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Cover Page Footnote

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Echoes of *Dracula*: Racial Politics and the Failure of Segregated Spaces in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*.

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On 17 May 1954, the modern Civil Rights Movement in America experienced its first major victory with the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case. This landmark decision established that "the 'separate but equal' argument for segregation was inherently unequal" and thereby "opened the door for a wealth of legal battles against segregation at the local, state, and federal levels. It gave civil rights organizers their first serious victory of the 20th century and made it clear that blacks were indeed citizens of the republic, with rights to match" (SparkNotes). Against this backdrop, in the same year, one of the most prominent vampire novels of the twentieth century appeared in print: Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*. Coincidence? Perhaps, but the juxtaposition of a burgeoning Civil Rights Movement with a key moment of literary reinvigoration for the vampire is most intriguing.

The link between literary vampires and racialized constructions of monstrosity is nothing new. Numerous studies of *Dracula*, in particular, have explored the characterization of Bram Stoker's infamous Count as an allegorical representation of late nineteenth-century British anxieties regarding the influx of large numbers of Eastern European Jewish immigrants onto English soil. In "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," Stephen Arata discusses how "Stoker ... transforms the materials of the vampire myth, making them bear the weight of the culture's fears over its declining status. The appearance of vampires becomes the sign of profound trouble" and "vampirism [marks] the intersection of racial strife, political upheaval, and the fall of empire" (629). Jules Zanger echoes this view in "A Sympathetic Vibration: *Dracula* and the Jews," and Judith Halberstam devotes an entire chapter to it in *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. According to Halberstam, *Dracula* "condenses the xenophobia of Gothic fiction into a very specific horror – the vampire embodies and exhibits all the stereotyping of nineteenth-century anti-Semitism" in which

the Jew was marked as a threat to capital, to masculinity, and to nationhood. Jews in England at the turn of the century were the objects of an internal colonization. While the black African became the threatening Other abroad, it was closer to home that people focused their fears about the collapse of nation through a desire for racial homogeneity. (14)

Halberstam's mention of black Africans as "threatening Others" is especially worth noting in the context of this study, as is Gwendolyn Whitehead's assertion that "The monstrosity of blackness is one of the final contributions of the nineteenth century to the modern myth of the vampire" (216). Such arguments clearly foreground the social, cultural, and political links between racism and vampire fiction of the Victorian era – links that carry forward into the modern era and are manifest in *I Am Legend*, where twentieth-century America replaces turn-of-the-century England as the nation under vampire threat. Thanks largely to the lasting impact of slavery and its attendant prejudices, the black African in this context is constructed as a monstrous Other that threatens the dominant society just as the Jew was perceived to threaten England: *from within*. It is my contention that the dramatic structure of Matheson's novel contains a very clear, racially charged subtext that reflects the cultural anxieties of a white America newly confronted with the fact that it can no longer segregate itself from those whom it has labeled Other. This Other may be constructively viewed as a manifestation of what Toni Morrison has termed an "Africanist" presence.

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison defines “Africanism” as “the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (6-7). Within the scope of early American literature, she contends that “Through significant and underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence – one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness” (6). In other words, white Americans relied on their constructions of blackness, literary and otherwise, as keys to defining their own white identities. This trend continued into the twentieth century and is articulated in *I Am Legend*, with its “heavily nuanced conflict” between Neville and the vampires.

The plot of *I Am Legend* pits a solitary man against a host of vampires in a post-atomic war world. In the year 1976, Robert Neville is the sole survivor of a terrible plague that has turned the rest of humanity, including family and former friends, into nocturnal creatures thirsting for his blood. In this novel, vampirism is not a supernatural curse but a consequence of biological warfare – i.e., a new strain of bacteria for which there is no known cure. Neville’s race is established very early and very directly as Caucasian. Matheson describes him as “a tall man, thirty-six, born of English-German stock,” complete with bright blue eyes (14). By contrast, the vampires have no obvious racial attributes per se. However, in Neville’s mind, they are consistently referred to in connection with blackness. Reflecting on the plague that caused vampirism, Neville recalls the Black Plague and thinks to himself that “Something black and of the night had come crawling out of the Middle Ages” (28). At a moment of intense frustration during a hangover, his hatred of the vampires surfaces and he despairs: “It was no use; they’d beaten him, the black bastards had beaten him” (35). When the plague first began to spread and people began to panic, Neville recalls being dragged into a revival meeting where the preacher exhorted his audience: “Do you want to be changed into a black unholy animal?” (113) Perhaps the most telling expression of the vampire as an Africanist presence in the novel occurs during one of Neville’s alcohol-induced mental ramblings. His raw sarcasm is worth quoting at length:

Friends, I come before you to discuss the vampire; a minority element if there ever was one, and there was one.

But to concision: I will sketch out the basis for my thesis, which ... is this: Vampires are prejudiced against.

The keynote of minority prejudice is this: They are loathed because they are feared ...

But are his needs any more shocking than the needs of other animals and men? ... Really, now, search your soul ... is the vampire so bad?

All he does is drink blood.

Why, then, this unkind prejudice, this thoughtless bias? Why cannot the vampire live where he chooses? Why must he seek out hiding places where none can find him out? Why do you wish him destroyed?

Ah, see, 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.

Robert Neville grunted a surly grunt. Sure, sure, he thought, but would you let your sister marry one? (32)

With its opening reference to a “minority,” its subsequent catalog of the very real problems facing the socially and politically disenfranchised, and its closing rejection of miscegenation, this passage couches Neville’s feelings towards the vampires in explicitly xenophobic terms and creates a subtext within the novel that makes racial difference and vampirism synonymous. It also coats his efforts to exterminate vampires, though ostensibly acts of self-preservation in what he perceives as a world gone mad, with an air of genocide.

Essentially, Neville is a white man who barricades himself in his house and spends most of his energy trying to keep the monsters out. He has established a segregated space that he fights to keep exclusively for himself, a small bastion of civilization in the midst of a suburban wilderness decimated by the effects of the plague. His character parallels, in many ways, the “self-conscious but highly problematic construction of the American as a new white man” which Toni Morrison posits as a focal concern of early American literature (39). Morrison quotes extensively from Bernard Bailyn’s *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution*, giving special attention to his chronicle of William Dunbar, an intellectual Scot who emigrated to Mississippi in the eighteenth century, acquired slaves, and built a successful plantation:

... alone on the far periphery of British civilization where physical survival was a daily struggle, where ruthless exploitation was a way of life, and where disorder, violence, and human degradation were commonplace, he had triumphed by successful adaptation. Endlessly enterprising and resourceful, his finer sensibilities dulled by the arasions of frontier life, and feeling within himself a sense of authority and autonomy he had not known before, a force that flowed from his absolute control over the lives of others, he emerged a distinctive new man, a borderland gentleman, a man of property in a raw, half-savage world. (qtd. in Morrison 42)

Morrison contends that this world is construed as “raw” and “savage” not only because “a nonwhite indigenous population” is present, but also “because there is ready to hand a bound and unfree, rebellious but serviceable, black population against which Dunbar and all white men are enabled to measure these privileging and privileged differences” (45). As it turns out, Bailyn’s portrait of colonial America anticipates post-Apocalyptic America as Richard Matheson constructs it. Like William Dunbar, Robert Neville is a “borderland gentleman,” a white man who finds himself alone in a savage world where he must learn to adapt, relying on his own authority and autonomy to establish dominance over his environment. Vampires, not slaves, are the unruly “black population” he must confront and endeavor to control. They are also the contaminated Others against whom he measures his own state of humanity, with blood as the prevailing indicator of who’s who. Under the lens of Neville’s microscope, his own blood becomes the standard for identifying what is pure – and, by default, what is human: the middle class white heterosexual male.¹

Both Neville’s body and his house are under constant threat, watched by vampires who seek any means of access. Violence is one potential route, as witnessed by the amount of time Neville spends stringing garlic, replacing boards, and repairing the damage vampires inflict on the house at night. The most dangerously effective strategy, however, is sex. Female vampires can rouse Neville’s lust with ease, and he agonizes with the knowledge that “The women were out there, their dresses open or taken off, their flesh waiting for his touch, their lips waiting for – My blood, my *blood!*” (Matheson 29) Like *Dracula*’s Jonathan Harker before him, he is both tempted and horrified by the bodies and lips of female vampires, who do not trouble to hide their lusts. At one point, he nearly gives in to temptation and goes out to them. Significantly, this moment of weakness occurs immediately following his extended reflection on vampires as minorities and the possibility of miscegenation implied therein. For Neville, mating with a vampire would involve the penetration of his body not only by vampire fangs, but by the bacteria vampires carry. In his world of strict binaries (inside/outside, pure/impure, white/black, light/darkness, good/evil, human/monster), this type of mixing is a possibility he refuses to allow. His blood remains uncontaminated and he is determined to keep it that way. Still, the intense desire that he feels for the vampire women, when considered in terms of his whiteness and their “blackness,” carries echoes of the very real sexual exploitation of black female bodies by white men during the era of slavery and beyond.²

¹ According to Judith Halberstam, by using monsters to “[produce] the negative of the human,” novels such as *I Am Legend* “make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual” (22).

² In *The Omega Man*, a 1971 film based on *I Am Legend*, the link between miscegenation and monstrosity is made explicit in the character of Lisa, a young African American woman who replaces Ruth as the human-vampire hybrid encountered by a very

Contextually, Neville enacts a predatory white male gaze. In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams discusses

the relation of the Male Gothic hero/villain's gaze to his identity and to a necessarily guilty desire, a transgression against the divine principle that flesh, especially female flesh, is a snare and a delusion. In Male Gothic the gaze is another aspect of those omnipresent boundary violations that lead, eventually, to punishment – looks may *literally* 'kill.' (145)

Robert Neville's gaze ultimately does lead to flesh-oriented transgressions against female vampires, and the boundary violations involved do lead to death for his chosen victims. As the novel progresses, he channels his frustrated sexual desire into a very practiced form of misogyny. In his quest to isolate the bacteria that causes vampirism and discover various methods by which vampires may be destroyed, his test subjects are always female. At one point, pricked by conscience, he asks himself, "Why do you always experiment on women?" Almost immediately, he understands the implication of the question and tries to deny it, thinking "For God's sake! ... I'm not going to rape the woman!" His conscience, however, reveals underlying doubt: "Crossing your fingers, Neville? Knocking on wood?" (61) His status as a sexual threat is very real, yet in scene after scene, he violates the bodies of female vampires every way *but* sexually. On one occasion, he steals a vampire woman from her bed, ties her to a chair, and attempts to force her to look at a cross. When she fights him, he kills her (the implication is that he beats her to death) and throws her body out the front door as spoils for the other vampires. In another instance, he goes into a house, finds a young woman with blood on her mouth asleep in her bed, turns her over, lifts her skirt, and injects one of his experimental vampire-killing concoctions into her buttock. Another woman is pulled from her bed and dragged down the stairs of her home. When she starts to resist him, he drags her the rest of the way outside by her hair and throws her onto the sidewalk to suffer a lingering death in the sunlight. At this point, the reader is told that "Usually he felt a twinge when he realized, *but for some affliction he didn't understand, these people were the same as he*. But now an experimental fervor had seized him and he could think of nothing else" (39, emphasis added). The Otherness of these women precludes their suitability as sexual partners and marks them as perceived threats to Neville's life, to the sanctity of both his body and his home. As such, they become expendable. His admission that, but for their vampirism (their "blackness," as it were), they are "just like him" renders his actions all the more racially and ethically problematic. The only positive emotions Neville displays toward women are reserved for his dead wife, Virginia, and daughter, Kathy,³ whose memory evokes longing for an idyllic female warmth and companionship he can no longer have. Both contracted the vampire plague, but Neville's memories of their former family life keep them "pure" in his mind. Kathy, whose body is burned in a mass funeral pyre, becomes an eternal child virgin incapable of enacting a monstrous return to her father's house. Virginia, however, endures a more complex fate. She is Neville's wife, and when she dies, he finds himself incapable of destroying her body. When she returns home as a vampire Neville must, like *Dracula's* Arthur Holmwood before him, pound the stake into his own beloved's breast to "free" her from the curse of vampirism (149). Christopher Craft, Burton Hatlen, and others have produced Freudian interpretations of the act of staking in *Dracula*, linking it with both rape and an especially violent orgasm.⁴ In *I Am Legend*, the absence of gory details describing Virginia's staking tends to preclude the rape/orgasm connection. The phallicism of the stake, however, ensures that the sexual connotation remains. After being infected by the bacteria that causes vampirism, Virginia becomes a

Caucasian Dr. Neville. This race change replicates a disturbing master/slave dynamic, with Neville cast as the white man who threatens to sexually exploit a black woman. Neville is killed before the relationship is consummated, but the desire between them is clear and contextually coded as dangerous.

³ Given the racial and sexual subtexts present in male vampire fiction, it is interesting that the names of both Neville's wife and daughter mean "pure."

⁴ See Burton Hatlen, 86 and Christopher Craft, 122.

contaminated creature who threatens to reproduce her contagion in others. Her staking at the hands of Robert, her still-human husband and representative of the American cultural status quo, is a final act of possession, a gesture of his exclusive rights to penetrate her body. Once Virginia is truly dead, Neville places her body in a casket and locks the casket in a marble crypt to which only he has access. When he discovers the crypt's iron door ajar, his fears are vividly expressed: "If they've been at her, I'll burn down the city ... I swear to God, I'll burn it to the ground if they've touched her" (36). Neville's dread of vampire/minority incursions and his obsession with the continued purity of Virginia's body drives him to emotional extremes. Although her casket remains intact, he violently expels the body of a male vampire who sought shelter within the crypt. This willful act of segregation keeps Virginia safely "his." Thanks to his efforts, her body will neither produce nor nourish any vampires. Metaphorically, the white male has protected the sanctity of the white female body, thereby assuring the continued incorruptibility of white blood. On one level, the entire scene may be read as a reflection of the dominant society's views regarding appropriate vs. inappropriate sexual congress. The underlying condemnation of interracial sex and the resultant mixing of bloodlines is clear.

In Neville's worldview, hybrid blood equals contaminated blood. His obsessive studies of blood and his efforts to identify, prevent, and possibly cure blood contamination reflect a desperate desire to restore homogeneity and, with it, a social order that he recognizes. Alone in his house, he perceives himself as an island of humanity/civilization surrounded by vampires/chaos, in perpetual danger of being overwhelmed. His resulting paranoia becomes the driving force behind his continued existence. Judith Halberstam has discussed the tendency of "masculine paranoia, or paranoid Gothic" to "force the subject to gothicize "others" while attempting to elevate or purify the self" (112, 117). For Neville, this tendency reaches a nadir in Part Three of the novel, which is set in June 1978. After more than two-and-a-half years alone he discovers Ruth, a woman whom he is shocked to encounter abroad in daylight. He spies her across a field, chases her down, and brings her home with him in true caveman fashion. Though desperately lonely, he stubbornly refuses to trust that she is what she appears to be – a living, *normal* human woman. Fearing that she may be infected with the vampire bacteria, he insists on testing her, first shoving a plate of crushed garlic under her nose and then asking for a sample of her blood. His assertion that "You're on trial, not me," (Matheson 130) demonstrates not only his sense of authority in this situation, but also his perception of himself as the norm, of his own blood as the control factor against which she and all others are to be judged. Convinced that her normal appearance may belie the contamination of her blood, Neville is essentially afraid that she may be "passing," that he may, in fact, have let a monster into his house. In *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, H.L. Malchow discusses this particular fear in the context of vampire fiction as a fear of racial hybridity. According to Malchow,

... there is also lurking in the vampire the powerful suggestion of an explicitly racial obsession – that of the "half-breed." Both vampire and half-breed are creatures who transgress boundaries and are caught between two worlds. Both are hidden threats – disguised presences bringing pollution of the blood. Both may be able to "pass" among the unsuspecting, although both bear hidden signs of their difference, which the wary may read. (168)

Neville spends much of his time with Ruth searching her behavior and, ultimately, her blood, for these "signs." Their conversations at this stage are crucial in terms of highlighting how narrow Neville's understanding of the world truly is. For instance, during dinner he confesses: "I don't understand it ... almost three years now, and still there are some of them alive. Food supplies are being used up. As far as I know, they still lie in a coma during the day.... But they're not dead. Three years and they're not dead. What keeps them going?" (Matheson 133). It is interesting – and profoundly disturbing – that he makes no exception for these people who are still, by his own admission, *alive* and clearly not relying on blood for sustenance. If he finds them in a coma during the day, he murders them. In his one-man crusade, it is Neville who has become the solitary monster who stalks his victims as they sleep – and he cannot see it. Even Ruth, lucid though she is, is not safe from the extremity of his prejudice against plague victims. His thoughts leave little doubt as to what her fate will be should he find the bacteria in her blood: "He was

afraid he might discover that she *was* infected. In the meantime he had to pass an evening and a night with her, perhaps get to know her and be attracted to her. When in the morning he might have to ...” (134). Neville refuses to complete the thought, but it is clear that despite her human appearance and human behavior, he is ready to kill her based solely on what he sees in her blood. When Ruth questions him about the nature of the vampire bacteria and about his progressive studies of vampires, she is treated with very clinical descriptions of how he has killed vampires by various means. When she shows signs of distress, he smiles and says, “One gets used to these things ... One has to” (146). Still, she questions him:

“But you said a lot of them are – are still living ... How do you know they’re not going to *stay* alive?”

“I know,” he said. “I know the germ, know how it multiplies. No matter how long their systems fight it, in the end the germ will win. I’ve made antibiotics, injected dozens of them. But it doesn’t work, it can’t work ... It can’t be done, believe me. It’s a trap. If I didn’t kill them, sooner or later they’d die and come after me. I have no choice; no choice at all.” (146)

Or so he tries to convince himself. For the first time in years Neville must consider a viewpoint at odds with his own, and he finds the experience disconcerting.

It was strange, he thought, to find himself vaguely on the defensive for what yesterday was accepted necessity. In the years that had passed he had never once considered the possibility that he was wrong. It took her presence to bring about such thoughts. And they were strange, alien thoughts.

“Do you actually think I’m wrong?” he asked in an incredulous voice. (146)

By her very presence in his home, Ruth has begun to undermine Neville’s myopic presumptions about the world and his self-appointed role in it. Only later, after learning that Ruth’s blood is, indeed, contaminated, does he begin to understand just how wrong his assumptions have been. In the note she leaves behind, Ruth reveals that she was indeed sent to spy on him:

I know now that you were just as much forced into your situation as we were forced into ours. We *are* infected. But you already know that. What you don’t understand yet is that we’re going to stay alive. We’ve found a way to do that and we’re going to set up society again slowly but surely. We’re going to do away with all those wretched creatures whom death has cheated. And, even though I pray otherwise, we may decide to kill you and those like you. (154)

As it turns out, there *is* a drug that controls the bacteria. Ruth and those like her are hybrids, existing at a level between human and vampire, and their numbers are growing. Eventually they will dominate the planet, and there is nothing Neville can do to stop them. In addition to killing vampires, he has been murdering innocent people like Ruth – including Ruth’s husband – with no comprehension, no sympathy, no remorse.

When the hybrids finally come for Neville, he watches as they exterminate the vampires that have so long been the focus of his hatred – and is horrified.

Did they have to do it like this, with such a black and brutal slaughtering? Why did they slay with alarum by night, when by day the vampires could be dispatched in peace?

Robert Neville felt tight fists shaking at his sides. He didn’t like the looks of them, he didn’t like the methodical butchery. They were more like gangsters than men forced into a situation. There were looks of vicious triumph on their faces, white and stark in the spotlights. Their faces were cruel and emotionless. (158)

The irony here is that he makes no connection between his own previous crusade of butchery against vampires and what he sees now – yet he was every bit as ruthless, and the daylight deaths he caused were far from “peaceful.” He remains stubbornly blind to his own hypocrisy and to his own kinship, however unwanted, with both the killers and the killed. He feels hatred for these “dark men with their guns and their bloodstained pikes,” (160) yet when they breach the defenses around his house, he wonders: “What were they doing? Why didn’t they call on him to surrender? He wasn’t a vampire, *he was a man like them*. What were they doing? ... He didn’t understand, he didn’t understand!” (161, emphasis added). In this new hybrid society, Neville’s worldview is no longer dominant and he has lost the authority to enforce his determinations of who is “monster” and who is “man.” From the perspective of the hybrids, whom he has terrorized, he is certainly not “a man like them,” and his world “spin[s] away into blackness” as “the dark men [drag] his lifeless body from the house ... Into the world that [is] theirs and no longer his” (162).

The tableau of a white man being dragged from his house by “dark men” into a world that is “no longer his” is a stark concretization of white racial anxieties in 1950s America and serves as a powerful metaphor for the inevitable failure of segregation. It echoes the racism that Judith Halberstam has “identified as a hallmark of nineteenth-century Gothic literature,” (15) continuing a trend found in *Dracula* and earlier vampire texts which suggest that the monster

... will find you in the intimacy of your own home; indeed, it will make your home its home (or you its home) and alter forever the comfort of domestic privacy. The monster peeps through the window, enters through the back door, and sits beside you in the parlor; the monster is always invited in but never asked to stay. The racism that seems to inhere to the nineteenth-century Gothic monster, then, may be drawn from imperialistic or colonialist fantasies of other lands and peoples, but it concentrates its imaginative force upon the other peoples in “our” lands, the monsters at home. (15)

I Am Legend further complicates this issue, however, by shifting the protagonist’s perception of his own racial identity as the novel ends. On one level, Neville represents the dominant/white society striving to keep the monsters/blacks out of a space he has constructed as exclusively his own. On another level, from the hybrids’ perspective, Neville himself is the monster who “peeps through the window” and invades their homes by daylight. He realizes this, finally, as he looks down on a street full of people who

all stood looking up at him with their white faces. He stared back. And suddenly he thought, I’m the abnormal one now. Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man.

Abruptly that realization joined with what he saw on their faces – awe, fear, shrinking horror – and he knew that they *were* afraid of him. To them he was some terrible scourge they had never seen, a scourge even worse than the disease they had come to live with. He was an invisible specter who had left for evidence of his existence the bloodless bodies of their loved ones. And he understood what they felt and did not hate them ...

Robert Neville looked out over the new people of the earth. He knew he did not belong to them; he knew that, like the vampires, he was anathema and black terror to be destroyed. (169-170)

Finally, in that moment, Neville understands – and accepts – the monster he himself has become. He swallows the poison pills Ruth has given him and as he dies, he acknowledges how, through him, the vampire has come “Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever” (170).

This displacement is the ultimate irony of the novel. Through Neville and his legacy, readers are left with a story in which the white Western male has become the monster, the “legend” to be feared. The old world (symbolized by Neville, his barricaded/segregated house, and his singular convictions of moral

rectitude) must give way to the new world (symbolized by Ruth, the other hybrids, and their restructuring of society). The inevitable shift in power comes, in no small part, because of Neville's incapacity to change. Though Ruth warns him of danger well in advance, he refuses to leave his house, stating

I ... couldn't ... I almost went several times. Once I even packed and ... started out. But I couldn't, I couldn't ... go. I was too used to the ... the house. It was a habit, just ... just like the habit of living. I got ... used to it. (165).

In this unstable post-apocalyptic landscape, it is Neville who has become stagnant, "passé," a persistent stereotype that refuses to die. In line with the racial subtext of the novel, he is the white male whose battle to preserve the status quo, to remain in the house where his truths and his values dominate and where, through violence and exploitation, he has managed to keep out everything he designates as Other, is doomed to failure. He was once part of a ruling majority, but in the end the novel situates him as a minority who finds himself surrounded and subsequently shot, both his house and his body penetrated by a race he is erroneously convinced he "knows." This dexterous bit of race reversal is concretized by Matheson's closing juxtaposition of color – namely, the sea of "white faces" that look up at Neville and see him as a "black terror." In *I Am Legend*, both Neville (white society) and the vampires (black society) are overrun and destroyed. Those who survive are a hybrid mixture of the two, yet Neville still interprets this scene using racialized signifiers for what is human (white) and what is monstrous (black). His word choice reflects the degree to which he depends on these signifiers as a means of understanding his own identity. It also supports Morrison's contention that "The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self" (17) – in this case, a white male American writer meditating, at least in part, on how the racial and cultural ramifications of desegregation will impact his place in a changing society. The world Matheson projects through Robert Neville's eyes is horrifyingly tragic and violent, yet it is not entirely without hope. People survive to begin rebuilding society – but they will do so without Neville, "the last of the old race," (167) who has become the Other against whom they will define themselves. His newfound blackness plays out what Eugenia DeLamotte has described as "the Gothic suspicion that the dark evil Other is, after all, a projection of the darkness at the heart of whiteness" (27). The manner of his demise suggests that racially motivated fears and prejudices, along with their attendant violence and ultimately futile efforts at segregation, will endure no matter what new hybrid form the society takes. It also suggests that those who perpetuate racially motivated violence are doomed to become victims of such violence themselves.

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