



Abjection and Authoritarianism in *I Am Legend* and its Remakes

by Jeremiah Morelock

Ours is an age of post-truth, war on science, and anti-intellectualism (McIntyre 2018; Mooney 2007; Jacoby 2018). That America is also surging with authoritarian populism is no coincidence (Morelock 2017). A classical component of authoritarian populist movements is promotion of irrationalism (Marcuse [1934]1968). In America today, this trend is clearly rampant. In a recent article, I presented an analysis of tribalism and morality in *I Am Legend*. I argued that over time, between the 1954, 1964, 1971 and 2007 versions of the story, compassion decreases, and the moral frame simplifies toward ‘us-against-them.’ I suggested this may present something of a window into America’s “tribal turn” over the past several decades (Morelock 2018a). Yet America today is not only replete with tribalism, but also with irrationalism and authoritarian populism (Morelock 2018b).¹

In this paper I give an alternate and complementary reading of *I Am Legend* and its remakes, focusing on the psychodynamics behind authoritarian populism. My analysis is rooted primarily in Fromm’s theory of the authoritarian character ([1941]1994, [1955]2012, [1973]1992, 1984), Kristeva’s (1982) theory of abjection, and Sontag’s (1989) theory of plague as metaphor. I explain these in greater detail below.

All versions of the *I Am Legend* story start from the following basic narrative: Robert Neville is the last vestige of modernity in a post-apocalyptic world of diseased humanoids. He is also alienated,ⁱⁱ having no interaction with other humans. He is immune to the disease, but the infected still present him with the constant threat of death, since they seek to kill him. They are *abject*; in being human but diseased to the point of inhumanity they threaten the borders of the human. The pandemic context involves a combination of the threats of death, madness, or some allegorical form of either/both, such as losing one’s individual identity to a collective mind; all meaning in one way or another leaving behind the symbolic order through obliteration and/or engulfment. Robert’s primary purpose is to resist the threats and devise a cure for the disease.

The powers of modernity thus test their strength against forces of obliteration and engulfment, which can be frightening, yet can also be compelling to give in to, for overcoming anxious alienation. I find a threefold general trend chronologically across the versions of the story: a) a *punishment narrative* moves from margins to center, b) the punishment is identified more with humanity’s scientific hubris, and c) madness and religion become better for *overcoming alienation*. These findings are all the more striking when considered alongside the tribal moral trajectories in the story (Morelock 2018a), namely decreasing compassion, and moral simplification to an ‘us-against-them’ frame. Altogether, these combined findings indicate the evolution of *I Am Legend* uncannily reflects growing American authoritarian populism.

Background

Matheson wrote *I Am Legend* in the 1950s, and like many American science fiction stories from that time, his novella carried themes about rationality, conformity, and resistance to collectivities of Others (Jancovich 1996). Perhaps the most oft studied story from this time period is Finney's (1955) *The Body Snatchers*, first adapted to film in 1956 as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. One of the fears the body snatchers story effectively dramatizes is the fear of "loss of self to a larger collective" (Katovich and Kinkade 1993, 629). While analyses of the loss of self threat often connect it to Cold War fears such as of Communism or McCarthyism (Rogin 1984), Robinson's (2009) existential interpretation of the body snatchers loss of self theme is particularly pertinent for the present study. She emphasizes that the loss of self is treated not only as frightening, but also as alluring.

In these films, there is an ambivalence portrayed between the attraction of engulfment and the horror of self-annihilation. The attraction to the pods stems from the fact that we have a deep-seated need to escape our fundamental, ontological isolation by merging with others and losing ourselves in something larger than our finite selves [...] Yet, being absorbed in a crowd also invokes terror, a fear of being torn asunder or of being engulfed. The *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* series illustrates the duality of this ambivalence. (24)

This framing of "engulfment" as connected with "self-annihilation" concerns Sartre's ([1956]1992) broad notion of being-in-itself – the level of reality beneath differentiated human consciousness, which we often experience as basic emptiness that we will dissolve into, for example through death or *nirvana*. Rejoining being-in-itself is thus an unknowable experience that seems to indicate a) becoming whole by actualizing as part of a whole, and b) disappearing entirely.ⁱⁱⁱ While descriptively astute, Robinson's existential focus on "fundamental, ontological isolation" echoes Sartre's omission of historical and social change in *Being and Nothingness* (Marcuse 1948, 1972), in this case namely the rampant *social* isolation that had already developed in 1950s America (Reisman 1950). Contrasting with Sartre's existentialism, Fromm's social psychoanalysis includes the notion of a more or less fundamental isolation with a consideration of modern alienation. In Fromm's analysis ([1941]1994), the anxieties of alienated modern life influence people to join authoritarian social movements.

Fromm explains that beginning in early childhood, we emerge from being enveloped by our primary human bonds, moving toward autonomy in adulthood. This is a movement of liberation, but also of anxiety. Every step toward independence carries with it a loss of security, and places new demands of responsibility on us for being the authors of our own actions, with less guidance and support. Freedom thus brings alienation; feelings of aloneness and insignificance which can become unbearable. For Fromm, there are a few ways to respond to this dilemma. His ideal way is through becoming independent but reengaged authentically, spontaneously, and creatively in the human community. But it is also possible for people to retreat from freedom, attempting to escape from it through sadomasochistic *symbiosis*, or

the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside of the own self) in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of its own self [...] In one case I dissolve myself in an outside power; I lose myself. In another case I enlarge my strength by making another being part of myself [...] It is always the inability to stand the aloneness of one's individual self that leads to the drive to enter into a symbiotic relationship...(Fromm, [1941]1994, 157)

The psychological process is echoed on a sociological scale with the emergence of modern capitalism. In feudal society, individuals were much more immersed in their communities. Capitalism thrust the individual into a competitive and alienated society. Hence individuation is now more anxiety-provoking than under feudalism. And when masses of alienated individuals seek greater security in sadomasochistic retreat to substitutes for primary bonds. An unstable situation arises for Fromm when rapid economic change and accompanying social dislocation force the social character out of alignment with the social structure. Especially under such conditions, sadomasochistic characters may latch onto authoritarian social movements for satiety. Fromm's theory of authoritarianism, while poignant, is seldom referenced in studies of film and popular culture.

Where Fromm posits a dialectic, Kristeva (1980, 1982, 1984) also posits an ambivalent dual relation: When we are first born, we have no sense of self as independent from the environment (which initially is the mother's body). In this primary experience of connectedness, we have no language or concepts; we have not yet entered the Symbolic (the Lacanian symbolic order). We are fully within the Semiotic *chora*. The Semiotic, for Kristeva, is feeling, rhythm, sensation, and so on. It is prior to language, somewhat akin to Lacan's "imaginary," with the difference that, for Kristeva, the Semiotic does not entirely vanish (McAfee 2004). In everyday speech, we operate in both dimensions, Semiotic and Symbolic. Without the Semiotic, we would be left without body language, affect – the humanness that contextualizes communication. Without the Symbolic, we would lose conscious grip on reality – we would be psychotic. Yet entrance into the symbolic order requires individuation from an identified non-self (from the mother's body and the rest of the environment). Hence parts of the undifferentiated, Semiotic self have to be cast out as Other, in Kristeva's terminology: *abjected*.

Semiotic elements that we disown as Other are still there, however, threatening the borders we have established that demarcate the self. They are horrifying because of this border-threatening characteristic, yet at the same time they are alluring. We are ambivalent to them, repelled and compelled at once. The abject thus represents lost parts of the self, parts that were only incorporated prior to the sense of the self as an independent entity. Hence the abject elements carry with them the threat (and allure) of a loss of self which is also a completion of the self. We are always under the psychological threat of the semiotic overtaking us again, taking us out of the symbolic order. Hence we have a dual relation to the abject: anxiety and longing. We have an innate fear of losing independence; at the same time we long to escape it, back into the *chora*. As does Fromm, Kristeva identifies fascism as an ideological response to this longing. Through such maneuvers as "*rage against the Symbolic* [including] abstraction, reason, and

adulterated power” and “the attempt to substitute *another Law* for the constraining and frustrating symbolic one, a law that would be absolute, full, and reassuring” (178), the longing for the abject can be channeled into fascist ideology (Sjoholm, 2004).

Kristeva’s theory of abjection has been used in a variety of readings of biological horror and science fiction (Creed 1993; Goodnow, 2010). Popular films and writings about pandemic viruses, zombies, and so on tend to be easy fodder for identifying abjection themes: the infected are generally Othered, taking on visual markers like via death, decay or mutilation. “A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay [...] refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live [...] The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection” (Kristeva, 1982, 3-4). Being feminist psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva’s work is often employed in topics explicitly gender-focused. Yet much of her work focuses on Othering, including the psychology of fascism. Whereas Creed employed Kristeva’s theory of abjection to analyze the “monstrous-feminine” in horror films, comparable studies have not been done using her theory of abjection to analyze fascist allegories.

In Morelock (2018a), declining compassion and ambivalence, and simplifying to an ‘us-against-them’ tribal frame were shown across the chronology of *I Am Legend* iterations. The tribal turn identified in *I Am Legend* was discussed in light of declining social capital and civic engagement in America, and the thesis promulgated by Fromm and others that alienation may inspire reactionary group loyalties. Yet Fromm was concerned with authoritarianism, not just tribalism. Hence Fromm’s theory raises two further questions: a) whether growing tribalism has coincided with growing sadomasochism, and b) whether there has been any change in how, if at all, people envision overcoming their anxious alienation. This paper is dedicated to these questions.

Methodology

I focus my readings on two major themes: a) the *punishment narrative*, and b) methods of *overcoming alienation*. (A) The punishment narrative is the notion that humanity is to blame for and deserves the apocalyptic pandemic. The notion of plague as punishment has been common throughout history, extending back to ancient times: a component of what Sontag (1989) calls “the plague metaphor.” The plague metaphor is elastic in that it can embody simultaneous claims of a) a morally culpable (Othered and scapegoated) minority who incur disease as punishment and thus are specifically vulnerable, and b) an epidemic threat to *everyone*. Moreover, plague can be seen as evidence that the moral status of the whole society is corrupted – and thus the whole society is held responsible and under threat. For example “the plague in Book I of the *Iliad* that Apollo inflicts on the Achaeans in punishment for Agamemnon’s abduction of Chryses’ daughter [and] the plague in *Oedipus* that strikes Thebes because of the polluting presence of the royal sinner” (40). As will be seen below, in *I Am Legend*, culpability is articulated in relation to humanity monolithically, rather than focusing on distinct persons or organizations and their actions as harboring greater or lesser moral responsibility. It is generally framed as a punishment from God or a natural consequence. The line is that “we” in some sense brought it upon “ourselves.” Yet over time scientific practice become saddled with blame.

I interpret the punishment narrative as a form of sadomasochistic wish-fulfillment expressed in the film-as-dream (Fromm [1941]1994; Freud 2010; Nimmo and Combs 1990), indicating authoritarianism.^{iv} Adopting this general perspective follows Fromm's methodology. For Fromm, social character is not the sum total of an individual's character traits. It is the character traits common to a social milieu, molded by their objective conditions of life. He also explains that sadism and masochism are related impulses and are often found in the same persons, hence his fusion of them under one "sadomasochistic" character type.

If we interpret the film as a dream following Freud, it is always on some level wish-fulfillment. The conscious *fear* of pandemic might be a displaced unconscious *desire* for pandemic. Sontag (1965) argues as much, that people are drawn to horrific science-fiction movies because they have a lust for the dangers that are frightening on the surface. When the possibility of condensation and displacement are considered for an unlimited mass of viewer-dreamers, desire, hatred and fear, masochism and sadism, cannot be reliably disentangled. An individual person might identify as part of the "we" who are to blame, an outsider who is blaming a "we," or an innocent member of the "we" who suffers for others' mistakes (the mistakes of medical scientists, for example). While many variations are probable, they are all contained implicitly in the unit of analysis here: the general, overarching sadomasochistic punishment narrative.

(B) Methods of attempting to overcome alienation in *I Am Legend* include human connection (or surrogate human connection through pets or anthropomorphizing), God, madness and death. Here, madness and death should be understood in reference to Kristeva's Semiotic: madness means the receding of the symbolic order, and death means loss of self in engulfment/obliteration. "Madness" is not meant to denote a diagnosable psychiatric state. Instead, the broad term is intended in a folk meaning, as being on the negative side of an imaginary line demarcating "sane" from "insane." A person who is "mad" or "out of her/his mind" is a person far out of touch with consensus reality. This may include hallucinations, irrational behavior or incorrect beliefs. Psychoanalysis does not take these terms seriously, but they are still common parlance, denoting socially marginalized, allegedly mentally incorrect, "crazy" people. Kristeva uses the word "psychosis" to denote something reminiscent of this, namely a person whose grip on the Symbolic is incomplete, and is more or less consumed by the Semiotic so as to seem irrational or hallucinatory to the point of being out of touch with reality.

Through the lens of Kristeva, these varied avenues of escape found in *I Am Legend* – God madness and death – have direct relevance to Fromm's theory of authoritarianism. This is due to the considerable overlap in Kristeva's notion of desire for the abject Freud's notion of desire for symbiosis. Both contain the key component of loss of self; in Kristeva, into the non-rational, in Fromm, into the group.^v This element of the non-rational also complements Fromm's theory of authoritarianism by emphasizing a key element in fascist culture and ideology that Fromm's theory arguably underplays. Kristeva's theory of abjection and fascism deals explicitly with anti-rationalism. Yet hers is still a depth psychology which does not include a robust theory of the relationship

between social structure and social character. Fromm and Kristeva are useful compliments to one another.

Findings

Below I begin with the novella and then proceed chronologically through the film renditions. For each version, I start with a brief plot synopsis^{vi} before giving my reading, the latter of which contains expository dialogue from the story.

I Am Legend (1954)

Robert Neville is a medical scientist living alone in a suburban house, after a killer virus turned everyone left into vampires. He is immune and believes himself to be the only living human. His wife and daughter were among those who turned vampire. He spends his days killing vampires, his nights hiding in his house. He is also working toward finding a cure. Eventually he comes across an unturned woman (Ruth). He brings her back to his home against her will. They talk, and develop romantic feelings. Against her will, he tests her to see if she is infected. She is in fact infected, and knocks him out when he finds out. She leaves him a note of explanation, saying she was a spy from a colony of infected but unturned people (which I call “survivors”), who keep the illness dormant through medication. She includes a sample pill with the note. She insists her affections for him were genuine and encourages him to flee for his safety. He does not. Survivors come to his home to capture him. They take him and imprison him. Ruth visits him as he is locked up and gives him more pills, allowing him to commit suicide rather than be killed by the survivors. (Morelock, 2018a)

Infected women pose a particular struggle for Robert – he is sexually drawn to them. “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 the flesh” (7-8). The women reach Robert on the level of his alienation. They draw him towards them against his rationality (a hint at madness, the receding of the symbolic order), yet they are abject just the same as the infected men. To go to them would mean death; in other words giving in to the temptation of the abject would mean total engulfment/obliteration.

He also flirts with suicidal ideation directly (without the sexual mediation), for example in one of his internal monologues: “Why *not* go out? It was a sure way to be free of them. Be one of them” (18). To escape the threat of the abject, he could willingly let go of the “self” and the symbolic order. Two characters in the film present a window out of his alienation through actual companionship: first a dog, then Ruth. In both cases, their companionship is connected to the threat of creeping madness and to death. Additionally, the dog brings up thoughts of God, and Ruth is abject.

When Robert spots the dog, he becomes very excited, even obsessed with it to the point of suicidal ideation.

“Don’t run away!”

He didn’t hear the shrill quiver of hysteria in his voice as he screamed out the words. [...] With a grunt of fear he hobbled on faster, ignoring the pain of the hangover, everything lost in the need to catch the dog. [...] Oh, my God, the thought came then, what if it comes back tonight for the meat and they kill it? [...] I couldn’t take that [...] I’ll blow out my brains if that happens, I swear I will.

The thought dredged up the endless enigma of why he went on.

Robert desperately turns to God to transcend alienation via the dog.

To his complete astonishment, he later found himself offering up a stumbling prayer that the dog would be protected. It was a moment in which he felt a desperate need to believe in a God [...] [H]e felt a twinge of self-reproach [...] [but] went on praying anyway. Because he wanted the dog, because he needed the dog. (83-86)

Later, the dog dies, with Robert as witness. When Robert sees Ruth for the first time, he worries “I’ve gone mad [...] The man who died of thirst saw mirages of lakes. Why shouldn’t a man who thirsted for companionship see a woman walking in the sun?” His drives exceed his reason. “He didn’t know what welled up in him. It was too quick to analyze, an instinct that broke through every barrier of time-erected reserve” (110). Robert and Ruth develop romantic feelings, and even kiss and hold one another. Yet she is abject, threatening borders twice over: First, she has the virus, which means technically she is a vampire, and vampirism transcends the border between life and death. Second, through medication she transcends the border between healthy and infected. When Robert discovers all this, he feels “as if all the security of reason were ebbing away from him. The framework of his life was collapsing and it frightened him” (145).

Ruth is tied to Robert’s death. She is connected to the survivors’ colony (who capture him for execution), and she supplies him with the pills to kill himself. When she delivers the pills, Ruth kisses him, and tells him he will be with his late wife soon (upon his death). In his last thoughts, he associates himself with the abject (the infected), and shows compassion (Morelock, 2018a) for survivors.

[H]e understood what [survivors] felt and did not hate them [...] [H]e knew that, like the vampires, he was anathema and black terror to be destroyed [...] Full circle. A new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever.

I am legend. (159)

Regarding the punishment narrative, in a scene from the past, Robert encounters a heatedly proselytizing man and a group of devout listeners that are yelling responses in unison such as “No!” “Amen!” “Save us!” and so on. The man and his group are portrayed as very swept up in irrational, sadomasochistic energy.

“I tell you that unless we become as little children, stainless and pure in the eyes of Our Lord [...] unless we fall to our knees and beg forgiveness for our

grievous offenses – we are damned! [...] God has punished us for our great transgressions! God has unleashed the terrible force of His almighty wrath!” (103-104)

Later on, the punishment narrative very briefly resurfaces in a conversation between Robert and Ruth. Robert immediately discards it, and Ruth does not argue:

“Why were we punished like this?” she asked.

[...]

“I don’t know,” he answered bitterly. “There’s no answer, no reason. It just is.” (139)

The Last Man on Earth (1964)

Robert Morgan is a medical scientist, alone after a killer virus turned everyone left into vampires. He is immune and believes himself to be the only healthy living human. His wife and daughter were among those who turned vampire. He spends his days killing the infected/vampires, his nights hiding at home. He works toward finding a cure. He finds a healthy woman (Ruth). He suspects she is infected. He wants to try to cure her. She declines, but he cures her anyway. Ruth reveals she is a spy from a colony of infected but healthy/unturned people (which I call “survivors”), who keep the virus dormant through injections. She encourages him to flee. He refuses. Survivors chase him into a church and kill him (Morelock, 2018)

Here the punishment narrative is gone. Regarding alienation, Robert eagerly attempts overcoming it through companionship with a dog and Ruth. In both cases, they are connected with death. He has to witness the dog’s death, and as soon as he lets Ruth in, the events that led to his own death are underway (she is connected to the survivors).

The Omega Man (1971)

Robert Neville is a medical scientist (who used to work for the military), alone in a city apartment. A killer virus turned the surviving infected locals into a blue-skinned, white-eyed cult who avoid sunlight. Robert is immune, believing himself to be the only living healthy human. He spends his days killing infected members and enjoying civilization’s remnants, his nights hiding at home. They view him as evil because he is uninfected, healthy, uses modern machinery, and because he kills them. Eventually he finds a healthy woman (Lisa) and chases her unsuccessfully. The infected capture him and sentence him to death. A healthy man (Dutch) and the woman he saw (Lisa) rescue him. They take him to a small colony of healthy people (which here I call “survivors”). One of them (Richie) is ill. They ask Robert to try and cure him. Robert cures him with a serum made from his own blood, and becomes romantically involved with Lisa. Robert and the survivors plan to move away and bring Robert’s cure so they can all be immune. Richie goes to the leader of the infected (Matthias) to attempt peace, but he is killed. Getting supplies for the move, Lisa encounters the infected and becomes ill (one of them). Using her, infected members enter Robert’s home and abduct and kill him.

Dutch and the other survivors find him the next morning. Dutch is able to get a bottle of cure off him. The survivors take ill Lisa into their car and leave. (Morelock, 2018)

Robert Neville suffers from creeping mental illness, his symptoms all surrounding his alienation and his dejected hopes of transcending it. He casually talks to dead bodies. For example, in an early scene he soon goes to a used car dealership. There is a corpse sitting at the desk. While getting the car fueled up to leave the dealership Robert says “Alright, how much will you give me in trade for my Ford? Really? Thanks a lot, you cheating bastard.”^{vii} He then goes to see the Woodstock movie. While watching alone in a theater, with a bitter grin he recites a man’s words as he speaks in the film:

Robert: “Just to see, just to really realize what’s really important. What’s really important is the fact that if we can’t all live together and be happy, if you have to be afraid to walk down the street, if you have to be afraid to smile at somebody, right?” Nope, they sure don’t make pictures like that anymore.

Robert’s alienation is driven home, as he sits by himself mirroring the man’s words that celebrate positive human relationships, in a film about a huge festival celebrating love (among other things). When he leaves the theater he is barraged by the imagined sound of ringing phones. He yells “There’s no phone ringing, damn it!” The phone sounds stop. “There is no phone.” The phone is, of course, a tool people use to talk to one another. There cannot possibly be a phone ringing because there are no people left who would call him. His hallucination (madness) comes in the form of the illusion of other people, the illusion that his alienation might be breached.

His second moment of concern about madness occurs when he first encounters Lisa. In a clothing store, he reaches for a mannequin in a bra, presumably out of sexual attraction (his drives propelling a kind of fantasy – hinting toward madness – about overcoming his sexual alienation). During this gesture, he sees Lisa. And with her escape, he questions whether it was actually a symptom of creeping madness, and even asks himself if this is how his unravelling starts. It is not a hallucination this time, but if it were, it would again be about breaching his alienation.

Lisa and Robert become romantic and sexual partners, yet she is connected with death, as she is the window through which the infected are able to reach and kill Robert. First, to calm his nerves after chasing her, Robert goes to a bar, and in this bar is where the infected are who take him prisoner. Second, when they are romancing, he realizes he forgot to fill the generator. Her affections are thus distractions that cause him to mess up and allow the infected to break in through the basement. Third, in the same scene she looks out the window, leaves it open, and turns her back to it, standing around in the middle of the room – and one of them gets into the apartment through just that window. Fourth, she turns infected while out for supplies, despite his reticence of her to go out. After turning, she [somehow] lets Matthias and a group inside Robert’s apartment. In his death scene, Robert is too distracted by Lisa to see Matthias picking up and throwing the spear that kills him.

Matthias' revolt is explicitly anti-modern. He frames modernity as leading to its own destruction, as we learn from Robert's WWII memories. In one, he is sitting at a desk in a lab coat, with Matthias giving a newscast on television, with a televangelistic flare:

Matthias: Now the question is survival. Is this the end of technological man? Is this the conclusion of all our yesterdays? The boasts of our fabled science? The superhuman conquests of space and time? The age of the wheel? We were warned of judgment. Well, here it is. Here. Now. In the form of billions of microscopic bacilli. This is the end.

Matthias' theory about the disease is twofold: we brought it upon ourselves, and it is punishment from God for our scientific and technological hubris, for the symbolic order gone-too-far. In Matthias view, the virus is akin to "rage against the symbolic," which Kristeva associates with fascism. In the present, Matthias identifies with the virus. Instead of seeing it as something to cure, he considers harboring it – and the physical manifestations of it – as something to be proud of. It is Robert, as a member of uninfected humanity, who must be purged, not the disease. Matthias gives something of a sermon to this effect, when Robert is ostensibly placed on trial after the infected capture him.

Matthias: Do you see him as we were before the punishment, before we gained grace? Do you see lying there the last of scientists, of bankers, of businessmen, the users of the wheel?

Cultists: Yes.

Matthias: Do we use the tools of the wheel as he does?!

Cultists: No.

Matthias: Is he of the family?

Cultists: No.

Matthias: Is he of the sacred society?

Cultists: No.

Matthias: Then what is he?

Cultists: Evil.

Matthias: He is part of the dead. He has no place here. He has the stink of oil, electrical circuitry about him. He is obsolete. [points a finger at Robert] You are discarded. You are the refuse of the past.

In particular, he identifies the changed eye-color of the infected as: a) punishment, and b) indication of being chosen.

Matthias: He has confessed all, brothers! Murder, use of forbidden tools, practice of prescribed rites, he admits science, medicine, weapons, machinery, electricity; he has not shared the punishment. He does not bear the marks.

Robert: Marks?

Matthias: Show him, my children. Show him the pretty marks.

[the infected take off their sunglasses to reveal their bluish-white eyes]

Matthias: These are the marks, Mr. Neville. The punishment which you, and those like you brought upon us. In the beginning we tried to help one another, those that were left. We tried to clean things up, set things straight. We buried things and burned. Then it came to me. That we were chosen. Chosen for just this work. To bury what was dead. To burn what was evil. To destroy what was dangerous.

Robert: You're barbarians.

Matthias: Barbarians. You call us barbarian. Well, it is an honorable name. We mean to cancel the world you civilized people made.

Matthias' revolt reflects fascist ideology, in the language on family, the revolt against modernity, and advocating genocide to serve the evolution of the species. In one scene, the infected even carry out a book burning. The infected are bound by a group mind under Matthias' charismatic leadership, at times speaking in ritualistic unison in response to Matthias' calls.^{viii} Matthias' is a sadomasochistic character. Sadistically, he is a dictatorial ruler who wants to destroy the remnants of modernity. Masochistically, his twofold vision of the disease is a positive framing on the receiving of a punishment from an all-powerful force.

Robert and the survivors are not seduced by Matthias, but none of them provide a compelling defense of modernity, other than appreciating Robert's capacity to use science to devise a cure. In one telling scene, Robert informs the survivors the cure works, and tells them they will all go far away into a place civilization hasn't touched. Dutch, in his excitement, says it will be just like a new Garden of Eden, "only this time we won't trust no friggin' snake!" The Garden of Eden reference indicates a world being blissful without civilization; in effect agreeing with Matthias in large measure. Moreover, he fantasizes about returning to a golden age – a common trope in fascist ideology – prior to humanity's exile from: a) ignorance, b) unity with nature, and c) God's protection.

I Am Legend (2007)

Robert Neville is a medical scientist and [former] lieutenant colonel living alone with a dog in a city apartment, after a killer virus has turned the surviving population into vampire-zombie-like creatures (which here I call "the infected"). Robert was immune, and holds out only a small hope that he may not be the only living human. His wife and daughter died in a helicopter crash during the chaos of the outbreak. He keeps trying to devise a cure; sometimes this involves capturing and experimenting on the infected. After he has to kill his recently-turned dog, he goes on a late-night murder-suicide rampage. An uninfected woman (Anna) saves his life, brings him back to his home and fixes up his wounded leg. Anna travels with a boy (Ethan), the two headed toward a colony of surviving humans. She tries to convince Robert to believe in God and to come with her to the colony. Robert declines. Robert's home is attacked by the infected, who evidently followed Anna's car back to Robert's home the previous night. Robert extracts blood from a recovering infected he had recently experimented on, evidently with success. He gives the vial to Anna, tells Anna and Ethan to hide, and saves them by suicide-

bombing the infected in his basement laboratory. Anna delivers the vial to the survivors' colony. (Morelock, 2018)

The very first scene frames the illness as punishment for the hubris of using rationality (via science) to dangerous excess. This may indicate a displaced “rage against the symbolic” (Kristeva, 1982) in that it indicates a potentially disastrous result of the symbolic gone-too-far. The purpose for engineering the apocalyptic virus was to cure cancer, in other words to ward off death. Yet the disease brings rampant death. The disease is hence a tragic irony, perhaps a karmic punishment: the attempt to go against death led humanity to it. The frame suggests sadomasochistic wish-fulfillment (Fromm [1941]1994; Freud 2010) – humanity’s act of symbolic hubris was in defiance of the natural order, and deserves correction from a superior power.

Karen: The world of medicine has seen its share of miracle cures, from the polio vaccine to heart transplants, but all past achievements may pale in comparison to the work of Doctor Alice Krippin. Thank you so much for joining us this morning.

Alice: Not at all.

Karen: So Dr. Krippin, give it to me in a nutshell.

Alice: Well the premise is quite simple. Take something designed by nature and reprogram it to work for the body rather than against it.

Karen: You’re talking about a virus.

Alice: Indeed, yes, in this case the measles virus, which has engineered at a genetic level to be helpful rather than harmful. And I find the best way to describe it is if you can imagine your body as a highway, and you picture the virus as a very fast car being driven by a very bad man. Imagine the damage that that car could cause. Then if you replace that man with a cop, the picture changes, and that’s essentially what we’ve done.

Karen: Now how many people have you treated so far?

Alice: Well we’ve had 10,009 clinical trials in humans so far.

Karen: And how many are cancer free?

Alice: 10,009.

Karen: So you have actually cured cancer.

Alice: Yes, yes. Yes, we have.

The punishment narrative is explicit again, albeit briefly, in a late scene where Robert shows Anna his basement laboratory. Anna view Robert’s wall of photographs of infected that he captured and experimented on.

Anna: Did all of them die?

Robert: Yes.

Anna: My God.

Robert: God didn’t do this, Anna. We did.

In underscoring his atheism, Robert also indicates “we” are responsible for the pandemic as natural consequence. In this exchange, Robert displays no compassion for

the infected. He refers to the infected captured woman unconscious in his laboratory as “it,” and casually tells Anna that his experimenting “will almost certainly kill it.” His “yes” when she asks if all of his photographed experimentees died is similarly matter-of-fact (Morelock, 2018a).

Throughout the film, we witness Robert continuing his experiments, which have under these conditions taken on an intrinsic ambivalence. The disease he is now combating was created through medical science. His efforts thus go to fending off the embodiment of symbolic human hubris, by using the same hubristic capacities that caused the apocalypse. In a video journal, at one moment we observe Robert dejectedly stating that his experiments are coming to no avail.

Robert: Vaccine trials continue. I’m still unable to transfer my immunity to infected hosts. Krippin virus is...elegant. Just fishin’ in the dark, son. Behavioral note: an infected male exposed himself to sunlight today. Now it’s possible decreased brain function and growing scarcity of food is causing them to ignore their basic survival instincts. Social de-evolution appears complete. Typical human behavior is now entirely absent.

The part of this statement about hypothetical ignorance of survival instincts is ostensibly about numbness to drives and irrational behavior, but it is about alienation. His last two sentences are key. The infected are in an animalistic state, and he has no hope of communicating with them. They have exited the symbolic order. They are abject, and he is alienated from them. In his alienation, he flirts with the boundary of madness as a palliative. He treats his dog Sam as a reservoir for all close human connection, variously projecting child, spouse, and best friend roles. This is expressed through conversation as well as action. For example Sam eats from a human’s plate at meal times, and in an early scene Robert talks to her about eating her vegetables, as if she were a child.

Robert: Eat your vegetables. Don’t just push them around. Eat them. Okay. Well you’re gonna eat your vegetables. We will sit down here all night.

A couple of scenes later, we see Robert waking up in bed next to Sam. Robert asks Sam “how’d you sleep?” and soon runs on a treadmill with Sam running on a separate treadmill next to him. Robert’s conversations with Sam often involve pretend or imaginary agreements. One of these ‘agreements’ happens immediately after the dinner scene mentioned above.^{ix} Robert is now washing Sam in the bathtub:

Robert: What are you whining about? Why didn’t you just eat your vegetables? Uh hey, alright, here’s the deal. Look, you’re gonna eat twice as many vegetables tomorrow night. Alright? Deal? Deal?

He also carries out imaginary, if one-sided, interactions with mannequins he has evidently set up in the video store, for that purpose, at times seemingly approaching an undecidable space of whether he considers them real people or not.

Robert: Hey! Morning Marge! Morning Fred! What are you guys doing here so early? Nice sweatshirt there, Fred. Don't set it down anywhere. I'll see you guys inside [...] Morning, Hank [...] Hey, who's the girl with in the, uh...never mind. Hey, I'll see you in the morning.

He also suffers from recurring nightmares and flashbacks about the death of his wife and daughter. While such flashbacks are of a traumatic turn of events, they also connect him to memories where he is with his wife and daughter. He remains connected with them through traumatic memory.

The series of events that led to his undoing begin with Robert's confrontation with his palliative play-madness for alienation. While driving and talking to his dog, Robert spots one of the mannequins from the video store – “Fred” – positioned on the road far away from the store. Robert gets out of his car and furiously interrogates Fred, pointing his gun at the mannequin.

Robert: The hell are you doing out here, Fred?! What the – what the hell are you – no! No! No! No! What the hell are you doing out here, Fred?! [...] Fred, if you're real you better tell me right now!

Robert cannot tell if Fred is a mannequin or “real” (presumably meaning human or infected). This moment of impossibility threatens the already eroding borders of reality Robert flirts with, between his knowledge of the mannequins as inert and his interaction with them as if they were human. His flirtations with the border before were jovial, but now Fred's positioning actively threatens Robert's sense that he is in control of the blurring of the border between reality and fantasy. Robert proceeds to shoot Fred, many times, until Fred falls over. Robert gets caught in a trap, and in his escape, Sam is bitten and becomes infected.

After killing his infected and briefly resurrected dog, Robert tearfully begs his female mannequin crush in the video store to say hello, signaling not just that he is alienated and flirting with madness, but that he is actively welcoming madness. Here madness is positioned as remedy to alienation.

Robert: [I] Promised my friend that I would say hello to you today. Hello. Hello. Please say hello to me. Please say hello to me.

He promptly continues toward madness, and now also toward death, via a murder-suicide rampage at the pier where his wife and daughter died. Anna steps in to save him, and her presence is initiated with a bright white light^x, suggesting divine intervention. This reflects back on the prior scene of pleading with the mannequin to speak: Robert may have been praying – consciously or not – for God's presence, Anna's arrival being God's amenable response. In our first glimpse of Anna's actual person, next to her is a crucifix hanging from the rearview mirror of her car.

Upon waking up in his home on the couch, with his leg bandaged, and Shrek playing on his television, hearing sounds of dishes from the kitchen, he crawls to get a handgun out of a drawer, and then limps toward the kitchen. Robert's first fully conscious

visual glimpse of Anna and Ethan happens then, although initially it is not actually of them, but a brief hallucination of his deceased wife and daughter layered over them; a fleeting moment of madness that makes his wife and daughter seem closer. Entering the kitchen it becomes clear that the woman is not his wife, and the child is a boy, not his daughter. He walks in bewildered, puts the gun down.

Anna and Ethan threaten the narrow worldview he has clung to in order to bear – although not without creeping madness – his alienated situation. Not only is he unexpectedly interacting with humans again, and in his house for that matter, but Anna is about the same age as his deceased wife, Ethan is about the same age as his deceased daughter, and the breakfast scene Anna orchestrated is extremely normalizing, simulating a normal morning as if Anna were his wife and Ethan were his child.

Anna: We came from Maryland. We heard your message on the radio. We were at the peer at noon. We waited all day. We're going to Vermont, to the survivor's colony.

Robert: What?

Anna: In Bethel. It's a safe zone.

Robert: No, there's no survivor's colony, no safe zone. Nothing happened the way it was supposed to happen. Nothing worked the way that it was supposed to work.

Anna: In the mountains.

Robert: Mm mm.

Anna: There's a whole colony of people there who didn't get sick.

Robert: Mm mm.

Anna: The virus couldn't survive the cold, there's a whole...

Robert: [throws plate] Shut up! Everybody's dead! *Everybody* is dead. [points to his head] I've, I've – I just need I need a minute. Okay? I just... [pounds the table twice] I just – I was saving that bacon. I was saving it. You – I just – I'm gonna go upstairs. Alright, just, I'm gonna go.

His angry insistence that everyone is dead – spoken twice for emphasis – indicates again how tightly he has bound himself in his alienated reality; that his mental survival has been predicated on such a tightening of his world such that he is dependent on suppressing hope for human connection. Of course, his defense has not been entirely successful; in his alienation he has compensated by an eccentric over-humanizing of mannequins and his dog, and he suffers from flashbacks and hallucinations of his dead family.

Robert goes upstairs and sits on the edge of his bathtub, comes downstairs again to the living room, where Ethan is sitting in front of the television watching Shrek. Robert recites dialogue along with the television, which gets him concerned looks from Anna and Ethan (is he crazy?). The dialogue is from a scene where Shrek joins up with his donkey companion instead of going his quest alone, and there is discussion about being without friends. Robert's potentially mad – if not “mad,” then at least very eccentric – knowledge of Shrek is expressed via recited dialogue about overcoming alienation. He

says “I like Shrek” and goes to the kitchen to sit down at the table with Anna, who says “You’re not so good with people anymore, are you?”

Anna: Come with us, Neville, to the colony.

Robert: There’s no colony Anna. Everything just fell apart. There was no evacuation plan...

Anna: You’re wrong. There is a colony. I know, okay?

Robert: How do you know, Anna?

Anna: I just know.

Robert: How? I said *how* do you know? How could you know?

Anna: God told me. He has a plan.

Robert: God told you.

Anna: Yes.

Robert: The God.

Anna: Yes. I know how this sounds.

Robert: It sounds crazy.

Anna: But something told me to turn on the radio. Something told me to come here.

Robert: My voice on the radio told you to come here, Anna.

Anna: You were trying to kill yourself last night, right?

Robert: Anna, just no...

Anna: And I got here just in time to save your life.

Robert: Stop it.

Anna: Do you think that’s a coincidence?

Robert: Just stop it. Stop it. Hey, what are you doing? Stop it.

Anna: He must have sent me here for a reason. Neville, the world is quieter now. You just have to listen. If we listen, we can hear God’s plan.

Robert: God’s plan.

Anna: Yeah.

Robert: Alright, let me tell you about your God’s plan. There were 6 billion people on Earth when the infection hit. KV had a 90% kill rate. That’s 5.4 *billion* people. Dead. Crashed, and bled out! Dead! Less than 1% immunity. That left 12 million healthy people like you, me, and Ethan. The other five hundred and eighty-eight *million* turned into your “darkseekers!” And then they got hungry! And they killed and fed on everybody! *Everybody!* Every single person that you or I has ever known is *dead! Dead!* There is no God. There is no God.

Robert’s description of Anna’s claim as “crazy” explicitly associates religious experience with madness. When Anna originally says “God told me,” it sounds like she might be describing a crazy experience of hearing voices. Her further description reveals she is not talking about hearing language (the symbolic). She is describing an intuitive feeling (the semiotic). Anna’s reference to God and to their planned meeting indicates even further the potential religious dimension of Neville’s pleading to the mannequin to say “hello.” Yet her bold claim has not been proven, and if she is wrong, she does appear to be “mad.” Anna is either “crazy,” or she is God’s response, and either way, she invites Robert toward the Semiotic. But more than this, she unwittingly led the infected back to

his home. Her entrance thus opens the gate to the abject, who pour in. Robert's fortress against the abject is invaded and ultimately destroyed.

The destruction of his home, however, culminates in an act where he completes his murder-suicide, following a moment of dissociation coupled with a flashback to the last thing his daughter said before she died: "look at the butterfly," which he now interprets as God's presence. In this scene, Robert has taken Anna and Ethan down into his laboratory to stay protected from the invading and attacking infected "darkseekers." Anna discovers the woman Robert has been experimenting on is healing from the disease. The infected bust in through the wall of the basement, Robert shuts a glass door barricading him, Anna and Ethan inside. The infected run and dive into the glass. The infected alpha arrives and repeatedly runs into the glass. As the glass wall it cracks in the shape of a butterfly, the sound disappears, and Robert hears Marley's voice whispering "Daddy, look at the butterfly." Robert fills a vial with blood from the recovering infected woman. He pushes table to the side to reveal a small door in the back wall.

Robert: The cure is in her blood. You two are gonna be safe. Get in. Ethan!

Go.

Anna: Come on, get in. Get in!

Robert: Anna. I think this is why you're here.

Anna: What are you doing?

Robert: I'm listening.

Anna: Neville, there's room in here, come!

Robert: They're not gonna stop. They're not gonna stop. Stay until dawn.

Robert gives Anna the vial of blood. When he says "I'm listening" he refers to Anna's earlier statement that Robert should "listen" and he will hear God's plan. In order to "listen" to God, Robert opens up to interpreting his dissociative flashback as carrying a message for him to instruct his actions. He needs to murder-suicide so Anna and Ethan can escape. He closes the hatch so Anna and Ethan are inside, looks at a picture of his dead wife and daughter, and pulls a grenade out. When the glass is going to shatter through, he pulls the pin and runs to the glass from his side while the alpha runs to it from the other. When they hit, the grenade goes off, filling the basement lab with flames.

Discussion

The punishment narrative

In 1954, the notion that the disease is a punishment from God is present, but not given much space, and given even less credence. It is first raised by people who seem very irrational: a furiously proselytizing man and his frenzied following. Ruth mentions the notion of punishment briefly later, but Robert shoots it down. In 1964, the punishment narrative disappears. In 1971, it comes back via Matthias, but is explicitly anti-modern. Whereas humanity's transgressions went unspecified in 1954, in 1971 they are clearly articulated to be science, technology, modernity; human 'progress.' The punishment narrative is given more space here, and arguably more credence to the point of ambivalence, since for all Matthias' demagoguery and Otherness, he is correct that humanity brought the apocalypse upon itself, which he interprets as humanity deserving apocalypse. And Dutch indicates optimistically that in the future humanity will "trust no

friggin' snake"; in the story of Genesis, trusting the snake initiates the great transgression that incurs God's punishment: expulsion from paradise. The myth is analogous to Matthias' notion that humanity brought the apocalypse upon itself as punishment for its hubris.

In 2007, the punishment narrative is not directly articulated, but Matthias' 1971 philosophy that humanity brought its own downfall through scientific hubris is woven into the main narrative of the 2007 story from the very first scene. Robert, although still practicing medical science, carries an atheist's version of the punishment narrative: "God didn't do this, Anna. We did." If there is a punishment, it is not a vengeful act of God. It is a natural consequence "we" caused. The punishment narrative undergoes two general changes throughout the versions over time: a) it is given more credence, b) it is increasingly directed at science. In 1954 it is portrayed negatively (as incorrect, frenzied, irrational), and with no mention of science. In 1964 it is neutral (in that it is absent). In 1971 it is articulated somewhat convincingly, and it is now directed at science, yet it is primarily touted by a megalomaniacal sociopathic cult leader who is infected and abject along with all of his followers. In 2007, it is worldly wisdom, and it is directed at science.

These changes are more striking when understood in light of the decreasing compassion and moral ambivalence (Morelock, 2018a) across *I Am Legend* iterations. As compassion for Others decreases, the punishment narrative increases in legitimation, and science is forged as morally transgressive culprit. Though the punishment narrative remains on the level of the general "we" rather than blaming a subpopulation, a blamed practice is articulated: science. Concomitant to moral simplification and loss of compassion concerning the treatment of Others, Kristeva's "rage against the symbolic" rises, playing out within an increasingly emphasized sadomasochistic punishment element in a fantasy involving mass death.

Overcoming alienation

In 1954, Robert's desperate (and obsessive) attempts to remedy alienation through healthy companionship with the dog and Ruth are briefly rewarding, but unsustainable in themselves, and ultimately they connect Robert to death (the dog's and his own). At one point he ponders madness as a palliative response to alienation (when he first sees Ruth and doubts his sanity), but the theme goes no further. The only truly workable escape from Robert's alienation *is* death. He toys with the idea of giving in to death or suiciding several times, and via the seductive infected women his death is paired directly with *jouissance* and physical connectedness to others. Finally, his death at the end is facilitated by Ruth, his one personal (albeit torn) connection, with romantic (and somewhat sexual) decoration. 1964 is similar to 1954, but without the seductive women, suicidal ideation, physical intimacy with Ruth, and death by Ruth's pills.

In 1971, there is no dog. Robert's connection to Lisa maintains healthy romantic and sexual jubilation for several scenes, yet still leads to his death. The use of borderline madness to address alienation is employed throughout the film, in Robert's excessive in-house cameras and humanizing of mannequins, including playing imaginary chess. As in 1954, when he first sees Lisa he wonders if he is losing his mind, but this time does not

ponder this sort of madness as his mind trying to lessen his alienation. There is no mentioned suicidality, and no association of death with transcending separateness.^{xi}

In 2007, Robert's companionship with his dog is ongoing – he has been with Sam from before the outbreak. In this sense, he has never been entirely alone in the way he was in 1971, 1964 and 1954. Yet his companionship with Sam is excessive and tinged with creeping madness. And of course, it is somewhat compensatory (Sam is a dog). Robert has to experience the death of Sam here as well, and meeting Anna leads to his own death, except for the neutralizing fact that he would have died sooner if she had not arrived to save him. She also “saves” Robert by helping him find God. Robert's use of mannequins to flirt with madness and ameliorate alienation is more pervasive here than in 1971. He arranges multiple mannequins up at the video store and talks to them, has imaginary social dynamics with them, has a pretend or not pretend crush on one of them, and even begs his crush to say hello. His blurring of fantasy and reality is severe enough that he has a crisis when he sees Fred out placed in the road. His murder-suicide rampage does not carry the narrative of transcending alienation, but it is connected to his being discovered (saved) by Anna.

His final, successful murder-suicide is prompted by a combination of dissociation, traumatic flashback, and religious experience. His flashback is of his daughter's voice, and his decision to die is prompted partly by his listening to *her*. His method of murder-suicide is running headfirst into the infected, carrying a live grenade which explodes when he collides with the breaking glass wall that separates him from the abject. The style of death is reminiscent of the way his wife and daughter died – through the collision (and presumably the explosion) of theirs with another helicopter that was spun out due to infected jumping on it. Thus metaphorically, Robert's style of death connects him with their death, as he joins them in death, prompted by his daughter's voice. And all of this takes place in dovetailing madness and religious awakening.

In all of the *I Am Legend* renditions, overcoming alienation is associated with madness and death, both of which involve exit from the symbolic order. Madness is explored, but it is not entirely satisfying to the protagonist (perhaps because he never loses his mind completely). To the extent that death is interpreted to mean unification with the infinite, it is a successful overcoming of alienation through masochistic symbiosis. The change that takes place chronologically between versions of the story is in the friendliness of Robert toward madness and God. In 1954 and 1964 he resists madness. In 1971 and 2007 he actively flirts with it. In 2007, he finally welcomes it, and it is tied in with his religious martyrdom. In all three of the earlier versions, he remains non-religious. In 2007, religious awakening is a key part of his overcoming alienation. This trend occurs alongside an increasingly honed us-against-them tribal frame (Morelock, 2018a). As the sense of separation between insiders and outsiders grows, so does the lure of the non-rational as salvation.

Conclusion

Over time, the following changes occur: a) the punishment narrative moves from margins to center, b) the punishment is identified more with humanity's scientific hubris, and c) madness and God become better for overcoming alienation. Framing the

punishment narrative in somewhat Frommian ([1941]1994) terms as sadomasochistic wish-fulfillment, the change indicates growing authoritarian desires. And in Sontagian (1989) terms, there is growing articulation of science as moral pollution. Regarding (c), it appears that irrationalism is given increasing credence as a path of escape from alienation, harkening to Kristeva's (1982) "rage against the symbolic."

Certainly other readings are also possible, but these trends seem especially pertinent in light of the tribal moral trends already identified in the story (Morelock, 2018a). Connecting the two sets of trends yields the following picture. Compassion declines as sadomasochistic punishment fantasies grow in intensity and become directed at science. Tribal identities solidify and symbiotic irrationalism is embraced as remedy for alienation. In light of the recent surge of American authoritarian populism, this picture is strikingly illustrative.

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ⁱ Tribalism and authoritarian populism converge on issues of Othering and in-group loyalty.

ⁱⁱ Clasen (2010) claims “loss of love and companionship, is the central concern of the novel [*I Am Legend*]” (319).

ⁱⁱⁱ This notion of primary, deep ambivalence at engulfment/obliteration is echoed in Kristeva’s theory of the Semiotic *chora*, and our relation to the *abject*. The theories are

somewhat commensurate in this sense, yet Kristeva's is a more rigorous theory, extending beyond phenomenology into psychoanalysis. Another advantage to Kristeva is her and Fromm's ideas overlap concerning the development of deep ambivalence during infancy in the individuation process.

^{iv} In Fromm, "authoritarian character" is synonymous with "sadomasochistic character."

^v Fromm's analysis also includes submission to large forces such as nature or fate.

^{vi} So as not to bother reinventing the wheel, I copy the plot synopses verbatim from Morelock (2018a).

^{vii} He is generally of a casual swagger, and prone to make snappy sarcastic remarks even in morbid circumstances. He also has some odd habits: putting cameras up in his apartment so he can more effectively talk to himself (which he explains to survivors later on), and talking to a mannequin that he has sat at a chess game, and whom he continues to egg on that it is his move.

^{viii} The sermon/trial quoted above is an example.

^{ix} Two other examples: in one scene he prods Sam to tell him if he is planning Robert a surprise birthday party. Robert promises to act surprised if Sam admits to it. In another scene he promises Sam that he will say hello to a specific mannequin in the video store the following day.

^x She uses some form of electricity to fend off the infected predator about to pounce on him as he lies injured in his overturned car.

^{xi} Also in 1971, Robert was not shown with any family prior to the apocalypse. In all other versions the death of his family remains a point of trauma for him.

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