires abdicate their roles

as suburban housewives to reveal the monster behind the feminine mystique. This dialectic reflects sexual containment ideology that, as May writes, "was rooted in widely accepted gender roles that defined men as breadwinners and women as mothers. Many believed that a violation of these roles would cause sexual and familial chaos and weaken the country's moral fiber. The center of this fear was the preoccupation with female 'promiscuity'" (112). The seductive women vampires embody this fear of female promiscuity. The narrative illogic of their supposed manipulations—the zombielike women intentionally seduce Neville—makes sense because the monstrous body is a hybrid "construct and . . . projection" (Cohen 4) of the "fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" of the culture that created it. That is, it resists internal consistency, classification, hierarchies, and binary systems—constituting, in sum, "a rebuke to boundary and enclosure" (7). Although Neville tries to maintain the boundary between his suburban home and the sexual chaos outside, the domestic Madonna/whore binary unravels as women oscillate between suburban wife-mother and streetwalking vampire-temptress. One day, Neville talks with Virginia at the breakfast table, the next, she returns from the grave as a zombie-vampire he must dispatch to a final death. Neville brings home normal-appearing Ruth in hopes of reconstituting his nuclear family, but she turns out to be an infected sent to spy on him. Each woman embodies both sides of the Madonna/whore binary, defying its oppositional logic.

In repeatedly crossing the boundary between home and streets, Neville and the vampire women deconstruct the gendered oppositions that structure the narrative and signal the instability of social arrangements routinized by Cold War suburban containment. Definitions of human remain unstable as Neville slides between humanist scientist and sexual aggressor and the women between domesticated and loosed embodiment. The narrative, too, oscillates between the fantasy of destroying oppressive constraints on sexuality and gender and the terror of the resulting sexual anarchy—as evidenced by Neville's ambivalent desire for and sexualized violence against the women. This ambivalence signals "the inescapable dread that such boundaries [between housewife and harlot] cannot be maintained while paradoxically playing on our desire to witness the [suburban nuclear family] system break down" (Hassler-Forest 120). Neville evokes the sense of claustrophobia these heteronormative binaries engender when, lying sleepless in bed the night after burying Virginia and before her undead resurrection the next day, he despairs that "everything in the world seemed suddenly to have dropped into a pit of duality, victim to a system of twos" (Matheson 64). His meaning

here, though somewhat ambiguous, speaks to the duality of mind and body, as well as between men and women, husbands and wives, promulgated by Cold War containment ideologies.

Importantly, *Legend* uses the zombie apocalypse spatial structure to represent anxieties about suburban containment for a white and newly middle-class society, given that nonwhites were excluded from the suburbs by federal and local laws and policies as well as by social norms. In fact, Neville alludes to housing segregation in one passage where he muses that perhaps the vampire is a "minority element" (20) who deserves to "live where he chooses" (21). He draws this analogy between vampires and minorities to ponder whether his crusade against the vampires is motivated by "prejudice" rather than self-defense. But he rejects the comparison of minorities to vampires when he remembers the women "out there, . . . waiting for—My blood, my *blood*!" Thus, the comparison does not so much make "racial difference and vampirism synonymous" (Patterson 20) as make them analogous. For this reason, *Legend* is not an allegory for US racial conflict but rather an example of man's tribal violence more generally.[8] This problem of tribal violence preoccupies the narrative, culminating in Neville's epiphany at the novel's end that the living vampires deem *him* a monstrous threat, just as he does them, and commit the same fear-based violence. In this way, the narrative explores man's inhumanity to man from a universalist standpoint that centers white masculinity.[9] Tribalism wins out in Neville's imaginary debate over vampire rights. One side trots out the usual liberal arguments for the vampires: "You have turned the poor guileless innocent into a haunted animal. He has no means of support, no measures for proper education, he has not the voting franchise. No wonder he is compelled to seek out a predatory nocturnal existence" (Matheson 21). But the other side counters with the classic racist deal-breaker: "Sure, sure, he thought, but would you let your sister marry one?" The passage ironically evokes US racism as an exemplary form of tribalism while alluding to the patriarchal practice of maintaining boundaries by policing the traffic in women.[10]

Back to the Future: Prehistoric Wife-Capture and Reproductive Futurism

The Secret Sharer

Although many critics overlook the centrality of gender to *I Am Legend*, they readily acknowledge *Legend*'s concern with alienation, a common theme of midcentury science fiction. In the 1950s,

alienation was thought to be the psychic cost of the conformism required by Cold War politics, intensified capitalist production, and mass suburban consumption. As capitalist mass production became national ethos, individual identity bent to the demands of corporate bureaucracy and desire was threaded through the channels of middle-class consumerism. Cultural critics at the time lamented the ensuant materialism, complacency, and lack of individualism in US society. David Riesman and William H. Whyte, for example, wrote about the deadening effects of a corporate structure that forced "organization men" (May 24) into a rigid, hierarchical, and alienating environment from which the home and family ostensibly offered some respite.[11] Several contemporary women social critics raised objections to women's role as suburban housewives in terms Betty Friedan later popularized in *The Feminine Mystique*, but alienation was considered primarily a man's problem.[12] Literary critics consider the aliens of 1950s science fiction to be stand-ins for both the alienated self and the Cold war enemy, with *Legend* using the "last-man-on-earth" trope (Booker 84) to epitomize the alienated individual living under the cloud of nuclear holocaust. In a variation on this theme, I propose the novel's last-man-on-earth trope signifies Neville's alienation from the emasculating routinization of life as a corporate worker and suburban commuter. This trope exposes the incompatibility of two ideals of Cold War capitalism's masculinity: the rugged individualist and the suburban family man/wage worker.

Legend explores the alienating effect of capitalist conformism through Neville's love/hate relationship with his former neighbor and carpool buddy, Ben Cortman, now his vampire nemesis and alter ego. Three years into the apocalypse, Cortman, along with the nameless women, circles Neville's house each night, calling Neville to come out. By day, their roles reverse, with Neville hunting the suburban surrounds for Cortman as he sleeps. Theirs is a special relationship, the hunting a "recreational activity" (Matheson 108) they both enjoy. This reciprocal relationship invites comparison between Cortman, a company man suited to (un)life in the vampire-zombie horde, and Neville, a maverick holdout. Neville remarks that even after death, "Ben hadn't changed much" (53). In fact, Ben seems "happier now than he ever had been before" (107), perhaps because he was "born to be dead. Undead, that is" (108). In his aptitude for the mindless role, Cortman shows that the capitalist worker is already undead.[13] For this reason, "the undead are the blasé [sub]urban subject's uncanny double" (Hassler-Forest 133). By contrast, Neville's Crusoe-like isolation as Last Man affords him an "individualist fantasy of

self-improvement" (128). For example, he studies up on the science and appreciates the classical music his parents encouraged but that he hadn't pursued as a suburban family man. The narrative also aligns Neville's exemplary masculinity with his Teutonic background as "a tall man, . . . born of English-German stock, his features undistinguished except for the long, determined mouth and the bright blue of his eyes" (Matheson 2). His stature contrasts with Cortman's "corpulence" (55) and clownish masochism, like "a hideously malignant Oliver Hardy buffeted and long-suffering," which the narrative implicitly aligns with his Jewishness. That Neville becomes capitalism's "transcendent individual subject" (Hassler-Forest 129)—coded as white, Euro-American, and Protestant—only by rejecting commuter conformity exposes capitalism's contradictions for US masculinity.

Last Man/First Man

The narrative's succeeding section further explores this contradiction between masculine ideals of rugged individualist and domestic family man when Neville finds the woman survivor. Now three years after the apocalyptic event, Neville has immersed himself in a more urgent reality that allows him to cultivate dormant characteristics of rugged masculinity: independence, self-reliance, rationality, and physical prowess. In this sense, *Legend* anticipates the zombie genre's operation as a "structuring fantasy that . . . fulfills the nostalgic desire to break free from the decadent unreality of modern [sub]urban life" (Hassler-Forest 124). Returned to "an older age of supposedly natural innocence and purity," Neville forcibly captures a woman he thinks might be another survivor. When he spots her walking in broad daylight seemingly uninfected and alive, he calls out, but she runs from him. He is, after all, "six-foot-three in his boots, a gigantic bearded man with an intent look" (Matheson 112). Neville chases her down, overpowers her with blows, and reduces her to a "cringing form" (113) at his feet. He then forces her to his house, dragging her over the threshold while she "cried and begged him not to kill her" (114). Once in the house, "all she did was cower in one corner the way the dog had done" (115) so that Neville is "compelled" to lock her in the bedroom. He presumes the right to confine her and access her body, thinking, "If she had come two years before, maybe even later, he might have violated her" (124). But now, with his sexual urges atrophied, his mind toggles between two possible futures: forming a relationship in which they "become husband and wife, have children" (127) and killing her if she turns out to be infected.

Neville's acquisition of the woman resembles the practice of "wife-capture" (Ruddick 46), first theorized in 1865 by Victorian "armchair anthropologist" (45–46) John F. McLennan as the origin of Victorian courtship and marriage customs. As Nicholas Ruddick explains, McLennan proposed that primitive societies evolved from internally promiscuous and matrilineal hordes to groups of patrilineal, monogamous, and nuclear families when men began capturing women from rival hordes for individual possession. Because wife-capture instantiated exogamy (a term invented by McLennan), the Victorians considered it crucial for "the horde's reproductive survival" (47) and therefore accepted the implicit sexual violence as a eugenic imperative. Many Victorian naturalists, including Darwin, subscribed to wife-capture as a stage of social evolution, even if they disagreed with aspects of McLennan's theory. It seemed to uphold "the mid-Victorian sexual-political status quo" of monogamous, patriarchal marriage "in which a wife is her husband's monopolized property"—an arrangement "progressionist anthropologists" considered "the rock upon which civilization was founded." Ruddick, however, recognizes the theory as a Victorian "sexual fantasy" (63) "impelled by nostalgia for a golden age and anxiety about present degeneration" (51) of gender roles. By 1891, scientists no longer believed wife-capture was universal to primitive societies, but many early- to mid-twentieth-century popular prehistoric fictions used wife-capture to dramatize "the origin and nature of human beings" (62). Even now, wife-capture survives in the cartoon motif—ubiquitous well into the second half of the twentieth century—of the caveman who acquires a mate by clubbing a woman on the head and dragging her back to his cave by the hair. As Ruddick observes, the staying power of this "courtship with a club" (45) motif demonstrates that "wife-capture is tinged with an uncanny primal eroticism that survives most attempts to deny, ironize, or mock it" (48).[14]

The wife-capture trope in prehistoric fictions supposes that rape is foundational to the evolution of human society. Neville enacts this cultural fantasy when he forces Ruth home and contemplates rape in the hope of "becom[ing] husband and wife" (Matheson 127). This euphemistic term for their imagined future relationship is not unlike the Victorians' anachronistic term *wife*-capture to describe prehistoric man's imagined abduction and implicit rape of women; it confers legitimacy and civility on a coercive relationship. At the same time, if the Victorians considered wife-capture the precursor to modern marriage customs, then perhaps the term points to a coercive basis for the modern role "wife." Put another way, if taking women by force

is the fantasized basis of modern matrimony, then perhaps modern matrimony as an institution is in fact based in part on coercive arrangements of sex and reproduction.[15] Neville glimpses this basis in force when bringing home his intended bride fails to resemble a "Hollywood production; stars in their eyes, entering the house, arms about each other, fade-out" (114). The difference between his Hollywood expectations and caveman behavior suggests the fantasy of romance veils a coercive reality. The inherent contradiction of rationalizing primitive gender violence in the name of civilized marriage is further apparent when Neville's primal masculinity unfits him for the companionate ideal of midcentury marital relations. He fails to recognize Ruth as an independent subject, dismissing her words and actions as feminine manipulations. He finds "terrifying" (128) the prospect of having to "make sacrifices and accept responsibility again" as a husband and lacks compassion for her suffering (she lost her husband and two children). Noting his lack of compassion, Neville muses wryly, "Emotion was a difficult thing to summon from the dead" (119)—as if he were the dead one, not the vampires. This ironic dialectic between dead and undead here highlights the ideological contradictions that underpin postwar patriarchal marriage and masculine ideals.

This contradiction within normative masculinity between primal man and family man is resolved—or evaded—when Ruth turns out to be a spy and the question of marriage becomes moot. As a foreign agent, Ruth exemplifies the Cold War notion that "behind every subversive, it seemed, lurked a woman's misplaced sexuality" (May 93). Just as Neville confirms with a blood test that Ruth is infected, she knocks him unconscious and escapes. But she leaves a note explaining the living vampires have adapted to living with the infection and are building a new society. They consider Neville a "scourge" (Matheson 159) for having killed so many of their group, including Ruth's husband, and plan to execute him. Neville ignores Ruth's warning to flee the city and is eventually captured. As he awaits public execution, Neville recognizes that living vampires will displace him as the new normal for humanity because "normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man." Because the new society of posthumans will supplant the old, some critics argue the novel's politics are progressive.[16] And yet the new society offers no meaningful difference from the old, as Neville's final dialogue with Ruth elucidates. He criticizes the vampires' violence against those who threaten their survival, but she defends it as no different from his violence against them. The absence of social progress is underscored

by Neville's description of the crowd awaiting his execution like a medieval mob. He sees their "awe, fear, shrinking horror" of him and realizes he is "legend," "a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever." Governed by fear and superstition, not science and reason, the new society is not more advanced than the old; they both rationalize murder of the other as self-defense. The apocalypse does not yield a utopic—or even measurably different—future.

Reproducing a Human Future

In questioning Neville's and the new society's mutual tribal violence, the novel leaves the violence against women unexamined, as if it were simply an inevitable aspect of man's violent nature. Presumably, the new society will restore the "sexual-political status quo" (Ruddick 47) of traditional marriage and the nuclear family to control sexual behavior and reproduction. But in the chaotic interregnum between the old and new societies, when women do not provide sex or reproductive services, Neville compels their cooperation or punishes their nonparticipation. He enacts vengeance on the women who "forced celibacy" (Matheson 8) on him and violently captures a prospective "wife" and shamelessly contemplates raping her. Beyond the exigencies of the apocalypse, Neville's sense of masculine entitlement to sex and the reproductive services of women authorizes his violence against them to ensure compliance or punish disobedience. Both his entitlement and use of force, as encapsulated in wife-capture, indicate women's compulsory role in the heteropatriarchal reproductive regime. In this sense, they are constitutive of this sex/gender system, not an aberration.

I connect wife-capture to the notion of reproductive futurism, Edelman's term for the "humanistic political regime that grounds itself in an ever-deferred future staked on the symbolic logic of the Child" (Sullivan 269). Protecting this imagined Child represents an "affirmation of a value so unquestioned" (Edelman 2) that it "invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought." In the process, this political logic preserves "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations." Put another way, defining the future in terms of the sentimentalized Child works to enforce a heteropatriarchal reproductive system and to exclude the nonreproductive "queer" (6) who stands for "no future." Feminist critics since Edelman have pointed out the "queer" who disrupts the

logic of reproductive futurism is not only the gay man (Edelman's primary concern), but also the nonreproductive woman. If the nonreproductive woman disrupts the logic of reproductive futurism, it follows that women are needed to sustain the regime by engaging in heteropatriarchal reproduction. Thus, I propose a corollary to the symbolic logic of the Child for whom we build the future: a symbolic logic of the Wife that solicits and even compels women's participation in reproductive futurism. Thus, to narrow Edelman's claim, reproductive futurism grants heterosexual men "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity" (2) by mandating it for women.

My reading of *I Am Legend* therefore shifts the focus from the Child as symbol of the future to the Wife as symbol of women's role in producing the Child and thus the future. Women's abdication of this role governs *Legend*'s apocalyptic vision of no future. At the novel's start, following the destruction of the suburban nuclear family system, neither Neville nor the narrative imagines a future horizon beyond day-to-day survival. Moreover, the narrative focus on Neville's sexual frustration, his obsessive desire for and violence toward the women, demonstrates the threat to reproductive futurism posed by sexually unavailable and nonreproductive women. In other words, there is no future because there are no women available to the Last Man. Furthermore, as Neville's incel violence against the women demonstrates, reproductive futurism entitles (white heterosexual) men to sexual satisfaction as well as to reproduction. That is, Neville expects the women to meet his sexual needs (in addition to his reproductive needs), rages when they do not, and channels that anger into violence against them. Reproductive futurism thus guarantees "the absolute privilege of" sexual gratification, as well as reproduction, which is sanctioned by the "heterosexual alibi of reproductive necessity" (13). In other words, reproductive necessity provides an "alibi" for heterosexual men's nonreproductive sexual pleasure. Cold War containment discourse addressed the dual aims of heteronormative masculine privilege by pushing monogamous marriage in the suburbs as the locus for sexual satisfaction and reproduction. The impact of losing this heteronormative masculine privilege is signified by the vampire women who not only taunt Neville with their sexual unavailability but also pose a murderous threat to him. In this way, the women function as a masculine fantasy of the lethal threat of nonreproductive and sexually unavailable women.

To elaborate briefly on the threat posed by *Legend*'s vampire women, I draw on two feminist critiques of Edelman that explain how sexually unavailable and nonreproductive women, like the gay

man, function as queer threat to the regime of reproductive futurism. In distinguishing between men's and women's roles in the regime, these critiques reveal reproductive futurism's gendered disparities of power. In the first of these critiques, Mairead Sullivan discusses 1970s radical feminists who advocated a politics of lesbian separatism. These second-wave feminists sought to dismantle the postwar reproductive regime of Matheson's era. The radical feminist lesbian separatists renounced femininity, heterosexuality, reproduction, and the nuclear family to destroy the patriarchal "gender system at the center of a capitalist, bourgeois state" (Sullivan 272). Their tactical renunciation indicates that heteronormative sex and reproduction are crucial to sustaining the entire socioeconomic and political field. In this sense, they described reproductive futurism *avant la lettre*. Their rejection of these institutions of femininity, heterosexuality, and heteronormative reproduction as enabling the entire patriarchal political order reveals the father/Father, not the Child, is the actual beneficiary of reproductive futurism. Put simply, the radical feminist lesbian separatists' refusal to participate in heteronormative sex and reproduction threatened a larger socioeconomic system that benefits men. This is perhaps why radical feminists of that era are remembered today less for refusing to have children and more for "seem[ing] to take a perverse pleasure in the hating—and perhaps killing—of men" (275). Although they predate the 1970s lesbian separatists, *Legend*'s vampire women, with their murderous threat to Neville, effectively align with them, if not in feminist intent, then with the cultural image of the man-killing radical feminist—even though it is Neville who murders them.

Neville's practice of wife-capture also indicates women's role in producing the Child and the future. In capturing Ruth, Neville intends to "become husband and wife, have children" (Matheson 127), in effect, to restore the regime of reproductive futurism based on the heteronormative nuclear family. As Neville tells Ruth, once he determines she's not infected, they can "plan and work" (140) for this future. But Ruth's infected status frustrates his reproductive aims and torpedoes his future. Jennifer Doyle explores the significance of nonreproductive women to reproductive futurism through the rhetoric around abortion and childbirth. Working from Edelman's reference to a prolife billboard featuring an image of a fetus in utero that Edelman says implicitly admonishes him as a nonreproductive gay man, Doyle describes how it erases the woman from the picture of the future Child. She writes that such images, and humanist discourse on reproduction and abortion more generally, "fram[e] . . . the fetus

as future-child" (Doyle 31) by rendering it as a "visible subject, distinct in its identity from the body that contains it. The pregnant woman disappears into an amorphous and undefined background" (32). By reducing women "to passive, reproductive machines" (Carol Stabile qtd. in Doyle 32), this standard fetal image "divorce[s] the future embodied by the fetus from the present embodied by the woman—her 'present' is recast, in fact, as the future's abject past" (Doyle 32). Doyle's claim that reproductive and anti-abortion discourses frame the woman as an inert vessel for the future Child helps clarify the symbolic function of the Wife. The figure Wife performs the discursive work that helps turn women into these vessels. We see this discursive work when Neville perceives Ruth primarily as a reproductive body; her subjectivity does not emerge from the category "wife" into which he slots her. "Wife," then, is the name for the reproductive machine needed to generate Neville's and humanity's future. Thus, in *Legend* and in wife-capture discourse, "wife" names "the discursive field through which the female body is produced and read as a reproductive body" (40).

Lisa Yaszek explains that critical histories of midcentury science fiction have generally considered family matters peripheral, with women characters relegated to roles as "housewife heroines" ("Unhappy" 97) who "quietly fulfilled their roles as wives and mothers, tending the nuclear family while their heroic husbands were off solving interstellar crises." Yaszek revises this history, arguing that midcentury women science fiction writers may not have "perform[ed] radical critiques of patriarchy" (109), but they did "engage many of the values and social arrangements trumpeted by the keepers of Cold War culture" ("Stories" 77), in part by writing stories in which nuclear war "destroy[s] the family itself" ("Unhappy" 101) and "lead[s] to total war between the sexes" (107). I contend that Matheson's novel also denaturalizes midcentury arrangements of sex and gender by imagining their ruin after nuclear war. Like the 1950s sci-fi narratives that grappled with the potential fallout of nuclear war, zombie apocalypse narratives also imagine how to organize families to ensure a human future. They often end with the survival of a mating pair, a pregnant woman, or a girl child. For example, *Dawn of the Dead* ends with a man and a pregnant woman as survivors, *28 Days Later* ends with the survival of a teenage girl and a romantically linked, heterosexual couple, and *Train to Busan* ends with the survival of a pregnant woman and a young girl. In Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, survivors obsessively follow news reports on the health of the orphaned Tromanhauser Triplets because "these babies

were localized hope, and they needed the Triplets to pull through" (52). These endings indicate the importance of reproductive women to heteronormative futurist regimes. As Major Henry West, from *28 Days Later*, plainly explains why he authorizes his men to detain and rape two civilian female survivors: "I promised them women. Because women mean a future" (01:20:17). His chilling pledge conflates rape and reproduction as key to building a human future. I propose we attend to this conflation in zombie apocalypse and other speculative fictions to better understand the role of sexual and gender violence in futurist discourses and our present political regime.

Notes

1. *I Am Legend* has been adapted for film as *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), starring Vincent Price; *The Omega Man* (1971), starring Charlton Heston; and *I Am Legend* (2008), starring Will Smith (a sequel is in production).

2. *Legend* was retroactively deemed the first zombie apocalypse text when George Romero said he "ripped off" ("George A. Romero") Matheson's story for *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), his iconic film that transformed the zombie from its Haitian origin as a person raised from the dead to perform slave labor to its "contemporary" or "Hollywood" version as an infectious, cannibalistic, horde being.

3. For example, *Legend* reads as allegory for America's fight against Soviet communism (C. Brooks 477), for the bourgeois subject's last stand against the proletariat (Mathews 85, 92), for traditional authority structures' attempt to forestall the coming 1960s counterculture (Moreman 130), and for the individual's effort to resist social conformism (Booker 85). For an account of the relationship between science fiction and postwar US culture, see Booker. For a brief account of the increased popularity and legitimacy of science fiction in the wake of postwar developments in science and technology, see Yaszek's "Afrofuturism."

4. Previously a rural agricultural area, Los Angeles underwent a building boom beginning in the 1920s and continuing through the postwar years. Unlike many cities, Los Angeles's land use was zoned for single-family homes, contributing to its suburban sprawl. The Federal Housing Administration (formed in 1934) and city government imposed redlining, local zoning regulations, and covenants to enshrine racial segregation in these single-family neighborhoods (see Rothstein 82, 130–31). For a brief biography of Matheson, see "Richard Matheson," Library of America, sciencefiction.loa.org/biographies/matheson.php.

5. For a comprehensive account of how postwar-era US government policies barred Black people from new suburban development in California, see Rothstein.

6. I rely extensively on Hassler-Forest's excellent discussion of the zombie apocalypse genre's spatial structure, yet I depart from him by arguing that *Legend* spatializes the ideological tensions of suburbanization rather than urbanization.

7. First published in December 1953, *Playboy* claimed to be a "healthy" outlet of sexual fantasy for married men owing to its girl-next-door sexual aesthetic, but it pushed against prevailing sexual mores and regulations against pornography (Bracewell 106–07). I see this tension reflected in the way Neville's postapocalypse décor of living room bar, sound system, and masculine bedroom anticipates the bachelor pad *Playboy* introduced in 1956 (Kraus), yet Neville cannot enjoy the nonmarital sex *Playboy* advocated with this site-concept.

8. In the narrative's only other explicit reference to racial difference, Neville "recall[s] talking once to a Negro at the plant" (Matheson 56) about the man's experience in mortuary school. The remembered conversation perhaps indicates how suppressed or "willfully ignored" (Newitz 89) discourses of racial difference surface in associations "between certain racial identities and death," but it does not suggest the narrative is an allegory for US race relations. In other words, although US racial segregation informs the novel's post-war suburban milieu and Neville represents a dominant white masculinity, Neville's battle against the vampires does not primarily represent US racial conflict.

9. Although I acknowledge Kinitra D. Brooks's important demand that theorists stop "centering the white male experience and its repugnant fascination with black men or white women" (461) and move beyond "simplistic explorations of whiteness and masculinity" to address neglected intersections of race and gender in contemporary zombie texts, I find it necessary to address *Legend*'s long-neglected sexual and gender violence as a central aspect of its white and masculine perspective.

10. For a feminist analysis of kinship, exogamy, and the exchange of women among men, see Rubin (in particular 171–85). For a discussion of how white supremacist cultures promulgate a miscegenation taboo to ensure the traffic in women preserves dominant racial group boundaries, see Bergner (80–81).

11. Popular books about the alienated American man include Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950); C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951); Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955); Whyte, *The Organization Man* (1956); and Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), among others.

12. Although Friedan did not publish *The Feminine Mystique* until 1963, the book grew out of a survey of Smith alumnae she conducted in the mid-1950s and wrote about in an article for *McCall's* magazine in 1957 (Booker 6).

13. Many critics link the zombie, our "only modern myth" (Deleuze and Guattari 335), to the capitalist mode of production. For a particularly generative account of the zombie's relation to postindustrial capitalism and the (post)human, see Lauro and Embry.

14. Ruddick attributes the phrase "courtship with a club" to P. G. Wodehouse's *A Gentleman of Leisure* (1910).

15. Of course, not every heterosexual marriage is in practice coerced or violent, but historically our reproductive ideology has naturalized, tolerated, and sometimes authorized gender and sexual violence against women.

16. Birch and Christie argue the new society that, with Neville's death, supersedes the old represents progress. Birch writes, "Matheson's novel, despite its blatant misogyny and wanton slaughter, is essentially optimistic about the value of community and the possibility of change" (162). Christie argues the new society represents a post-humanism potentially freed from the destructive consequences of liberal humanism such as "global warming, resource depletion, [and] warfare" (80).

Works Cited

Bergner, Gwen. "Who Is That Masked Woman? or, The Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*." *PMLA*, vol. 110, no. 1, 1995, pp. 75–88.

Birch, Jessica E. "From Vampires to Zombies: The Revisionist Recreation of *I Am Legend*." *The Supernatural Revamped: From Timeworn Legends to Twenty-First Century Chic*, edited by Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016, pp. 161–76.

Booker, M. Keith. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946–1964*. Greenwood, 2001.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. U of California P, 1993.

Bracewell, Lorna. *Why We Lost the Sex Wars: Sexual Freedom in the #MeToo Era*. U of Minnesota P, 2021.

Brooks, Christopher. "When Is a Hero Not So? America, Robert Neville, and I am Legend." *The Image of the Hero in Literature, Media, and Society: Selected Papers: 2004 Conference*, edited by Will Wright and Steven Kaplan, Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, 2004, pp. 477–81.

Brooks, Kinitra D. "The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories." *African American Review*, vol. 47, no. 4, 2014, pp. 461–75.

Christie, Deborah. "A Dead New World: Richard Matheson and the Modern Zombie." *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, edited by Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro, Fordham UP, 2011, pp. 67–80.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, U of Minnesota P, 1996, pp. 3–25.

Dawn of the Dead. Directed by George Romero, Universal Pictures, 1978.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, U of Minnesota P, 1983.

Doyle, Jennifer. "Blind Spots and Failed Performance: Abortion, Feminism, and Queer Theory." *Qui Parle*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2009, pp. 25–52.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke UP, 2004.

Hassler-Forest, Dan. "Zombie Spaces." *The Year's Work at the Zombie Research Center*, edited by Edward P. Comentale and Aaron Jaffe, Indiana UP, 2014, pp. 116–49.

Kraus, James. "The Great Indoors: *Playboy* Magazine and the Invention of the Bachelor Pad." *Kāv Style–Masculine Interiors*, June 2015, masculineinteriors.com/the-great-indoors-playboy-and-the-invention-of-the-bachelor-pad.

Lauro, Sarah Juliet, and Karen Embry. "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism." *boundary 2*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2008, pp. 85–108.

Matheson, Richard. *I Am Legend*. 2nd ed., Tor, 2007.

Mathews, Cheyenne, "Lightening 'The White Man's Burden': Evolution of the Vampire from the Victorian Racialism of *Dracula* to the New World Order of *I Am Legend*." *Images of the Modern Vampire: The Hip and the Atavistic*, edited by Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2013, pp. 85–98.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Basic Books, 2008.

Moreman, Christopher M. "Let This Hell Be Our Heaven: Richard Matheson's Spirituality and Its Hollywood Distortions." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2012, pp. 130–47.

Newitz, Annalee. *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture*. Duke UP, 2006.

Night of the Living Dead. Directed by George Romero, Image Ten, 1968.

Patterson, Kathy Davis. "Echoes of *Dracula*: Racial Politics and the Failure of Segregated Spaces in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*." *Journal of Dracula Studies*, vol. 7, 2005, pp. 19–27.

Romero, George. "George A. Romero on *Diary of the Dead*." Interview by Mariana McConnell. *Cinemablend*, 13 Feb. 2008, cinemablend.com/new/Interview-George-Romero-Diary-Dead-7818.html.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. Liveright, 2017.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna R. Reiter, Monthly Review Press, 1975, pp. 157–210.

Ruddick, Nicholas. "Courtship with a Club: Wife-Capture in Prehistoric Fiction, 1865–1914." *Science Fiction*, special issue of *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2007, pp. 45–63.

Sullivan, Mairead. "Kill Daddy: Reproduction, Futurity, and the Survival of the Radical Feminist." *WSQ*, vol. 44, nos. 1–2, 2016, pp. 268–82.

Train to Busan. Directed by Yeon Sang-ho, Next Entertainment World, 2016.

28 Days Later. Directed by Danny Boyle, DNA Films, 2002.

Whitehead, Colson. *Zone One*. Anchor, 2011.

Yaszek, Lisa. "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future." *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 41–60.

———. "Stories 'That Only a Mother' Could Write: Midcentury Peace Activism, Maternalist Politics, and Judith Merril's Early Fiction." *NWSA Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2004, pp. 70–97.

———. "Unhappy Housewife Heroines, Galactic Suburbia, and Nuclear War: A New History of Midcentury Women's Science Fiction." *Extrapolation*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2003, pp. 97–111.

Young, Iris Marion. "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State." *Signs*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1–25.