
ANG1755: Vampires in Films and Literature

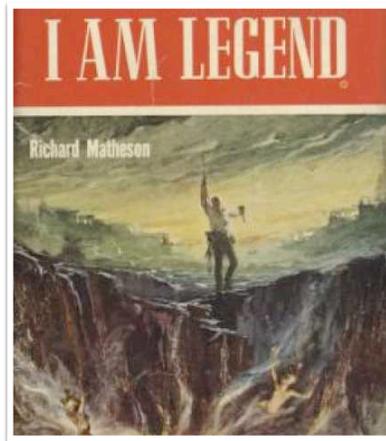
Winter 2020
Dr. Michael E. Sinatra

Week 4

- ❖ Richard Matheson, I am Legend (1954)

I am Legend

- Richard Matheson
(born 1926)
- Author of dozen of
books and short stories
- Also wrote for
television, in particular
The Twilight Zone



Mood

- Opening sentence of the novel: “On these cloudy days, Robert Neville was never sure when sunset came, and sometimes they were in the streets before he could get back.” (generic threat)
- “For he was a man and he was alone and these things had no importance to him.” (theme of loneliness; cf. “Be one of them.” and “It was dangerous to hope. That was a truism he had long accepted.” and “In a week the dog was dead.”)

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- “One of them Neville found inside a display freezer. When he saw the man lying there in this enamel coffin, he had to laugh; it seemed such a funny place to hide.” (failed attempt at humour)
 - “A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend.” (rewriting of myths)

Sexuality

- “It was the women who made it so difficult, he thought, the women posing like lewd puppets in the night on the possibility that he’d see them and decide to come out. ... 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. ... All right, it was a natural drive, but there was no outlet for it any more. They’d forced celibacy on him”.

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- “It was always hard when they were alive; especially with women. He could feel that senseless demand returning again, tightening his muscles.” (vampirism and human/monster depravity)
 - Reaction with Ruth at the end of the novel showing impact of time on Neville (cf. “He felt no physical desire for her”)

Vampires

- “Unless they had attacked one of their own. They did that often. There was no union among them. Their need was their only motivation.” and “None of the three was speaking to either of the others. They never did. They walked and walked about on restless feet, circling each other like wolves, never looking at each other once, having hungry eyes only for the house and their prey inside the house.” (cf. vampires as zombies)
- “And, before science had caught up with the legend, the legend has swallowed science and everything.”

- Vampirism as disease (ie. bacterial infection and dust storm; “I dub thee vampiris” -- cf. science in Dracula).
- Scientific explanations of vampiric signs (cf. “What would a Mohammedan vampire do if faced with the cross?” and “when he drove in the stake, the dissolution was so sudden it made him lurch away and lose his breakfast. ... a row of salt and pepper mixed” and “the bacilli effected the creation of a powerful body glue”)
- “the black bastards had beaten him.” (theme of vampirism and race, including infected [“the dark men”])

- “They were strange, the facts about them: their staying inside by day, their avoidance of garlic, their death by stake, their reputed fear of crosses, their supposed dread of mirrors.” (facts versus myth)
- “‘The strength of the vampire is that no one will believe in him’. Thank you, Dr. Van Helsing, he thought, putting down his copy of Dracula. ... It was true. The book was a hodgepodge of superstitions and soap-opera clichés, but that line was true; no one had believed in them, and how could they fight something they didn’t believe in?”

“Matheson goes to great lengths to rationalize or naturalize the vampire myth, transplanting the monster from the otherworldly realms of folklore and Victorian supernaturalism to the test tube of medical enquiry and rational causation.”

Mathias Clasen, ‘Vampire Apocalypse: A Biocultural Critique of Richard Matheson’s I am Legend’ (2010)

On King

- ❖ Structure
- ❖ Salem’s Lot
- ❖ Vampires
- ❖ Metafictional aspect

Next week

- ❖ Viewing: Ultraviolet “Habeus Corpus”
- ❖ Discussion of King’s Salem’s Lot