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Hearth of Darkness:

The Familiar, the Familial, and the Zombie

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Comparative Literature

by

Sara Simcha Cohen

2013



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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hearth of Darkness:  
The Familiar, the Familial, and the Zombie

By

Sara Simcha Cohen

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Eleanor K. Kaufman, Chair

“Hearth of Darkness: The Familiar, the Familial, and the Zombie,” considers the influence Jewish history and culture have had on the production of American popular horror culture. A thorough examination of the zombie from its roots in the voodoo tradition, through its rise and fall in American film and comic book culture as well as in the Yiddish and Jewish American literary canon, this work considers the zombie in terms of its allegorical value, investigates the way in which the zombie has shaped and reoriented familiar spaces and institutions, and repositions the zombie from the apocalyptic end of humanity and of the world, to the beginning: the marker of redemption, the advocate of disorder, the witness to history, and the progenitor of a new family.

The project’s first chapter, “A Living Man, A Clay Man: Violence, the Zombie, and the

Messianic in H. Leivick's *The Golem*," includes the Yiddish literary and cultural figure of the golem under the rubric of the living dead in order to explore the themes of catastrophe and apocalypse, violence and love in H. Leivick's 1921 Yiddish dramatic poem *The Golem* and Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" (1921). Chapter Two, "The Legend of Disorder: The Living Dead, Disorder, and Autoimmunity in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*," then moves from a discussion of the golem to an examination of biopolitics, and analyzes the categories of order and disorder, immune and autoimmune, via the vampires in Matheson's 1954 novel.

The third chapter, "Muzzled Monsters: 1950s Comic Book Trends and the Zombie as Witness," examines and articulates a bifurcation in the historical production of comic books, considering the role of the zombie in relation to the act of witnessing as it occurs in the wake of the Holocaust, and engaging with genocide studies by way of popular culture. Finally, the fourth chapter, "Final Families: Sacrifice, Rebirth, and the Zombie as More than Mere Apocalypse," explores the link between the zombie genre and feminist film theory, positioning the zombie as a model for understanding the institution of family.

The zombie's precarious position on the border between culture and representation allows for the possibility of a more malleable discursive boundary: one that includes both folkloric figures, like the golem, and historical figures, like the victims of the Holocaust. As it repositions the living dead from the apocalyptic to the messianic, my work thus offers a new position on the interdisciplinary relationship between Jewish culture and popular culture.

The dissertation of Sara Simcha Cohen is approved.

Gil Hochberg

Saree Makdisi

Warren Montag

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University of California, Los Angeles

2013

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Many thanks to my dissertation committee: to Sianne Ngai, for offering me invaluable feedback and a true sense of the field I was entering; to Warren Montag, for seeing in me possibilities I couldn't and for pushing me to challenge myself and my past; to Saree Makdisi for giving perspective and for leading seminars that continue to shape my own thinking; to Gil Hochberg, for understanding more than most the delicate line I constantly walk. To my chair, advisor, and mentor, Eleanor Kaufman, thank you for your tireless support, for reading multiple drafts in various stages with such a thoughtful and attentive eye, for inspiring me early on with your seminars, for working with me on a handful of projects – some contemporary, some Medieval, some English, some Yiddish – and for devoting so much of your time and your energy to me and to this project.

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This is a project about family. And one that owes a great deal to my family: to Wilder and Barb who have shared in my highs and lows and have always been honest and always been real; to Chris and Amanda and Michael for opening your home and your hearts to me; to Paul, Cristin, Michaela, and Abby who showed me what family could be; and to Bob and Kathy, without whom I might never have touched a gremlin.

Finally, to Jared: my friend, my rock, and above all, my Monster.

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“**Golems and Zombies and Heroes, Oh My! The Messianic Zombie in H. Leivick’s *The Golem***” Western Jewish Studies Association Conference, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, April 6-8, 2013



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## INTRODUCTION

First printed in 1722, Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* provides a detailed account of the Great Plague of 1665 and its impact on the city of London, as narrated by Defoe's fictional narrator, H.F. As an urtext, *Journal of the Plague Year* presages quite remarkably many of the tropes present in today's post-apocalyptic fiction. Defoe writes at length about measures taken to contain and quarantine the plague: about how "the House wherein [the infected] inhabiteth, shall be shut up" (Defoe 35), about the watchmen who were appointed to barricade and guard houses visited by disease, about the infected homes being marked with a red cross. He gives a frighteningly prescient account of germs and mosquitos later taken up in such works as Richard Matheson's post-apocalyptic novel *I Am Legend* (1954): "talk of infection being carried on by the Air only, by carrying with it vast Numbers of Insects, and invisible Creatures, who enter into the Body with the Breath" (Defoe 65). Defoe describes in detail the emptiness of an infected London, the "desolate Place the City was at that Time" (Defoe 87), descriptions that are adopted again and again in contemporary zombie filmic and literary depictions, including *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *Day of the Dead* (1985), and *28 Days Later* (2002). He refers to victims of the plague as "the infected" and occasionally as "creatures," renaming them, reidentifying them, in order to create distinctions between the human population and the infected, or monstrous, population. And like today's zombie films, the lines between the living and the dead are blurred in Defoe's account, as the living throw themselves in with the dead: "People that were Infected, and near their End, and delirious also, would run to those Pits wrapt in Blankets, or Rugs, and throw themselves in, and as they said, bury themselves" (Defoe 53). Defoe's descriptions of infection and the infected, of quarantine and the need to distinguish the

living from the dead, prefigure Michel Foucault's descriptions of a plague-infested city in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault describes in unrelenting detail the process of quarantine and purification used to create order. For Foucault, as for Defoe, the modern act of discipline derives from the fear of the uncontained.

As a genre, horror takes pride in its ability to frighten viewers and readers in its portrayal of ever bigger and scarier monsters, capitalizing on our fear of the unknown (often by not showing us the very source of our fears, as in *Jaws* [1975] or *The Blair Witch Project* [1999]). As viewers, we take comfort in the notion that the evil we *know* is surmountable. And yet when it comes to the zombie genre, a subgenre of the horror genre, the evil we know is precisely the evil used to frighten us. The institutions, values and ideologies we have become so familiar with – the space of the home, the comfort of the family – are transformed into vicious, damaging forces and, in the face of the zombie, are destroyed and reborn. The major tropes of the post-apocalypse in zombie film and fiction – containment, transmission, the fear of contagion, desolation, the intermingling of life and death – can all be traced to the centuries-old narrative of the Plague. For if the modern world is characterized by its unwavering need to control and discipline the “abnormal,” if the Foucauldian modern act of discipline derives from the fear of the uncontained, “of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder” (*Discipline and Punish* 198), the zombie represents the very abnormal that refuses to be disciplined.

The figure of the zombie originated in Haitian folklore as an integral element of the island's religious beliefs: a hybrid of African animism and Roman Catholicism known as “voodoo.” According to Haitian legend, a sorcerer would bring about a victim's death through a magic potion, capture the victim's soul, and then reanimate the corpse as a soulless slave. In

1887, amateur anthropologist Lafcadio Hearn traveled to the island of Martinique to study its local customs and folklore, and encountered the legend of the *corps cadavers*, or “walking dead.” Hearn’s resulting article for *Harper’s Magazine*, entitled “The Country of the Comers-Back,” introduced the zombie to the English-speaking world. However, the zombie was not widely popularized in the United States until William Buehler Seabrook, an explorer and journalist from Westminster, Maryland, arrived in Haiti to research superstitions in voodoo culture. Seabrook’s travelogue, *The Magic Island* (1929), details his explorations in Haiti, including his encounter with a Haitian farmer, Polynice, who allegedly secured Seabrook’s first encounter with zombie slaves. *The Magic Island*’s popularity both inspired the first American zombie film, *White Zombie* (1932), which exposed voodoo zombies to American cinemagoers, and spawned an important moment in zombie history: the shift from cultural and folkloric belief to pop-cultural representation. As it lumbers across national, cultural, artistic, and intellectual borders, the zombie’s slippery position between the highbrow and the popular and its historical fluidity across the boundary from cultural figure to filmic illustration have since catapulted it to the heights of popularity in both the critical domain<sup>1</sup> and the popular cultural domain.

The evolution of the modern, post-voodoo zombie began with Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel *I Am Legend*, which gave rise to several film versions, including *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *The Omega Man* (1971), and *I Am Legend* (2007). The creatures in Matheson’s novel are technically vampires, but they nevertheless inspired several important zombie tropes: contagion and the fear of the viral monstrous Other, the anxiety that accompanies being contained within a small space in a society that has been overrun by what was once a minority population, a quickly dwindling human population, and a focus on a series of strict rules and traditions associated with

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, David Chalmers’ work on zombies in philosophy, or the recent May/June 2013 issue of *Philosophy Now*, which was dedicated entirely to the zombie.

survival. I will consider *I Am Legend* in this project as a text that bridges the “versus” in the oft-decried “zombies versus vampires” debate, a text that has been worked, reworked, honored, and plagiarized; the renowned “Godfather of all Zombies,” George A. Romero, has been quoted as admitting that *Night of the Living Dead* was an idea he “basically had ripped off from a Richard Matheson novel called *I Am Legend*” (Romero).

The modern zombie only fully emerged in film form in 1968 with George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, which popularized the figure of the zombie in American film culture by adapting the voodoo zombie into a cannibalistic plague. Romero transformed the Afro-Caribbean otherness of the voodoo zombie into a domestic political allegory in his eerie post-apocalyptic setup and created what is still considered a subversive critique of the Vietnam-era United States. Romero then went on to make *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009), each of which sets its protagonists in slightly different locations (a shopping mall, an army base, an island), and expands on the repercussions of the zombie plague.

Romero’s films inspired a wave of zombie movies in Italy in the 1970s and 80s, and ultimately several reimaginings of the zombie in the American popular culture domain as well. In 1979, Italian director Lucio Fulci released *Zombi 2*, an unofficial sequel to Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*, which was distributed throughout Europe under the title *Zombi*. By the 1980s, the Italian film industry had developed a reputation for shamelessly and cheaply remaking other countries’ films. Italian zombie movies followed a simplistic formula: a man-made disaster in a Third World locale causes a violent and bloody zombie revolution and the threat of a global apocalypse. Fulci’s *Zombi 2* triggered a tremendous outpouring of Italian zombie movies in this

period, including two 1980 films: Umberto Lenzi's *Nightmare City (Incubo sulla città contaminata)*, and Bruno Mattei's *Hell of the Living Dead (Virus - l'inferno dei morti viventi)*.

In 1985, cinematic zombies underwent another transformation: from tottering, moaning ghouls to speaking creatures with an insatiable craving for brains. Dan O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) was an early zombie comedy ("zom com"), which follows a group of teenage punks fleeing a horde of brain-hungry zombies. An important year in the zombie film calendar, 1985 also marked the opening of Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator*, a science fiction horror comedy based on the H. P. Lovecraft story "Herbert West – Reanimator." *The Return of the Living Dead* has moreover served as the inspiration for a number of zombie comedies, including *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and the recent *Zombieland* (2009) and *Warm Bodies* (2013), all of which appropriate the post-apocalyptic setting of the zombie plague, while engaging the subject matter humorously, deftly walking the line between horror and comedy.

In the early 2000s, zombies experienced a cinematic comeback brought on by Paul W. S. Anderson's 2002 film version of *Resident Evil*. Originally a survival horror videogame also known as *Biohazard*, *Resident Evil* was first released in 1996 by Capcom for the Playstation. Borrowing elements from the video game, Anderson created a film that follows amnesiac heroine Alice and a group of commandos attempting to contain the outbreak of the "T-Virus" at a secret underground facility. Clearly influenced by Romero's take on zombies as "infectious," *Resident Evil*, which has since been followed by four sequels (*Resident Evil: Apocalypse* [2004], *Resident Evil: Extinction* [2007], *Resident Evil: Afterlife* [2010], and *Resident Evil: Retribution* [2012]), literalizes the trope of infection and transmission. This concretization of Romero's figurative conceit continued with Danny Boyle's 2002 British zombie film *28 Days Later*, in which the breakdown of society is precipitated by the accidental release of the "rage" virus, and

the zombie is updated as fast-moving and more physically threatening than merely uncanny. Boyle refers to his creatures as “the infected,” and insists they are the products of a virus and not part of the illustrious zombie lineage. Zack Snyder’s 2004 remake of Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* then solidified the place of the fast-moving zombie in horror cinema.

The 2000s also saw a resurgence of zombie comic books and fiction, including *The Walking Dead*, a monthly black-and-white American comic book series published by Image Comics beginning in 2003. Created by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore, *The Walking Dead* follows a group of people attempting to survive in a post-apocalyptic zombie universe. In 2010, director Frank Darabont adapted the comic book for television, and AMC Network began to air episodes of *The Walking Dead*. The pilot garnered 5.3 million viewers, and the show became the most watched basic cable series in its demographic. Moreover, in 2007, Max Brooks, son of director Mel Brooks, published *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, a faux oral history told by several survivors of an imagined zombie apocalypse. Brooks prefaced *World War Z* with *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003), which makes an attempt to think through the many contingencies attendant in an actual zombie plague. In 2009, Seth Grahame-Smith expanded the zombie fiction genre by writing *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, a novel that incorporates the entirety of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* with elements of modern zombie fiction. Grahame-Smith’s zombie mash-up laid the groundwork for a series of such fictional combinations.

Recently, the zombie’s popularity has extended its reach beyond any particular contained medium. The current decade has seen zombies in comic books, like *The Walking Dead*, on television, in multi-million dollar films, like *World War Z* (2013), in both comedic films (*Warm Bodies*) and serious films (*World War Z*). The zombie appears persistently on the literary scene,

in David Wellington's *Monster Island* series, for example, and in film and television. It draws on its history in Haitian voodoo culture, it culls from Romero's precedent and from its portrayal as a viral transmission. It is sometimes slow moving and often fast moving and has become an omnipresent part of popular culture.

And the zombie has become the vogue not only in the popular cultural domain, but moreover in the critical domain. Mark McGurl, for example, reads the zombie as an anti-character compared to its fully fleshed-out counterpart, the vampire:

The brightest star in that firmament has always been the vampire, with his elegantly alarming fangs and aristocratic lineage, and a philosophically instructive vampire vs. zombie class war is being conducted before our eyes today. Vampires are smart, agile, glamorous. Even when presented as a sort of minority community... they are also highly individualized, even eccentric, with identities held intact across centuries. Not so the plodding zombie, to whom we generally feel superior. Compared to vampires, zombies are dull, dim-witted, déclassé – the monster lumpenproletariat. Forever teetering on the brink of ridiculousness, they convert the vampire's relatively dignified desire to drink blood into an unrestrained instinct to devour flesh or, in an interesting recent radiation on the original, brains. (McGurl 3)

While the vampire is furnished with a distinct personality and voice, the zombie is often (though not always!) monotonous: in its one-note moan, its uneven totter, its base, ghoulish instincts and soporific rotting flesh. McGurl then suggests that it is the very flatness of the zombie, its lack of glamor, that yields its allegorical potential: "Zombies are anti-characters, but they do make for good allegories, their very flatness propelling us into speculation about what they might mean



‘on another level’” (McGurl 4). The zombie’s flatness, its role as an anti-character, serves as a cipher upon which to project various abstractions: zombies have been wielded as allegories for everything from anxieties over consumer culture (*Dawn of the Dead* [1978]), which is set in a shopping mall) to the fear of nuclear disaster (*The Crazies* [1973], which features a town infected by the effects of a nuclear weapon). And although the zombie has made its way between culture and popular culture, between historical reality and filmic representation, it is always located in the milieu of an apocalyptic genre, perpetually associated with the catastrophic end of the world and the erasure of humanity. Entitled “Hearth of Darkness: The Familiar, the Familial, and the Zombie,” my dissertation attempts to relocate the zombie from its solid position in this apocalyptic milieu, offering instead a redemptive reading of the living dead.

Not merely an American horror icon, the zombie moreover has a well-documented (albeit contentious) history in the field of Jewish literary and political studies; in fact, this project’s examination of the relationship between the popular American zombie and the Jewish cultural and literary zombie reveals the integrality of the Jewish element in our understanding of the American popular zombie. The relationship between the Jew and the figure of the living dead can be traced as far back as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, to the tale of the *Ahasuerus*, or the eternal wandering Jew, a figure from medieval Christian folklore. The original legend, which draws on the Biblical story of Cain, depicts a Jew who taunted Jesus on the way to the Crucifixion and was cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming. The exact nature of the wanderer’s indiscretion, as well as aspects of his character, vary in different versions of the tale and the tale itself has been adapted and reimagined over time, appearing in English, German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Russian, and Romanian traditions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the link between the Jew and the living dead is often associated with the issue of Jewish citizenship; in large part due to the

“Jewish Question,” or the concerns and resolutions surrounding the historic civil, legal and national status of minority Ashkenazi Jews, particularly in Europe, Jews have long been depicted as uncanny, as occupying the space between life and death. As Jews were represented as spectral, as lacking a national home, they were perceived as aliens wandering into others’ homes, haunting them and rendering them *unheimliche*. For example, in his 1838 *Plan of a New Ahasverus*, Karl Gutzkow (a leader of the Young Germany movement) uses the figure of the *Ahasuerus* to illustrate the problem facing Jewish redemption: “Ahasverus is the tragic consequence of Jewish hopes... only Ahasverus stays on, a living corpse, a dead man who has not yet died” (Gutzkow, 199). Gutzkow reappropriates the medieval figure of the *Ahasuerus* to describe the Jewish race as a parasitic, ghostly race that had outlived its usefulness and could neither die nor be assimilated into the new German nation. In his 1882 essay “Auto-Emancipation,” early Zionist thinker Leo Pinsker, adopts a similar image in service of a very different set of writings on Jewish emancipation: “The world saw in this people the uncanny form of one of the dead walking among the living. The ghostlike apparition of a living corpse” (Pinsker 163). In his argument for the need for a Jewish State, Pinsker likens anti-Semitism to a fear of ghosts, and the Jew to the living dead. The image of the Jewish people as a “living corpse” has subsequently pervaded Jewish literature, both in its Yiddish context and in its American context.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the trope of the uncanny Jew, or the Jewish zombie, was intensified after the Holocaust when images of the *muselmann*, the Nazi concentration camp inmate suffering from a combination of starvation and exhaustion, generally unresponsive, and occupying the

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer’s *Enemies, A Love Story* (1966), for example (a text I discuss as part of this project), depicts a Holocaust survivor as a living dead figure. Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* (1989) famously features a ghost. And E.M. Broner’s *Ghost Stories*, a playful collection, features several living dead figures in various forms.

space between life and death, saturated the media outlets. The *muselmann*'s inability to speak or walk upright, his exclusion from his surroundings, suggest he has been so divested of his humanity he blurs the boundary between living and dead, serving as a tragic model of the living dead. Much of the artwork from the Holocaust illustrates variations on the theme of living death, underscoring the relationship between Jewishness and the zombie. Both Waldemar Nowakowski<sup>3</sup> and Stefan Horszki,<sup>4</sup> among many other Holocaust-era artists, painted *muselmänner* to resemble skeletons, or other instantiations of the living dead. Nowakowski's "The Jew's Last Road" is a heartbreaking watercolor of a sunset with red clouds, under which a row of skeletal *muselmänner* files out of the barracks and is counted by a uniformed guard. Horszki's, "Carrying Away the Dead" (1944) features a similar row of marching *muselmänner* with shaved heads, wearing stripes, loading a dead prisoner into an open coffin, obscuring the boundary between the living buriers and the dead being buried.

In order to explore the relationship between Jewish literature and American popular culture, "Hearth of Darkness's" first chapter, "A Living Man, A Clay Man: Violence, the Zombie, and the Messianic in H. Leivick's *The Golem*," considers the zombie's ties to Jewish culture and folklore by including the Yiddish literary and cultural figure of the golem under the rubric of the living dead in order to explore the themes of catastrophe and apocalypse in H. Leivick's 1921 Yiddish dramatic poem *The Golem*. This chapter examines violence and its relation to the messianic via Walter Benjamin's 1921 essay "Critique of Violence." Published the same year as Leivick's dramatic poem, Benjamin's critique rewrites the discussion of law and

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<sup>3</sup> Waldemar Nowakowski was born in Bialogrodek, Ukraine in 1917 and was arrested in 1939 for anti-Nazi activities. He was deported to Auschwitz in July 1940, and during his four years in concentration camps, he completed nearly 300 watercolors on cardboard. He was liberated on May 3, 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Horszki was a Polish painter, born in 1912. He was sent to Sachsenhausen in 1940. In 1947, he published a book with sixteen paintings of life in the camp. It remains unclear whether these paintings were created before or after his liberation.

justice as one of messianism and divine law, positing that true justice consists of bloodless violence that founds revelation (a revelation based not on apocalyptic futurity but rather on Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit*, or "now-time"). Leivick's play noticeably challenges Benjamin's categories in its depiction of a world in which the innately violent golem is the only appropriate messiah for its time, but in which the very dimension of violence is rewritten as one of love. My reading of this underappreciated Yiddish text positions the golem in the context of apocalyptic and messianic writing, probes the relation between Leivick's depiction of the golem and contemporary representations of the zombie, and, in questioning the extent of the relationship between violence and the messianic, considers the influence of Jewish culture in establishing the canons of American popular horror culture.

At its core, "Hearth of Darkness" is interested in the zombie's role with respect to the apocalypse, both in its literary instantiations and its cultural resonances. Chapter Two, "The Legend of Disorder: The Zombie and Autoimmunity in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*," therefore moves from a discussion of the folkloric golem to an examination of biopolitics and the question of life, and analyzes the conjunction of the apocalypse and the living dead in Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend*. Through my reading of the relationship between plague and containment, and via the work of Michel Foucault, I address the way zombie discourse reveals the implicitly violent order in the zombie's disorderly infection. Matheson's living dead underscore the relationship between the plague and the order it induces as well as the self-negating violence inherent in that order. As they extend the lineage from vampire to zombie, the living dead draw attention to the underlying theme of contagion that runs throughout the zombie narrative; however, I argue, by way of the zombie, that Jacques Derrida's account of unknowable, incalculable autoimmunity is a preferable paradigm to Roberto Esposito's account of immunity.

And as the zombie compels its human victims into an autoimmune paradigm, the very state of living dead disorder emerges as a positive state as opposed to Esposito's more negative account.

Having established the zombie's position as salvific and having rescripted the implications of violence in the first and second chapters, The third chapter, "Muzzled Monsters: 1950s Comic Book Trends and the Zombie as Witness," returns to the zombie's connection to Jewish culture and history and considers the relationship between Jewish history and the production of American comic books, examining and articulating a bifurcation in the historical production of comic books: horror comics, which are graphic and grisly and were ultimately censored in the 1950s, and superhero comics, which feature heroes with superpowers and have grown vastly in popularity. The critical response to the dual trends of comic books implies a discomfiting relationship to the "myth of silence," or the notion that post-war American Jews refused to discuss the Holocaust out of a desire for assimilation. In reading these comic book trends, I consider the roles of both the zombie and the superhero in relation to the act of witnessing as it occurs in the wake of the Holocaust, engaging with Holocaust studies by way of popular culture. In assessing the Holocaust's *muselmann* as an instantiation of the "uncanny Jew," I question whether, as Giorgio Agamben argues, a witness to historical trauma must be voiceless, or if perhaps the zombie might provide a more authentic testimony to history; as they unsettle the living around them, the living dead account honestly for both life and death.

As a figure resonant in both Jewish and American traditions, and one whose essence is predicated on the relationship between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between life and death, the zombie throws into sharp relief theoretical concerns with the familiar – how to define it, how to contain it, what its relationship is to the strange – and their convergence with issues of the familial. A core element of zombie fiction is its concern with the familial. From the earliest

zombie film, *White Zombie* (1932), the zombie genre constructs and deconstructs families; Murder Legendre (Béla Lugosi), *White Zombie*'s villain, zombifies the film's protagonist, Madeline (Madge Bellamy), who is torn from her husband on their wedding night in order to be united with another man, restructuring the family with a female voodoo zombie at its core. This trope of familial restructuring continues throughout the zombie genre, as zombies are reinterpreted from their traditional voodoo roots to infectious flesh-eating ghouls, whose very presence requires the quickly dwindling human population to relocate, restructure, and reorient its familial dynamics.

The final chapter, "Final Families: Sacrifice, Rebirth, and the Zombie as More than Mere Apocalypse," therefore considers the possibility of the zombie not only as a witness to the past, but moreover as a hope for the future in its role as restructuring the familial. By exploring the link between the zombie genre and feminist film theory, this chapter addresses the ways the zombie film genre complicates Carol Clover's theory of the Final Girl, the masculinized female character who uses phallic weapons, adopts masculine names and attitudes, and is fluid across gender lines, strengthening the role of the mother while allowing for male audience identification. Zombie narratives, in contrast, adopt a father figure, who is sacrificed in order to make way for a Final Family that can confront post-apocalyptic reality, redefining the notion of family. The zombie film produces a "Final Family," a hapless collection of survivors who band together as a family in order to survive. By reading zombie films from the 1970s and 1980s, including George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and Boris Sagal's *The Omega Man*, this chapter addresses the role of the zombie within the larger context of horror films, considers the impact the restructuring of the Final Girl has on our conceptions of horror, of the family, and of the familiar, and positions the zombie as a model for understanding the very institution of family.

In pairing classic Yiddish literature with the modern zombie film, my dissertation offers a new position in the discussion of biopolitics, of canon formation, and of posthumanism by reframing the zombie as a hopeful metonym. As it negotiates the influence Jewish culture has had on the production of American popular culture, “Hearth of Darkness” suggests that the zombie bears far more significance than its rotting, shuffling popular cultural representation admits, and bids us to consider repositioning the living dead from the apocalyptic to the messianic. “Hearth of Darkness” considers a variety of different categories of the living dead, drawn from Jewish folklore, American popular culture, and Jewish history. As a figure that itself migrates across both geographic and cultural borders, the zombie welcomes its comparison to golems, to vampires, to *muselmänner*, and it is precisely these points of comparison that enable us to reposition the zombie as hopeful.

In his essay “The Parergon” (from *The Truth in Painting*), Jacques Derrida takes up Immanuel Kant’s Third Critique, and specifically the notion of the *parergon*, an image that helps elucidate the position of the zombie. According to Kant, because reason is conscious of its own impotence to fulfill its moral need, it resorts to the *parerga*, or “those things which do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements, but only externally as complements” (Kant 61). Derrida’s essay provides pictured examples, ostensibly to elucidate Kant’s obliqueness and define the *parergon*. However, Derrida’s examples ultimately deconstructively muddy Kant further; the more Derrida attempts to reveal the *parergon*, the less he is able to control its parameters: “Where does the frame take place. Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between the two limits” (“Parergon” 63). Derrida presents his questions as punctuated statements, suggesting in his very choice of punctuation a kind of play between the open-ended

question and the period-ed statement. According to Derrida, the *parergon* “comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done, the fact, the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board. It is first of all the on (the) bo(a)rd(er)” (“Parergon” 54). Both a board – or metonymically the deck of a vessel constructed of planks (the thing itself) – and a border – or the limit or extremity of the thing – the *parergon* frames the *ergon* (the work), simultaneously delimiting the inside from the outside while allowing for leakage from inside to outside and outside to inside. Derrida describes the *parergon* as “a theory which would run along as if on wheels” (“Parergon” 52), a theory which cannot be pinned down, which defies clear categorization. Derrida defines the *parergon* as the ornament, the *hors-d’oeuvre*, the clothes on a statue, but then admits, “*parergon* also means the exceptional, the strange, the extraordinary” (“Parergon” 58). The *parergon* defies easy definition. The frame, because it is constructed, is fragile, is accidental. Its very accidentality is its *parergonality*. The *parergon*, as the frame on the painting, the clothing on the statue, ought to clearly mark the division between inside and outside; however, its very nature complicates the space of the border by having no clear beginning or end: “This delimitation of the center and the integrity of the representation, of its inside and its outside, might already seem strange. One wonders, too, where to have clothing commence. Where does a *parergon* begin and end” (“Parergon” 57). Without the *parergon*, the *ergon* is no longer an *ergon*. As it fades into the general background, and then into the work itself, the *parergon* simultaneously defines the work and the background, while always allowing for a certain flux between the two.

As interstitial figures, zombies, like the *parergon*, define the spaces around them. Zombie



films are littered with terms like “containment” and “perimeter” and “breach” and use the liminal zombies to negotiate the significance of particular spaces. George A. Romero’s *The Crazies* (1973) is a zombie film that exemplifies the relationship between the zombie and the physical spaces attempting to contain it. Set in Evans City, PA, *The Crazies* features dual plotlines that run alongside one another, tracing the responses of both a civilian community and a military community to the outbreak of “Trixie,” a biological weapon that induces violent insanity. Over time, however, the dual plotlines blur together; the military seeps into the civilian community and civilians are able to breach the military boundaries. Early in the film, Major Ryder (Harry Spillman) explains, “we’ve quarantined the area, we’re sealing off the town” and Colonel Peckem (Lloyd Hollar) confirms the need to “set up some kind of a perimeter.” The victims of the viral outbreak, or “crazies,” have created a need for quarantine and perimeter, for a clearly defined inside and outside. And by the end of the film, Peckem confirms that all 3613 citizens of Evans City have been accounted for, including “2100 survivors, if you want to call them survivors.” The civilian community has been contained within a strict perimeter, numbered, tested, limited, and labeled. But the lines grow less clear as we discover that several of the civilian protagonists, including Clank (Harold Wayne Jones) and David (Will McMillan) are ex-military (“the Army ain’t nobody’s friend, man. We know, we’ve been in”) and as the military personnel, including Dr. Elliot Watts (Richard France) are not immune to the effects of the virus and find themselves contained, quarantined, and executed along with the civilians of Evans City. The “inside” here is quickly transformed from a locus of safety to a place of sexual transgression, enclosure, and murder, and the zombies, function *parergonally*, simultaneously demarking inside from outside and puncturing the divide between the two spaces, blurring military and civilian, living and dead, infected and uninfected.

Throughout its exploration of the relationship between Jewish studies and cultural studies, “Hearth of Darkness” considers the role of physical space, as that space is filled or emptied by the living dead. Leivick’s golem cannot be contained by a particular space and tries to forcibly breach the walls around him. Matheson’s Neville barricades himself in the confined space of his home to escape the vampires. Zombie films engage the motif of inside and outside spaces to capture the relationship between the living and the living dead. Romero’s *The Crazies* was remade in 2010, directed by Breck Eisner, and set in Ogden Marsh, IA, population 1200. The remake sacrifices the perspective of the military, replacing it with a recurring satellite screen that locks in on a location and proposes a course of action. In this version of the film, we follow a dwindling group of humans, and finally, a nuclear family – father (David, played by Timothy Olyphant), mother (Judy, played by Radha Mitchell), and an unborn child. The core family unit manages to maneuver past the watchful eye of the military and evade the hordes of infected “crazies.” Fending off the infected, they flee Ogden Marsh just as it is destroyed in a nuclear explosion designed to wipe out the virus. Throughout the film, Cedar Rapids, the nearest big city has been the source of hope for the couple, who tell each other “everything is going to be okay” in Cedar Rapids. But as they enter Cedar Rapids, population 126,326, a view from the military satellite highlights the couple, then Cedar Rapids, and spews out the words, “initiate containment protocol.” Survival of the nuclear family here entails the destruction of hundreds of thousands. Like the original film, the 2010 remake uses terminology like “quarantine,” “containment,” and “perimeter,” to delineate inside and outside and separate the two. And like the original film, the inside quickly veers from its perception as the safe, contained womb space, and becomes a threatening, imprisoning space that continually encroaches on the outside, enlarging the

biohazardous wound (Ogden Marsh to Cedar Rapids, 1200 to 120,000) by poking through the scab, and allowing a family of survivors to seep from town to town.

Survival in these films entails a puncturing of the border between outside and inside, through which the real, the authentic, and the superficial coincide to produce an anti-toxin with great restorative potential. The interstice is the space the zombie inhabits: for Leivick it is the space between Jew and gentile, for Matheson it is the space between a past fantasy and present reality, for Romero it is the space between humanity and monstrosity. The precise allocation of limits differs from text to text, but the liminality of the space remains. The zombie's significance is its viral refusal to be contained; it defies barricade, quarantine, disinfection, delimitation, labeling, classification, and definition.

Zombie literature moreover speaks to the larger scheme of post-apocalyptic literature, drawing popular culture into the literary realm and raising issues of canonicity. Writers like Cormac McCarthy, Don DeLillo, and Colson Whitehead, alongside other postmodern American writers, write about a post-9/11 world, a world in which things seem like they are never going to right themselves again. McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Road*, for example, follows an unnamed father and son as they journey through a post-apocalyptic landscape and encounter roving bands of cannibals. In addition to the post-apocalyptic trope and the references to cannibalism, McCarthy's characters repeatedly reassure each other that they "carry the fire," a motif introduced into the zombie tradition by George A. Romero to symbolize the way in which humans represent enlightened civilization; Romero's zombies fear fire and the human population is able to use fire to deter the zombies.<sup>5</sup> *The Road* is unapologetically bleak, and by its close, the

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<sup>5</sup> In *Night of the Living Dead*, for example, Ben lights a chair on fire at the entrance to the farmhouse in order to keep the zombies away. Later in the film, the characters construct homemade Molotov cocktails that they use to intimidate the zombies in an effort to escape. In *Land of the Dead*, fire is updated to fireworks, which the human population uses to distract the zombies.

father has died and though the son is discovered by a man and his family, who assure the boy that they too are “carrying the fire,” the novel is clear that this devastated reality is “a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again” (McCarthy 287). But I will argue that, by its inclusion in the larger scope of post-apocalyptic literature, the zombie can reconstitute the literary landscape: from apocalyptic to messianic, from unspeakably bleak to possibly hopeful.

The zombie is in fact an emblem of hope, an easily overlooked characterization amid the destruction and chaos of the apocalypse. What appears to be apocalyptic disorder in Matheson’s *I Am Legend* is in fact the solution to the violence of order. What appears to be living dead violence in the case of Leivick’s *Der Goylem* is in fact an act of love. Zombies, like the *muselmänner*, bear witness to a fraught past, to a history, to a Holocaust. And zombies in twentieth century film and fiction forcibly destroy broken institutions to allow for rebirth. The messianic, the autoimmune, the witness, and the familial hope: the zombie is not the cause of the apocalypse, but rather the solution to the apocalypse.

It is easy to brush the zombie off as scary, as a signifier of the end of the world, of apocalypse, of devastation, of the end of humanity. It is easy to be afraid of zombies, terrified of the possibility of the dead returned to life, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, with an appetite for human flesh. The Haitians were terribly afraid of the possibility of becoming zombies. Moviegoers in 1968 had never seen anything as terrifying as Romero’s ghouls and the modern zombie has made us afraid of being consumed by the living dead. Even cellphones now have apps that make games out of being chased by zombies in a makeshift cardio apocalypse.

But to my mind, zombies are as much the beginning as they are the end of anything. Set eight years after a zombie plague, Jonathan Levine’s *Warm Bodies* (2013) exemplifies the hopeful possibility of the zombie, and the inkling that perhaps, in this era, the zombie might be

more than just the bearer of apocalypse. The film features R (Nicholas Hoult), a self-conscious zombie who lives in a grounded airplane, and Julie (Teresa Palmer), a human girl who lives with her militaristic father in the walled-off city, a member of a group of young people sent outside the wall to gather resources, “a critical part of what stands between [humanity] and extinction.” When R and Julie meet, R is eating Julie’s boyfriend’s brains, but is instantly smitten with her. He takes her back to his airplane. Over the course of time, R falls more deeply in love with Julie and, simultaneously, grows more and more human until both he and Julie are forced to admit, “the dead are coming back to life. They’re changing.”

There are different breeds of dead here. The living dead, or “corpses,” shuffle through the deserted streets, eating human brains in order to “feel human again.” The “bonies,” or “skeletons,” are more aggressive zombies that have “just give[n] up, I guess... los[t] all hope.” The key difference between the corpses and the bonies is that the corpses are the living dead who have the potential to “com[e] back to life.” Already living [dead], they are the potential living living dead. Julie organizes the distinctions around the notion of “trying.” She tells R, “It must be hard, being stuck in there. You know, I can see you trying. That’s what people do, you know, we try to be better. Sometimes we kind of suck at it, but I look at you and you try so much harder than any human in my city. You’re a good person, R.” What distinguishes R and the other zombies from the bonies is that the bonies have given up trying, “too far gone to change.” Like the *muselmann*, who has similarly given up trying, who, in Wiesel’s description of his own father as a *muselmann*, is an exhausted victim who has resigned himself to “Death that he had already chosen” (Wiesel 105), the bonies eventually “just waste... away” while the zombies “kind of learn... how to live again.”

*Warm Bodies* suggests that zombies are necessary. A plague, a destruction of the core nuclear family, of the familiar institutions, the erection of a wall, of unclear distinctions between the living and the dead: all are necessary for amending a broken world. By exploring the positive value of the zombie, “Hearth of Darkness” investigates the way in which the zombie has shaped and reoriented familiar spaces and institutions, redefining the terms of the zombie and positioning it not at the end of humanity and of the world, but at the beginning: as the marker of redemption, the advocate of disorder, the witness to history, and the progenitor of a new family.

Zombies ask us to reach just past the point of familiarity. Maybe zombies are scary. But as R confesses, “every great thing starts out a little scary, doesn’t it?” And so the question of why zombies matter is really this: the abnormal continues to generate a cataclysmic fear, an apocalyptic fear, a fear of the bits and pieces that cannot (or will not) be normalized and regulated, and the zombie offers a means by which to untangle our understanding of terms like “familiar” and “familial” as these terms and their accompanying concerns and consequences germinate, diverge, and extend their reach. The zombie is not only the answer to apocalypse; it is the signifier of a new beginning.

## CHAPTER I

### **A Living Man, A Clay Man: Violence, the Zombie, and the Messianic in H. Leivick's *The Golem***

The *Oxford English Dictionary* first recorded the term “zombie” in 1819, tracing its etymology to the Creole word “*zonbi*,” a person who is believed to have died and been reanimated divested of free will. The zombie thus appears to have clearly defined parameters: associated both with a lack of free will and with reanimation. However, the clearer the parameters appear, the less they account for the variety implicit in narratives about, discourses on, and illustrations of the zombie: dozens of lists and blogs and discussions, books, chronicles, and resources include analyses of such films as *The Crazies* (1973) and *28 Days Later* (2002), neither of which includes actual reanimation, and a myriad of films depict zombies with free will, including *Day of the Dead*'s (1985) “Bub,” or *American Zombie*'s (2007) community of Angeleno zombies. And if the rubric of the zombie genre expands to include films, novels, and critical essays about infectious viruses and “the infected,” the “crazies,” and the “contagious,” the fundamental element that appears to underlie this now quite diffuse collection is precisely the refusal of the “zombie” to be contained, its immunity to unequivocal definition. This figure – not quite living and not quite dead, and often quite literally the source of a contagious plague that threatens to beget apocalypse – defies categorization.

In its teeming contagion, in its lack of a categorical, containable boundary, the zombie not only defies definition, but moreover, easily allows for inclusion in its genre of other figures that – like it – refuse to be contained. The golem, for example, is typically classified as a cyborg, android, or automaton,<sup>6</sup> but like the zombie, evades the precision of definitive characterization;

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<sup>6</sup> The “cyborg theory” was defined by Donna Haraway in her 1985 article “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” Inspired by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, this

the golem is both domestic servant and resistance fighter,<sup>7</sup> simultaneously protector and threat, emblematic of both the act of creation and the act of destruction,<sup>8</sup> and it is the golem's evasiveness, its refusal to be fully contained, that locates it squarely in the context of the zombie. However, as I will argue, the golem's inclusion in the zombie genre nuances the genre itself, expanding it, teasing apart the borders, calling into question the possibility of a zombie genre at all, and most importantly, negotiating between the catastrophic doom of the zombie – the inherent fear produced by the living dead plague – and a hopeful dimension that stems from the golem's shamble through the illusive apocalyptic boundary of the zombie and into the realm of the messianic. Like the violence of the zombie, the violence of the golem refuses to be contained; it spills over, spreads, and infects the homes and communities of the very people it is created to protect. However, I will argue, in its uneasy shuffle through the “boundary” of the zombie, the golem rewrites the terms of violence as terms of love, relocating the zombie from its position in the apocalypse, and offering a hopeful dimension to an otherwise apocalyptic genre, a messianic possibility for the post-apocalypse.

The golem's ambivalent etymology, cultural history, and identity earn it a place in the zombie genre; however, as the zombie demands a degree of the unclassifiable, an evasion of the very idea of genre, the golem's association with the zombie generates a particular tension: the tension between the golem's zombie-esque qualities and its refusal to be categorized altogether.

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classification includes manmade monsters, creatures, androids, or automatons. Like Frankenstein's Creature, these manmade monsters are typically considered part of a rubric altogether different from the zombie.

<sup>7</sup> Famously, the golem is created as a protector of Prague's Jewish community, but is given a secret identity as a woodchopper and water carrier. His dual role often results in a disconnect between the literal world and the golem's understanding; Goethe's 1797 poem “The Sorcerer's Apprentice,” for example, is often traced to a tale of the golem in which he is asked to draw water and never told when to stop, which results in his flooding the synagogue.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri delineate this particular contradictory set of the golem's features in their recent work *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*: “along with the threat of destruction [golems] also bring the promise and wonder of creation (12).



The golem and the zombie share a host of analogues, including a basic physical resemblance. The golem's physicality – lumbering and awkward, designed by human hubris – yokes it at a corporeal level to the living dead. The golem was first introduced to the cinematic tradition by German expressionist filmmaker Paul Wegener in 1915 (seventeen years before the introduction of the zombie to film with *White Zombie* in 1932). While appearing in the 1913 version of *The Student of Prague*, Wegener heard the legend of the golem and proceeded to write and direct the first film adaptation of the tale: *The Golem* (1915). Wegener's original silent film has since been lost, but in 1920, he reworked the tale and created *The Golem: How He Came Into The World* (*Der Golem: wie er in die Welt kam*), which became a German cinematic classic and cemented Wegener's place in German expressionist cinematic history. Although Wegener's golem predates the cinematic zombie by more than a decade, his depiction of the golem in many ways inspired the physicality of early zombies. Hampered by the technology of the time – a hand-cranked camera and silent film – Wegener's golem is inherently silent, eerie, and awkward. However, Wegener himself donned the golem costume and played the golem as a lumbering, maladroit creature: a characterization that was then adopted in the 1930s and again in 1968 (by George A. Romero) to brand the cinematic zombie.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to their comparable physicalities, both the zombie and the golem bear a significant relation to death and reanimation. Although a lodestone of folklore, biblical and rabbinic stories, the golem is most-often constructed through the inscription of the Hebrew word “אמת” (“truth”) on its forehead. “אמת” consists of three Hebrew letters – א “aleph,” מ “mem,” ת

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<sup>9</sup> Early voodoo zombies were all slow-moving, appearing in an almost trance-like state and Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) continues the depiction of the slow-moving, ponderous zombie. Zombies behave like a creeping plague, deriving their power from membership in a group. This hindered locomotion became a staple of the zombie character until Umberto Lenzi's *Nightmare City* (1980), which first introduced the fast-moving zombie. However, the fast zombie was not fully established in zombie lore until the release of Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002).

“*taf*” – and contains within it the word “*מת*,” meaning “death.” According to legend, the golem is deactivated by the erasure of the letter “*aleph*,” revealing the “*מת*,” death, at its core. The golem’s very birth, therefore, like the zombie’s, exists in relation to death. Their implicit link to death and resurrection further joins the golem and the zombie by emphasizing their shared lack of free will. The zombie’s origins in the voodoo tradition entail the death and re-animation of a human who no longer has free will and is therefore enslaved in its status as the living dead. The golem is similarly deprived of free will, physically and mentally controlled by its creator. In H. Leivick’s Yiddish dramatic poem *דער גולם* [*The Golem*], for example, the golem’s creator commands: “רייד, איך הייס דיר ריידען. יאסעל איז דיין נאמען” [“Speak, I order you to speak. Your name is Yosl”] (Leivick 26), and the golem then blandly acknowledges his name is Yosl. Later in the text, the golem is described as “שטעהט א צוגעשמידטער” [“virtually tethered”] (Leivick 163), emphasizing his inability to determine his own fate.

Moreover, both the zombie and the golem can be read as consequences of human conduct, underscoring an additional dimension of comparability between the two. The golem is perhaps more obviously the result of human action; traditionally, a rabbi (though occasionally a man, woman, or child) creates the golem using Kabbalistic techniques, and the golem, much like Frankenstein’s creature, ultimately escapes the control of its master, wreaking havoc on the local population.<sup>10</sup> And, though its roots as manmade are perhaps less overt, from its inception in *White Zombie* (1932), the cinematic zombie is similarly constructed through human action and resists its master’s authority: *White Zombie*’s Charles Beaumont (Robert Frazer), who has been

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<sup>10</sup> See Goethe’s 1797 poem “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” – a rewriting of a classic golem mishap. The golem, like *Frankenstein*’s creature, is yet another example of a sentient zombie: a zombie who speaks, and who, despite a seeming lack of free will, uses his affectivity to infect the population around him (in the case of Leivick’s golem, to leave his mark by spilling Jewish blood).

poisoned and transformed into a zombie, breaks Murder Legendre's (Bela Lugosi) mental control and pushes the sorcerer over an escarpment, releasing his zombie slaves; *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) makes reference to a wayward Venus probe destroyed for its high radiation levels that may have been responsible for the zombie plague; in *28 Days Later* (2002), the antagonistic zombie population is the direct result of a scientifically-developed "rage" virus.<sup>11</sup>

But while both the golem and the zombie are interstitial creatures devoid of free will, lumbering and awkward, constructed by human hubris, and inherently tied to death and resurrection, it is the golem's evasiveness, its refusal to be fully contained, that positions it in the domain of the zombie. The root of the word "golem" (ג ל ם) first appears in Psalms 139:15, an homage to the omnipresence of god: "גלמי ראו עיניך" ("your eyes saw my unshaped form"); the Hebrew word "גלמי" ("galmi," derived from the root ג "gimmel," ל "lamed," ם "mem"), or "my unshaped form," suggests a rawness, an unformed crudeness, that is later appropriated in the golem's mythology. The notion of creating a golem is first raised in the Babylonian Talmud,<sup>12</sup> which relates the very cursory anecdote of Rabbi Abba Ben Rav Hamma (Rava), who constructed a clay man as a messenger for Rabbi Zeira: "רבא ברא גברא" ["Rava created a man"] (Sanhedrin 65b). In the sixteenth century, two rabbinical masters were linked to the creation of a golem: Eliahu Ba'al Shem of Chelm (1550-1583) and Rabbi Judah Leyb ben Bezalel (1520-1609). Most commonly associated with Rabbi Judah Leyb ben Bezalel, or the Maharal,<sup>13</sup> the sixteenth century chief Rabbi of Prague, the golem took on a magical, Kabbalistic

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<sup>11</sup> The zombie as a consequence of human action is moreover depicted in *The Crazies* (1973), *Re-Animator* (1985), and *Return of the Living Dead* (1985).

<sup>12</sup> The compilation of rabbinical commentaries and discussions and one part of the written compendium of Judaism's Oral Law, recorded in the fifth and sixth centuries C.E.

aspect: a giant being formed from clay in order to simultaneously function as a domestic servant and to defend Prague's Jewish ghetto. The myth diverges as to the precise origin of the golem: some stories involve the carving of the word "אמת" (truth) on the golem's forehead, the first letter of which (א "aleph") is then erased to form the word "מת" (death) for its destruction; other stories claim the tetragrammaton (YHWH) must be combined with each letter of the alphabet, and then each of the resulting letters pronounced with every possible vowel sound in order to produce the appropriate permutations of the name of god, signaling creation; some stories have a command written on a piece of parchment and placed inside the golem's mouth. Etymologically, the word is equally difficult to pin down; both Modern Hebrew and Yiddish slang use the word "golem" to imply a kind of foolishness, but alternatively, the word may have been corrupted from the Hebrew "גאלנו" ["goaleynu"]—our redeemer (Dennis 110-11).

The story of the golem first appeared in print in 1847 in a collection of Jewish tales entitled *Galerie der Sippurim*, published by Jewish Austrian publisher Wolf Pascheles. And though the golem waned in popularity throughout the nineteenth century, it made a resurgence in the twentieth century. In 1909, another Austrian publisher, Yudl Rosenberg, modernized the golem narrative, printing a Hebrew and Yiddish chapbook with an assortment of golem stories that included additional characters and more pronounced mystical elements. Gustav Meyrink's 1914 novel *Der Goylem* then introduced the golem to mainstream European society, where it was taken up in Paul Wegener's *Golem* series, a set of expressionistic silent movies. There were also several other screen versions featuring golems, including Julien Duvivier's French-Czech coproduction *Le Golem*. In the 1920s, anthropologist Shloyme Bastomski issued two chapbooks

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<sup>13</sup> An acronym, the word *Maharal* (מהרל) consists of four Hebrew letters: מ "mem," ה "heh," ר "resh," and ל "lamed," which stand for *Moreinu* (our teacher) *Ha'Rav* (Rabbi) *Lev* (Leyb).

of Yiddish legends about Prague, one of which mentions the golem. H. Leivick's 1921 Yiddish dramatic poem *דער גולם: א דראמאטישע פאעמע אין אכט בילדער* [*The Golem: A Dramatic Poem in Eight Scenes*] and Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1969 version of the tale crested the revival of golem narratives in the twentieth century; Leivick's verse drama is perhaps the golem's most famous treatment.

H. Leivick, the pseudonym for Leyvik Halpern, who did not want to be confused with the prominent Yiddish poet Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, was born in Ihumen, Byelorussia. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, Leivick received a traditional Jewish *heder*<sup>14</sup> education. The oldest of nine children, he was often hungry and ill, and developed leg wounds caused by starvation, which he later described vividly in his dramatic poem *Chains of the Messiah*.<sup>15</sup> During the Revolution of 1905, Leivick joined the Bund,<sup>16</sup> ceased attending synagogue, and began writing Yiddish poetry. In 1906, he was arrested by the tsarist police and sentenced to four years of forced labor and exile for life in Siberia, from where he escaped and fled to New York in 1913. Leivick's corpus is clearly stained by his encounters with violence: the pogroms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, World War I, the interwar period and the persecution of Jews in Russia and Germany, World War II, and the postwar response in the face of the horror of the Holocaust. *דער גולם* [*The Golem*] translates Leivick's own suffering, his frustrated revolutionary dreams, into the language of traditional Jewish mythology; Job, the golem, Isaac's

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<sup>14</sup> Literally, "room," *heder* refers to a traditional elementary school that teaches basic Jewish studies, Scripture, and Hebrew language.

<sup>15</sup> A kabbalistic image, the "chains of the Messiah" refer to the notion that the Messiah is held captive until the messianic time. The leg wounds and the "chains of Messiah" are images that recur in *דער גולם* [*The Golem*].

<sup>16</sup> The Jewish Labor Bund (בונד), from the German word meaning "federation" or "union," was a secular Jewish socialist party founded in Vilnius on October 7, 1897. Active between 1897 and 1920, the Bund sought to unite all Jewish workers in the Russian Empire into a united socialist party. The Bund also promoted the use of Yiddish as a Jewish national language, opposing the Zionist project of reviving Hebrew.

sacrifice, the chains of the Messiah all inform the language of his text. **דער גולם** [*The Golem*] takes on a national (and perhaps global) dimension in its depiction of exile, tradition, and social revolution, which are rewritten as the Jewish motifs of **גלות און גאולה** [“exile and redemption”] (Malka, “The Yiddish poet H. Leivick”).

The first act of Leivick’s dramatic poem establishes both the figure of the golem and the larger work itself as part of the zombie genre: liminal, uncontained, outside the scope of the defined and definable. Even in its form, the text positions itself liminally as a play that cannot be performed as written.<sup>17</sup> Written in blank verse better appreciated on the page, and rife with impractical details (spirits, specters, the power of invisibility), Leivick’s dramatic poem demands to be reinterpreted for the stage. In fact, its very first performance in 1925 in the Habima Theater in Moscow was not even a Yiddish performance, but a Hebrew one; under the direction of B. Vershilov and V.L. Mchedelov the dramatic poem was restructured to be feasibly enacted. The artistic director of the Manhattan Ensemble Theater, Dave Fishelson, writes, “H. Leivick originally wrote **דער גולם** [*The Golem*] (first published in 1921) to be read, not performed. Though it *has* been produced frequently throughout the world since its premiere in Moscow in 1925, the play has always been trimmed for performance. The Manhattan Ensemble Theater adaption... is but the latest in a series of adaptations that have been visited on the work” (Fishelson 5). This play that is not quite a play, that cannot play like a play, evinces the very malady of the zombie: it cannot quite be classified.

The first act, “**ליים**” [“Clay”], captures the malleability of the dramatic poem and its golem – not delimited but able to be shaped and reshaped, molded, whittled, and forged. The scene opens in darkness, and the general lack of clarity extends not only to the figure of the

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<sup>17</sup> This play that cannot be performed as written is much like the “reading play,” its own dramatic genre.

golem, but also to the physical location and setting, to the Maharal, his apprentices, and the various spirits he encounters. Set in darkness, but just as the sun is beginning to dawn, “רעדט צום שמש” [“As the sun is rising”] (Leivick 7), the physical and temporal backdrop of the scene locates both the golem and the dramatic poem interstitially, highlighting the nebulousness surrounding the golem’s creation. The golem has been formed out of clay but not yet given life; he is an outline, a figure, but not yet a being. The Maharal then draws together the golem and the context of the scene in his comparison of the golem to the night as it melts into the Eastern sky, “אזוי ווי עס אנטלויפט די נאכט פון מזרח” [“Just as the night melts in the Eastern sky”] (Leivick 11). Emphasizing the liminality of the golem and the setting, the Maharal describes them both as melting, as embodying the space between night and day in which one diffuses into the other.

As he presides over the golem’s form, the Maharal is visited by two phantoms – the phantom of the golem and the phantom of the local priest, Tadeush – each of which further serves to underscore the golem’s indefinable quality. The Yiddish word for “phantom” – “געשטאלט” [“*Geshtalt*”] – connotes a shape, cast, image, likeness. These phantasmic figures are the simulacra of beings;<sup>18</sup> a notion into which Plato’s *Republic* offers insight by introducing the Platonic division of Form and matter: the aspatial, atemporal Ideal Forms and the material

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<sup>18</sup> Gilles Deleuze makes the connection between the simulacra and the phantom in his assessment of the simulacra as a phantasm. Deleuze conflates the phantasm and the simulacrum – as opposed to Pierre Klossowski who sees the phantasm as an unsubstitutable element. Although Deleuze’s analysis here appears atypically not rigorous, but rather just a conflation of these terms, he is in fact offering a very literal understanding of the phantasm, reinterpreting it as demonic, as a kind of gothic force, as opposed to Klossowski’s more figurative understanding: “These differential systems with their disparate and resonating series, their dark precursor and forced movements, are what we call simulacra or phantasms” (*Difference and Repetition* 126).

imitations of those Forms.<sup>19</sup> Plato's *Sophist* takes up the notion of imitation in its division of "the craft of imitation" (*Sophist* 235c) in two: the art of likeness-making and the art of appearance-making. While likeness-making "keep[s] to the proportions of length, breadth, and depth of the model, and also [keeps] to the appropriate colors of the parts" (*Sophist* 235e), appearance-making "says good-bye to truth and produce[s] in [its] images the proportions that seem to be beautiful instead of the real ones" (*Sophist* 236a). Plato further explicates the idea of imitation in his discussion of the craftsman in the *Republic*. According to Plato, there are "three kinds of beds. The first is in nature a bed, and I suppose we'd say that a god makes it [...] the second is the work of a carpenter [...] and the third is the one the painter makes" (*Republic* 597b). The original bed in nature is the Form of bed, the carpenter, as craftsman, is "the maker of a bed," (likeness-making) and the painter, "whose product is third from the natural one [is] an imitator" (appearance-making) (*Republic* 597d-e). Imitation either imitates appearance or imitates truth, and in the case of the painter, the imitation, twice removed from the original, is the art of appearance-making: the simulacrum. Both the imitation and the imitator, according to Plato, pose a danger in their pretense of actual contact with the Forms. The painter is imitating the work of the carpenter while masquerading as an actual imitator of the Form of bed itself (likeness-making). The imitation thus deceives the public into believing it is truly a bed that the carpenter has made and not a twice-removed simulacrum of a copy of the Form of bed. The simulacrum for Plato is, then, an imitation of an imitation, which in its very distance from the Form itself poses a threat to those who may not be able to distinguish the painting of the bed (simulacrum) from the material bed (imitation).

While Plato defines the simulacrum as a copy of a copy whose relation to the model

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<sup>19</sup> The division between form and matter is one Aristotle further takes up in *Metaphysics* where he describes the four possibilities for "substance": "By the matter I mean, for instance, the bronze, by the shape the pattern of its form" (1029a3).



(Form) has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be termed a copy of the Form, Gilles Deleuze, in *The Logic of Sense*, argues for a reversal of Platonism. Plato attempts to distinguish copies from simulacra, “assuring the triumph of the copies over the simulacra” (*Logic* 257); Deleuze, however, argues for the affirmation of the simulacrum: “to reverse Platonism’ means to make the simulacra rise and to affirm their rights among icons and copies” (*Logic* 262). Deleuze underscores the distinction between copies and simulacra: “copies are secondary possessors. They are well-founded pretenders, guaranteed by resemblance; simulacra are like false pretenders, built upon a dissimilarity, implying an essential perversion or a deviation” (*Logic* 256). A copy is defined by the presence of internal, essential relations of resemblance to a model. The simulacrum, on the other hand, bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to a putative model. According to Deleuze, the simulacrum is a being of difference. The simulacrum exists in and of itself, neither predicated on nor referenced to a model. The distinction between simulacra and Form is no longer one of degree; the simulacrum is less a copy twice removed than a phenomenon of an entirely different nature: a pure concept of difference. While a copy is created in order to stand in for its model (the carpenter’s bed for the Form of bed), a simulacrum, in contrast, does not aim to stand-in for a model, but rather to overturn the notion of model and copy altogether, to create a space for an ideology founded entirely on difference, rather than sameness.

Leivick’s געשטאלט [“phantoms”] certainly fit the Platonic model here, as the phantoms pose an overt threat to the Maharal who covers his face with his hands in fear at their appearance: “פארדעקט פנים מיט די הענט” [“He covers his face with his hands”] (Leivick 8). Plato’s simulacrum imitates an imitation of a model Form, and in its removal from the Form, poses a threat to those who may perceive it as an imitation of the Form itself. But like the other

liminal elements in the first act, the געשטאלט ["phantoms"] waver between Plato's notion of the simulacrum as a threat and Deleuze's notion of the simulacrum as an opportunity. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explains: "confronted with the most mechanical, the most stereotypical repetitions, inside and outside ourselves, we endlessly extract from them little differences, variations and modifications" (*Difference* ix). Deleuze's simulacrum provides an opportunity for an alternative ideology: it resembles a model only externally; internally, the simulacrum is pure difference, its own model. And Leivick's געשטאלט ["phantoms"] allow for a Deleuzian ideology of difference – their very sameness enables the perception of difference on the most infinitesimal level. Only once the phantom of the golem appears can the Maharal begin to define its role as distinct from humanity, moving from its human likeness, to its fundamental difference: it is a woodchopper, a messenger, a savior, "א לעבעדיגר מענש" ["a living man"] (Leivick 12), a golem.

Leivick's play challenges the notion that the simulacrum is either a Platonic threat or a Deleuzian opportunity. It locates us in the space between the two – in which the genuine (the golem itself) and the performed (the phantom of the golem) are not easily separable, in which the simulacrum eases into the realm of the Form. This play resides in the darkness of the night melting in the Eastern sky; and as it lingers in the overlap between the Platonic and the Deleuzian, between the genuine and the performed, it suggests that this very unclear, uneasy, ill-defined space the golem permeates is precisely the space from which to evoke both fear and hope.

The entire first act of דער גולם [*The Golem*] is characterized by a lack of clarity: one that emphasizes the way in which both the play and the golem escape definition. The scene is set in darkness: "אלץ ארום איז שטיל און פינסטער" ["all around is darkness and silence"]

(Leivick 7). As the Maharal kneads the golem in darkness, he encounters the first געשטאלט ["phantom"] – the געשטאלט ["phantom"] of the golem – but is unable to clearly identify it: “איך זעה ניט קיינעם” [“I can’t see anyone”] (Leivick 9). Having just formed the golem, the Maharal should be intimately familiar with its shape, its appearance; and yet he does not recognize the געשטאלט ["phantom"] because despite his familiarity with the golem’s form, the golem itself evades description. It takes on a simulated appearance, becomes a simulacrum of itself, in order to destabilize the Maharal’s perception.

The darkness is not only debilitating to the Maharal, but also to his apprentices, Yitzchak the Cohen and Yaakov the Levite. Yitzchak recounts the tale of their night spent in the synagogue in prayer over the Maharal’s impending creation: פינסטערניש האט אונז

ארומגעכאפט, / ווי מיט א דיקער וואנט צושיידט אונז איינס פון צווייטען, / אזוי אז דער דערווייטערט, קול פון יעדען / העט צו דעם צווייטענס אויער ניט געקענט דערגרייכען

[“Darkness quickly surrounded us/ and with a thick wall that separated us from one another,/ so far apart that every voice/ was powerless to reach an ear”] (Leivick 16). The personification of darkness serves to further accentuate the lack of clarity in the scene. Terrified in the darkness, the two apprentices believe that they stand on opposite sides of the room, that each is alone in contending with the darkness. When they light a candle, they realize that they are actually standing side-by-side. The text then grows increasingly confused and confusing as Yitzchak and Yaakov fail to retain their individual personas; the darkness hinders them not only from seeing one another, but also from maintaining distinct selves. Yitzchak relates a terrible nightmare he has had while awaiting the Maharal’s orders in the synagogue, in which he perceives the golem and the impending violence and destruction in the Jewish community. The Maharal reassures him that despite his fear of mass Jewish death, the creation of the golem holds great promise. To

which *Yaakov*, and not *Yitzhak* (blurring the individual identities and experiences of the two apprentices) responds: “איו האט זיך אים געחלומיט, רבי” [“and that is why I dreamed, Rabbi”] (Leivick 20). The golem’s defiance of clear definition extends not only to the setting in which he is created, but also infects, much like the zombie, the characters around him.

Not only does the darkness make it difficult to see, it makes it difficult to know. The Maharal begins the scene feeling confident about his decision to create the golem. This is a figure that will protect the Jewish community, will function as a replacement for the Jewish messiah. The Maharal feels this is a god-given mission, coming from “אין הימעל” [“in heaven”] (Leivick 11). Yet as he leans over the golem’s body, he is approached by the געשטאלט [“phantom”] and almost immediately his surety turns to hesitation: “אזויפיל שלעכטע צייכענס” [“So many terrible signs”] (Leivick 20). Itself a liminal figure, the געשטאלט [“phantom”] creates liminality in its wake, leaving the Maharal wavering between certitude and doubt for the remainder of the play: alternating between his belief in the golem as the only appropriate messiah for its time, and his fear of the golem’s innate violence.

Leivick’s דער גולם [The Golem] moreover maneuvers within the Maharal’s own vacillation between the golem’s messianism and the golem’s violence: an indecision that underscores the golem’s position as uncontainable. Noticeably (though inadvertently) in dialogue with Leivick’s dramatic poem, and published the same year as דער גולם [The Golem], Walter Benjamin’s 1921 “Critique of Violence” (“*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*”), which interrogates the mythic yoke that joins violence and the law and examines the degree to which the messianic is inherently tied to violence. Benjamin opposes divine violence with mythical violence and Leivick depicts a world in which a violent messiah is the only messiah, presenting the golem as both innately violent and the only appropriate messiah for its time. Benjamin’s critique

highlights an untenable paradox: violence is only deemed lawful insofar as it functions to either create or preserve a legal framework. Benjamin sees labor strikes as exemplary forms of violence, as simultaneously interior to and productive of systematic law. However, he is not content to merely recognize the bond between law and violence; to do so would be to simply condemn “mythical violence,” or the lawmaking, boundary-setting, guilt and retribution-inducing, bloody violence that “is bloody power over mere life for its own sake” (“Critique” 297).<sup>20</sup> Instead, Benjamin examines the circular dialectic between the mythical violence necessitated by law-making and the law-preserving violence that maintains the state (or state-of-affairs) created by law-making violence: “if that first function of violence is called the lawmaking function, this second will be called the law-preserving function” (“Critique” 284). Benjamin then proposes the use of divine violence – violence that is “pure power over all life for the sake of the living” (“Critique” 297) – as the counter to mythical violence. Benjamin thus rewrites his discussion of law and justice as one of messianism and divine law, positing that true justice consists of violence that founds revelation. Nonetheless, like Leivick’s golem, Benjamin’s mythic violence cannot be clearly demarcated from his notion of divine violence; Benjaminian divine violence exists in the ill-defined space of the zombie: the space of simultaneous divinity and violence, fear and hope. Ultimately, however, though Leivick’s text presents the golem as a violent messiah, **דער גולם** [*The Golem*] rejects Benjaminian divine violence, rewriting the very dimension of violence as one of love.

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<sup>20</sup> In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben famously elaborates on the notion of “bare life” that Benjamin introduces here. Agamben distinguishes between “*zoē* and *bíos*, between *zēn* and *eu zēn* (that is, between life and general and the qualified way of life proper to men)” (*Homo Sacer* 66). In his analysis, Agamben explains that the Greek word for “life” – *soma* – originally meant “corpse,” suggesting that only through death would life itself manifest as a unity; life was made sacred through a series of rituals designed to separate life from its profane context. But ultimately, for Agamben, it is “bare life” that exists “in the most intimate relation with sovereignty” (*Homo Sacer* 67) and is therefore worthy of thorough investigation.

Both Benjamin's and Leivick's texts adopt the motifs of blood and boundaries – some literal, some allegorical – in their respective discussions of violence and liminality. For Benjamin, whereas mythical violence is always a constraint, a production of limitations, divine violence is always a release from those boundaries: “if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them” (“Critique” 297). Divine violence abolishes law by destroying boundaries without establishing new ones. It is boundlessly expiatory, accepting sacrifice without demanding it. In fact, divine violence is invisible, “the expiatory power of violence is not visible to men” (“Critique” 300), and its invisibility, like the golem's power of invisibility, is an abstract and imperceptible manifestation of its inherent boundary-destroying quality; it refuses to subscribe even to the parameters of the physical world.

Though not consciously engaged with Benjamin, Leivick appears to be implying that the figure of the golem embodies something like Benjamin's paradigm of divine violence; certainly his liminality, but moreover his engagement with various physical boundaries, underscores the golem's seeming affinity with Benjamin's divine model. The second act of *דער גולם* [*The Golem*] is entitled “ווענט” [“Walls”], and depicts the Maharal's (in his role as both law-making and law-preserving) attempts to establish physical boundaries for the golem, to create definition and to erect walls and thresholds in an effort to contain his new creation. However, the Maharal has created a golem who exceeds physical boundaries, and who cannot even enter the Maharal's own home without bending his head: “די טיר איז נידעריג און דו / ביסט הויך” [“The doorway is low and you / Are tall”] (Leivick 25). This is a creature that cannot be contained by mundane physical thresholds, a creature whose very creation places him outside the bounds of

the doorway.<sup>21</sup> Once inside, the golem balks at the walls around him, clambering over furniture in a desperate attempt to leave: “וואנט דער צו זיך שפארט” [“He pushes against the wall”] (Leivick 27). The Maharal has to remind him that a man is not capable of walking through solid walls.

The golem is depicted as a creature with a lack of distinction with respect to both the physical boundaries of walls and the non-physical boundaries of Jewish and gentile identity on which the community depends. But the golem’s frustration lies in the fact that even his very identity defies boundaries. He carries two identities simultaneously: that of the golem, and that of “Yosl the woodchopper,” who masquerades to the Jewish community as a visiting Jew, a wanderer, and most importantly, a man: “דו ביסט א מענש” [“you are a man”] (Leivick 26). The golem must constantly balance two dueling identities; as Yosl the woodchopper, a wanderer and the Maharal’s new servant, the golem ought to belong in the Jewish community, and yet is perpetually ostracized. The Maharal constructs a narrative to assure his wife and granddaughter: Yosl is a guest from far away, he was found lying in the street, a poor man, in need of shelter, and conveniently, the Maharal has an opening for a servant. The *Rebbetzin* (Rabbi’s wife), however, immediately sets Yosl apart from the rest of the community, underscoring his difference: “און קוקט ניט אויס נאר ווי א איד” [“He doesn’t seem to be a Jew”] (Leivick 32). The golem forgets to wash his hands before eating, does not know the benediction to make before breaking bread, is unfamiliar with the order of prayers. Yosl the Jewish woodchopper is not an identity that fits the golem naturally, and the entire community sees through the façade, admitting to the Maharal that the golem induces fear, that he is “א מענש א מאדנער” [“a

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<sup>21</sup> For an interesting take on the notion of walking through solid walls see Eyal Weizman’s “Walking Through Walls: Soldiers as Architects in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” in which he explores the use of theoretical tools from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, Bataille, and the Situationists by military thinkers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

strange man”] (Leivick 32). Always a stranger, never at ease donning the costume of Yosl the woodchopper, the golem must constantly be reminded of his name: **”יאסעל איז דיין**

**”געדענקען. זאלסט נאמען.”** [“Yosl is your name. Remember it.”] (Leivick 27).

However, beneath his façade as Yosl the woodchopper, the golem bears the identity of Golem, savior of the Jews, a figure endowed with the power of invisibility, of a psychic connection to his maker, of superhuman strength, **”א געזונטען מענש”** [“a strong man”] (Leivick 38). The golem’s dual identities are an outbreak of Leivick’s presentation of this figure as a model of Benjaminian divine violence. The golem is perpetually negotiating boundaries: physical boundaries of home, threshold, window, and door, but moreover, boundaries of human and inhuman, Yosl and golem. And like Benjamin’s divine violence, the golem destroys the boundaries established by the Maharal. The golem must bow his head before entering a room, must remember his own name, must navigate between Yosl and golem. But instead, the golem destroys rooms and breaks windows, cannot remember his own name, fails to uphold the divide between Yosl and golem.

Finally, the Maharal designates a particular space for the golem, but one that is constantly changing, one that itself breaches boundaries. The golem is banished to the ruins of a castle outside the city, to the **”פינפער טורעם”** [“the Fifth Tower”]. Once an opulent castle, the ruins are now tragic remnants of what once was, a space characterized by its destroyed boundaries: its broken walls and doors, smeared murals, shattered windowpanes. Tankhem, a Jewish pauper who, after the murder of his only son Yokhanan, has taken refuge in the Fifth Tower and become its overlord, describes the numerology of Fifth Tower as symbolically above and beyond any earthly physicality: **”אין איינער פאר מערב/ איינער פאר צפון, איינער פאר מזרח,**



“אײנער פאר דרום, / דער פינפטער --- פאר מיר” [“One for east, and one for west, / One for north, one for south, / And the Fifth – for me”] (Leivick 62). The Fifth Tower lies outside the four physical directions; it literally cannot be contained by spatial units. And moreover, it houses the outsiders, those who have been ostracized from society: the pauper, the sick man, the blind man, the redhead, the hunchback, the peg leg, the tall man, the short man, and the golem. Appropriately, this tower stands above and beyond the container of the physical world offers shelter to the uncontainable, the social outcasts and the golem whose position on the border impedes him from accepting the boundaries established around him.

In addition to residing in a space that defies boundaries, the golem seemingly exemplifies Benjaminian divine violence in his relationship to the Maharal, as his very being unrestrictedly destroys boundaries. Though never explicitly stated, the creation process imbues the golem with a psychic link to his creator; the Maharal need only be thinking (or dreaming) about the golem and the golem hears a summons. Early on in the play, the golem approaches the Maharal, who dozes at a table in his study. The Maharal awakens suddenly, panicked. Angry at the golem’s seemingly unbidden approach, he chastises the golem for entering the study, for settling on the bench and assuming the Maharal’s expression and position. The golem’s tendency to mimic the Maharal is unnerving; it highlights the golem’s uncanniness, his position as a liminal **געשטאלט** [“phantom”], a feigning simulacrum. The golem grows increasingly confused, and finally protests, “האסט מיך גערופען” [“You called me”] (Leivick 46). Unconsciously, in the throes of a nightmare about fire, blood, the Fifth Tower, and the golem, the Maharal has reached out to the golem psychically, beckoning him to his study.

Their metaphysical connection extends to the linguistic domain as well, further underscoring the golem’s breach of boundaries, his refusal (or inability) to remain within the

bounds of either his own mind or body. After falling into a deep and restless sleep for two days in the Fifth Tower, the golem relates a nightmare to the Maharal. In the dream, the Maharal bears a literal cross – comprised of glowing gashes – on his forehead and begs the golem for mercy, for release from the burden of the cross. A fight ensues; the Maharal is attacked by the Messiah and thrown into a pit. But the golem’s language belies his breach of the corporeal body. As he relays the nightmare, the golem describes the Messiah assailing the *Maharal* and shouting, “Golem, golem!” blurring the line between the Maharal and the golem. And in describing the Maharal’s fate, his being cast into a pit and buried alive, the golem suddenly shifts pronouns and begins to describe the scene in first person, using the pronoun “מִיר” (Leivick 148), or “me.” The weeping, the bruises, wounds, darkness, and live burial falter between the Maharal’s body and the golem’s, leaving us uncertain as to the recipient of the violence.

Moreover, the perpetual muddle between the golem’s body and the Maharal’s body extends to the golem’s mission to prevent blood libels.<sup>22</sup> In the cave beneath the city, having been ordered by the Maharal to stop the local priest, Tadeush, from accusing the Jewish community of using gentile blood in the baking of unleavened bread for Passover, the golem is accosted by a variety of spirits. In a scene that closely mimics his creation scene, the golem encounters the געשטאלט [“phantom”] of the Maharal, just as the Maharal once encountered the געשטאלט [“phantom”] of the golem. And just as the געשטאלט [“phantom”] of the golem served as an early warning to the Maharal against the dangers of creating this creature, the געשטאלט [“phantom”] of the Maharal serves to undermine the golem’s mission. The Maharal’s געשטאלט [“phantom”] is angry, antagonistic, and cows the golem into submission,

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<sup>22</sup> Historically, the Jewish community of Prague in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century was forced to confront an abundance of anti-Semitism that stemmed from blood libels, or false accusations that Jews use the human blood of Christian children in certain aspects of their religious rituals – namely, to bake *Matzah* (the unleavened bread) for Passover.

commanding, “פאל צו צום ערד און ליג!” [“Drop to the ground and lie there!”] (Leivick 167)

The golem bears the capacity to displace the Maharal from his body, to create a געשטאלט [“phantom”], a simulacrum, of the Maharal, and to impose his own liminality on the Maharal’s corporeal being. On the surface, the געשטאלט [“phantom”] of the Maharal is a Platonic simulacrum, an imitation that poses a clear threat, particularly to the golem, who perceives the געשטאלט [“phantom”] as the Maharal himself, and who grows more and more distressed at the געשטאלט’s antagonism. However, the געשטאלט [“phantom”] of the Maharal is also the Deleuzian opportunity for an ideology of difference, for a space in which corporeal boundaries can be renegotiated. The golem not only cannot be contained, but also infects those around him with his own liminal qualities: in his relationship to the Maharal, the golem both refuses to be contained by his own body, and breaches the corporeality of the Maharal’s body: a seeming illustration of Benjaminian divine violence.

But whereas the golem appears to exemplify Benjaminian divine violence in his boundary-breaching, his relationship to blood manifests a more complicated violence: not quite divine, but not quite mythic. According to Benjamin, divine violence is “lethal without spilling blood” (“Critique” 297), and the example Benjamin offers is that of Korah and his judgment (Numbers 16:1-40), in which divine violence “strikes privileged Levites, strikes them without warning, without threat, and does not stop short of annihilation” (“Critique” 297). However, Benjamin’s account of the narrative is somewhat misguided; although the actual “strike” may be exemplary of divine violence, it is pre-empted both by several warnings and by markers of a more mythical violence. After Korah’s rebellion – his incitement of the people against Moses – Moses approaches Korah and warns him, using the language of separation, of boundary, and establishing the setting as a mythical one: “המעט מכם כי הבדיל אלהי ישראל”

“אתכם מעדת ישראל” [“Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel?”] (Numbers 16:9). Korah and his followers are Levites, and have therefore been awarded special privileges in the Tabernacle, particular ministrations that separate them from the rest of the congregation. The context is thus a separative one, one of mythic boundaries, threats, and demarcation, rather than the divine lack of boundaries. The language of separation is taken up afresh in a second warning, this time from God to Moses and Aaron, further intimating the mythical lexicon: “הבדלו מתוך העדה הזאת” [“Separate yourselves from among this congregation”] (Numbers 16:21). God institutes a second-order boundary here between Moses and Aaron and the rest of the congregation, again emphasizing the character of mythical violence – both its role as boundary-producing and as threatening – in this anecdote. The establishment of boundaries is then followed by a final warning from Moses to Korah, clearly antithetical to Benjamin’s assessment of the scene as “without warning, without threat”: Moses details the possibility of the earth’s opening and swallowing Korah and his followers whole, offering a literal and elaborate threat, and when Korah refuses to heed Moses the threat is realized, “וחפתח ארץ את פיה וחבלע אחם” [“And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them”] (Numbers 16:32). If Benjamin characterizes the distinction between mythical and divine violence in terms of their respective relations to warning – “if the former [mythical violence] threatens, the latter [divine violence] strikes” (“Critique” 297) – the example of Korah seems better suited to the category of mythical boundary-producing, threatening violence than of divine boundary-destroying, striking violence.

In effect, both in its lack of divinity and in its lack of expiation, the example of Korah undermines Benjamin’s analysis of divine violence. For Benjamin, the connection between bloodlessness and expiation is a particular one: “a deep connection between the lack of

bloodshed and the expiatory character of this violence is unmistakable” (“Critique” 297). It is precisely the lack of bloodshed that allows divine violence to be expiatory, and Korah’s death is bloodless: annihilation in the episode of Korah and his followers takes place via earth and fire. However, the particular characterization of the earth suggests the event is somewhat less than expiatory. In the narrative of Korah, the earth is distinctly characterized as a unique, personified character, and as representative of a hopeless fate for Korah and his followers. The earth is initially personified both as female, and as possessing a mouth and the capacity to swallow: “וּתְפַתַּח אֶרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וּתְבַלַּע אֹתָם” [“And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them”] (Numbers 16:32). Moreover, in a Scriptural context, there are two words used to denote “earth”: “אֶרֶץ” [“*Eretz*”] and “אֲדָמָה” [“*Adama*”] “אֶרֶץ” [“*Eretz*”] tends to refer to a specific, bounded land (a territory) whereas “אֲדָמָה” [“*Adama*”] refers to “earth” in a more general sense,<sup>23</sup> and “אֶרֶץ” [“*Eretz*”] carries connotations of hopelessness whereas “אֲדָמָה” [“*Adama*”] is more hopeful in its connotation.<sup>24</sup> During the annihilation of Korah, the “אֶרֶץ” [“*Eretz*”] engages in a particularly human act – a swallow – as the earth is described as physically opening her mouth in order to swallow Korah and his followers, their houses, and their possessions. In fact, the

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<sup>23</sup> Rashi (an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, a Medieval French Rabbi known for his commentary on Scripture) distinguishes between “אֶרֶץ” as the dryness that is not water – the land that is bounded, separated from the water initially as a territory, and “אֲדָמָה” as the literal soil, or earth (Rashi, Genesis 2: 5-7). Moreover, “אֶרֶץ” is first used in Genesis to describe the act of creation, the specific designation of the earth from the heavens, intimating the distinction between the specificity of “אֶרֶץ” and the generality of “אֲדָמָה.”

<sup>24</sup> While Adam is created from “אֲדָמָה” (a word with which he shares a common root: א ד מ), symbolizing the hopefulness of new life, Cain is sent to wander endlessly the “אֶרֶץ”: “נֹעַד תְּהִיָּה בְּאֶרֶץ” [“a wanderer you shall be in the land”] (Genesis 4:12). The Maharal of Prague, who in addition to being known for his creation of the golem wrote an extensive commentary on Scripture, explains that the word “אֲדָמָה” implies potential. If cultivated, “אֲדָמָה” has the potential to produce life; however, if left fallow it will not reach its potential. According to the Maharal, Man was formed from “אֲדָמָה” and therefore called “אָדָם” to indicate that he is a being of potential much like the matter from which he is composed: “כִּי הָאָדָם שְׁהִיָּה בְּכַח הָאֲדָמָה קֹדָם בְּרִיאָתוֹ” [“Because Man was in the strength of the ground before his creation”] (Maharal, Genesis 2:7). Appropriately, the Maharal’s assessment of “אֲדָמָה” and “אָדָם” links to his creation of the golem, which, like Adam, is created from clay and is unformed; in its clay state, the golem is strictly potential: a potential the Maharal misreads as salvific without accounting for its dormant violence.

personification of the earth, of her swallow, is antithetical to Benjamin's characterization of divine violence. Though the swallowing is certainly bloodless, it is an act performed by an "ארץ" ["*Eretz*"] – the particular word for "earth" that upholds boundaries (as opposed to "אדמה" ["*Adama*"], which might be a more appropriate term for the boundlessness of divine violence) – and an act performed with distinctly human (not divine) elements: a mouth, a swallow.

Furthermore, while Benjamin's assessment of the incident as sacrificial holds, as the text explicitly denotes a fire that consumes "מקריבי הקטרת" ["those who offered incense"] (Numbers 16:35), for Benjamin to argue that the incident is expiatory seems misplaced. Sacrifice abounds in the episode, as not only are those who are consumed themselves sacrificial, they are sacrificed in the process of offering sacrifice. However, the word "expiation," derived from the Latin *expiātiōn-em*, meaning "of action," implies atonement, implies a distinct change in the situation, an action that occurs in order to modify the current situation. And in fact, Benjamin clearly indicates that divine violence achieves a break in the mythical cycle of law and violence by breaching boundaries and refusing to replace them with new boundaries. Yet immediately following the episode with Korah, the earth, the swallow, and the fire, the text continues:

"וילנו כל עדת בני ישראל ממחרת על משה" ["On the morrow, all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses"] (Numbers 17:6). Had the act of divine violence indeed been expiatory, the response to the act would not identically mirror the incident preceding the act of divine violence, in which Korah gathered the Jews in a cry against Moses.

Ultimately, Benjamin argues that the link between bloodlessness and expiation lies in what he refers to as "mere life" ("Critique" 297), or life symbolized by blood, a term Giorgio Agamben rewrites as "bare life" in his distinction between the Greek terms *bíos* and *zoē*. For

Agamben, *zoē*, or bare life, suggests animality – life that is common to all beings, life the human shares with the animal – and *bíos* is the specifically human way of life in a culture or a political world (*Homo Sacer* 66). For Benjamin, however, bare life is the state of being at the heart of the distinction between mythical violence and divine violence; whereas “divine violence [is] pure power over all life for the sake of the living [mythical violence is] bloody power over mere life for its own sake” (“Critique” 297). Like Agamben, Benjamin is critical of “mere life” for its failure to distinguish “essentially from the life of animals and plants” (“Critique” 297). In contrast, divine violence is not interested in mere life, but in “all life,” in “living.”<sup>25</sup> Thus the dissolution of sovereign juridical structures, of the cycle of mythical violence, is simultaneously the dissolution of mere life. But Benjamin’s choice of examples, his citation of the narrative of Korah as exemplary of the act of divine violence, points to an ambivalence at the heart of his critique: divine violence may be bloodless, but it is not always expiatory. It can resemble more closely the human, bounded, earth-swallowing instant of Korah’s death than the boundary-destroying, expiatory, unwarned strike Benjamin initially proposes.

Through the figure of the golem, and particularly its relation to blood in the play, Leivick’s *גולם דער* [*The Golem*] offers a nuanced alternative to Benjamin’s fraught divine violence; the golem exemplifies a violence rescripted as love. In his manifestation of a violence that is simultaneously divine and boundary-breaching, while also abundantly forewarned and not at all expiatory, the golem embodies the ambivalence Benjamin gestures toward. But whereas

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle’s *De Anima* offers a well-ordered catalogue that attempts to define what Aristotle terms “*psukhē*,” or the “vital principle.” Aristotle rescripts *psukhē* – from its earlier usage by Plato and other thinkers, who thought of *psukhē* as a principle of motion (atomists), a unifying principle (cosmologists), a matheme governing the universe (Pythagoreans) – as an ontological principle: the common vital thread across every instance of life. In defining *psukhē*, Aristotle, whose work dictates the priority of function over form, distinguishes between the *psukhē* and its articulation, a distinction Eugene Thacker understands as the “split ... between *Life* and *the living*” (Thacker 17), an integral element of Aristotle’s ontology and the bifurcation between a grounded notion of “Life” and its manifestation in instances of “the living.”

Benjamin's ambivalence is merely suggested, implied by the example of Korah that does not quite fit with his depiction of divine violence, Leivick uses the motif of blood to engage more forcefully in dialogue with Benjamin around the bloodlessness of divine violence. Leivick proposes that divine violence is just as caught up in the perpetual cycle as mythical violence. Leivick's text opens with the Maharal standing over the golem's clay form, speaking to god, confirming that the golem is "מִן הַיָּמַעַל" ["from heaven"] (Leivick 8), and is the physical instantiation of a divine mission. Moreover, like Benjamin's divine violence, whose power is "not visible to men" ("Critique" 300), the golem possesses the power of invisibility, a power he uses to enact violence against Tadeush (Leivick 97-98). However, despite tussling with Benjamin's ideas, Leivick's golem presents a violence that is distinctly not expiatory, not law-breaking, and not bloodless. And while Benjamin critiques mythical violence as "pernicious" and upholds divine violence as "obligatory" ("Critique" 300), his example of Korah provides an opening for Leivick's golem to highlight the hopeful possibilities inherent in violence.

The very context of *דַּעַר גּוֹלֵם* [*The Golem*] is rooted in blood. Although written between 1917 and 1921 and published in 1921 in New York, Leivick's play is set in Prague in the seventeenth century. The capital of the Czech Republic and Ancient Bohemia, Prague was one of the most important Jewish centers in Europe for many centuries. The relationship between Prague and its Jewish community has historically been a fraught one, beginning with the Crusades in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the pillaging, ransacking, and burning of the Jewish Quarter, and the strict prohibitions placed on the Jewish population by the Fourth Lateran Council in the thirteenth century. However, notwithstanding the complications between Prague and its Jewish community, Prague's Jewish ghetto was also a center of Jewish mysticism, and one that flourished in the sixteenth century, the age of the Prague Renaissance. During this time,



and particularly during the reign of Rudolph II (1576-1612), Rudolph's perceived weakness and indifference to the Catholic Counter-Reformation in the Hapsburg Empire allowed for a golden age for Jewry in Prague. A large number of scientists and intellectuals assembled in Prague and were permitted to speak and practice without impediments from the church, and Jews were awarded economic freedom, resulting in a flowering of Jewish culture; about 7,000 Jews lived in Prague during this time (Ryobár 30).

Despite the cultural flourishing of the Jewish population, the period of the Maharal's lifetime in Prague (1525-1609) was also a time of intense anti-Semitism; the Maharal predominantly had to contend with anti-Semitism that stemmed from blood libels, or false accusations that Jews use the human blood of Christian children in certain aspects of their religious rituals – namely, to bake *Matzah* [unleavened bread] for Passover. Leivick sets his play just before the Passover holiday, evoking the anxiety of the Jewish community over potential libelous accusations, and the creation of the golem in Leivick's play stems directly from the Maharal's need to protect the Jewish community against blood libels. The Pauper Tankhem reminds us early on that his only son was killed as bloody recompense, and that despite its associations with Elijah and its promise of messianic possibility,<sup>26</sup> the impending holiday of Passover instills more fear in the community than joy: **ווען ניט דער גרויסער יום טוב** “**ווען ניט דער גרויסער יום טוב**” [“If not for the grand holiday of Passover/ My Yokhanan would still be alive”] (Leivick 61). Leivick's choice of setting – in a Prague beset by anti-Semitism in the seventeenth century, during the days leading up the Passover – both

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<sup>26</sup> The Passover *seder* – the ritual meal performed as a retelling of the story of Exodus, carries strong messianic implications. Tradition holds that the Prophet Elijah visits each home on Passover, and in fact, a “cup of Elijah” is left out on the table throughout the meal. Elijah's visit foreshadows his future arrival to announce the coming of the Jewish Messiah.

emphasizes the way in which the play is mired in the context of blood (libels) and hints at the relationship between blood and the messianic that the play later explores.

In addition to its role in the context of the play, blood constitutes the underlying language of Leivick's text. Speaking to the golem, the Maharal commands him to remember at all times two crucial elements: his name (Yosl) and the word "blood." Through the Maharal's command, which links the character of the golem to the word that underpins the entirety of the play, blood takes on the significance, the fundamentality, of identity: **אין הער דאס ווארט, ואס איך** "And hear this word, that I will reveal to you/ Grasp it well, see its redness,/ Discern its warmth, its trembling and its sharpness, / The word is --- Blood." (Leivick 149). The Maharal describes "blood" as a **וועל דיר אנטפלעקען, פארנעם אים גוט, דערזעה זיין רויטקייט, דערשפיר זיין** **ווארימקייט, זיין ציטער און זיין שארפקייט, דאס ווארט הייסט --- בלוט.** "Blood" is revealed as a character – a trembling, tangible character – and once revealed, it takes on a life of its own, appearing in the caves beneath the Fifth Tower, in the hands of Tadeush, as a symbol for the messianic, as the metonym for the play's tragic conclusion. Blood is red and it is warm and it trembles and it is sharp, and furthermore, it is the word that defines the golem, the word that underpins Leivick's narrative, moving it from the banks of the river to the Maharal's study to the Fifth Tower and finally to the synagogue in its constant negotiation between various identities.

Whereas blood begins as a way to distinguish between Jew and gentile, human and golem, it ultimately becomes the source of precisely the lack of distinction between the two. In

act seven, the Maharal sends the golem to the underground caverns that extend from beneath the Fifth Tower to the town's synagogue. Hidden in the caverns, Tadeush, accompanied by the local monk, is carrying three corked bottles of Christian blood in service of a potential blood libel. Here, the text uses blood to distinguish between Jew and gentile. Christian blood has a particular character: "איו ליבשאפט --- ווייל בלוט" ["For blood --- is love"] (Leivick 155). Christian blood is the blood of love, the blood of Christ who has sacrificed himself for generations of future Christians.<sup>27</sup> Tadeush refers to this blood as the blood of "קינדער" ["children"] (Leivick 155), the blood that symbolizes the love of Christ for his children. Christian blood differs immensely from the Jewish blood the Maharal describes; Jewish blood is angry, sharp, and trembling, while Christian blood is gentle, blessed, and loving. Tadeush makes the distinction explicit, intimating that while Jewish blood is tinged by revenge, Christian blood is colored only by love: "נקמה? ניין, נאר איינע ליבשאפט/ ווייל בלוט --- איו ליבשאפט" ["Revenge? No, Only love. / For blood --- is love."] (Leivick 155). Tadeush's dialogue is marked by an extended dash, the punctuation itself emphasizing the divide between Jewish blood and Christian blood. Thus blood here becomes the marker of the distinction between Jew and gentile.

However, by the play's end, blood becomes the symbol of the golem's failure to distinguish between Jew and gentile. Desperate for the Maharal's attention, the golem uses his axe to shed Jewish blood, the blood of the members of his own Jewish community:

"פארגאסען בלוט/ אידיש בלוט" ["--he shed blood/ Jewish blood"] (Leivick 212). The Maharal laments the sudden development, attempting to redefine the boundaries between Jew and gentile, and admonishing the golem for his action, particularly for his inability to recognize "אידיש בלוט" ["Jewish blood"] (Leivick 212). In his attempt to re-establish the categories of

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<sup>27</sup> Christ's blood moreover plays a significant role in the Eucharist. In the Catholic Ceremony, once consecrated in the Eucharist, bread and wine and become the literal body and blood of Christ.

Jew and gentile, to understand the golem's failure, the Maharal uses the motif of blood, blood that once symbolized a boundary and now stands in for a lack of boundaries:

“געקומען ראטעווען און איצט אליין פארגאסען” [“He came to save, but now sheds our (blood)”] (Leivick 213). In fact, blood's refusal to be bounded, its lack of boundaries, is foreshadowed earlier in the poem during the directive of the golem's mission. Confirming the details of the golem's impending task, the Maharal asks the golem to determine what he smells: “וואס שפירסטו מיט'ן נאז?” [“What do you smell with your nose?”] The Maharal not only asks the golem what he smells, but asks what he smells with his nose, reinforcing that what he is interested in is particularly olfactory sensory descriptions. Yet the golem responds, “דאס ווארט” [“The word, the word... blood”] (Leivick 157). The golem's synesthesia – his smelling of a word – is indicative of the boundary-breaching blood denoted in the final act, and moreover, his reference to blood as a “word” foreshadows the symbolic nature of blood, the way in which it will represent far more than a mere word. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's 2004 work *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* describes the figure of the golem in relation to the notion of boundaries: “The golem, the monster of war, does not know the friend-enemy distinction” (Hardt and Negri 11). Whereas blood begins as a means of distinguishing between Jew and gentile, human and golem, it ultimately becomes the source of indistinction, as in his bloodletting, the golem fails to distinguish between friend and enemy, Jew and gentile.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt bases his conceptual realm of state sovereignty on the distinction between friend and enemy: “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy” (26). These categories are the foundation for sovereignty, and enable the sovereign's power to decide the establishment of an *Ausnahmezustand*.

Through the illustration of blood, its movement from bounded to boundless, Leivick amends Benjamin's critique of violence. However, Leivick's golem challenges the Benjaminian category of divinity in the realm of violence most forcefully as he performs the role of the Jewish Messiah.<sup>29</sup> Like Benjamin's work itself, the Jewish tradition makes very few unequivocal mentions of messianism, but obliquely references it in the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel and the Talmudic tractate of Sanhedrin. It is through the Midrashic and Kabbalistic traditions (the Rabbinic traditions) that Jewish messianism is discussed most thoroughly and plainly. Drawing on the Kabbalistic tradition, Gershom Scholem characterizes Jewish messianism as indubitably intertwined with apocalypticism, as "always occur[ing] in the closest connection with apocalypticism" (Scholem 4), and determines that this apocalypticism is distinguished by two opposing elements: catastrophe and utopia. The catastrophic and the utopian are bound together in the apocalyptic, and in their union, "bring to bear with full force the two sides of the Messianic event" (Scholem 8). Jewish messianism holds in tension the catastrophic, destructive nature of redemption, and the utopianism of the content of a realized messianism.

In fact, the figure of the Messiah himself is doubled, split into dual trends: the Messiah of the House of David and the Messiah of the House of Joseph. The Messiah son of Joseph is a messianic figure in rabbinical apocalyptic literature said to appear prior to the coming of Messiah son of David in order to wage war and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. He is the dying Messiah who perishes in the messianic catastrophe. In contrast, the Messiah son of David represents the utopian element of the apocalypse, the Messiah "in whom what is new finally comes to the fore [who] presents the purely positive side of this complex phenomenon"

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<sup>29</sup> The relationship between Benjamin and messianism is a fraught one; although German-born Jewish philosopher and historian (and Benjamin's close friend) Gershom Scholem highlights the messianism present in Benjamin's work, Benjamin's Marxist commentators regard it as the unfortunate result of Benjamin's having been unduly influenced by Scholem. Nevertheless, the explicit references to messianism in Leivick's play accent Benjamin's more tacit allusions to messianism both in his "Critique of Violence" and elsewhere.

(Scholem 18). Leivick's golem embodies the tension between the two Messiahs: as Yosl the woodchopper, he bears the title of the Messiah son of Joseph ("Yosl" is a derivative of "Joseph"), and as the golem, he bears the role of savior of the Jews. The golem's dual personas – one violent, one salvific; one human, one non-human; one Yosl, one Golem – emphasize the perpetual balance he negotiates, and moreover, parallel the doubling of the Jewish Messiah, underscoring the way in which Jewish messianism is distinguished by its penchant for holding in tension opposing forces.

Benjamin assumes this same tension in his implicit discussion of Jewish messianism in "Critique of Violence." In the very notion of divine violence, Benjamin brings together catastrophe and utopia, presenting a conceit that is both catastrophic in its boundless strike and utopian in its law-breaking expiation: necessarily violent, but also divine. Benjamin's conception of divine violence is moreover a messianic one in that it produces the fundamental change in human/animal relations necessary for a break with mythical violence's "bloody power over mere life" ("Critique" 297). Benjamin suggests that exalting mere life is not merely a feature of a law-making and law-preserving society, but moreover, the law entails a degree of corruption that is simultaneously a source of hope: "what corruption is in the law, anxiety is in their thinking. It messes a situation up, yet it is the only hopeful thing about it" ("Franz Kafka" 132). Like the cycle of law-making and law-preserving mythical violence that induces the possibility of divine expiatory violence, mere life is "hopeful." The hope inherent in mere life is the capacity for a "philosophy of history." Embroiled in the violence of his time, in a society that values mere life and embraces the corruption of the law to further make and preserve the law, Benjamin nevertheless sees his critique of violence as "the philosophy of its history – the 'philosophy' of this history, because only the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating,

and decisive approach” (“Critique” 299). Embedded in mere life is the possibility of critique, the hope of attentiveness, the dimension of the human that gives way to the messianic.

Benjamin describes messianism as “a slight adjustment to [the world]” (“Franz Kafka” 134), and the “slight adjustment” is a prominent element in Jewish messianism, one that Giorgio Agamben further explores by relating a parable about the Kingdom of the Messiah as a world in which “everything will be as it is now, just a little different” (*Coming Community* 53):

“A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come.” Benjamin’s version of the story goes like this: “the Hassidim tell a story about the world to come that says everything there will be just as it is here. Just as our room is now, so it will be in the world to come; where our baby sleeps now, there too it will sleep in the other world. And the clothes we wear in this world, those too we will wear there. Everything will be as it is now, just a little different.” (*Coming Community* 53)

Benjaminian divine violence is synonymous with the coming of the Messiah, which represents an intervention in mere life, an investment in “all life,” in “living” (“Critique” 297). Divine violence dissolves law-making and law-preserving boundaries and in so doing dissolves mythical violence’s high estimation of mere life. Divine violence brings neither guilt nor retribution – both features of mere life – but rather expiates. And divine violence is bloodless, unlike the blood that symbolizes mere life. Thus divine violence is not only messianic in its implicit tension

between catastrophe and utopia, but in the “slight adjustment” it proffers in the move from bounded to boundless, from bloody to bloodless, from retributive to expiatory.

In the golem, Leivick presents a figure that similarly embodies the tension between catastrophe and utopia. As a being created to save the Jewish community, but one who eventually spills Jewish blood, the golem perfectly manifests the apocalyptic balance Scholem describes. However, unlike Benjamin’s small change, the “slight adjustment” that characterizes his take on messianism, Leivick’s play presents three possible messiahs and confronts the outcome of a violent messiah – of divine violence – in a violent time. When the golem is sent to the caves beneath the Fifth Tower, he is accosted by a series of spirits and grows increasingly distressed. Faced with three possible paths, the golem decides on “דער מיט” [“the middle”] (Leivick 175), describing himself as sitting “אין דער מיט” [“in the middle”] (Leivick 175). Once positioned in the middle, the golem confronts two other messianic figures: the “יונגער” [“Young Beggar”] and the “מאן מיטן קרייץ” [“Man with the Cross”]. Each messiah is associated with a particular tool that represents his messianic role: the Young Beggar is fettered to a long chain, the Man with the Cross bears an enormous cross, and the golem carries an axe. The three figures sit together in the caves, lamenting their respective fates, each desperately wishing to cast off his chain, cross, axe. In fact, from the beginning of the play, the golem’s axe has been a tool he simultaneously resents and utilizes. He is created to be a woodchopper, but complains to the Maharal that his role causes him pain, that the people in the community taunt him for being an outsider, that his axe is a marker of distinction and he resents it: “זיי לאזען מיר ניט שפאלטען” [“They won’t allow me to split (the wood)”] (Leivick 47).

Moreover, the axe becomes the symbol for the catastrophe/utopia dichotomy the golem represents as a messianic figure. The Maharal endows the golem with the axe in order to provide



him with the tool necessary to preserve the Jewish community; but the axe is simultaneously the tool used to spill Jewish blood. And Leivick foreshadows this symbolic tension early in the play, when the golem complains to the Maharal about the axe. The Maharal realizes that by imbuing the golem with unlimited strength, he has also given him the potential for limitless violence:

”זאל פליהען ווי א פערדער אין דיין האנט די האק” --  
אזוי האב איך געגעבען דיר מיין ברכה.  
נאר איצט, איך זעה, מוז אנדערש זיין.  
מיט מיה, מיט שווערער אנשטרענגונג, מיט שווייס  
זאל יעדער הויב פון האק דיר אנקומען.  
און יעדעס מאל, ווען אויפ’ן האלץ וועט זיך דער שארף  
אראפלאזען, זאל אויך דער אטעם דיינער  
ארונטערזינקען, ווי א שווערע משא...  
ס’איז ניט קיין שטראף נאר דיר א טובה.

[“The axe should fly into your hands like a feather”/ That was the benediction I gave to you./ Now I see it must be different./ With effort, difficult effort, with sweat/ Each time the blade arrives at the wood./ And each time, when the sharpness will sink on the wood/ May your breath also sink/ Like a heavy load.../ This is not a castigation but a favor.”] (Leivick 48-49). As the representation of both catastrophe and utopia, the axe foreshadows the golem’s ultimate bloodshed. It moreover leaves the Maharal wary, feeling the need to renege on his original construction. Whereas the golem was endowed with super strength, with an axe that would feel like “א פערדער” [“a feather”] (Leivick 48), the Maharal now quickly backtracks and attempts to give weight to the axe, to reconsider the golem’s strength as a liability and not an asset. The golem’s violence is divine: his creation mirrors Adam’s, the Maharal confirms his divinity at the

play's outset, and the golem embodies the very contradiction inherent in Jewish messianism. Yet there is tragedy implicit in the golem's very existence. Like the Young Beggar and the Man with the Cross, the golem is linked to a tool that represents the tragic dimension of divine violence; the axe bears the potential for boundless law-breaking, but also for boundless bloodshed.

Though Leivick's text presents three possible messiahs, it then slowly eliminates the Christian Messiah and the Jewish Messiah, leaving the golem as the only appropriate messiah for his violent time. From his introduction, the Christian Messiah is depicted as a martyr. He is pushed onstage by an invisible hand, and is initially described as carrying a "גרויסען קרייץ" ["great/big cross"] (Leivick 178), nearly buckling beneath its weight. This is a figure whose fate is determined by an invisible force, in contrast with the golem who is an invisible force controlling the fates of those around him. Moreover, whereas the golem is the first to arrive in the caves, the Man with the Cross is the last. His entire dialogue is punctuated by the word "ענדליך" ["finally"] (Leivick 178), which opens nearly every sentence he speaks: finally I'm here, finally I'm free, in my final hour. The Christian Messiah requires a tableau into which he can enter, a world already in place into which he is pushed as the final addition. Again, a stark difference from the golem who is from the outset described in association with creation, birth, and origin; the Christian Messiah cannot create, originate, or begin, but only enter *in medias res* and only when pushed by an invisible hand. Leivick ultimately rejects the Christian Messiah as a redemptive figure by emphasizing his martyrdom and its relation to death. The Man with the Cross describes himself as bearing "נעגעל פון די הענט, / דארן פון מין קאפ" ["nails in the hands, thorns around the head"] (Leivick 179), calling attention to his sacrificial role as a martyr. This is a figure who bears the scars of sacrifice, who is metonymically aligned with nails and thorns, the tools of martyrdom. And because of his role as a martyr, a passive recipient of

violence, a figure who turns the other cheek in favor of enacting violence, he is rejected by the golem who deems him an inadequate messiah: “א טויטקייט טראגט פון דיר” [“you give off the stench of death”] (Leivick 180). The Man with the Cross is dismissed for emitting a connection with death. He is a rotting messiah, a messiah whose martyrdom is inappropriate in the current milieu, a messiah whose proximity to death implies that he needs to give over the messianic position to a figure closer to the state of birth than to the stench of death.

Like the Christian Messiah, the Jewish Messiah (and his companion, Elijah), are discarded in Leivick’s dramatic poem. They first appear in the fourth act, “בעטלער” [“Beggars”], and are depicted as two beggars, the Old Beggar and the Young Beggar. Associated from the outset with the Fifth Tower and the outcasts it houses, the Jewish Messiah is clearly depicted as an outsider. When the Young Beggar and Old Beggar enter the Fifth Tower, the narration describes them as “צוויי פּרעמדע וואַנדערענדע” [“two foreign wanderers”] (Leivick 91): even among the ostracized – the paupers, the ill, the blind – these two beggars are “foreign,” are outsiders who wander without a set space in which to dwell. They come to the Fifth Tower seeking shelter and are turned away by the Maharal. Furthermore, the Jewish Messiah is never named, only referred to as the “Young Beggar,”<sup>30</sup> and because he arrives in costume, performing the role of wandering foreigner, he is distanced from the community even further. In fact, his status as an outsider aligns him with the golem, who is similarly described by the Maharal as a wanderer, as a guest from far away whose outsidership sets him apart from the community.

Verily, this foreignness is an integral messianic element, as Jewish messianic figures are

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<sup>30</sup> According to Scripture, Elijah ascended to heaven alive in a fiery chariot. He is not dead, but also not alive, and has a unique present/non-present relationship with Jewish tradition. A glass of wine and a chair are left out for him at the Passover *sefer*, he is provided with a chair at every Jewish boy’s circumcision ceremony, and in Jewish folklore, Elijah appears repeatedly, often dressed in beggars’ clothing, in order to assess whether it is the appropriate time for the arrival of the Messiah. Always caught between death and life, Elijah is a perpetual wanderer, and his costume here – as an Old Beggar, a foreign wanderer – positions him both in the Scriptural tradition of liminality and in the folkloric tradition of appearing in beggar’s garb in association with the Messiah.

traditionally presented as alien or foreign. Moses, for example, a Jew cast from his parents' home as an infant and raised in an Egyptian palace, is an outsider from birth. As an adult, Moses wanders through the Egyptian kingdom, the Jewish "son" of Pharaoh, with a desire to identify as part of the Hebrew community. When he sees a Mizrian smiting a Hebrew, he recognizes the Hebrew as "מאחיר" ["one of his brothers"] (Exodus 2:11). Yet the Hebrews resent him, "מי שמך לאיש שר ושפט עלינו" ["Who made you a prince and a judge over us?"] (Exodus 2:14), and Moses is excluded both from the Hebrew community and from the Egyptian community. It Moses' very outsidership, however, that allows him to ultimately redeem the Jewish people from their fate as Egyptian slaves. In the Jewish tradition, the condition of being an outsider is a precursor for the Messiah – an element the Maharal accounts for in his creation of the golem: a guest from far away, a wanderer, who "און קוקט ניט אויס נאר ווי א איד" ["He doesn't seem to be a Jew"] (Leivick 32).

Despite the apparent similarities between the Young Beggar and the golem – their comparable foreignness, their corresponding associations with the Fifth Tower – the Jewish Messiah is aligned more closely with the Christian Messiah than with the golem. The scene in which the Young Beggar first appears is practically the antithesis of the golem's introduction. The golem generates terror in the Maharal's house and is immediately pegged as an outsider, identified as a figure lacking in Jewishness: in Jewish appearance, Jewish mannerisms, and Jewish knowledge. In contrast, withal their status as outsiders, the Young Beggar and Old Beggar are warmly welcomed by the paupers staying in the Fifth Tower, who greet them, "א גוט נ'ארוענט אייך, אידען" ["Good evening to you, Jews"] (Leivick 91), recognizing their Jewishness rather than ostracizing them for their outsidership. The paupers shake the Beggars' hands and offer them a place to sleep. The Redhead refers to the Old Beggar as "זיידע,"

meaning “Grandfather,” further emphasizing the communal and familial connection, and the Hunchback notes that the Young Beggar bears “אזא איידעל פנים” [“what a noble face”] (Leivick 96), designating him clearly as one of the “אידען” [“Jews”], in stark contrast with the golem whose face distinguishes him as “נאר ווי א איד” [“not one of the Jews”] (Leivick 32). Moreover, like the Christian Messiah, the Jewish Messiah is marked by his wounds. His feet are covered in sores and bound with old cloth, and he sits on the floor of the Fifth Tower, crying, “זיי שלאגען זיך אלץ מער פאנאנדער, פלאצען/ זיי גרייכען שוין די קנייה” [“They keep spreading and they keep bursting/ They come up to my knees”] (Leivick 92). Like the Man with the Cross who emits “א טויטקייט טראגט פון דיר” [“the stench of death”], the Young Beggar is rotting, his flesh literally disintegrating beneath him, the decay spreading from his feet, up his legs, and to his knees. He complains of exhaustion, collapsing on the ground of the Fifth Tower and falling instantly asleep. He is wasting away, festering in the face of the golem’s newborn strength. Notwithstanding his description as “young” – as a young counterpart to Elijah’s “Old Beggar,” as almost childlike and needing to be cared for by the Old Beggar who finds him a place to sleep and helps bind his sores – the Young Beggar nevertheless “א פוילקייט טראגט פון דיר” [“exudes the stench of rot”] (Leivick 177). Though he appears young, his presence is degenerating, a stark physical enactment of his abdication of the messianic position to the golem and his newborn strength.

The Jewish Messiah’s rotting flesh is merely one indication of his close link with time. The two Beggars enter the play in a hurry. The other paupers ask if they have been hurrying, “איר איילט?” [“Are you hurrying?”] (Leivick 92), and the Old Beggar responds by using the verb “to hurry” three times, grounding their movement in time, accentuating the need for hurry, the pressure of time’s passage, and the Young Beggar’s aging flesh. The Maharal then sends the

Young and Old Beggars away, chastising them for appearing before their time. He explains to the golem, “איך הייס דיר. זייער צייט/ איז ניט געקומען. איצט איז דיין צייט” [“Their time has not yet come. This time right now is yours”] (Leivick 96). The Young Beggar is tied to a particular notion of time – the future – a linear time, a time that has not yet arrived. And there is no room for that notion of linear time in Prague’s current predicament.

In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin similarly rejects any orientation toward futurity, calling for a revolutionary “tiger’s leap into the past” (“Theses” 7) based on what he reads as a messianic stasis. Benjamin argues that grounding a concept of history in linearity, succession, or homogeneity creates a fundamental paradox, and instead conceives of an alternative vision of history and temporality: *Jetztzeit*, or “Now-Time.” *Jetztzeit* is modeled on messianic time, and rejects the notion of linearity, of “homogenous and empty time” (“Theses” 264). Benjamin then connects his model of messianic time with his understanding of Jews and temporality; for Benjamin, the Jewish concept of the Messiah strips the future of its magic by focusing on the present as the moment of infinite possibility. At any moment, the Messiah might arrive, privileging the present over the future. Leivick similarly privileges the present, though does so by displacing the Jewish Messiah into the future. The present is a time of violence that must be met with a violent messiah, and the Young Beggar is far too fragile to confront the present. The Maharal berates the beggars for their untimely arrival, suggesting that the delicate, noble features of the Young Beggar are not fit for the current violent time, but belong somewhere far off in the future with the promise of peace.

As the Maharal sends the Young Beggar away, the Young Beggar draws attention to his own affiliation with time and his current untimeliness. The poem’s meter changes drastically

with the Young Beggar's departure, mimicking the ticking of a clock, and the Young Beggar describes himself as swaying on a chain: ,וויג זיך, וויג זיך / אויף מיין קייט, אלטע, "vig zich, vig zich/ uff mein keit/ alte, blinde/ abigkeyt" ["Sway, sway,/ On my chain,/ Old, blind/ Eternity"] (Leivick 111). Throughout, the dramatic poem has been written in blank verse, in iambic pentameter, with occasional rhyming lines. However, as the Young Beggar opens his monologue, the meter shifts from long ten-beat lines to shorter, terser five-beat lines, mirroring the swaying of a watch on a chain, or the ticking of the hands on a clock and, in its very form, underscoring the Young Beggar's link to time. The image of the chain recurs several times throughout the poem: it acts as the refrain in the Young Beggar's monologue in which he repeats the word "קייט" ["chain"] three times in five short verses; and it recurs again in the scene in the town caves, as the Young Beggar sits beside the Man with the Cross and the golem. The chain is the image that metonymically represents the Young Beggar's messianic role. The Young Beggar positions himself as a messianic figure, and then defines himself as entangled in "רינגעלדיגע קייט" ["the circling chain"] (Leivick 175). The chain not only links the Jewish Messiah to a particular temporality, but also imprisons him, inflicting wounds on his feet that force him to acknowledge his own mortality. The Young Beggar is simultaneously young and aging. Though he arrives on scene young, he immediately moves toward the future, feeling the bind of the chain, the ache of his wounds. His relationship to time is one in which he can never exist in the present, but is always being drawn toward the future, to impending death. And so he relinquishes the messianic position to the golem, who arrives on scene fully grown but acting like a child, who similarly embodies the youth and age of the Young Beggar, but does so with a timelessness, refusing the boundaries of time and embodying the principles of *Jetztzeit*.

Thus *דער גולם* [*The Golem*] rejects both the Young Beggar and the Man with the Cross, both the Jewish Messiah and the Christian Messiah, in favor of the golem as a messianic figure. Through the images of wounding and rotting, the text suggests that both the Young Beggar and the Man with the Cross are connected to death and dying, while the golem is born anew: a violent messiah for a violent time. The Young Beggar is sent away by the Maharal, who laments the fact that this peaceful, delicate messiah has appeared before his time “ניטא, ניטא, ניטא” [“No more, no more, no more”] (Leivick 118). As literature and gender studies scholar Warren Rosenberg explains: “The world, then, is not ready for a Christlike, peaceful Messiah... The beggars’ leaving is the end of the hope, the dream, of peace” (Rosenberg 79). Not ready, not yet, no more: the Young Beggar’s wounded feet, his position between age and youth, forces him to stumble toward a perpetual future, because the world is not yet ready for him. In a failure to discern the divinity in the situation, the Maharal sends the Young Beggar away. From the outset of the play, the Maharal is beset by divine warnings – “דארום בין איך געקומען ווארנען דיך” [“I’ve come to warn you”] (Leivick 10) – and yet in his perception, his entire mission is divinely inspired and he therefore banishes the Young Beggar to the future: “עס האט מין גאטגעשיקט” [“God sent me here”] (Leivick 11). Because the effects of divine violence are invisible, the messianic is perpetually deferred.

However, Leivick’s text offers a rescripting of the uncontainable boundary: not tragic in its divinity, but messianic in its violence; not the panic over the zombie plague, but rather a violence that is rewritten as love. As a figure that defies strict definition, the golem replaces the Christian and the Jewish Messiah, both of whom are tied to time and to mortality. Nonetheless, though he wields violence almost innately, the golem’s relation to death is a complicated one: for the golem, death closely resembles love. Hardt and Negri characterize the golem as embodying



“the inevitable blindness of war and violence” (Hardt and Negri 11), arguing that while once the exception, and calling for a state of exception,<sup>31</sup> war has become the rule, “erod[ing] the distinction between war and peace” (Hardt and Negri 5). For Hardt and Negri, the golem, who breaches boundaries and refuses to be contained, is the ultimate “icon of unlimited war and indiscriminate destruction” (Hardt and Negri 10). As a figure so closely tied to destruction, the golem functions figuratively, a symbol of war, a metonym of violence. The danger the golem poses is in his zombie-esque lack of precision; unable to recognize the friend-enemy distinction he preys indiscriminately on the Jewish community and on its enemies. His indefinability extends to the violence he wields, and as he himself cannot be completely defined, he blurs defined spaces in his wake: Jew and gentile, friend and enemy. By the end of Leivick’s dramatic poem, the Maharal laments the golem’s inability to distinguish particular spaces, “אֵיךְ הָאֵב גְּעוּוֹאֵלֵט פֶּאַרמִיידען בְּלוֹט אֹן בְּלוֹט פֶּאַרגאַסען” [“I wanted to avoid blood and blood I spilled”] (Leivick 213). The Maharal uses the motif of blood to emphasize the blurring of Jew and gentile. The golem is created to prevent the loss of Jewish blood, but in providing him with the strength necessary to enact divine violence, the Maharal imbues the golem with the tragic capacity to spill Jewish blood.

However, inasmuch as the golem represents death, he simultaneously represents “possible redemption through love” (Hardt and Negri 12), suggesting that love and death are not as antithetical and Hardt and Negri indicate. The golem is a figure who wants desperately to be loved, whose desire for love is constantly reproached and reviled, and whose inherent violence is

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<sup>31</sup> Though often translated as “state of emergency,” the German concept of *Ausnahmezustand* literally means “state of exception” (“*zustand*” meaning “state” and “*ausnahme*” meaning “exception”), a concept elaborated by Carl Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*. According to Schmitt, the state of exception frees the sovereign from any legal restraints to its power that would normally apply, and moreover, every law must be structured around the possibility that it will be suspended for its own preservation.

always tied to his lack of love. From the moment he meets her, the golem feels a connection to the Maharal's granddaughter, Devorah'le. His interactions with her strongly resemble Frankenstein's creature's encounters with Safie and the De Lacey family in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and a comparative reading of the two texts offers not only an understanding of the golem as a zombie-esque creature, but moreover insight into the relation between love and death in Leivick's **דער גולם** [*The Golem*]. In both Leivick's dramatic poem and Shelley's novel, the motif of hair operates as the contour along which desire is configured. The creature narrates his desire for Safie via his observations of her hair: "I beheld a countenance of angelic beauty and expression. Her hair of a shining raven black, and curiously braided" (Shelley 79). The golem similarly expresses his initial desire for Devorah'le through a description of her hair: **האר** **עס הענגען / אריבער איהרע אקטלען איהרע לאנגע** ["It hangs/ Her long hair hangs over her shoulders"] (Leivick 34). But both Frankenstein's creature and the golem are met with fear: even the creature cannot "describe their horror and consternation on beholding me" (Shelley 91), and Devorah'le hides behind her grandmother in terror and cries, **איך שרעק מיר** ["I'm terrified"] (Leivick 33). The creature recognizes instantly that although he has spent months observing the De Lacey family and developed self-awareness through his observations of them, he is not wanted, and, cognizant of their perception of his hideous appearance, he leaves: "I quitted the cottage, and in the general tumult escaped unperceived to my hovel" (Shelley 91). The Creature not only "quit[s] the cottage" but also hides "unperceived" in his "hovel." The dual layers of separation emphasize the degree to which he is alone, ousted by the human community and exiled from the possibility of love. Similarly, the golem is cast from the human community and refused the possibility of love, although he possesses a somewhat less developed self-awareness and must be chastened by the Maharal. Like the creature, the golem is destined to be alone, and

the Maharal warns the golem that his separation from Devorah'le extends to speech and thought: “זאלסט נאר נישט ריידען און ניט טראכטען וועגען איהר” [“You must not ever talk about her, ever even think about her”] (Leivick 35). Moreover, the golem is forbidden to engage with any of the Maharal's congregants: “מיט מענשען זאלסטו זיין פון ווייגען” [You must keep away from people”] (Leivick 36). The golem's creation marks him as different, and, like Frankenstein's creature, he is fated to a life of isolation and alienation.

In each case, these companionless creations enact violence against their human counterparts, and in each case, the violence is directly connected to (in fact stems from) the love refused these creations. Though sorely mistreated by Victor Frankenstein, the creature remains non-violent until his encounter with the De Lacey family. At that point, his feelings and actions change dramatically: “My feelings were those of rage and revenge” (Shelley 92). In his very first violent act he sets the De Lacey's cottage on fire, and gazes at the destruction with the same desire with which he once gazed at Safie: “The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues” (Shelley 94). The creature uses language of desire in order to describe the destruction of the cottage. The fire is personified and sexualized; it clings and licks and is fanned out much like hair released from a “curiously braided” coiffure. In setting the cottage aflame, the Creature is able to consummate his desire, to release the curious braid and fan out, to lick and cling, all in the violent act of destruction. Consummation here is replaced by consumption, and in its aftermath, the creature feels renewed, “with the world before [him]” (Shelley 94).

Similarly, the golem's violence arises from his unrequited love for Devorah'le. Every mission the Maharal sends him on is private, and the golem is commanded to remain hidden, a lonely woodchopper with no ties to the community. The golem only emerges publically on two

closely linked occasions: his public embrace of Devorah'le (desire) and his public bloodshed at the play's conclusion (destruction). After meeting Devorah'le and describing his desire for her through depictions of her hair, the golem follows her outside and in a public spectacle, witnessed by the entire Prague community, the golem approaches Devorah'le at the well<sup>32</sup> and publically embraces her. The Maharal responds to the golem's public outburst by removing the axe from his hands, emasculating the golem by divesting him of the symbol of his masculinity and virility. However, by the play's end, the golem reclaims this masculinity in his second public outburst. The golem consummates his desire through violence, reclaiming the axe and swinging it overhead, demonstrating his virility to the community before commencing on his rampage. He then spills Jewish blood, enacting a breach of (the Jewish-gentile) boundary and mimicking the result of violating Devorah'le in her virgin state. For both the golem and Frankenstein's creature, violence becomes a means of consummating desire, a response to loneliness.

Hardt and Negri argue that love is the antithesis of death, the cure for death, "the possible redemption" (Hardt and Negri 12) from death. However, Leivick's golem – particularly in his final moments – implies that not only are love and death not opposites as suggested by Hardt's and Negri's conclusion, but that they are in fact quite congruous. The golem's relationship to the Maharal accentuates not only the role of love in the production of violence, but moreover the tangled relationship between love and death. The Maharal offers the golem a space in his house, a home. The golem then quickly bonds with the Maharal – imitating him, following him from room to room, psychically sharing his dreams – and grows anxious at the possibility of being

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<sup>32</sup> Wells play an important role in matchmaking throughout Jewish history. Abraham goes in search for a wife for his son, Isaac, and finds Rebecca at the local well, and she impresses him with her offer of water to his camels: "אשקה ואשה וגם הגמלים השקתה" ["drink, and I will give your camels to drink as well"] (Genesis 24:46). And later, in an interesting reversal, Moses meets Zipporah at the well, and her father gives her to Moses in marriage because he chases away the shepherds and waters Zipporah's sheep: "ויקים משה וישען וישק את צאנם" ["Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock"] (Exodus 2:17).

separated from his maker: “ניט שיק מיך מער אוועק פון דיר” [“do not send me away from you”] (Leivick 50). But the Maharal does send the golem away, banishing him repeatedly. By the end of the play, beset by loneliness, the golem begs the Maharal, “פארלאז מין ניט” [“Don’t leave me”] (Leivick 209), and when the Maharal does inevitably leave, his departure incites the golem to raise his axe. When deprived of the love promised him, the golem innately responds by unleashing his wrath on the Jewish community.

Throughout Leivick’s play, the golem complains about having to fulfill each mission alone, having to protect the Jewish community while maintaining a distance from the Jewish community, and by the play’s conclusion, the golem beseeches his maker: **וועסט אבער** “ניט אוועקגעהן, רבי, -- יע?” [“You will not leave me, Rabbi, – will you?”] (Leivick 221). Company implies love to the golem, who constantly compares his relationship with the Maharal to the Maharal’s relationship with his other progeny, Devorah’le; the Maharal creates both children, but only protects, watches, and loves one. He shields Devorah’le from the golem’s antics, and banishes the golem in order to protect Devorah’le. Only in death does the Maharal evince any kind of love for the golem, standing over the corpse **א לענגערע צייט** [“a long time”] (Leivick 221), providing the companionship neglected in the golem’s “life.” The golem’s death, and its occurrence in tandem with the Maharal’s display of love, implies not only that love and death are aligned, but also that Maharal must engage with death, must undo his fatherly bond with the golem, in order to love him. He has the golem enact in reverse the very motions used in his creation; in creation, the Maharal smoothes, forms, and shapes the golem’s clay features, providing him with arms, legs, and finally opening his eyes, and in death he has the golem lie on the ground, stretch out his arms and legs, and close his eyes. Though the Maharal adopts the role

of father in the creation of the golem, it is only in the undoing of this bond that the Maharal is finally able to demonstrate his love.

If the zombie is a figure that evades the very idea of discipline, Leivick's *דער גולם* [*The Golem*] is clearly a zombie narrative. Etymologically and physically unformed, the golem itself embodies the zombie's liminal position. Through the golem, Leivick's play reorients familiar spaces and institutions. It locates the golem in the context of the messianic in order to redefine time, to mingle past, present, and future in its depiction and rejection of various messiahs; it embraces violence in order to align love with death, to undo the parameters dividing violence and desire; and it appropriates the process of birth and creation in order to deconstruct and reconstruct the family, to reinterpret the familial bond between father and child through the veil of death.<sup>33</sup>

As Leivick's *דער גולם* [*The Golem*] intimates, the figure of the golem exemplifies the fear of contagion, the desperate desire for containment. The golem stands just outside of the community, breaching boundaries between light and dark, Jewish and gentile, mythical and divine, and reorienting familiar institutions of family, love, violence, desire, and death, generating a cloud of terror that engulfs the society around him. From the start, the golem is depicted as a creature with a lack of distinction, a general inattentiveness to the deeply ingrained boundaries (both physical – in the case of walls and windows, and non-physical – in the case of Jewish and gentile identity) on which the community relies. As a zombie, Leivick's golem is boundless, seemingly like Benjamin's assessment of violence. And like Benjamin's critique, Leivick's play attempts to break with the cycle of violence through violence; the Maharal's construction and animation of the golem – the violent messiah created for a violent time –

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<sup>33</sup> The role of the zombie in deconstructing and reconstructing the familial order is one that will be explored further in Chapter 4.

literally manifests the way in which divine violence is engaged as a means of contending with anti-Semitic violence and blood libels. However, whereas Benjamin uses divine violence to break free of the cycle of mythical violence, Leivick rewrites the notion of violence entirely: violence as love. Leivick concludes his dramatic poem in the context of the Sabbath, a day of rest and a break from the cycle of creation, signifying a rupture in the cycle of violence. The stage directions read, “פרייטאג צו נאכט צו קבלה שבת” [“Friday night and the welcoming of the Sabbath”] (Leivick 193). In Genesis, each day of creation is marked by the phrase, “וַיְהִי בֹקֶר” [“And it was evening and it was morning”] (Genesis 1:5), creating a rhythm, a cycle to creation, a repetition of night and day and night, and drawing attention to the way in which creation is more cyclical than linear. Yet the seventh day – Sabbath – is not marked by the repetitive phrase, and instead serves as a period, a close, a break with the cycle of creation. Similarly, Leivick’s play, which opens at dawn, closes in the evening at the welcoming of the Sabbath, intimating the close of an era, one in which violence is rewritten as love, in which the violent moment of death is transformed into the image of a maker standing over his dead creation in a single, powerful act of love.

In his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin’s descriptions of the “Angel of History,” a figure from Scholem’s poem “*Gruss vom angelus*” [“Greetings from the Angel”], offer insight into the transformative role the golem takes in the context of the zombie. Benjamin’s angel brings together hope and despair: the spread wings and the staring eyes, the past and the future, Paradise and the pile of debris. Like the golem, the “Angel of History” marks a particular liminal space, one in which the dead have the potential to be reanimated, in which the angel wants to “make whole what has been smashed” (“Theses 257). However, whereas the angel of history is caught, his wings trapped, the golem is the source of metamorphosis. In the

domain of a post-apocalyptic genre, a milieu in which the zombie is perpetually associated with the end of the world, with the erasure of humanity, the golem's inclusion in the zombie context offers a hopeful dimension to an otherwise bleak setting: he represents the hope of attentiveness embedded in the animal, and replaces two dying messiahs (symbols of apocalypse) with newborn promise. Ultimately, Leivick's play rejects Benjaminian divine violence in favor of love, and the golem, who lumbers in the space between the zombie and the messiah, toys with the boundaries of the zombie genre, his rewriting of divine violence calling into question the possibility of classifying the zombie altogether. The golem transforms zombie conventions, but more significantly, draws a continuum between the messianic and the zombie. In the moment of absolute fear that the golem generates, there arises also the potentiality of hope: a transformation made possible precisely by the boundary-breaching, terrifying, zombie-esque figure of the golem. And in bringing together hope and fear, in linking the living dead with the messianic, in rescripting death as love, the golem disassembles, reassembles, and reorients the yet uncontainable zombie.



## CHAPTER II

### **The Legend of Disorder:**

#### **The Living Dead, Disorder, and Autoimmunity in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend***

If H. Leivick's **דער גולם** [*The Golem*] rewrites the notion of violence as love, Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend* offers a second possibility for redeeming the figure of the living dead from its position in the apocalypse by reconfiguring the terms of order and disorder, immune and autoimmune. Both texts contend with the notion of violence: Leivick's dramatic poem understands violence as a kind of love, and includes the golem under the rubric of the zombie in order to rescript the apocalyptic as messianic. Matheson's novel, in contrast, draws out the positive value inherent in disorder, demanding a critique of order. Rather than rewrite the terms of violence, as Leivick's golem does, the living dead in *I Am Legend* ask us to embrace both disorder and the paradigm of non-violent autoimmunity disorder carries with it.

Set in the distant future year of 1976, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* depicts the city of Los Angeles in post-apocalyptic devastation produced by a plague of deadly, contagious vampires. This legion of the living dead manifests a fictional representation of the relationship between contagion and containment, of the relationship between immunity and autoimmunity, and of the implicit order in the disorderly threat of the living dead: the order that necessarily emerges from the midst of the contagious, uncontained living dead tangle, the order that suggests that – in the face of the plague – disorder is the ultimate antidote. Clearly evincing the anxiety described in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Matheson's legendary depictions of a plague-infested city and the ensuing inspection, partition, quarantine, purification, and, above all, *order* that arises recalls the Foucauldian modern act of discipline, which derives from the fear of

the uncontained, the fear of the literal and figurative plague: “behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of ‘contagions’, of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder” (*Discipline and Punish* 198). If the modern world is represented by modern techniques and institutions designed specifically to control and discipline the “abnormal,” Matheson’s vampires represent the abnormal that refuses discipline.

In fact, the relationship between the living dead and the notion of containment extends its roots to the etymological inception of the term “zombie.” As elaborated in Chapter 1, the zombie’s foundations lie in the Haitian voodoo tradition, and the actual term “zombie” can be traced to the Creole word “*zonbi*,” indicating, quite literally, a person who dies (often under insidious circumstances, most frequently poisoned), is reanimated by a voodoo ritual led by a voodoo priest, and is left divested of free will and forced to obey a master. The literal zombie’s origins, deeply rooted in Haitian folklore, reflect the obvious traces of the colonial impact on Haitian culture and tradition; the United States occupied Haiti in 1915 under the guise of protecting American interests on the island. Both echoing and inspiring American prejudices of the Haitians’ inability to govern themselves, the zombie became the monster whose existence could be cited as proof of Haitian savagery. The literal “voodoo zombie” thus emphasizes the uneven colonial relationship between master and slave through a figure – a monster – whose very being generates fear driven by the possibility of slavery: “For most Haitians, the predominant fear was not of being attacked by zombies, but of becoming one” (Russell 11). The zombie of Haitian folklore was terrifying in its role as slave, in its lack of free will, and in its allusion to the occupation of the island of Haiti.

Published a mere nine years after the close of World War II, Matheson's text is similarly haunted by a historical moment, by the effects of war, and uses the figure of the vampire<sup>34</sup> to link the historical reality of the Second World War with the fictional mosquito-borne plague caused by the fictional (unnamed) war depicted in the novel. The shift from day to night in *I Am Legend* parallels the relation between plague and war: Neville spends his days carefully combing the city of Los Angeles, working from a hand-drawn grid and going house-to-house to eliminate the vampire threat and contain the plague, while at night, he stays indoors, the details of his domestic space underscoring the relation between the plague and the war in the novel. As he sits at home, listening to classical music and reading classic literature, "'The Year of the Plague,' by Roger Leie, filled his ears. Violins scraped and whined, tympani thudded like the beats of a dying heart, flutes played weird, atonal melodies" (Matheson 20). An appropriate albeit fictional piece of

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<sup>34</sup> Despite their apparent status as vampires, the novel's creatures, reduced by a vicious plague to a violent population, are widely considered to have influenced the zombie genre by popularizing the notion of a worldwide apocalypse brought on by disease. In fact, the renowned "Grandfather of the Zombies," George A. Romero, has been quoted as admitting that *Night of the Living Dead*, the film whose adaptation of the voodoo zombie into a cannibalistic plague popularized the figure of the zombie in American film culture, was an idea he "basically had ripped off from a Richard Matheson novel called *I Am Legend*" (Romero). And though Matheson writes about vampires and Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* refers to his living dead creatures as "ghouls," "things," and "unidentified assassins," the living dead in both texts share a range of similarities, suggesting a direct lineage between the vampire and the zombie and highlighting the model of infectious threat that produces order. In both texts, the living dead provide the source of fear; what little remains of the human population is terrorized by the dead who have returned to life. Throughout *I Am Legend*, Neville refers to the infected creatures as "undead" (Matheson 120), and an expert scientist on the news broadcast in *Night of the Living Dead* similarly describes the zombies as "just dead flesh" (*Night*). The fear in both texts is intensified by the threat of infection and contagion, as the human population is rapidly infected, becoming the very monsters it once feared. Matheson's Neville explicitly characterizes the living dead as infected by a "bacteria that caused the plague" (Matheson 73) and *Night of the Living Dead* describes the zombies as "bugs" (*Night*), likening them to Matheson's parasitic mosquito-borne plague. The attendant fear of infection and contagion is well-founded, as the living dead rapidly overtake the human population, spreading worldwide destruction and resulting in total apocalypse, save one lone survivor: *Night of the Living Dead*'s Ben (Duane Jones) and *I Am Legend*'s Robert Neville. In each case, these survivors are forced to contend with a plague the parameters of which are still very uncertain, and they work to discover particular ways to destroy the living dead. Neville spends months performing experiments and establishing the vampire's weaknesses and determines, "there is a germ, it's transmitted, sunlight kills it, garlic is effective" (Matheson 90). Ben determines his living dead have a similar photosensitivity and articulates the need to "get some more lights on in this house" (*Night*).

music, “The Year of the Plague” is described as “weird,” as “atonal,” as “the beats of a dying heart,” reflecting Neville’s own sentiments about his experience with the plague. As he settles in to his nightly domestic routine, listening to “The Year of the Plague,” Neville notes his choice to “never [wear] pajama tops; it was a habit he’d acquired in Panama during the war” (Matheson 21), overtly referencing “the war” and offering an account for the setting’s weirdness and atonality, for the beats of a dying heart, and linking the living dead to both plague and wartime.

Moreover, in a brief flashback to the beginnings of the vampire infection, Neville recalls a conversation he has with his wife, Virginia, that patently links the novel’s recent war with the apocalyptic plague. Discussing the plethora of insects and dust in the air, Neville wonders if the insects might be mutating, ““Oh, it means they’re... changing. Suddenly. Jumping over dozens of small evolutionary steps, maybe developing along lines they might not have followed at all if it weren’t for...’ Silence. ‘The bombings?’ she said... ‘And they say we won the war,’ she said” (Matheson 56). The insects, which Neville ultimately realizes have spread the plague, are responsible for transmitting the vampire germ; they have mutated as a result of the novel’s recent war. Like the Haitian zombie that represents the fear driven by colonial rule, Matheson’s vampires evoke the effects of the historically recent nuclear bombings, which, in the context of the novel, spread far beyond the physical and historical bounds of the war itself, causing worldwide devastation, apocalypse, the erasure of the human community, and the rise of a new society of vampires.

The work of Michel Foucault offers a lens through which to understand the fear generated by the modern vampire as it marks the particular break in the modern era<sup>35</sup> from

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<sup>35</sup> Melinda Cooper ascertains the period between 1775-1800 as a crucial moment in Foucault’s work on life: the point at which “the opposition between organic and inorganic began to be perceived as fundamental, superimposing itself on the old order of three kingdoms and entirely reworking its categories of resemblance and difference” (*Life*

sovereign power to “biopower.” Whereas sovereign power is strongly associated with death, with the exercise of the sovereign in subtracting and appropriating life and the body, normalizing scientific and social practices act as the form of social discipline in the biopower regime, encouraging life, and more importantly, abstracting life from the living. A regime wherein the power of the norm replaces the power of the law, biopower is “a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (*History of Sexuality* 136).

In his analysis of the measurable potential of life, Foucault reconceptualizes communities under the regime of biopower as comprised not of individuals, but rather of “populations,” or communities imagined along specifically biological lines:

During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines – universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of “biopower.” (*History of Sexuality* 140)

Populations and biopower are intimately connected, as medical and public health practices, political and economic disciplines – biopolitical strategies – give rise to the notion of population. Rather than assessing life on the basis of individuals or individual experience, biopower endeavors “to rationalize the problems presented to government practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation,

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*as Surplus* 6). For Cooper, the Foucauldian notion of life is intrinsically tied to labor, and before the turn of the nineteenth century, “there was no ‘life’ in the modern, biological sense of the term” (*Life as Surplus* 6).

birthrate, longevity, race” (“The Birth of Biopolitics” 73). Appraisal, and more importantly regulation, takes place at the level of population: a level at which life is far more efficiently administered and controlled.

Foucault considers life through the opposition of biopower and sovereignty, concluding that whereas “sovereignty took life and let live...now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists in making live and letting die” (*Society Must Be Defended* 247). For Foucault, biopower is distinctly about life, about “the power to make live” (*Society Must Be Defended* 247), and the move from sovereignty to biopower, a negative one for Foucault, is nevertheless one that regards agency with respect to life: “letting live” becomes “making live” and death is relegated to the passive role once reserved for life under sovereign rule. Foucault’s concept of life is thus a measurable factor, separate from concrete living beings and individual lived experience, and collected at the level of populations in order to define standards, make political interventions, and direct, manage, and discipline through normativization.

The plague in Matheson’s novel functions both literally and figuratively: as an infectious, blood-borne pathogen that spreads rapidly through the population and as the figurative disease of abnormality that Foucauldian biopolitical techniques and institutions attempt to supervise and discipline. Inherently multiplicitous in its references, and extending its reach beyond the literal figure drawn from Haitian folklore, the living dead have been wielded as allegories for the labor market (in George Romero’s *Land of the Dead* [2005], which segregates the wealthy in a luxury high rise, “Fiddler’s Green,” and has the poorer classes rapidly dying as they work on the front lines to feed their families and protect the city from zombies), the horrors of war (in Bob Clark’s *Deathdream* [1972], which features a zombified soldier who returns from war, and in Joe

Dante's "Homecoming" [2005] in which dead soldiers from the recent Iraq war begin returning to life), the anxieties over consumer culture (in George Romero's *Dawn of the Living Dead* [1978], which is set in a shopping mall), the fear of nuclear disaster (in George Romero's *The Crazies* and in Tobe Hooper's "Dance of the Dead" [2005], both of which feature bioterrorism as the cause for the zombie plague), the preoccupation with life after death (in Don Coscarelli's *Phantasm* [1979], in which a child is obsessed with a mausoleum, and in George Romero's *Day of the Dead* [1985] in which a scientist endlessly dissects and experiments on the living dead), and the tension between science and nature (in John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness* [1987], in which a group of graduate students attempt to scientifically analyze a mysterious cylinder, and Hal Barwood's *Warning Sign* [1985] in which a bio weapons facility literally masquerades as an agricultural research center).

The living dead's duality as both a literal and figurative being is paralleled by its physical move from Haiti to the United States. Journalist William Buehler Seabrook is often credited with transporting the figure of the living dead across geographical and cultural borders by way of his travelogue, *The Magic Island* (1929), which details his time spent in Haiti and includes an uncanny encounter with zombie slaves.<sup>36</sup> *The Magic Island's* popularity spawned the first American zombie film, *White Zombie* (1932), exposing voodoo zombies to American cinemagoers. Thus, as the living dead made its way across national and geographic borders, it moreover shifted positions from a literal slave figure at the heart of Haitian cultural and folkloric belief to a pop-cultural representation in the American film industry that included manifestations

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<sup>36</sup> Seabrook transcribes Polynice's descriptions of zombies in *The Magic Island*:

The zombie, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanic semblance of life –it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. People who have the power to do this go to a fresh grave, dig up the body before it has had time to rot, galvanize it into movement, and then make of it a servant or slave, occasionally for the commission of some crime, more often simply as a drudge around the habitation or the farm, setting it dull heavy tasks, and beating it like a dumb beast if it slackens. (Seabrook 93)

of the living dead as not only zombies, but moreover ghouls, ghosts, and vampires. The fluidity of the living dead, its shuffle across physical geographic borders, across cultural and artistic borders, from folklore to allegory, from genuine cultural fear to pop-cultural illustration, indicates its slippery position: at the very core of the living dead is its refusal to be contained, its immunity to unequivocal definition. Often presented as the source of a literal contagious plague that threatens humanity with apocalyptic destruction,<sup>37</sup> the living dead are moreover symbolically contagious; not quite living and not quite dead, they defy categorization, slipping over the edges, borders, and boundaries designed precisely to contain fears and monsters.

From its inception, Matheson's plague is conceptualized as a "virus," and loosely identified with storms, mosquitoes, and dust: with elements that cannot be easily contained. In a flashback, Neville recalls the days before the plague's destruction and his early anxiety over the fact that "half the people on the block" (Matheson 54) have "some kind of virus" (Matheson 54). Neville's wife flippantly brushes a mosquito away, murmuring, "they carry diseases" (Matheson 55). While the entire country's scientists have been working tirelessly and futilely to "find the germ" (Matheson 57), Virginia inadvertently pinpoints a major source of the plague's life cycle. Ultimately, Neville is able to parse the particular relationship between the vampire and the plague: the vampire acts as host to the germ; vampires are "as much a tool of the germ as the living innocents who were originally afflicted. It was the germ that was the villain. The germ that hid behind obscuring veils of legend and superstition, spreading its scourge while people cringed before their own fears" (Matheson 88). The novel further distinguishes between two classes of

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<sup>37</sup> Examples of texts and films that present the zombie as a literal contagious plague include: George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Dan O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), George A. Romero's *The Crazies* (1973), Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981), Mary Lambert's *Pet Sematary* (1989), David Cronenberg's *Rabid* (1977), Ruben Fleischer's *Zombieland* (2009), David Wellington's *Monster Island: A Zombie Novel* (2006), Robert Kirkman's comic book series *The Walking Dead* (2004), and Brian Keene's popular novel *The Rising* (2004).



vampires: those entirely activated by the germ (the dead) and those still physically alive (the living dead). Germ and vampire work in tandem with the dust storms and mosquitoes: as the germ infects the vampire and is sustained by blood, the host ultimately decomposes, and the infected spores are blown by the storms and carried by insects, seeking new hosts to germinate and infect.

Matheson creates an impressive mythology around *I Am Legend's* plague, replete with scientific terminology (“bacillus,” “isotonic solution” “self-killing bacteriophages” “sporulates”) and a strong historical link to plagues throughout the centuries. Tracing the effects of the vampire plague on his contemporary world, Neville considers the germ’s historical impact: “Neville recounted the historical plagues. He thought about the fall of Athens. That had been very much like the [recent vampire] plague of 1975. Before anything could be done, the city had fallen. Historians wrote of bubonic plague” (Matheson 88). Matheson’s plague is a plague with a lineage, one overtly linked to the bubonic plague and to the past. This bacillus clearly recalls the measures used to contain plagues of the past, and thus Foucault’s descriptions of partition, surveillance, and purification.

In addition to the literal bacteriology of the disease and the risk of physical contagion – the plague, its link to historical germs, and its viral implications – Matheson’s novel underscores the fear of a more figurative contagion: the anxiety produced by the threat of the abnormal. In his argument regarding the “repressive hypothesis,” or the mass refusal to acknowledge the prolific discussion of sex in the modern era, Foucault’s descriptions of the relationship between sexuality and the abnormal are exemplified by the anxiety taken up in *I Am Legend* (which ironically, is futuristically set in the very year Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* is published [1976]). For Foucault, homosexuality poses a threat to the newly established modern biopolitical systems and

is thus marked as disorderly, as “especially abominable” (*History of Sexuality* 38). Matheson’s novel captures this marked anxiety over the abnormal in its depiction of a man struggling with his own sexual identity and caught between the fantasy of heteronormativity and the reality of a world in which the human body and humanity are increasingly normalized and medicalized.

From its opening, the novel highlights Neville’s attempt to assert his masculinity, depicting his daily routine of vampire-hunting, research, and self-protection: “He knew he should burn up the paper plates and utensils too, and dust the furniture and wash out the sinks and the bathtub and toilet, and change the sheets and pillowcase on his bed; but he didn’t feel like it. For he was a man and he was alone and these things had no importance to him” (Matheson 14-15). As a man, Neville purports to be comfortable in his total lack of domesticity, his undusted, unwashed, uncleaned house. But he is far less comfortable in relation to the (vampire) women around him. In fact, as Leivick’s Devorah’le generates anxiety for the golem who cannot understand his feelings for her, women in *I Am Legend* are similarly Neville’s prime source of anxiety: “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” (Matheson 19). Neville performs all of his experiments on female vampires, injecting them with essence of garlic, thrusting them into the sunlight, and timing their deaths. He is simultaneously disgusted by them and terrified of them – not of their vampirism, but of their femininity: “the women were out there, their dresses open or taken off, their flesh waiting for his touch, their lips waiting for –” (Matheson 33). As he contemplates the women standing outside his unkempt masculine domain, he is unable to even complete the thought of engaging in a sexual act with them. Their “dresses,” their “lips,” their “flesh” discompose him.

Aside from his experiments, Neville interacts with only one woman in the novel: Ruth, an

infected woman who is part of a newfound society that has been able to adapt to the sunlight. The novel positions her as the perfect counterpart to Neville: the Eve to his Adam, his only possibility to repopulate the world. In the image depicting their first encounter, they are described as “man” and “woman,” as the heteronormative ideal and a hopeful possibility for procreation: “the two of them, the man and the woman, stood facing each other in the great, hot field” (Matheson 125). Yet Ruth’s very name – the Hebrew word for “companion” – is precisely the way in which Neville perceives her. Throughout, he refers to her as a “companion,” and is irritated by her femininity: “Far from being attracted, he felt irritated. It was a typical feminine gesture, he thought, an artificial movement” (Matheson 141). The possibility of Neville and Ruth – of the man and the woman – is moot here, as Neville grows more and more anxious over the idea of procreating with her. They sit together in his living room and he considers that Ruth may be a vampire, and then a more terrifying prospect than her potential vampirism: “if she stayed, if they had to establish a relationship, perhaps become husband and wife, have children... Yes, that was more terrifying” (Matheson 139). Neville’s unease over his own sexual identity leaves him terrified of Ruth’s being anything more than a mere “companion.”

Neville’s neighbor (and pre-pandemic friend) Ben Cortman reinforces Neville’s position as a man caught between his masculine fantasy and the reality of his crushing anxiety over his own sexual identity. Cortman torments Neville, calling through Neville’s windows and walls each night, imploring him, “‘Come out, Neville! Come out!’” (Matheson 20): out of his house, out of the masculine space, and into the realm of the perceived “abnormal.” Neville then grows obsessed with the idea of killing Cortman, of destroying the “especially abominable” threat Cortman poses to the heteronorm – “the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, [which] ... tended to function as a norm” (*History of Sexuality* 38) – that Neville is trying so hard to

maintain. He organizes his days around plotting Cortman's destruction, interspersing his daily traipse through the city with searches for Cortman's daylight hiding place: "it had become a relaxing hobby, hunting for Cortman; one of the few diversions left to him" (Matheson 119). Neville embraces the human justification for exterminating the infected (vampire) body, both for its literal infectiousness and for its symbolic abnormality. In the Foucauldian periodization from the sovereign power over death to the biopolitical management of life, which draws considerably on Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological* (1991), managing life implies normalizing and regulating life, and the panoptic gaze, the "strict spatial partitioning" (*Discipline and Punish* 195) of biopower, arises in response to the threat of the abnormal; as a representation of the abnormal, living openly on the outside, "happier now than he ever had been before" (Matheson 119), Cortman thus unsettles Neville.

However, by the novel's end, the distinctions between the vampire body and the human body, Cortman's body and Neville's body, the masculine body and the homosexual body, the normal body and the abnormal body, disintegrate. Neville has come to identify with Cortman to the degree that "his [own] body jerked with convulsive shudders as he watched Cortman's body jerk under the impact of the bullets" (Matheson 159). As he shudders beneath the impact of bullets aimed at Cortman, Neville understands the depth of his position and the relationship between the abnormal and the plague, between love and violence. Neville has not succumbed to the "abnormal" vampire plague, has not loved, and now will "die, he thought, never knowing the fierce joy and attendant comfort of a loved one's embrace. To sink into that hideous coma, to sink then into death and perhaps, to return to sterile, awful wanderings. All without knowing what it was to love and be loved" (Matheson 78-9). As with Leivick's **דער גולם** [*The Golem*], in which the golem's violence is tied to love, to the unrequited love between the golem and

Devorah's, violence here – the violence of bullets aimed at Cortman's body – is a notion inextricably linked to love, or the lack of a requited love: a love not defined by a man and a woman or a man and a fantasy or a man and a companion; a love not colored by a domesticity couched in a costume of sheer masculinity; a love that might entail coming out or touching or perhaps even embracing the realm of the perceived “abnormal,” the realm of the vampire.

The text ultimately reverses the roles of “normal” and “abnormal,” repositioning Neville as “abnormal” and the vampire as “normal,” and forcing the vampire society to exterminate Neville in order to immunize itself against the threat of *his* abnormality. Neville is “an invisible specter” (Matheson 169), a being poised delicately between two worlds: the living and the dead; the night and the day; the fantasies of his comfortable (and comforting) past heteronormative family and the realities of his present inability to reconcile his anxieties over women and sex with the invocations of his once-beloved neighbor, Ben Cortman. Unable to accept his own position, Neville longs for the fantasy of the heteronorm, and becomes fixated on the image of his dead wife and daughter. At the novel's end, he realizes that as a man unable to “come out,” unable to come to terms with his own sexuality, he poses a threat to the newly developing society around him: “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” (Matheson 169). Despite their physically diseased bodies, Ruth and her new society are far more threatened by Neville's “abnormal” humanity than by the vampire pandemic. They are a new society, one that has adapted to the pandemic and has embraced the notion of “repossessing society... to survive” (Matheson 166). And thus Neville recognizes the reversal that has taken place, the “full circle” (Matheson 170) that has resulted in his abnormality, in his becoming “the

last of the old race” (Matheson 167), a being whose *legend* is the failure to embrace his abnormality until it is forced upon him, the failure to become a vampire.

The abnormal in Matheson’s novel is always tied to disorder, and whether literal or figurative, whether in the form of the bacteriophage or the vampire, the plague is inherently disorderly. In response to the disorder levied by the vampire plague, Matheson’s *I Am Legend* establishes a series of orderly reactions, Foucauldian disciplinary mechanisms that emerge from the seat of contagion in order “to sort out every possible confusion” (*Discipline and Punish* 197). Foucault describes the ambience of the plague as a “festival” (*Discipline and Punish* 197). As a physical and biological source of contagion, the plague flits between bodies and spaces, spreading infection, refusing containment, and generating disorder. Viral and communicable, it diffuses itself through entire towns via fleas or rats, rendering bodies swollen, chilled, and gangrenous. Moreover, the plague’s disorder extends beyond the scope of the biological plague itself and into its social context: “suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear” (*Discipline and Punish* 197). Whereas the word “festival” derives from the Latin “*festivus*,” marking its connection with feasting, a tradition with notably ordered elements, what Foucault here describes as the “festival” that springs up around the plague is branded by disorder. Defined in opposition to “fasting,” “feasting” implies a particular anniversary (usually religious), an appointment, an observation: certainly a repast, but always enacted within the confines of a calendar, memorial, or personage. If feasting is characterized by order, Foucault implies that the plague has the capacity to take the orderly feast and transform it into the disorderly festival, literally unraveling the very etymological roots of the term. This, then, is the

risk of the plague: it mars bodies, defies laws, and unhinges social structures; it mingles, spreads, and transmits; and it renders the orderly disorderly.

However, though the plague itself is disorderly, the vampire – as a model of infectious threat – reveals the order that necessarily emerges from the midst of the disorderly plague. Foucault captures the concurrent order and disorder of the plague in his description of the political response to the plague:

But there was also a political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his “true” name, his “true” place, his “true” body, his “true” disease. The plague as a form, at once real and imaginary, of disorder had as its medical and political correlative discipline. Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of “contagions,” of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder. (*Discipline and Punish* 197-8)

Attention here slips from the plague’s disorder to the order attendant in controlling the plague, in administrating its human bearers through “the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life” (Foucault 197). Neville’s day similarly begins with the construction of his daily list: “*Lathe at Sears/ Water/ Check generator/ Doweling (?)/ Usual*” (Matheson 23). Neville takes comfort in his lists, which hardly vary from day to day. He saturates his day in routine, eating breakfast, brushing his teeth, searching for Ben Cortman, finding doweling and

fashioning stakes, burning bodies, eating dinner, listening to music, falling asleep. During the day he establishes order not only in his personal routine, but also in his response to contagion. With a map of the city in hand, he maneuvers from street to street, locating vampires and staking them: “he went from house to house and used up all his stakes” (Matheson 28). Neville generates lists to maintain control, to calculate his own needs, and to assess the vampires’ weaknesses. Baffled by the plague’s disorder, its inconsistencies, he attempts to organize the plague’s features: “He made a list. One column he headed ‘Bacilli,’ the other he headed with a question mark” (Matheson 91). But the plague defies organization. The vampires’ responses to the cross, the soil, sunlight, the stake, the mirror, garlic cannot be accounted for by science and Neville is forced to “crumple... the paper into a ball in his fist and hurl... it away” (Matheson 91), to acknowledge that though the plague inspires order, it thrives in and on disorder.

Lists, partitions, and maps sort morning from evening, daylight from nighttime, breakfast from dinner, vampire from human. Neville embraces “the monotony of his daily tasks: the carrying away of bodies, the repairing of the house’s exterior, the hanging of garlic” (Matheson 50), and moreover, he relies on the orderliness of his routine to distinguish himself from the infected around him. In his frustration one night, he drinks and metonymically shatters his own order, swallowing a glass of whiskey, which “run[s] out the edges of his mouth [and] leaping across the rug to grind the glass into splinters under his heavy shoes” (Matheson 92). As the whiskey escapes the bounds of his mouth, running “out the edges,” and the glass shatters, creating splintered disorder in his domestic space, Neville suddenly acknowledges, “I’m an animal!” (Matheson 92), assessing that the loss of his orderliness, his plunge into the disorderly, has moved him outside the domain of the human.

In addition to Neville’s brand of practical order, his listing and partitioning as a means of



distinguishing human from animal and combatting the vampire plague, Matheson's text introduces a degree of order in the development of the new vampire society. In a letter to Neville, Ruth describes the evolving society and its shift from infection to order: "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" (Matheson 154). In spite of infection, the new society is determined to embrace order, embrace life. Ruth accents the establishment of the new society, the way in which it is being "set up," designed, and ordered. As the new society develops, the living dead pursue Neville who poses a threat to their newborn order: "They came by night. Came in their dark cars with their spotlights and their guns and their axes and pikes. Came from the blackness with a great sound of motors, the long white arms of their spotlights snapping around the boulevard corner and clutching out at Cimarron Street" (Matheson 157). Through the stark contrast of white illumination on a black nighttime backdrop, the text emphasizes the new society's order as it cuts through the infection, pursuing Neville in order to contain the plague.

Driven by the living dead, order in Matheson's *I Am Legend*, much like love in Leivick's **דער גולם** [*The Golem*], is moreover inextricably bound to violence. Both Neville's human order and the new society's vampire order are violent orders, suggesting that order that arises in response to the disorder of the plague is necessarily violent. Motivated by "an experimental fervor" (Matheson 39), a need to define the vampire, to separate it from the human and generate a plan for the elimination of the plague, Neville erects a system of classification distinguishing human from vampire, himself from them. On his daily hunt, he discovers "one of *them*" (Matheson 39) [emphasis mine] and responds violently in an effort to maintain the order separating human and vampire: "he jerked back the covers and grabbed her by the wrists. She

grunted as her body hit the floor, and he heard her making tiny sounds in her throat as he dragged her into the hall and started down the stairs... he tore out of her grasp with a snarl and dragged her the rest of the way by her hair... he threw her on the sidewalk outside” (Matheson 39). The vampire here is depicted as female, characterized as particularly feminine and weak, “making tiny sounds” in comparison to Neville’s daunting brute violence. Neville drags her “by her hair,” calling attention to this symbol of her femininity; his response to the vampire is, in part, an assertion of his (misplaced) masculinity, as well as a violent assertion of a particular hierarchy in which the weak, “tiny” feminine vampire is required to submit to the strong masculine human, who bears the capacity to mark her as tainted, as vampire, and to negotiate “the stairs,” to create a violently hierarchical order amidst the plague.

Like Neville’s order, the new society’s order is inherently violent, characterized by “methodical butchery” (Matheson 158) and a degree of brutality that astounds Neville, who notes the intentionality of the violence: “the dark-suited men knew exactly what they were doing” (Matheson 158). In a dramatic shift, the new society violently reorganizes the hierarchy, positioning the vampire as the dominant figure and the human (Neville) as passive and lifeless. As Neville drags the vampire female to assert his human authority, he is finally attacked by the new vampire society and “the dark men dragged [Neville’s] lifeless body from the house. Into the night. Into the world that was theirs and no longer his” (Matheson 162). Whereas Neville asserts his order during the day, the vampire order is oriented around the nighttime; they physically cut through the blackness of night, distinguishing vampire from human and overturning Neville’s order, as the living becomes the lifeless, the human becomes the infectious threat, and the world is repossessed by the vampire order. Ruth explains that the new society is “a revolutionary group – repossessing society by violence” (Matheson 166). As Neville’s order is

a necessarily violent response to the disorder of the vampire plague, the new society's order is a necessarily violent response to the disorder of Neville's human plague.

This, then, is the price of order. It is, as Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," suggests, always violent. As discussed in Chapter 1, "Critique of Violence" examines the relationship between violence and order in Benjamin's assessment of the circular dialectic between the mythical violence necessitated by law-making and the law-preserving violence that maintains the state (or state-of-affairs) created by law-making violence: "if that first function of violence is called the lawmaking function, this second will be called the law-preserving function" ("Critique" 284). Order is produced by law-making violence and maintained by law-preserving violence. In fact, the relationship between order and violence is one that extends back to *Genesis*, wherein Adam classifies the animals, creating order in the animal kingdom – "the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Genesis 2:19-20) – an order that breeds violence. Immediately upon naming the beasts of the field, Adam is persuaded to sin, which results in his being violently cast from Eden: an expulsion marked by a clear symbol of violence: "a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24).<sup>38</sup>

Like Benjamin, Matheson depicts the violence of order. Per *I Am Legend*, order will destroy the vampire who will destroy the human. It will render life lifeless, render the human

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<sup>38</sup> The relation between violence and order is taken up throughout fictional film and literary text as well, appearing in such narratives as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), in which the initial scene – "The Dawn of Man" – features a peaceful tribe of herbivorous early hominids, who soon develop the use of tools, fashioning bones into apparatuses that will protect their tribe from the leopards who steal their water supply, and establishing order between the animal (leopard) and the man (hominid). This order, however, almost immediately leads to violence as the bone becomes a weapon used not only to kill prey for their food but eventually to slay the leader of an opposing tribe

infectious, and drag him by the hair until he acknowledges his smallness, his “tiny” voice. Violence is disorderly and defining. It tears down and rebuilds hierarchies, reassessing the parameters of the living and the lifeless, and asserting itself in the darkness. It is forced into being by disorder (or perhaps is the axis upon which disorder spreads, infiltrates, and infects) and disorders as it orders, refusing, repossessing, reorienting, regressing, redefining. In an interview, George A. Romero describes his interest in Matheson as stemming from the violent reordering of society, from Matheson’s depiction of “a new society coming in and devouring the old” (Curnutte). And in fact, *I Am Legend* concludes with Neville’s capture by a foundling society of vampires who threaten to execute him for posing a threat to their new order, and Neville suddenly realizes, “I’m the abnormal one now. Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man” (Matheson 169). His familiar world order is overturned as the human population dwindles into the minority and the vampire population overtakes – devours – the old world.

In the midst of the disorder brought on by contagion and plague, by bacteria, the living dead, and the return of undead loved ones, a new social order emerges. Order is forged from disorder. Neville is a new infection, “to them he was some terrible scourge they had never seen, a scourge even worse than the disease they had come to live with” (Matheson 169). The new vampire society has immunized itself against vampirism, and as the vampire infection becomes the norm, it now must protect itself against humanity and the human infection. The vampires become “the new people of the earth” (Matheson 170), and the sole remaining human becomes the lifeless “terrible scourge.” Neville adopts the perspective of the new society, seeing himself as an “anathema and black terror to be destroyed” (Matheson 170), drawing on the language of “blackness” to recall the Black Plague and his earlier correlation of the vampire pandemic to “the

Black Plague, that horrible blight that swept across Europe, leaving in its wake a toll of three-fourths of the population” (Matheson 88), and to underscore his recognition of his own status as an infectious threat warranting destruction.

As he embodies the new human infection, Neville finally embraces his own abnormality, establishing himself in a context of disorder and contradiction. Having acknowledged the fickle nature of the majority, the way in which the norm so easily slips into the abnormal, Neville now attests: “Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend” (Matheson 170). As the majority bleeds into the minority, as the changeability of the world order manifests itself, Neville simultaneously, and contradictorily, makes reference to “the unassailable fortress of forever,” to the way in which his humanity has forever been rewritten as infectious. Having spent his life generating order through lists and maps, through the partitions and definitions between human and vampire, Neville now embraces disorder. In his final moments, he rejects the violence of order, adopting a wholly non-violent perspective: “so long as the end did not come with violence, so long as it did not have to be a butchery before their eyes” (Matheson 170). Neville’s legend is thus the legend of disorder. By embracing non-violence, he embraces disorder, indicated by the implicit contradiction in his final thought regarding simultaneous changeability and unassailability. Disordered, he relinquishes his lists, his partitions, and muddles the distinctions between normal and abnormal, between changeable and unassailable, between death and the birth of a “new terror.” He envisions his current state as circular, “full circle,” a sphere with no clear break. As the vampire becomes the norm and the human becomes the infection, Neville recognizes the violence implicit in his – in all – ordering, acquiesces to the disorder inherent in the plague, and accepts his legend.

In addition to underscoring the disorder inherent in the plague, Matheson's depiction of the circular nature of order in the context of the plague ties Neville's ultimate suicide to notions of immunity and autoimmunity. Locating his work squarely in response to Foucault, Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito offers a paradigm he describes as "restor[ing] the missing link of Foucault's argumentation" (*Bíos* 9): the "immunity paradigm." Esposito critiques Foucauldian biopolitics for constantly toggling between the two concepts he sees as composing biopolitics – biology and politics – without ever bridging the two.<sup>39</sup> For Esposito, the immunity paradigm performs the interface between biology and politics: "immunization fill[s] that semantic void, that interval of meaning which remains open in Foucault's text between the constitutive poles of the concept of biopolitics, namely biology and politics" (*Bíos* 45). If biopolitics is comprised of biology and politics, immunization reveals their intrinsic interrelation: "Rather than being superimposed or juxtaposed in an external form that subjects one to the domination of the other, in the immunitary paradigm, *bíos* and *nomos*, life and politics, emerge as the two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole" (*Bíos* 45). Esposito rewrites the relationship between biology and politics from one in which the two face each other from opposite ends of a biopolitical spectrum to one in which the very continuum that runs between them constitutes their significance.

Tracing the immunitary paradigm's political application to Hobbes, Esposito argues that any attempt at human self-preservation fails because natural human impulse inevitably entails

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<sup>39</sup> Esposito's critique is somewhat misguided, both because Foucault's own work very rarely even uses the term "biopolitics," and more so because Foucault does in fact bridge biology and politics, particularly in his assessment of biopower's discipline of the body and the institutional political mechanisms used to discipline and control the biological body. According to Foucault, modern projects of "docility" represent a new level of control over the body, which requires uninterrupted, constant coercion. And while these body-control disciplines had always existed in monasteries and armies, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they became a general formula of domination, a policy of coercion that acted on the body. In Foucault's understanding of the modern system, a political anatomy and a mechanics of power shape the very operations and positions of the body through the actions of discipline (*Discipline and Punish*).

conflict. In the state of nature, competition, diffidence, and glory form the three basic causes of the natural inclination toward conflict: “And therefore, as long as this natural Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be), of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live” (Hobbes 87-88). Thus human life is destined to self-destruct because it “carries within itself something that ineluctably places it in contradiction with itself” (*Bíos* 58). Life must therefore negate itself in order to assert the will to live. Enter the immunitary paradigm: “preservation proceeds through the suspension or the alienation of that which needs to be protected” (*Bíos* 58). Death is a necessary immunitary function of preserving and enabling life. For Esposito, the Nazi concentration camps are a prime example of the immunitary paradigm at work; in order to preserve themselves against the contagion of the Jewish body, to immunize the Aryan race, the Nazis built death camps and quite literally politicized medicine, using medical language and techniques to achieve political ends, sacrificing humans to preserve humans.

Esposito’s immunitary paradigm underscores the degree to which the Foucauldian notion of population as it relates to life is bound up with the concerns and effects of contagion, communicable disease, outbreak, and epidemics: the source of anxiety at the heart of the living dead. In her recent work *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, which explores both the anxiety and the appeal evoked by contagion in both a scientific domain and in the mainstream media, Priscilla Wald describes the way in which epidemics justify (and perhaps occasion) the need for regimented social behavior as a means of protection. According to Wald, biopolitics “concerns the emergence of institutions, policies, and practices that shaped the contours of a ‘population’” (Wald 18). Not just the regulator and assessor of population, biopolitics *produces and shapes* populations, engaging techniques that emerged from the

quarantine procedures in Europe in the late Middle Ages. As Foucault confirms, the plague functions as the backdrop against which the modern conception of discipline is created. Foucault captures the fear of the pandemic, and the “strict spatial partitioning” (*Discipline and Punish* 195), the ceaseless inspection, the ubiquitous panoptic gaze that arises as a result. Biopolitics, population, outbreak, containment – and the significant though complex links between them – comprise the tropes underlying living dead narratives (Wald offers examples in *The Last Man on Earth* [1964], *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1978], *The Omega Man* [1971], *Resident Evil* [2002], and *28 Days Later* [2002]): contagion and the fear of the viral monstrous other, the anxiety that accompanies being contained within a small space in a society that has been overrun by what was once a minority population, a quickly dwindling human population, a focus on a series of strict rules and traditions associated with survival.

Esposito outlines the way in which the immunitary paradigm, in its linkage of the domains of life and law, results in the practice of murder (death) in order to preserve life, a practice taken up as a recurring theme in living dead literature – including Matheson’s *I Am Legend* – which features living dead bodies that demand their own deaths in order to ensure the survival of the living. After Neville’s wife, Virginia, dies of the mosquito-borne infection, he defies the newly instituted public safety laws that mandate all bodies be thrown into a public fire pit and buries her in the local cemetery. Two days pass, and an undead Virginia reappears on Neville’s doorstep, reaching toward him, calling for him: “Rob...ert” (Matheson 77). Neville is forced to kill her again, to bury her again, to face his once-human wife in undead form. The living dead body compels even (or perhaps especially) those who love it to sacrifice it: to protect, stab, bury, and mourn it in the name of survival. As a “negative [form] of the protection of life” (*Bíos* 46), immunization preserves life by subjecting it to the conditions that negate its very



power. Arising from the implicit threat of contagion and death, immunization is the means by which contagion and death become both the affliction and the remedy.

Like Esposito's discussion of immunity and autoimmunity, Derrida's discussion of autoimmunity in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* links biology and politics, though it provides a far more redemptive reading of the category of the autoimmune. Esposito reads the autoimmune as the "excessive defense that ruinously turns on the same body that continues to activate and strengthen it" (*Bios* 148), as a "syndrome so out of control that it not only destroys everything that it comes into contact with, but turns disastrously on its own body" (*Bios* 165). For Esposito, the autoimmune is "ruinous," is "disastrous"; the violent order of immunity is transformed into disorder in the move from the immune to the autoimmune. When the immunitary paradigm turns on itself, it evolves into the autoimmune and relinquishes orderly control. However, for Derrida, autoimmunity offers protection and possibility. Amidst an assessment of democracy after 9/11, Derrida assures his audience that his concern with autoimmunity derives not from a biologicistic or geneticist inclination, but rather, "my questions concerning 'political' autoimmunity thus concerned precisely the relationship between the *politikon*, *physis*, and *bios* or *zōē*, life-death" (*Rogues* 109). At its core, autoimmunity is a question of life, of the living, and its relation to death. Derrida describes the relationship between immunity and autoimmunity as "neither one of exteriority nor one of simple opposition or contradiction" (*Rogues* 114). If immunity protects an organism by introducing into its system the very pathogen that threatens the organism, autoimmunity protects an organism by destroying the organism altogether. The terms do not oppose one another; autoimmunity draws the immunitary paradigm into a suicidal realm (*Rogues* 45).

Autoimmunity destroys not only the organism itself, but the *ipseity*, or the “I can,” the power of self-representation, questioning the very idea of a coherent self. To auto-immunize, then, is to destroy the very thing within oneself that is designed to protect the self against the intrusion of the other. Nevertheless, Derrida concludes with a redemptive reading of autoimmunity, which “enables an exposure to the other” (*Rogues* 152). Absolute immunity is not the goal for Derrida; and autoimmunity is ultimately acclaimed. Without autoimmunity, there can be no expectation, “without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event” (*Rogues* 152). In its destruction of the self, in its exposure to the destructive other within the self, autoimmunity allows for the possibility of expectation.

Much like Esposito’s notion of immunity emerges from the Foucauldian discourse on biopolitics and the move from sovereignty to biopower, Derrida’s notion of autoimmunity emerges from a discussion of democracy and the “rogue state,” or the *État voyou*: the outlaw designation that warrants a sovereign response to its disorder. The *voyou*, the rogue, is condemned because he “introduce[s] disorder into the street” (*Rogues* 63). Derrida parses the word “*voyou*,” teasing apart its etymology to better understand its implications. The *voyou* is always designated by second person, is always a masculine noun, and intimates sexual delinquency. It is the other as opposed to the self, but more importantly, it is the disordered other as opposed to the ordered self: “Voyoucracy is a principle of disorder, to be sure, a threat against public order” (*Rogues* 66). Derrida describes the *voyou* as involved “in parasiting” (*Rogue* 65), as having parasitic qualities, resembling the infectious body that similarly introduces disorder and must be contained. An outlaw, the *voyou* is like the “great criminal” from Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence,” the criminal who rises to the height of the sovereign in order to topple

the sovereign state. Characterized by the threat of disorder, the *voyou* is met with the force of order; like the plague, its disorder induces the rise of order around it: “they are picked out, denounced, judged, and condemned, pointed out as actual or virtual delinquents, as those accused and pursued by the civilized citizen, by the state or civil society, by decent, law-abiding citizens, by their police, sometimes by international law and its armed police” (*Rogues* 63-64). The very disorder of the *voyou* incites denouncement, judgment, and condemnation, rallying order in its wake.

As Derrida explains, the notion of autoimmunity in relation to democracy emerges because “rogues or degenerates are sometimes brothers, citizens, compeers” (*Rogues* 63). Democracy thus wants to welcome its citizens, brothers, compeers and exclude the rogues, but is forced to contend with the incompatible situation in which the rogue is the brother, in which democracy must confront its own constitutive autoimmunity. Autoimmunity always derives from aporia: “It is the persistence, the ineluctable return, in truth, of a sort of aporia or, if you prefer, of an antinomy at the heart of every –nomy, that is, at the source of every autoimmune process” (*Rogues* 46-47). The insoluble contradiction within an organism, being, or society provokes an autoimmune response.

The living dead underscore the potential for masquerade running through a disordered and disorderly society: the apparent brother who might be a masquerading rogue, the apparent suicide who might be masquerading possibility, the apparent disorder that might be masquerading order. The vampires in Matheson’s *I Am Legend* represent the relationship between plague and containment, between order and disorder, between immunity and autoimmunity. Neville’s concluding embrace of disorder and his plea for non-violence are closely tied to his relationship with both immunity and autoimmunity in the text. Neville evinces

both an immune and an autoimmune response to infection in the text, and his immunity and autoimmunity are respectively tied to order (and violence) and disorder (and non-violence). Neville traces his immunity to war time, drawing a link between violence and immunity: “while I was stationed in Panama during the war I was bitten by a vampire bat... as a result, my body built up an immunity to it” (Matheson 144). The violence of war enables Neville’s immunity. Bitten by a bat, Neville describes the ordeal as an “attack” and confides that his response to the bite was to kill the bat. Mired in the violence of war, of attack, of the bite, Neville nevertheless comes away from the ordeal immune. In his assessment of the immunitary paradigm, Esposito offers a similarly negative vision of immunity, in which immunity “activate[s] and strengthen[s]” the body (*Bios* 148), but only at the risk of self-destruction. Esposito describes immunity as “ruinous” (*Bios* 148), and aligns immunity with self-negation: “their immunitary (which is to say their self-negating)” (*Bios* 157). The cost of immunity’s order, of the way in which it defends against disorderly infection, is the violence of self-negation, and the immunity that emerges from violence is precisely the kind of order Neville ultimately rejects.

Although Derrida, like Esposito, reads the autoimmune as the limit case of immunity, the case in which the body turns on itself, he offers a more positive view of autoimmunity: “In this regard, autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil” (*Rogues* 152). For Derrida, the autoimmune is far more complex than Esposito’s one-dimensional self-negation. The autoimmune is not absolute, but incalculable: not ruinous but complex. And in its unknowability, it is not altogether negative.

Derrida opens his essay with a discussion of the image of the wheel, intimating the circularity at the heart of autoimmunity and positioning the living dead in the space of autoimmunity. He describes the motion of the wheel as a self-reflexive motion, “the rondure of a

return to self” (*Rogues* 10), like the autoimmune response that destroys the self to preserve the self. Moreover, the circular motion of the wheel, the space of ipseity, in which the self gives itself its own law, relates to the living dead. As the source of the turn and the return, the “returning or haunting [*revenante*]” (*Rogues* 8), the circle connotes *revenge*, and simultaneously its etymological relation to *revenant*, meaning “ghost” or “specter.” Derrida traces the relation between the return and the specter in *Specters of Marx* in his notion of “hauntology,” a means by which to encapsulate the way in which the specter is “neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology, to the discourse on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death. It requires, then, what we call, to save time and space rather than just to make up a word, *hauntology*” (*Specters* 63). Derrida depicts the specter as the living dead, as “neither living nor dead,” as the revenant that turns and returns, circling from the dead through the living and from the living through the dead. Like the rogue, which is both included and excluded from the carefully policed circle of respectable society, the specter is both included and excluded from the realm of the living.

Matheson’s conception of the autoimmune draws both on its linkage to the immune and on the positive condition of its complexity. Neville’s final line opens with the image of the “full circle,” an image distinctly resonant of Derrida’s assessment of the circularity at the heart of autoimmunity. As the wheel is self-reflexive, the autoimmune response destroys the self to preserve the self. Acknowledging the circularity of his situation, Neville responds in an autoimmune suicidal act, by swallowing pills. His final appraisal emerges as “lethargy cre[eps] into his limbs” (Matheson 170): a calm, non-violent moment. A response “so out of control,” so disorderly, autoimmunity is the appropriate setting for Neville’s legend of disorder. And yet, like Derrida’s complex and more positive autoimmunity, Neville’s autoimmunity brings with it the

hopefulness attendant in his rejection of violence. In his final non-violent act – a quiet, lethargic suicide – in his final embrace of disorder, his surrender of lists and partitions and his newfound appreciation of the contradiction, the circular, the human infection, his only possible response is the autoimmunity of suicide: the state of aporia, of the wheel, of disorder.

Caught in the space between living and dead, Matheson's vampires reveal the Foucauldian order that necessarily emerges from the midst of its own contagious plague. But ultimately, the vampire itself represents something far less insidious than the order that rises up around it. In fact, the figure of the living dead more nearly demands a critique of order, an embrace of the plague and of the disorder that the vampire bears, the paradigm of non-violent autoimmunity it carries with it. As the human minority fending off the vampire infection, "a minority element if there ever was one" (Matheson 31), Neville builds up his immunity. He finds himself immune to the vampire, immune to the infection, immune to the rote, mechanical ritual of his every day, to the stench of garlic, to the violent order he is forced into to distinguish between human and vampire. Initially, even his inclination toward an autoimmune response is a violent one, as he considers suicide, but only in its most violent form: "Be right out. Well, why not? Why *not* go out? It was a sure way to be free of them. Be one of them... Why go through all this complexity when a flung-open door and a few steps would end it all?" (Matheson 29). Contemplating flinging open the door and throwing himself into the midst of infection, Neville then faces a physical encounter with the vampire population that underscores the violence that runs throughout the text as the vampires attack Neville, forcing him into the structure of the house: "Neville was slammed against the house by the impact of his body. The hot blood-thick breath was on him again, the bared mouth lunging at his throat" (Matheson 45). Mired in the

threat of contagion, Neville shores up his immune response, responding violently in order to protect his own humanity.

However, by the novel's end, Neville's conception of the suicidal moment transforms from the violent "flung-open door" to a "final lethargy" (Matheson 170). In the shift from majority to minority, from healthy to infected, from normal to abnormal, Neville relinquishes his immune response in favor of an autoimmune response, relinquishes violence in favor of non-violence, and order in favor of disorder. His "legend" becomes both narrative and cipher: the legend of disorder and the key to understanding his response to the plague. The living dead reveal the implicitly violent order in the disorderly infection, encouraging the surrender of lists and partitions, of perfume and flames. The living dead underscore Esposito's negative immunitary model, drawing attention not only to the relationship between the plague and the order it induces, but to the self-negating violence attendant in that order. And as they accent the potential for masquerade in a disordered and disorderly society, the living dead demand a newfound appreciation of contradiction, of the circular, an embrace of disorder, of the wheel. As they are mitigated and rejected and protected against by the body and its rigid directives, the living dead suggest that perhaps Derridean, unknowable, incalculable autoimmunity is the preferred paradigm to immunity, that in the face of the plague, of the "black terror," of the "full circle," of the abnormal, of the vampire, *disorder* is the ultimate legend.

## CHAPTER III

### **Muzzled Monsters: 1950s Comic Book Trends and the Zombie as Witness**

In his analysis of the Holocaust, Giorgio Agamben famously points to a lacuna at the core of witnessing: “the ‘true’ witnesses, the ‘complete witnesses,’ are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness... whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their name knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness” (Agamben 34).<sup>40</sup> In the context of the Holocaust, life and testimony necessarily preclude one another. To live is to testify on behalf of the dead; only the dead can bear witness. And, of course, they rarely do. Dead men tell no tales. Reading the work of Elie Wiesel and of Primo Levi, Agamben notes the way in which many Holocaust survivors were driven to survive by “the idea of becoming a witness” (Agamben 15), by the possibility that they might speak to the trauma they had experienced. Yet, as Wiesel attests, “those who have not lived through the experience will never know; those who have will never tell; not really, not completely... The past belongs to the dead” (“For Some Measure of Humanity” 314). Levi confirms: “We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses... we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom” (*Drowned and the Saved* 83). The link between language and testimony is an aporetic one. Those who can speak, can speak only incompletely; for Agamben, the true witness must be mute.

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<sup>40</sup> Agamben’s work is one in a long lineage of accounts of the way in which the Holocaust is represented and witnessed. Saul Friedlander’s collection *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* addresses the “question of the limits of representation of Nazism and its crimes” (2) and places “considerable emphasis on the search for an adequate ‘voice’ to represent events such as Nazism and the Holocaust” (10). It includes essays by Hayden White, Perry Anderson, Amos Funkenstein, Carlo Ginzburg, Martin Jay, Dominick LaCapra, Dan Diner, Eric L. Santner, Vincent P. Pecora, Sande Cohen, Mario Biagioli, Anton Kaes, Yael S. Feldman, John Felstiner, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Peter Haidu, Berel Lang, and Geoffrey H. Hartman, and covers a range of perspectives on this issue, of which Agamben’s view is merely one voice.



What separates Agamben's work from his predecessors who have similarly addressed the issue of the witness and the Holocaust is Agamben's identification of a possible witness; in search of a representative witness to history, a figure who might serve as a mute witness, Agamben reads the Holocaust's *muselmann* as the ultimate witness, the witness who cannot speak. A derogatory term used among inmates of Nazi concentration camps to refer to a victim divested of humanity, hovering in the interstice between life and death, the *muselmann* becomes, for Agamben, the complete witness not only to the Holocaust but moreover to the unspeakable violence of the modern state. Agamben cites Levi, who similarly points to the *muselmann* as witness: "those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon... they are the Muslims,<sup>41</sup> the submerged, the complete witnesses" (*Drowned and the Saved* 83). In particular, it is the *muselmann*'s lack of speech, his "submersion," his stone visage after being made to behold the Gorgon,<sup>42</sup> that renders him a true witness.<sup>43</sup> Through Levi, Agamben draws the link between the *muselmann* and the role of language. As the complete witness is "he who by definition cannot bear witness" (Agamben 39), the language of witnessing must similarly "give way to a non-language in order

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<sup>41</sup> In his work *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben parses the etymology of the *muselmann*, concluding that although the precise origins of the term are unknown, the most likely explanation "can be found in the literal meaning of the Arabic word *muslim*: the one who submits unconditionally to the will of God," which in the context of Auschwitz is rescripted as "a loss of all will and consciousness" (Agamben 45).

<sup>42</sup> The Gorgon derives from the Greek word *gorgós*, meaning "dreadful," and refers to a Greek mythological creature: any of three terrifying sisters who featured hair of living, venomous snakes, and a horrifying visage that transformed all those who beheld it to stone.

<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Levi's reference to the "Gorgon" links the *muselmann* to horror comic books, which often invoked the powers of the Gorgon, extending the mythology from the graphic pages to the worlds of their readers. Harvey Publications, for example, would bait its audience, "WE DARE YOU TO READ!" ([Craig, Johnny (i)] *The Crypt of Terror* #17 (April-May 1950), EC Comics). Horror comic book publishers promised images so horrifying they could blind a reader, and simultaneously offered their readers image after image of what Fredric Wertham would eventually call the "injury-to-the-eye motif" in *Seduction of the Innocent* (90). Eyes are clearly an important feature in horror comic books and emphasize the relationship between the zombie and the witness that this chapter will address. Wertham notes both injuries to and injuries from the eye, such as in "The Eyes of Death!" ("The Eyes of Death." *Dark Mysteries* #7 [July 1952], Master Comics, Inc.), which depicts eyes being torn out of a face and "The Eyes of Horror" ("The Eyes of Horror." *Mysterious Adventures* #8 [June 1952], Story Comics, Inc.), which features a large serpent emerging from the eye socket of a man.

to show the impossibility of bearing witness” (Agamben 39). Thus, for Agamben, the *muselmann*’s silence yields the complete testimony to the violence of the modern state.

Agamben’s theory of the mute witness draws on the charged critical tradition regarding the relationship between language and the Holocaust that began in 1949 with Theodor W. Adorno’s “An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society,” in which he famously wrote (the oft-misquoted): “The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today” (Adorno 34). For Adorno, language is inherently made fraught by the Holocaust; it is no longer able to offer aesthetic and poetic pleasure, it is no longer able to testify. But in 1958, Paul Celan attempts to redeem language from the barbaric position to which Adorno condemns it, and in his acceptance speech for the Bremen Literature Prize, Celan responds to Adorno:

Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language.  
Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darkneses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, “enriched” by it all. (Celan)

Drawing on this debate about the power and the possibility of language in the wake of the Holocaust, a debate forged in part because of the tragedy and magnanimity of the trauma, in part because of the physical loss of a language and culture,<sup>44</sup> Agamben sides with Adorno, selecting

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<sup>44</sup> Before World War II, there were 11 to 13 million Yiddish speakers (Jacobs 3): a number that was reduced drastically by the Holocaust, which destroyed many Yiddish-speaking communities. An estimated five million people—85 percent of the Jews who died in the Holocaust—were speakers of Yiddish. Along with the demise of the

the *muselmann* as the complete witness and valorizing muteness as the fundamental quality of witnessing.

Postwar American response to the Holocaust and its relation to the act of witnessing has been widely traced and analyzed, and the vast majority of books written about postwar American Jewish culture make claims about the invisibility of the Holocaust during this period – that it was “barely remembered” (Jick 308), that it garnered “little public discussion” (Shapiro 7), that the age was reigned by a “conspiracy of silence” (Sorin 217). However, in her book *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*, Hasia R. Diner discredits the “myth of silence,” the notion that postwar American Jews refused to discuss the Holocaust either out of a desire for assimilation into American mainstream culture, or out of fear of being associated with genocide. Instead, Diner argues that the silence over the Holocaust in postwar American Jewish culture is plainly a historical falsehood:

American Jews told and retold details of the catastrophe in multiple forms. Over and over, men and women asserted the necessity of revisiting it in their institutions and organs of public opinion, in all its horrors. By virtue of belonging to the people who had been targeted for extinction and as the victims’ kin, both literal and metaphoric, they considered it their duty to recite the story of the six million. (Diner 11)

According to Diner, postwar American Jews “made their communities places to enshrine [the Holocaust] and act on it” (Diner 17): a reality diametrically opposed to either silence or denial. Diner makes an assertive claim, addressing praxis and literature, drawing support from liturgy, newspapers and magazines, sermons, and meetings. She argues that Jewish holidays, such as

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language, the Holocaust wrought destruction on Yiddish culture: on Yiddish literature, film, and a burgeoning theater culture.

Yom Kippur, Passover, and Tisha B'Av, invoked the Holocaust in revised liturgical works; that chapters on the Holocaust were published in Jewish school textbooks; that Holocaust plays were performed on Jewish radio shows; and that public memorial meetings were staged, well-attended, and reported on by Jewish press (Diner 15-16). Diner concludes her work by offering several possibilities for the emergence of the myth of postwar American Jewish silence around the Holocaust. According to Diner, postwar American Jews were not silent about the Holocaust, but rather *were silenced* by a generation of American Jewish activists and insurgents who, in the late 1960s, “issued, for the first time, a blanket condemnation of the previous generation” (Diner 388). In an effort to rescript the image of the Jewish figure from weak and passive to strong and triumphant after Israel’s military victory in 1967, this later generation accused postwar American Jews of having refused to confront the Holocaust. Diner, moreover, highlights the contrast between the immediate postwar response to the Holocaust and the response to the Holocaust since the 1970s, both in terms of quantity and characteristics. The enormous output of Holocaust memorials and testimonies since the 1970s “so overshadowed the earlier one as to render it nearly invisible” (Diner 372). In addition, postwar Jews generated narratives and memorials with “no obvious models to emulate and no ready-made language to draw on” (Diner 372), with no cultural framework, no historical context, and no literary equivalent. The American Jews of the post-1967 era, in contrast, benefited from the groundwork laid by the previous generation and were able to incorporate their language, their insights, and their memorials into the wider American consciousness.

For all of its decisiveness, Diner’s argument overlooks one particular element of American Jewish culture and its complex relation to the “myth of silence”: popular culture, and more specifically, the proliferation of the comic book industry and the way in which it

complicates Diner's claim. An examination of both the content and the historical context of early comic books reveals a bifurcated trend with a problematic relationship to the Holocaust and to postwar American Jewish response, and moreover, suggests that it is not the *muselmann's* silence that yields true testimony, but rather his living deadness. As a figure located between life and death, the *muselmann* is the only figure who can testify to the experience of death and present it to the world of the living.

Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1972 novel *Enemies, A Love Story*<sup>45</sup> expands the relationship between the *muselmann* and the witness to include the figure of the living dead in its portrayal of Herman Broder, a Holocaust survivor who is caught between relationships to three women: his legal wife, Yadviga, a Polish peasant who hid him in a hayloft enabling him to survive the war; his mistress, Masha, a Holocaust survivor herself, who is rent by her experiences and longs to die; and his pre-war wife, Tamara, who miraculously returns from the dead. Presumed dead, Tamara appears in New York suddenly, "as if [she had] risen from the dead" (Singer 70). Less a love story than a ghost story, *Enemies* is the narrative of a man haunted both literally and figuratively by three women. Masha haunts in her constant telephone calls, in her flightiness and anger, her passion and ultimate suicide; Yadviga haunts in her conversion to a Judaism Herman is trying to leave, in her peasant need for Herman's constant presence; and Tamara in her status as the living dead. Reported dead, "a witness saw her being shot" (Singer 61), Tamara nevertheless reappears to haunt Herman, who realizes "that the spirits of the newly dead encountered one another in this way, speaking the words of the living, not yet knowing the language of the dead" (Singer 70). Drawing together the significance of language and its relation

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<sup>45</sup> First published serially in the Yiddish newspaper *The Jewish Daily Forward* in 1966, the novel then entitled *Sonim, di Geshichte fun a Liebe*, was translated for an English speaking audience in 1972.

to the living dead here, Herman positions Tamara as the living dead by virtue of her ties to language.

Later in the novel, Herman more precisely locates Tamara in the sphere of the living dead, considering her return to him as a “symbol of his mystical beliefs. Whenever he was with her, he re-experienced the miracle of resurrection. Sometimes, as she spoke to him, he had the feeling he was at a séance at which her spirit had materialized. He had even played with the thought that Tamara wasn’t really among the living, but that her phantom had returned to him” (Singer 131). And Tamara herself acknowledges, “I’m not alive and I’m not dead” (Singer 189). Even Masha queries, “Has your wife risen from the dead?” to which Herman confirms, “So it seems” (Singer 223).

Singer offers a way in to the discussion of the *muselmann* as the living dead witness, as he brings the dead back in the figure of Tamara to testify to the horrors of the Holocaust. Tamara haunts Herman and his lovers, drawing fear from Yadwiga, jealousy from Masha, and telling the tale of her experiences in the Holocaust: “They shot two bullets into me. One is in my body to this day” (Singer 70). She bears the literal wounds of the Holocaust in the form of a bullet still lodged in her physical self. She has seen the Gorgon and been transformed from stone to human flesh to testify to the horrors that have borne the Hermans and the Mashas, those broken and unable to love, who respectively disappear or kill themselves in the wake of unspeakable tragedy.

### Superman as Golem

The year 1933 generated an initial connection between the Holocaust and comic books, as Adolf Hitler rose to power and was elected the chancellor of Germany, and an unemployed Jewish former teacher, Maxwell Charles “Charlie” Gaines (née Max Ginsberg), invented the

original comic book. Gaines collected Sunday newspaper comic strips and reprinted them with the help of his friend Harry L. Wildenberg, who worked in the sales department at Eastern Color Printing. In May 1934, Eastern Color Printing published the very first monthly newsstand comic book: *Famous Funnies #1*, Series 2. As the novelty of recycled Sunday paper comics began to wane, Gaines recruited young cartoonists to produce original material. Gaines's comic book company, called EC Comics,<sup>46</sup> was not very lucrative, and when he died suddenly,<sup>47</sup> Gaines left the failing company to his son, William Maxwell "Bill" Gaines.

Desperate to revamp his father's company, which until that point was best known for its adaptations of Bible stories, Bill Gaines eventually found his niche publishing horror, science fiction, and fantasy comics: *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Vault of Horror*, *Shock SuspenStories*, *Weird Science*, and *Two-Fisted Tales*. According to publisher Russ Cochran, however, the shift from Educational Comics to Entertaining Comics was more of a slow evolution. In the heyday of crime-themed comic books, led by Lev Gleason's *Crime Does Not Pay*, EC, with Bill Gaines at the helm, began publishing crime comics, introducing Captain Crime and *Crime Patrol*. But EC's artists, and particularly Al Feldstein, encouraged a shift in EC's brand from crime to horror, announcing "a new seminal feature called 'The Crypt of Terror,' in which Feldstein introduced his narrator, the Crypt-Keeper" (Cochran 10). The fans clamored for more, and by the sixteenth issue of *Crime Patrol*, all four stories featured in the serial were horror stories: Johnny Craig's "The Corpse in the Crematorium," George Roussos' "Trapped in the Tomb," John Alton's "The

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<sup>46</sup> EC Comics originally stood for "Educational Comics," which were "far more popular with parents than with children" (Diehl 20), and included publications such as *Picture Stories from the Bible*, and *Picture Stories from American History*. When Max Gaines died, in August 1947, his son Bill rebranded EC as a publisher of predominately crime comics: "The new approach was heralded by a subtle but important name change – within a year, Bill made the 'E' in EC comics stand for 'Entertaining,' rather than 'Educational'" (Diehl 23).

<sup>47</sup> In 1947, Charlie Gaines took his wife and their friends, Sam and Helen Irwin, and the Irwins' son Billy, to their vacation home on Lake Placid. Sam and Billy Irwin were with Charlie in the Gaines's family boat when the front of the boat was rammed by another speeding vessel. Max and Sam were killed instantly (Diehl 19).

Graveyard Feet,” and Al Feldstein’s “The Spectre in the Castle!” And EC morphed from the producers of *Crime Patrol* into the producers of horror comics, most notably *The Crypt of Terror*.

Simultaneous with the development of EC Comics, National Allied Publications (which became National Periodicals, Detective Comics Inc., and ultimately DC Comics) was developing the very first superhero comic books. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, immigrant Jewish adolescents living in Cleveland and cartooning under the racially neutral pseudonyms Leger and Reuths, created the original American iconic superhero: Superman. After a long and unsuccessful promotion of the Superman character to various newspaper syndicates, Siegel and Shuster eventually persuaded Harry Donenfeld, the owner of National Allied Publications, to publish the first Superman comic in March 1938, as the featured character of Donenfeld’s new title, *Action Comics* (Kaplan 6-8).

As Siegel and Schuster envisioned him, Superman closely parallels the figure of the golem, drawing Superman into the Jewish folkloric tradition and emphasizing his qualities as messianic, as providing a hopeful prospect for the future.<sup>48</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the

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<sup>48</sup> Current discussions of the messianic and related temporalities are grounded in the works of Gershom Scholem, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben, among others, which consider when the Messiah is to arrive and on what such an arrival is predicated. The Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 97b – 98a) features a passage about when the Messiah will come: “Rab said: All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds.” As discussed previously, Scholem’s work takes up this distinctly Jewish messianism in which human intervention is an essential part of the arrival of the Messiah. For Agamben, who reads Kafka’s “The Coming of the Messiah,” the messianic is not at all dependent on human action: “The messianic task of the man from the country...might then be precisely that of making the virtual state of exception real, of compelling the doorkeeper to close the door of the Law...For the Messiah will be able to enter only after the door is closed, which is to say, after the Law’s being in force without significance is at an end. This is the meaning of the enigmatic passage in Kafka’s notebooks where he writes, ‘The Messiah will only come when he is no longer necessary, he will only come after his arrival, he will come not on the last day, but on the very last day.’” (*Homo Sacer* 56-57). And for Derrida, the messianic is simply “the coming of the future-to-come [...] the same thing as the ghost” (*Specters* 45): the anticipation of an arrivant who never quite arrives, the future which never dissipates into the present, the expectation of imminence. Neither Leivick’s golem nor Superman is bound by a particular time. Leivick’s golem is in fact directly contrasted with the Jewish messiah in the play who is time-bound. However, nor do the golem and Superman arrive due to “repentance and good deeds.” Rather, these two messianic beings arrive by necessity; human action has forced the need for the arrival of a messiah.



golem's liminality, its position in the space between the zombie and the messiah, paints the golem as a source of metamorphosis, a hopeful dimension to the zombie's bleak apocalypse, and, as this chapter will explore, Superman is similarly drawn as a mythic descendent of the golem, a messianic hope. Jewish-American comic writer Will Eisner cements Superman's place in the golem's legacy and in the tradition of Jewish folklore: "[Jews needed] a hero who could protect us against an almost invincible force. So [Siegel and Shuster] created an invincible hero" (Kaplan 17). And American cartoonist Al Jaffee concurs with Eisner, further highlighting the connection between the golem and Superman around the notion of salvation:

The Jews have always been in some form of danger, and no matter how hard they try, no matter what they did for the gentile world, or the Arab world, or whatever world they were living in, they couldn't get away from an inquisition... They couldn't get away from discrimination and starvation and everything else that was heaped on them. [They were] blamed for the plague, blamed for the blood [libel]. After awhile, when you realize there's no way you can [endear] yourself to this hostile world so that they'd leave you alone, you have to start creating some kind of mythical fantasy creature that's going to come along and save you from the horrors of life. Life was horrible for these people! They're always in an alien land, so that's why they invented Golems! (Kaplan 17)

In its association with Rabbi Judah Leyb ben Bezalel, the sixteenth century chief Rabbi of Prague, the modern golem is commonly depicted as giant being formed from clay in order to defend Prague's Jewish ghetto.<sup>49</sup> The golem dons the persona of a domestic servant and

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<sup>49</sup> The folkloric narrative of the golem derives from two entwined sources: ancient Jewish rabbinic and Kabbalistic texts and the later development of golem legends in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest discussions of the golem depict the purpose for their creation as a means to achieving a mystical experience; as Gershom Scholem writes,

maneuvers between the world of woodchopping, caring for the synagogue, and interacting with the community, and that of the modern messiah whose supernatural abilities aid him in protecting Prague's Jews. Superman is similarly depicted as a supernatural messiah, a being whose superhuman attributes continually save the world from epic destruction: "Leaping over skyscrapers, running faster than an express train, springing great distances and heights, lifting and smashing tremendous weights, possessing an impenetrable skin – these are the amazing attributes which Superman, savior of the helpless and oppressed, avails himself of as he battles the forces of evil and injustice!" ([Siegel, Jerry (w), Joe Shuster (i), and Fred Guardineer (i)] "Superman on the High Seas." *Action Comics* #15 [August 1939], D.C. Comics). From his inception, Superman is a messianic figure, a figure who, like the golem, is designed to provide salvation.

Superman's relation to the golem is moreover taken up in various fictional works, including Michael Chabon's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. Chabon sets his novel in 1939 and depicts the relationship between Joseph "Joe" Kavalier and his cousin Sammy Klayman. Joe escapes from Prague by hiding in a coffin with the mythical "Golem of Prague" and arrives in New York City as a penniless refugee. He and Sammy bond over their shared love of magic and drawing and together begin writing and illustrating comics. Engaging the relationship between the golem and Superman in the context of

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"the study of the book [of *Yezirah*] was considered successful when the mystic attained the vision of the golem, which was connected with a specific ritual of a remarkably ecstatic character" (qtd. In Idel "The Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism" 16). This early Kabbalistic golem also had a practical purpose: as a domestic servant. The eleventh century poet and philosopher, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, for example, was forced by his severe skin disease into quarantined isolation and so created a golem as his housekeeper (Idel 223). However, as the golem traveled from the Kabbalistic to the cultural realm, from the ancient to the modern, its role shifted to a more salvific, more messianic one. Yudl Rosenberg's *The Golem, or the Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Liva* (1904) is the first text to depict the golem as defending Jews against violence. In it, Rabbi Leyb is instructed in a dream: "Ah, By Clay Destroy Evil Forces, Golem, Help Israel: Justice!" (Rosenberg 13). He then goes on to create a golem from clay and uses the golem "only for saving Jews from misfortune... most of all, he used him to fight against the blood libel" (Rosenberg 17). In a similar vein, Leivick's *The Golem* presents a messianic golem who, as discussed in Chapter 1, is depicted alongside the Jewish messiah and the Christian messiah.

a Holocaust narrative, Chabon emphasizes the direct lineage between Superman and the golem in his portrayal of Joe Kavalier's first attempt at a comic book superhero designed to capitalize on the popularity of Superman:

His frame was as sturdy and thick as his hobnailed boots. For costume he wore a tunic with deep creases, a heavy belt, and a big, shapeless stocking hat like something out of Rembrandt. The man's features, though regular and handsome, looked frozen, and his intrepid gaze was empty. There were four Hebrew characters etched into his forehead.

"Is that the *Golem*?" said Anapol. "My new Superman is the Golem?"

"I didn't – the conceit is new for me," Joe said, his English stiffening up on him.

"I just drew the first thing I could think of that resembled... To me, this

Superman is... maybe... only an American Golem." (Chabon 85-86)

Chabon emphasizes the debt American comic books owe to Jewish themes, Jewish history, and Jewish artists. Joe draws on his own history with the golem; his escape from the Nazis in Czechoslovakia took place as part of an elaborate scheme to preserve the original Golem of Prague. The golem thus becomes for Joe a symbol of redemption, born of the desire for escape and salvation. Joe perceives Superman as merely an American take on the golem, "an American Golem," an updated messiah with a direct link to the golem and one whose supernatural abilities, like the golem's, enable him to prevent evil and provide salvation for the oppressed.

An oversized clay defender of the Jewish community, the modern golem's creation is justified by his performance of the role of Messiah. Some sources trace the etymology of the word "golem" to the Hebrew word "*goaleynu*," or "our redeemer," clearly emphasizing the golem's messianic role (Dennis 111). In 1904, Yudl Rosenberg wrote a Yiddish folk book – *The*

*Golem, or the Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Leyb* – passing it off as a translation from Hebrew. The book is written in the style of Hasidic hagiography, a journalistic chronicle of adventures about the golem. The first text to position the golem as a defender of the Jews, Rosenberg’s folk book features Rabbi Leyb being instructed by a mystical dream to create the golem: “Ah, By Clay Destroy Evil Forces, Golem, Help Israel: Justice!” (Rosenberg 13). The very inspiration behind the golem’s creation is salvific in nature. The golem’s role is to “Help Israel: Justice!” Rabbi Leyb then goes on to create a golem from clay, and, as Rosenberg’s text notes explicitly, uses the golem “only for saving Jews from misfortune... most of all, he used him to fight against the blood libel” (Rosenberg 17). As discussed in Chapter 1, Yiddish writer H. Leivick’s 1929 dramatic poem *The Golem* then further establishes the figure of the golem as distinctly messianic, as one of three possible messiahs alongside the Christian Messiah and the Jewish Messiah. Like Rosenberg’s golem and Chabon’s comic book superhero “The Escapist” (who is modeled on the golem), Leivick’s golem is created as a salvific figure; in order to save the Jewish community from the threat of blood libel, the Maharal molds the golem as a salvation for the Jews. And, as previously elaborated in Chapter 1, though Leivick’s golem ultimately spills Jewish blood, his act of violence is in fact an act of love and the golem comes to represent a hopeful dimension to apocalypse.

Superman similarly plays the role of modern messiah, providing redemption from anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and criminal activity.<sup>50</sup> The connection between Superman and the messianic is strongly evident in the primary source material – the comic books themselves – and in commentary by cartoonists, though is not heavily discussed in critical literature. Cartoonist Al

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<sup>50</sup> Ironically, Siegel and Shuster derived the name “Superman” from Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Übermensch,” an individual who has overcome his own flaws and battled modern values’ corrupting forces in order to arrive at the zenith of intellectual and creative ability, and a term later associated with Nazism (Kaplan 11).

Jaffee, for example, draws an explicit link between Superman and the Messiah around the notion of salvation: “Who is the Messiah? The Messiah is Superman, a Super-God. I think that’s a great part of Jewish history, the need for a Messiah. And of course in modern times, the Messiah turns into Superman” (Kaplan 17). The opening frame of nearly every Superman Action comic describes Superman in messianic terms. *Action Comics #14*, printed in July 1939, refers to Superman as the “champion of the helpless and oppressed in his unceasing battle against evil and injustice!” *Action Comics #15*, printed in August 1939, names him the “savior of the helpless and oppressed!” And *Action Comics #16*, printed in September 1939, introduces Superman as the “friend of the helpless and oppressed!” Superman’s role is a salvific one; he perpetually “battles the forces of evil and injustice,” repeatedly saving both his home of Metropolis and the world from “the purple plague and the fiend who created it” ([Siegel, Jerry (w), and Joe Shuster (i)] “Superman and the Purple Plague.” *Action Comics #19* [December 1939], D.C. Comics), from “a gas so powerful that it is capable of penetrating any type of gas-mask!”<sup>51</sup> ([Siegel, Jerry (w), Joe Shuster (i)] “Superman Champions Universal Peace!” *Superman #2* [Fall 1939], D.C. Comics), and from a slew of criminals and instigators set on destroying the world or ruling the world or dramatically changing the world. The Superman comics nearly always conclude in the office of the *Daily Planet*<sup>52</sup> with Clark Kent<sup>53</sup> and Lois Lane<sup>54</sup> heaving a sigh of relief, “that Superman got

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<sup>51</sup> The image of gas that can penetrate a gas mask, particularly in a comic published in 1939, clearly recalls the ongoing war and, more squarely, the gas chambers of the Holocaust’s concentration camps.

<sup>52</sup> Metropolis’ local newspaper

<sup>53</sup> Superman’s alter-ego, an awkward reporter whose physicality and personality differ drastically from Superman’s super-strength and attractiveness

<sup>54</sup> Clark Kent’s colleague at the *Daily Planet*, Lois Lane finds Clark Kent bumbling and unattractive, but is in love with Superman: an irony that drives much of the humor in the Superman narrative.

[us] out of that mess alive!” ([Siegel, Jerry (w), Fred Ray (i), and John Sikela (i)] *Action Comics* #42 [November 1941], D.C. Comics).

Both Superman’s and the golem’s messianism derives from, and is intimately bound up in, their alienness, in the fact that both figures are outsiders to the communities under their protection, and that both must constantly balance two antithetical identities. In Leivick’s play, the Maharal creates the messianic golem from clay and constructs a second narrative and identity to explain the golem’s sudden appearance: the golem is Yosl the woodchopper, a guest from far away. Given a Jewish name and welcomed into the rabbi’s home, the golem is nevertheless immediately ostracized as “נאר ווי א איד” [“not one of the Jews”] (Leivick 32). In the Jewish tradition, outsidership is a necessary condition of the Messiah,<sup>55</sup> and the Maharal accounts for this in his creation of a golem who is simultaneously the messianic savior of Prague’s Jews and Yosl, “א מענש א מאדנער” [“a strange man”] (Leivick 32), an outsider from far away.

The golem’s dual identity prefigures Superman’s secret identity, which forces him to “hurry... off to a secluded spot [and] swiftly remove... his outer garments, transforming himself to dynamic *Superman!*” ([Siegel, Jerry (w), Fred Ray (i), and Leo Nowak (i)] *Action Comics* #43 [December 1941], D.C. Comics). While the golem is always perceived as an outsider, Superman presents himself as an insider in the guise of Clark Kent, masquerading as an awkwardly bumbling reporter at Metropolis’ *Daily Planet*. Nevertheless, the two characters – the golem and Superman – share significant parallels. Superman is constantly reminded that “one of these days I won’t be able to summon up an alibi fast enough, and then they’ll find out what I’m trying so hard to keep secret – that I am, in reality, *Superman!*” ([Siegel, Jerry (w), Jack Burnley (i), Jack

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<sup>55</sup> Other messianic figures who were outsiders include Moses, who was raised in an Egyptian palace, and the Jewish Messiah in Leivick’s dramatic poem, who comes from far away with his companion, Elijah.

Burnley and Ray Burnley (i), Leo Nowak (i)] *Action Comics* #38 [July 1941], D.C. Comics).

Constantly toggling between two identities, Superman, like the golem, must negotiate the human world as a perpetual outsider: as an awkward reporter who will never seduce the woman he loves and as a superbeing who will never be human.

In his work *Up, Up, and Oy Vey! How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped the Comic Book Superhero*, Simcha Weinstein quotes Jerry Siegel, who elaborates on Superman's mythological origins, origins that underscore Superman's alien qualities:

The story would begin with you as a child on far-off planet Krypton. Like the others of that world, you had super-powers. The child's scientist-father was mocked and denounced by the Science Council. They did not believe his claim that Krypton would soon explode from internal stresses. Convinced that his prediction was valid, the boy's father had been constructing a model rocket ship. As the planet began to perish, the baby's parents knew its end was close. There was not space enough for three people in the small model craft. They put the baby into it. The mother chose to remain on the doomed planet with the man she loved, and die with him. Tearfully, hoping that their baby boy would survive, they launched the craft toward the planet Earth. Shortly, Krypton exploded and its millions of inhabitants were destroyed. (Weinstein 22-23)

An orphan, an alien, a messiah, Superman is an updated Moses. Moses was cast from his parents' home as an infant, raised in an Egyptian palace and thus excluded from the Jewish community, and ultimately responsible for redeeming the Jewish people from their fate as

Egyptian slaves.<sup>56</sup> A prophet, Moses is also a messianic figure; he leads the Jews out of Egypt and to the promised land. Superman is similarly cast from his parents' home on Krypton as an infant, raised by humans on Earth, and responsible for redeeming humankind from their own crimes.

As Moses is forced to straddle the world of the Jewish slaves and the world of Pharaoh's palace, ultimately finding himself an outsider to both worlds and thus capable of a messianic feat, both the golem and Superman adopt dual personas in their alienage, fulfilling the duality in outsidership upon which Jewish messianism is predicated. In fact, as discussed earlier, the very figure of the Jewish Messiah is doubled, appearing as two distinct figures. The Messiah son of Joseph appears prior to the coming of Messiah son of David in order to wage war, generate apocalypse, and prepare for the coming of the Messiah son of David, who represents the utopian, positive aspect of the apocalypse. Superman's duality and outsidership are emphasized most explicitly in the 1950s comic books, when his mythology extends to include a cousin, also a refugee from Krypton: Supergirl. Witnessing her distress over her recently destroyed planet, Superman reassures Supergirl, "Yes, I know it was heartbreaking, Kara! I was orphaned from my parents the same way! As a baby, I was also shot away in a space rocket by my father, Jor-El" ([Binder, Otto (w), Al Plastino (i)] "The Supergirl from Krypton." *Action* #252 [May 1959], D.C. Comics). And yet despite their close familial status, the two superbeings cannot be seen together, because Superman has "adopted a secret identity on earth which might be jeopardized!" Superman pretends to be Clark Kent in order to continue to protect humankind as Superman, constantly balancing two identities. ([Binder, Otto (w), Al Plastino (i)] "The Supergirl from

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<sup>56</sup> As infant Moses is laid in a woven reed basket and set afloat on the Nile, "Superman arrived on earth in a space rocket long ago, when he was superbaby!" ([Binder, Otto (w), Al Plastino (i)] "The Supergirl from Krypton." *Action* #252 [May 1959], D.C. Comics).



Krypton.” *Action* #252 [May 1959], D.C. Comics). Forever destined to remain an outsider, not human enough for Earth and now without his home world of Krypton, Superman assures his cousin that she too can become a messianic figure, “But for a long time to come, you’ll live here quietly as an “ordinary” girl” ([Binder, Otto (w), Al Plastino (i)] “The Supergirl from Krypton.” *Action* #252 [May 1959], D.C. Comics). Like the golem, Superman’s (and later, Supergirl’s) messianism is contingent upon maintaining an outsider status cloaked in an apparent insidership.

Both Superman’s and the golem’s narrative possess an inherent structure built on the permutations of power and powerlessness, further linking Superman to the golem and underscoring Superman’s connection to a tradition of Jewish folklore. The golem’s powers vary from story to story, though it is often endowed with superhuman strength, the ability to raise the dead, and invisibility. In her work *The Golem in Jewish American Literature: Risks and Responsibilities in the Fiction of Thane Rosenbaum, Nomi Eve and Steve Stern*, Nicola Morris analyzes the golem’s simultaneous power and powerlessness:

Central to the story is the power of the golem itself with its super-human size and strength and its mission to save the Jews from violent oppression. Then there is the maker of the golem, whose creative powers parallel God’s, and who then has the power to destroy the golem or at least deactivate the golem, while the golem itself is helpless in the face of its own destruction or disarming. (16)

In many versions of the tale, including Leivick’s, the golem is created as a protector of Prague’s Jewish community; in Leivick’s dramatic poem, the Maharal creates the golem with super strength and endows him with an axe to prevent the loss of Jewish blood. However, in providing him with the strength necessary to enact violence against the anti-Semitic Czech community, the Maharal imbues the golem with the tragic capacity to spill Jewish blood, which the golem,

incapable of recognizing the boundary between Jew and gentile, does. The Maharal is then forced to divest the golem of his strength, to disarm him of his axe, and to destroy the golem who is vulnerable in the face of the Maharal's command.

Like the golem, Superman bears superhuman strength, coupled with super speed, the power of flight, impenetrable skin, x-ray vision, and in occasional comics, super breath. Nearly every Superman comic opens with a litany of his powers: "leaping over skyscrapers, running faster than an express train, springing great distances and heights, lifting and smashing tremendous weights, possessing an impenetrable skin – these are the amazing attributes of which Superman, champion of the helpless and oppressed, avails himself as he battles the forces of evil and injustice!" ([Siegel, Jerry (w), Jack Burnley (i), Jack Burnley and Ray Burnley (i), Leo Nowak (i)] *Action Comics* #38 [July 1941], D.C. Comics). Moreover, Superman's super powers separate him from the human community, emphasizing his alienness, as in the case of *Action Comics* #74 "The Courtship of Adelbert Dribble." Adelbert Dribble, a wily character, finds that his quest to court Miss Bertha Bigge, requires that he trap Superman and attempt to take over his identity: "when Bertha told me I would never amount to anything, I thought I could win her by pretending to be Superman" ([Unknown (w), Ira Yarbrough (i)] "The Courtship of Adelbert Dribble!" *Action Comics* #74 [July 1944], D.C. Comics). He inflates a suit with helium to be able to fly and sets up a faux hold-up. But by the end of the comic, Dribble finds himself unable to maintain the façade. His ingenious imitations of Superman's powers cannot live up to the real thing and he calls on Superman to help him rescue Bertha from a "dreadful gang" ([Unknown (w), Ira Yarbrough (i)] "The Courtship of Adelbert Dribble!" *Action Comics* #74 [July 1944], D.C. Comics). Superman's attributes are, in fact, "super," and the ordinary human man cannot imitate them completely.

However, in contrast to their respective superpowers, both the golem and Superman possess a single, fatal weakness, one that negates their super speed, power of flight, impenetrable skin, psychic connection, and superhumanness. Superman's fatal weakness is kryptonite; his proximity to the radioactive material remains of his home planet – Krypton – weakens him physically. In fact, the word “kryptonite” has become synonymous with “Achilles heel,” the one weakness of an otherwise invulnerable hero. Famously, in *Superman: The Movie* (1978), Lex Luthor (Gene Hackman), Superman's nemesis, steals a piece of kryptonite meteorite from a museum and places it on a chain around Superman's (Christopher Reeve's) neck, dropping him in to a swimming pool. Superman is rendered powerless, forced to be rescued in order to, himself, save the world (*Superman: The Movie*). The very source of Superman's powers – his alienness – is also the source of his weakness. In *Action Comics #63*, Superman is similarly divested of his powers when two meteorites collide and “vibrating at frequencies infinitely greater than those of electricity, showers of invisible rays are loosed in all directions. The cruder senses of ordinary mortals are undisturbed by the phenomenon, but the supersensitive nerve structure of the Man of Tomorrow is shaken like the rigging of a gale-tossed ship... the collapse of a giant” ([Cameron, Don (w), and Ira Yarbrough (i)] “When Stars Collide!” *Action Comics #63* [August 1943], D.C. Comics). Superman's “supersensitive nerve structure,” the facet that distinguishes him from the rest of the human population, renders him powerless.

The golem's fatal weakness varies from tale to tale, but is always tied to language. In many stories, the golem is unable to speak, and when it can speak, the golem is extremely literal. Goethe's 1797 poem “The Sorcerer's Apprentice” is often traced to a tale of the golem in which it is asked to draw water and never told when to stop, which results in the flooding of the synagogue. In other tales, the golem's linguistic weakness is the word written on its forehead,

which can deactivate the golem at any time, or the power of its maker to insert a written scroll into the golem's mouth and bring him to a sudden halt. In Leivick's version of the story, the Maharal commands the golem: "הויך אויס דיין לעצטען אטעם" ["Breathe out your final breath"] (Leivick 221), and the golem, subject to the verbal commands of the rabbi, is forced to obey.

Though both the golem and Superman are outsiders, a status deepened by their superpowers, their role with respect to assimilation, to the possibility of becoming an insider, differs dramatically. From the outset, the golem is depicted as an outsider, and even in death the golem maintains an outsider status. Immortal, the golem must be "erased," not killed; its death occurs through a literal erasure. According to legend, the golem is animated through the inscription of the Hebrew word "אמת" ("truth") on its forehead. "אמת" consists of three Hebrew letters – א "aleph," מ "mem," ת "taf" – and contains within it the word "מת," meaning "death." The golem then "dies" by the erasure of the letter "aleph," revealing the "מת," death. The golem's messianic role is to protect Prague's Jews, to keep them separate and safe from anti-Semitism and assimilation. In Yudel Rosenberg's hagiography *The Golem or The Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Leyb* (1904), for example, Father Tadeush, the Maharal's arch nemesis, lures the 16-year-old daughter of a Jewish wine dealer and persuades her to drink his wine and shake his hand.<sup>57</sup> Father Tadeush houses her in his church and eventually engages her to a gentile duke's son and the golem is summoned to rescue the girl and prevent the tragedy of intermarriage.

In contrast to the golem, Superman represents the ultimate assimilationist fantasy: that a nerdy, spectacled outsider can become an American superhero. In his essay "Did You Know

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<sup>57</sup> According to Jewish law, physical contact with the opposite sex, or *negiah*, is not permitted. Moreover, drinking *yayin nesech*, idolatrous wine, is not permitted.

Superman is Jewish?” Harry Brod describes the relationship between Superman’s dual personas as a necessary function of the assimilationist fantasy:

The psychic trick Siegel and Shuster needed to pull off only worked if at the same time that we knew who Superman really was, we also knew that the world, in its stupidity, saw him only as Clark... the classic Jewish nebbish. But little did they know! Jewish men had only to tear off their clothes and throw off their glasses to reveal the surging superman underneath, physique fully revealed by those skin-tight red and blue tights, and flaunt that billowing cape. (Brod)

A superhero created by Jewish immigrants, Superman embodies the American dream; he is sent to Earth in a pod, is a hardworking, prosaic and often bumbling, journalist by day, but only to conceal the latent presence of his inner superhero. As literary theorist and critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. confirms, Superman personifies the “(undocumented) alien who had been naturalized by the ultimate American couple” (*Superman is Jewish* 9). *Superman: The Movie* (1978) offers a lengthy and detailed description of Superman’s arrival on Earth drawn from the comic book origins, which underscores his process of Americanization. Superman arrives in an all-American farming town, Smallville, and is taken in by an all-American farming couple: Jonathan (Glenn Ford) and Martha Kent (Phyllis Thaxter). The Kents raise Superman as their own son, as the “alien who had been naturalized by the ultimate American couple.” And in the recent Superman reboot, *Man of Steel* (2013), Superman cements his position as an assimilated American by assuring the military: “I grew up in Kansas, General. I’m about as American as it gets.”

Assimilation, outsidersness, and messianism are tangled inextricably in the figures of Superman and the golem. Moreover, Diner recapitulates the link between assimilation and silence about the Holocaust against which she ultimately argues:

According to nearly all scholars...in the aftermath of World War II, the Jews of the United States rushed to the suburbs, embracing the acceptance being proffered to them by an increasingly tolerant America. In this “golden age,” they had everything to lose by associating themselves publicly with the horrendous event that made them so very different from the other white, middle-class Americans with whom they sought to integrate. (Diner 5)

In the scholarship Diner cites, post-war Jews were silent about the Holocaust as a means of assimilation, wanting to put the horrors of genocide behind them in order to better integrate into a white, middle-class America. And as a comic book icon, Superman equipped Americans with the ultimate assimilationist fantasy and thus the apparatus necessary to silence the testimony of the Holocaust, the testimony being depicted in horror comic books.

Superman not only provided an assimilationist fantasy in his character; the Superman comic books of the post-war era quite literally erased the war via images and their depiction of the ultimate iconic superhero. Between August 1941 and August 1943, *Action Comics* featured thirteen comics with images of the war on their covers. *Action Comics* #39 (August 1941) shows German soldiers in a tank, highlighting Superman with their spotlights, warplanes flying overhead. *Action Comics* #40 (September 1941) has a German tank shooting directly at Superman. *Action Comics* #43 (December 1941) depicts a Nazi parachute about to land and Superman fighting the Nazi midair. *Action Comics* #44 (January 1942) has Superman clutching the gun barrel of a giant Nazi tank with a swastika as German soldiers fire at him. *Action Comics* #48 (May 1942) has Superman punching the propeller of a Japanese warplane, as big warships pass beneath him. *Action Comics* #53 (October 1942) depicts Superman fighting Nazi soldiers who are fighting him ardently with flamethrowers. *Action Comics* #54 (November 1942) shows

Superman grabbing hold of the periscope on a Nazi U-boat (with a bold Swastika) and twisting the periscope into a pretzel shape, debilitating the submarine. *Action Comics #55* (December 1942) has Superman flying an mechanical airplane component through the sky to help the Allies as they build their warplane down below. *Action Comics #59* (April 1943) shows Superman climbing onto a Nazi tank which bears a Swastika, and pulling back the metal of the hatch to reveal two terrified German soldiers inside. *Action Comics #60* (May 1943) has Superman delivering supplies to Allied soldiers as they hunker in the woods. *Action Comics #62* (July 1943) depicts Superman using his body to fly through the air and block an Allied soldier from a Japanese warplane. And *Action Comics #63* features Superman sitting on the nose of a Japanese plane, punching its terrified pilot. However, of the thirteen comics featuring images of the war on their covers, only one (*Action Comics #62*, “There Will Always Be A Superman”) follows the direction of the covers and depicts the war between its pages. The others create a Superman so fantastic he does not even need to acknowledge the war taking place around him. The vast majority of Superman comics printed during the war ignore the war altogether in their pages and instead portray a Superman who fights off magnificent Supervillains and protects the world from the possibility of fantastic evil.



The cover of *Action Comics #54* (November 1942)

Comic book historian Bill Schelly captures the disjunction between the Superman covers and their stories: “On two of every three covers, the Man of Tomorrow helped fight World War II. But inside, in the stories themselves – those contained in the book – he battled foes more fanciful and frivolous. The war would be referred to, but Superman mostly stayed close to home” (Schelly 2). According to Schelly, comic book editors at National Periodical Publications were concerned that readers would not accept a superhero who focused all his energy on a single war. He needed to spread his powers to the world at large. Superman was a superhero who quite literally prevented the narrative of the war from taking place. *Action Comics #59* even tells a bona fide Cinderella fairytale. In “Cinderella a La Superman,” Clark Kent is wrangled into babysitting for Lois Lane’s niece. While reading her a story, he falls asleep and dreams about his own role in the Cinderella story. He brings about Cinderella’s “happily ever after”: “And so Cinderella and her Prince were married that very day and Superman was seated in the place of honor” ([Siegel, Jerry (w), and John Sikela (i)] *Action Comics #59* [April 1943], D.C. Comics). Superman provides the ultimate antidote to injustice. Simcha Weinstein draws a link between the Holocaust and Superman, implying that superheroes offer an optimistic alternative to the horrors of war via the salvific prevention of evil:

Soon the whole world would be engulfed in the blind hatred unleashed on this night, called Kristallnacht, “the Night of Broken Glass.” The planet needed a hero – fast...So Siegel and Shuster began submitting comic book treatments under the none-too-Jewish pseudonym Bernard J. Kenton...Eventually, they carved out a character that embodied their adolescent frustrations, served as a mouthpiece for the oppressed, and became an American icon. (Weinstein 21-22)



While the golem commits acts of violence that are actually acts of love, while the living dead ask us to embrace a disordered reality, and while the *muselmann* offers a true and complete testimony of the Holocaust, Superman is a superhero who foregoes the war and violence, who *prevents* the war and the disorder of wartime, by providing a happy fairytale ending.

### Horror Comics and the Holocaust

However, while Superman erased the possibility of a war, horror comics, in contrast, dealt with the war more overtly; and although no definitive direct historical link between the two sets of artwork has yet been drawn, their thematic and stylistic resonances indicate an indirect relationship: both are responding to the trauma of the Holocaust via particular artistic media and form. As a genre, horror comics are distinct from superhero comics, which classically pit superheroes against particular villains; Shakespearean scholar, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, and writer Jim Trombetta describes the horror comic as “rarely an interaction between heroes and villains” (Trombetta 171). According to Trombetta, “a horror comic might use a Nazi or some other conventional villain, but what it truly fears above all are the Nazi’s *victims*” (Trombetta 171). Trombetta further links the *muselmann* to the zombie in his explication of the symbolism behind the zombies of 1950s horror comics: “the zombies of the fifties are also the ones who didn’t make it out of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, the entire Nazi ‘concentration universe’” (Trombetta 171). In its depiction of the zombie, the horror comic uses *muselmänner* as the source of elemental fear. In the censored comic “The Living Dead” (*Dark Mysteries* #20, October 1954), for example, John D’Agostino depicts a man, “Ivor Blau, son of Dr. Klaus Blau, the Nazi scientist who disappeared [*sic*],” who finds a house while being chased in the woods. Inside, a beautiful woman, Vania, tells him the story of how his father performed terrible Nazi

experiments. Blau's father was a creator of zombies: "was sure he could draw blood from living people injected with his formula and restore wounded German soldiers dying from loss of blood to life." But his experiments are interrupted and he leaves "his guinea pigs on their beds – not alive, yet not quite dead." Forced to abandon his victims, Dr. Blau leaves zombies in his wake, *muselmänner* who are the result of Nazi experimentation. By the end of the comic, these zombies come to kill Ivor, "and Vania... now a real zombie, had her way of Ivor and she watched him sink to the floor as his screams grew faint and she knew he breathed his last agonizing breath" ([D'Agostino (i)] "The Living-Dead." *Dark Mysteries* #20 [October 1954], Master Comics, Inc.). D'Agostino depicts Nazi victims, in both their appearance and their role as attackers, as the source of fear, drawing together the Holocaust's *muselmann* and the figure of the zombie.

The structure of early horror comic books suggests they are participating in a particular form of Jewish response to catastrophe, which David G. Roskies identifies in his weighty text *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*: "The Jewish literature of destruction was part of a three-way dialogue that engaged the writer, the people and the God of Israel. The basis for that dialogue was the covenantal ideal of sin-retribution-and-restoration" (Roskies 4). Jewish responses to catastrophe, according to Roskies, always appropriate this covenantal ideal and engage this tripartite schema. As "preachies," or moralistic tales, horror comic books portray horrific crimes which then carry horrific repercussions, following the covenantal ideal of sin-retribution-and-restoration, albeit morbidly and often supernaturally. Historian Russ Cochran quotes EC comic artist Al Feldstein as defining the "preachy" and describing its relationship to World War II:

I came out of World War II with great aspirations and dreams of the wonderful, ideal 'New World' that we'd fought for and many had died for. And so when Bill

[Gaines] and I were plotting stories... my idealistic Liberal tendencies and philosophies inevitably came into play... stories about racial and religious intolerance, etc... And it was Bill Gaines who labeled them “preachies.” (Cochran 110)

Feldstein confirms the way in which the EC morality tales were clearly a response to the Second World War. The products of a Jewish artist and a soldier, Feldstein’s work is not only in dialogue with the Holocaust but models the Jewish archetype of revenge and restoration that Roskies describes.

EC Comics took up the horrific and the uncanny, introducing tales of revenge in which horrible crimes were committed and then avenged by ghosts, zombies, witches, and occasionally humans. EC’s horror titles are each introduced by horror hosts: the Crypt-Keeper, the Vault-Keeper, and the Old Witch narrate the horrific tales and irreverently mock the readers. These “Ghoulunatics,” the three horror hosts, would share each edition of *Tales from the Crypt* and would often bait each other to offer more salacious tales: “Heh, heh! So it’s *my* turn to ‘entertain’ you now, eh? Good! I’ve been waiting! Come into the Vault of Horror! I am your host, The Vault-Keeper!” ([Orlando, Joe (i)] “Madam Bluebeard! *Tales from the Crypt* #27 [December 1951-January 1952], E.C. Comics). EC Comics did not shy away from portrayals of the gruesome and horrific; they merely matched them with equally gruesome and horrific revenge schemes. Illustrator Reed Crandall, for example, in “Carrion Death!” depicts a man who recalls his own criminal acts: “thirty thousand dollars for which I’d held up a bank and murdered a guard, ahead, easy living and women and fancy clothes waited, smiling beckoning” ([Crandall, Reed (i)] “Carrion Death! *Shock SuspenStories* #9 [June-July 1953], E.C. Comics). Pursued by the police, the thief and murderer takes off into the desert, certain he has escaped redress, only to

find himself a victim of retribution by the tale's end, as he lies helpless in the sand, justice restored, a vulture tearing at his flesh: "And I feel no pain as the vice-like jaws of the raw-necked vultures close upon my flesh and peel it from my bones. I cannot move...I cannot stop them...I can only watch in silent horror as they feed upon me. I can watch only until one of them plucks my eyeballs from my skull" ([Crandall, Reed (i)] "Carrion Death! *Shock Suspense Stories* #9 [June-July 1953], E.C. Comics). Graham Ingels, another EC illustrator best known for his "horror tableaux [which] were swampy, oozing, decaying, and fetid, and [his] depiction of the rotting, shambling corpses" (Geissman 93), illustrated an issue entitled "Horror We? How's Bayou?" The episode takes place in a bayou and features Everett, a remorseless murderer whose modus operandi consists of dismembering the bodies of bayou visitors. At the issue's conclusion, the dismembered bodies reconfigure themselves, though confusedly, and wander back through the dripping bayou, walking on hands, with necks attached to knees, to haunt Everett. EC Comics's thieves, rapists, and murderers thieve, rape, and murder, but are then visited by terrifying ends – zombie attacks, eerie hauntings, vulture feedings – their sins compelling retribution and resulting in a kind of neat restoration, in which dismembered bodies are reconfigured and haunt their murderers, or the desert haven becomes the desert grave.

Moreover, the very style of the artwork in horror comics differs immensely from Superman comics, which were muted and basic in their line drawings. EC Comics openly confronted the vividness of the narratives they presented, offering bold depictions, firm lines, and far more dynamic imagery than the Superman comics. Stylistically, EC Comics's art resonates strongly with much of the art produced during the Holocaust in ghettos, transit camps, prisons, POW camps, and concentration camps. In their work on trauma theory, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok present and elaborate on the concept of the "crypt," a relationship

between stasis and trauma, and one that engages the very language and imagery of horror comics, – the “crypt,” which is featured in many of EC Comics’ titles – that allows us to link EC Comics drawings to the Holocaust. According to Abraham and Torok, when a loss, a “segment of an ever so painfully lived Reality – untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual assimilative work of mourning” (Abraham and Torok 141), cannot be admitted as a loss, the construction of a “crypt” takes place. Abraham and Torok compare the crypt to a cocoon, referring to the crypt as a “sealed off psychic place, a crypt in the ego” (Abraham and Torok 141). As trauma is inassimilable to consciousness here, inassimilable to the subject – “the assimilation of both the illegitimate idyll and its loss is precluded” (Abraham and Torok 141) – the relation to trauma is one of stasis, in which the trauma is always present, always “stray[ing] endlessly about the crypt” (Abraham and Torok 142), in its inassimilability.

Jim Trombetta notes the way in which horror comics “conveyed the unspeakable, and maybe even unthinkable, trauma of a whole society” (Trombetta 23), and Al Feldstein, EC Comics’s original artist, exemplifies the stylistic approach horror comic artists took in order to convey this trauma. Best known for his depiction of “static horror,” or “freezing a single action in time” (Geissman 25), Feldstein introduced to the comic book universe “a visceral, immediate style” (Geissman 25), suspending in time stiff and decaying corpses and mutilated flesh. In the April-May 1951 edition of *Tales from the Crypt*, Feldstein illustrated a man’s paranoid fantasy, in which he perceives himself as a rotting corpse, his flesh peeling away from the bone, his nose a gaping hole in his face ([Feldstein, Al (i)] “Reflection of Death!” *Tales from the Crypt* [April-May 1951], E.C. Comics).



Panel from *Tales From the Crypt* #23 (April-May 1951)

Feldstein's static style is highly resonant of Karl Schwesig's cycle *Schlegelkeller*.<sup>58</sup> Schwesig, a non-Jewish painter who was nonetheless imprisoned during the Holocaust, created ink work that similarly stills movement in time and focuses on the horrors of the Holocaust. Schwesig's "Prisoner on the Seashore" (1940), for example, features an ink close-up of an emaciated male prisoner, huddled in the fetal position beside the sea. The sketch is realistic and stiff: the bulbous clouds in the sky are frozen, the waves are still, the man's ribs and ankles protrude grotesquely through his skin, and his genitals are exposed (Blatter and Milton 104). Both Feldstein and Schwesig use a line-drawing technique to capture the grotesqueness of a single moment in time: a man imprisoned, either literally, in the case of Schwesig, or figuratively by his own mind, in

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<sup>58</sup> Karl Schwesig, born in Gelsenkirchen in 1898, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf. Although he was not Jewish, he was outspoken in his anti-Nazi sentiments, and was imprisoned for sixteen months in 1933. His cycle *Schlegelkeller* depicts this experience.

the case of Feldstein, and unable to move from his position on the seashore (Schwesig) or before the mirror (Feldstein).



Karl Schwesig, “Prisoner on the Seashore,” St. Cyprien, 1940. Ink, 9x12. *Ghetto Fighters’ House*, Israel

The *Beit Lohamei Haghetat* (Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum) archives, founded in 1949 by a community of Holocaust survivors as a place “to collect, preserve, catalogue, and present to the public every piece of testimony and documentation that will aid in telling the fate of the Jewish People in the 20th century and the crimes perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its supporters” (*Ghetto Fighters’ House*), offer a similar photograph of a *muselmänn*, lying on his back, surrounded by the black-booted feet of Nazi soldiers, and imprisoned on a wooden rack, unable to move.



**“Muselmann.” Photograph. *Ghetto Fighters’ House, Israel***

In addition to stylistic similarities between horror comic art and art produced during the Holocaust, horror comics feature content that strongly reflects elements of the Holocaust. Horror comic books frequently featured the shrunken head, a motif many historians trace to Exhibit USA-254, introduced on December 13, 1945 at the Nuremberg Trial of the Major War Criminals by prosecutor Thomas Dodd, furthering the connection between horror comics and the Holocaust:

Exhibit USA-254 was the head of either a Soviet or Polish prisoner (accounts differ) in the Buchenwald extermination camp, who had evidently been hanged for a “racial sex crime” (i.e., “relations with a German girl”). The head had been carefully prepared according to the Jivaro technique, as it was explicated in a German anthropology text. The skull had been removed, and the blackened head, complete with thick hair and a tiny face, was shriveled to the size of a fist. It was mounted on a little wooden pedestal so that Karl Otto Koch, commandant of Buchenwald, could use it as a paperweight on his desk. (Trombetta 117)



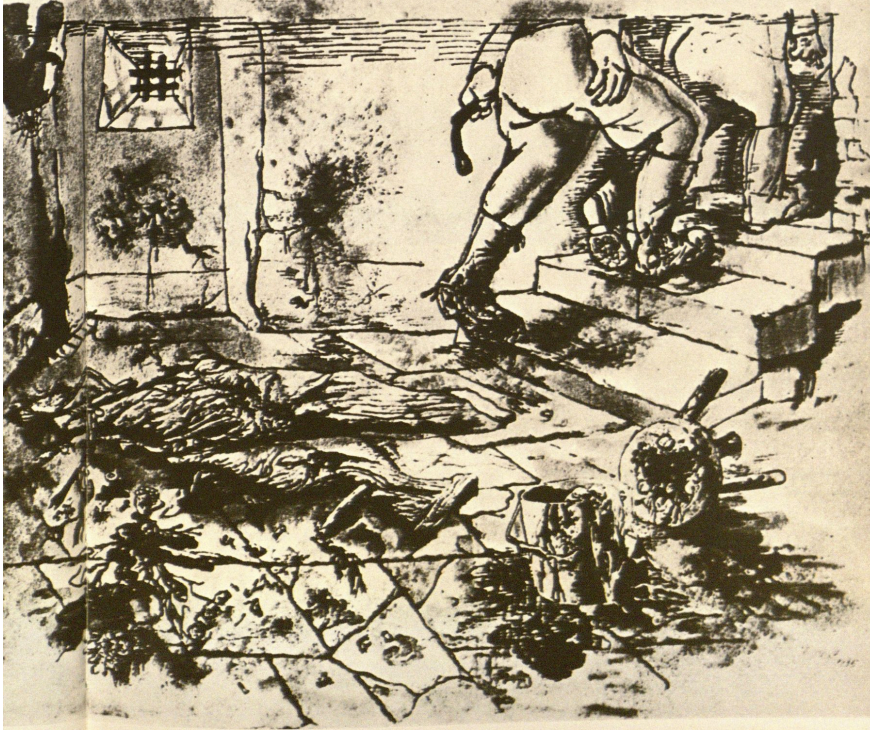
A traumatic revelation to the Western world, this particular shrunken head almost immediately began to appear in horror comic books, such as the cover of *Weird Mysteries* #6, which features a shrunken head that “pretty clearly seems to have been modeled on the Nuremberg skull – right down to the way the curling hair has been transmuted into Gypsy-style earrings (Gypsies also being victims of Nazi genocide)” (Trombetta 117).

Additionally, for the May-June 1953 edition of *The Haunt of Fear*, Jack Davis, an EC illustrator, illustrated “Foul Play,” a baseball-themed comic in which a team, competing for the playoff game, poisons and kills Jerry, a player from the opposing team. Jerry’s teammates, in a gruesome act of revenge, kill and dismember their opposing team and use their remains as baseball equipment ([Davis, Jack (i)] “Foul Play!” *The Haunt of Fear* [May-June 1953], E.C. Comics). Davis blurs the ultimate American pastime with visions of Robert Lenkiewicz’s art collection, which allegedly featured a lampshade made of Jewish skin, and with images of the concentration camp liberation, which featured piles of Jewish hair and gold and silver Jewish teeth.

Horror comics deal with both torture and brutality, boldly addressing realistic depictions of assault, rape, and murder, much like the artwork produced during and around the Holocaust. George Grosz’s<sup>59</sup> painting “After the Interrogation,” for example, depicts the legs and feet of two guards walking up a set of stairs. Behind them lies a bloody mess of human flesh and bones. Blood spatters the walls. A stool has toppled over beside a pail of indistinguishable matter (Blatter and Milton 53).

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<sup>59</sup> George Grosz was a social and political satirist in Weimar Germany. After a court battle and the destruction of several of his works in 1930, he emigrated to the United States and his German citizenship was annulled. The Nazis mocked his works in several exhibitions. Grosz lived on Long Island with his family from 1933 to 1959, during which time he painted political attacks against Nazi Germany.



**George Grosz, “After the Interrogation,” New York, 1935. Watercolor, 17 ½ x 22 ½”. Peter Grosz, N.J.**

Karol Konieczny<sup>60</sup>, an artist-survivor, created “Surprise – It’s Only Water – The Cry of a Disbelieving New Internee from Auschwitz” (1945), a muted watercolor of a mass of naked men, their genitals exposed, though minimally portrayed, mostly faceless and difficult to distinguish from one another. In a letter to editor Janina Jaworska, Konieczny explains:

I would like to ask you to print, as an absolute necessity, the drawings where the prisoners parade naked. Such was the reality of camp life. The first breaking of a human being depended on brutally stripping clothing off one’s body, which began in the first hours of our arrival in the camp and ended with a pile of naked corpses

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<sup>60</sup> Karol Konieczny, born in 1919 in Cieszyn, Poland, was deported to Buchenwald in 1939. He worked first in the quarries and then in a disciplinary group called the “excrement men.” Although he was transferred in 1944 to the barracks for pseudomedical experiments, he survived and was eventually evacuated.

near the crematorium. False prudishness is not needed here. (Blatter and Milton 141)



**Karol Konieczny, “Surprise – It’s Only Water—the Cry of a Disbelieving New Internee from Auschwitz,” Buchenwald, 1945. Watercolor, 8x11”. *Buchenwald Museum.***

The reality of the Holocaust was brutal and naked, as reflected by Konieczny’s work, along with the work of many artists of the time. For example, Paul Goyard,<sup>61</sup> a Buchenwald survivor, drew “Two Hundred Cadavers, Not Yet Burned” (1945), in which he depicts penciled outlines of naked, emaciated human bodies, replete with exposed genitals and protruding ribs (Blatter and Milton 157).

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Goyard was a French artist incarcerated in Buchenwald from 1944-1945.



Paul Goyard, “Two Hundred Cadavers, Not Yet Burned, Buchenwald, 1945. Pencil, 5x8”. *Musée de Deux Guerres Mondiales, Paris*

Horror comics illustrated comparable blatant exposure, ultimately leading the Comics Magazine Association of America to prohibit “nudity in any form.”

Scenes of torture are similarly ubiquitous in both Holocaust artwork and horror comics. BIM’s<sup>62</sup> three-part series entitled “Report Leader Kellerman and Camp Führer During and Interrogation in Gusen” (1944) portrays in chalk and pencil a man hung by his wrists and beaten and an emaciated, naked man who looks on as two uniformed guards drown a second man, upside down, in a barrel. Lying beside the barrel is a skeleton (Blatter and Milton 170).

Waldemar Nowakowski’s<sup>63</sup> “Nazi and Child” (1943) illustrates most disturbingly, in a pencil stippling, a Nazi holding a naked child by its hair (only the back of the child is shown, the sex is not visible), holding a gun to the child’s head (Blatter and Milton 193). As the war wore on, the

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<sup>62</sup> Three pencil and crayon drawings, done in Gusen, a satellite camp of Mauthausen, which housed approximately 67,000 prisoners between 1940 and 1945, are signed with the name BIM (unclear whether this is an acronym or a full name).

<sup>63</sup> Nowakowski was born in Bialogrodek, Ukraine in 1917 and was deported to Auschwitz in 1940. During his four years in concentrated camps, he completed about 300 watercolors in post-card format on cardboard, explaining “I involved myself with art in order to survive.” He was liberated on May 3, 1945.

artwork grew more defeated, though no less graphic. Helga Weisssova-Hoskova's<sup>64</sup> "Suicide on the Wire" (1945) depicts a badly emaciated woman, her breasts and genitals exposed through sheer and inadequate clothing, throwing herself, her face and body contorted in agony, against an electrified barbed wire fence. Rows of camp barracks are clearly visible in the background (Blatter and Milton 236).

In a clear example, when set side-by-side, a detail from the cover of *The Vault of Horror* #23, drawn by Johnny Craig in 1950 and a Linocut by Bertalan Göndör<sup>65</sup> entitled "From the Ranks of Death," painted in Budapest in the late 1930s, show undeniably the way in which Holocaust artwork and horror comics grapple with similar thematic concerns. In fact, Göndör's Linocut could easily be mistaken for a page in a graphic novel. Both works depict scenes in which a sexualized woman is being attacked by a monster. Göndör's work features a fully undressed woman on the verge of being raped and Craig's a clothed woman, also in a vulnerable state, whose body is emphasized by the cut of her dress: exposed cleavage, tiny waist, voluptuous hips; however, in both pieces, the woman is clearly in a position of fear, wide-eyed and terrified, and in both pieces, the women are grabbing powerlessly at a railing in the face of their respective attackers. Both artworks moreover display a living dead monster – a skeleton (Göndör) and a zombie (Craig) – only visible from behind and indirectly in a shadow (Craig) or a mirror (Göndör), implying its unimaginable horror.

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<sup>64</sup> Helga Weisssova-Hoskova was born in Prague in 1929. She was deported to Theresienstadt on December 7, 1941, where she continued her education underground. In April 1945, she was evacuated to Mauthausen and was liberated there.

<sup>65</sup> Bertalan Göndör was a Hungarian Jewish lithographer, born in 1908. During World War II, he was conscripted into forced labor in eastern Hungary, during which time he sent eight postcards to his wife in Budapest. The postcards were cartoonish and designed to escape censorship. Göndör was ultimately deported to Poland and died in Mauthausen in 1945.





Bertalan Göndör, "From the Ranks of Death," Budapest, 1933. Linocut, 12x9"

Courtesy of The Leo Baeck Institute, New York





The cover of Vault of Horror #23 (Feb-March 1950)

Holocaust themes and narratives are suggestively represented in horror comic books, which, unlike superhero comics, do not recoil from illustrating graphic scenes of torture and murder that bear great similarity to artwork produced during the Holocaust.

In addition to stylistic similarities between Holocaust artwork and horror comic books, EC Comics offered war stories alongside more typical horror stories: a drastic difference from Superman comics, which patently refused to acknowledge the war within their pages. *Shock SuspenStories*, a sampler periodical that was part of the EC line in the early 1950s, included a “War SuspenStory” in its issues, along with Science-Fiction *SuspenStories* and Horror

SuspenStories. Gaines and Feldstein explored the mixed genre of their new comic in their introduction to the first issue:

We've tried to satisfy every one of you readers who have written us insisting that EC increase its output! Many of you wanted another science-fiction mag...you horror fans wanted another horror book...and you suspense readers wanted a companion mag to *Crime SuspenStories*! We decided, therefore, to make this new mag an "EC Sampler"...and to include in it an S-F yarn, a horror tale, a Crime SuspenStory, and...for you readers of *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*...a war story!" (*Shock SuspenStories #1* [February-March 1952], E.C. Comics)

EC was already putting out volumes of war-related comics in *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*, revealing their differences from Superman comics in the very material they chose to write about. Moreover, in their new mixed genre comic, EC included war stories as one of the four main narrative genres their publication produced. In *Shock SuspenStories*'s first issue, alongside a story of a woman who vengefully kills her obsessively neat husband and places each of his parts in a jar, "each one in its place" ([Kamen, Jack (i)] "The Neat Job!" *Shock SuspenStories #1* [February-March 1952], E.C. Comics), the comic featured "Yellow," a War SuspenStory about a colonel whose son, Lieutenant Henderson, is a coward. After several acts of cowardice on his son's part, the colonel is forced to execute his own son, though falsely reassures his son the guns will be loaded with blanks in order to ensure Lieutenant Henderson's final moments would not be cowardly ones: "The firing squad's rifles barked and the 30 caliber lead slugs ripped through the lieutenant's body... killing him instantly! The grin froze on his face as his eyes glazed and his legs melted to the ground" ([Davis, Jack (i)] "Yellow!" *Shock SuspenStories #1* [February-March 1952], E.C. Comics). The captain then pats the colonel on the back and assures him, "at



least you can be proud of the fact that your son faced his death like a man, sir!” ([Davis, Jack (i)] “Yellow! *Shock SuspensStories* #1 [February-March 1952], E.C. Comics). EC did not evade the brutal realities of war, but rather created narratives in which fathers kill their sons on the battlefield.

An avid trope in zombie film and fiction, and one displayed clearly here in horror comic books, the compulsion to sacrifice loved ones is a theme that occurs throughout Holocaust literature as well, further highlighting the association between the horror comics trend and the Holocaust. Yiddish poet Avraham Sutzkever’s<sup>66</sup> 1943 poem “*Kol Nidrei*,”<sup>67</sup> for example, narrates the story of a Jew who kills his own son to save him from Nazi torture: “I had five sons once, like five faithful fingers,/ And I entrusted them with spinning my life after my death/ You took pity on me, made my old age lighter –/ One by one you cut them off, and left me sane... So I drove the dagger deep/ Into my last son’s breast./ That’s what your father can do!/ Not to let him torture you!” (30-34, 130-133). Like the colonel in “Yellow,” and like Matheson’s Neville who is forced to kill his wife in the face of the apocalypse, Sutzkever’s poem depicts a father forced to sacrifice his son in the face of war.

In addition to overtly referencing the war, EC Comics alluded in its illustrations and narratives to both Nazis and anti-Semitism. In the fifth volume of *Shock SuspensStories*, artist Wally Wood illustrated a comic entitled “Hate!” which features John Smith, an avid anti-Semite who posts a notice on a new neighbor’s door: “Don’t move in... Jew! You’ll be sorry! We don’t

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<sup>66</sup> Born on July 15, 1913 in Smorgon, in the (then) Russian Empire, Sutzkever began writing poetry at an early age, initially in Hebrew. He was among the Modernist writers and artists of the *Yung Vilne* (“Young Vilna”) group in the early 1930s. In 1941, he and his wife were sent to the Vilna Ghetto and his mother and newborn son were murdered by the Nazis. On September 12, 1943, he and his wife escaped to the forests, and together with fellow Yiddish poet Shmerke Kaczerginsky, Sutzkever fought the occupying forces as a partisan. In March 1944, a small plane was sent to the Vilna forests to bring Sutzkever and his wife to Russia. He died on January 20, 2010 in Tel Aviv, as an acclaimed Yiddish poet.

<sup>67</sup> Literally translated as “all vows,” *Kol Nidrei* is an Aramaic declaration recited in the synagogue before the beginning of the evening service on Yom Kippur.

want Jews in this neighborhood” ([Wood, Wally (i)] “Hate!” *Shock SuspenStories* #5 [October-November 1952], E.C. Comics). John Smith gathers a gang to beat the new neighbor into submission. He then sets the Jew’s house on fire, “the fiery light of the consuming flames silhouett[ing the man and his wife]” ([Wood, Wally (i)] “Hate!” *Shock SuspenStories* #5 [October-November 1952], E.C. Comics) and finally kills them as they jump to their deaths. Almost immediately, John’s mother appears for an impromptu visit, and informs John he was adopted and that his real parents were Jewish: “Are you different, John? Are you different, now? Do you feel any different? Are you the same man you were ten minutes ago... watching that last whisp of smoke fade away...” ([Wood, Wally (i)] “Hate!” *Shock SuspenStories* #5 [October-November 1952], E.C. Comics). John is then beaten by the same men who helped him beat his new neighbor, “hate is deep... hate is imbedded!” ([Wood, Wally (i)] “Hate!” *Shock SuspenStories* #5 [October-November 1952], E.C. Comics). The narrative structure of *Shock SuspenStories* requires a neat closure, an easy revenge schema in which the evildoer is hoisted by his own petard, and John clearly falls prey to the same hate he evinced earlier in the story.

Moreover, the image of the fire coupled with the intensity of John’s anti-Semitism recalls the crematoria of Nazi concentration camps. The flames are described literally as “the flames of hate” ([Wood, Wally (i)] “Hate!” *Shock SuspenStories* #5 [October-November 1952], E.C. Comics). The new neighbors are forced to their deaths as the neighborhood watches, unable to assist, and John Smith and his gang take gleeful pleasure in having set the house alight. The details are clearly resonant of concentration camp crematoria: of the Nazis who watched with pleasure as Jewish bodies were consumed by the flames, of the surrounding neighbors, Germans,

Poles, and Soviets, many of whom stood idly by unable or unwilling to help,<sup>68</sup> and of the many Jews who took their own lives in an effort to escape Nazi torture.

### The *Muselmann* and the Zombie

In addition to stylistic resonances and overt references to the war, horror comics moreover provide images of the living dead that align with the *muselmann*, drawing out the link Isaac Bashevis Singer makes in *Enemies, A Love Story* between the living dead and the *muselmann*. Because the zombie migrates from Haitian folklore to American anthropological study to Hollywood filmic allegory, from a strict and terrifying belief in the potential of unwillful life after death rooted in voodoo tradition<sup>69</sup> to a sincere anthropological examination responsible for carrying the zombie across national and physical borders<sup>70</sup> to a more gruesome and metonymic representation in popular culture, it welcomes its own comparison to actual cultural and historical figures, and not merely to pop cultural icons. The zombie's slippery position on the border between culture and representation, its historical fluidity across the boundary from

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Goldhagen's work *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, for example, a work that stoked great controversy and debate, argues that the vast majority of ordinary Germans were, as the title indicates, "willing executioners" in the Holocaust.

<sup>69</sup> As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the zombie originated in Haitian folklore, where it was an integral part of the island's religious beliefs: a hybrid of African animism and Roman Catholicism known as "voodoo." Voodoo allows for the possibility of possession of the human body by various gods, and the conceit that a person's soul can be separated from his body during a voodoo rite presents the very real danger that this process could be unduly appropriated by unscrupulous voodoo sorcerers. According to Haitian legend, a sorcerer would bring about a victim's death through a magic potion, and capture the victim's soul. The sorcerer would then reanimate the corpse as an obedient mindless slave.

<sup>70</sup> In 1887, amateur anthropologist Lafcadio Hearn traveled to the island of Martinique to study the local customs and folklore. While there, Hearn encountered the bizarre legend of the *corps cadavers*, or "walking dead." The zombie then made its initial appearance in the English-speaking world in the form of Hearn's short article for *Harper's Magazine*, entitled "The Country of the Comers-Back." Although Hearn offered a colorful account of his travels, the zombie was not widely popularized in the United States until an explorer and journalist from Westminster, Maryland – William Buehler Seabrook – arrived in Haiti to research superstitions in voodoo culture. Seabrook's travelogue, *The Magic Island*, published in 1929, details his explorations in Haiti, including his encounter with a Haitian farmer, Polynice, who allegedly precipitated Seabrook's first encounter with zombie slaves.

cultural figure to filmic illustration, allows for the possibility of a more malleable discursive boundary: one that includes both folkloric figures, like the golem, and historical figures, like the *muselmann*.

A figure divested of humanity, the *muselmann* blurs the boundary between living and dead, and in an oeuvre that itself underscores the intersection and overlap between history and popular culture, the Holocaust's *muselmann* and the popular cultural zombie align themselves around an underlying fantasy of genocide, order, and violence. Furthermore, like the zombie, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, evades the precision of definitive characterization, the very designation "*muselmann*" refuses to be etymologically contained; the term spread from Auschwitz-Birkenau to other concentration camps, where it metamorphosed. In Majdanek,<sup>71</sup> *muselmänner* were called *gamel* (derived from the German word "*gammeln*," the colloquial for "rotting") and in Stutthof,<sup>72</sup> *muselmänner* were renamed *krypel* (derived from the German *krüppel*, meaning "cripple"). As synonyms for the *muselmann*, both "*gamel*" and "*krypel*" moreover signify elements commonly associated with the rotting, shambling popular representations of the living dead, aligning the *muselmann* with the pop cultural zombie in an uncomfortable interplay of historical reality and cultural representation. And although the *muselmann* is not literally a zombie, and I am not suggesting we conflate a very real historic tragedy with a fictional representation, pop cultural figures are in many ways responding to historical traumas, and the figure of the zombie – and its portrayal in early horror comic books in particular – can be read as a link, as a response, as a means of coping with the horrors of the recent war.

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<sup>71</sup> A concentration camp on the outskirts of Lublin, Poland, that operated from October 1, 1941 until July 22, 1944

<sup>72</sup> The first Nazi concentration camp, built in 1939 just outside of the German border

At the close of *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Agamben provides testimony written by *muselmänner*, drawn from Zdzislaw Ryn's and Stanislaw Klodzinski's study in *Die Auschwitz Hefte*, a collection of historical, psychological, and medical texts documenting life and death in Auschwitz.<sup>73</sup> Agamben here characterizes the *muselmann* as "the living dead" (*Remnants* 41) and, citing Ryn and Klodzinski, offers a second understanding of its etymological origins:

His facial expression also changed. His gaze became cloudy and his face took on an indifferent, mechanical, sad expression. His eyes became covered by a kind of layer and seemed deeply set in his face. His skin took on a pale gray color, becoming thin and hard like paper... His hair became bristly, opaque, and split easily. His head became longer, his cheekbones and eye sockets became more pronounced. He breathed slowly; he spoke softly and with great difficulty... they became indifferent to everything happening around them. They excluded themselves from all relations to their environment. If they could still move around, they did so in slow motion, without bending their knees. They shivered since their body temperature usually fell below 98.7 degrees. Seeing them from afar, one had the impression of seeing Arabs praying. This image was the origin of the term used at Auschwitz for people dying of malnutrition: Muslims.  
(*Remnants* 42-43)

Ryn's and Klodzinski's description initially highlights the way in which the *muselmann* has been stripped of an identity through starvation. Upon entrance into the concentration camp, all victims

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<sup>73</sup> Based on a questionnaire survey of Auschwitz survivors, Ryn and Klodzinski collected testimony of *muselmänner*, which they then used as the basis for their article "*An der Grenze zwischen Leben und Tod. Eine Studie über die Erscheinung des 'Muselmanns' im Konzentrationslager*" ["On the Border Between Life and Death: A Study on the Phenomenon of the *Muselmann* in the Concentration Camp"].

were shaved and denuded of any personal or differentiating elements: a process that was underscored by trauma, starvation, and (in some cases medically) rendered sterilization, producing skeletal bodies that shared more than they differed and took on an appearance that further affiliated them with the pop cultural zombie. As discussed earlier, in Ryn's and Klodzinski's understanding, the *muselmann*'s analogical Muslim connotations derive less from an unconditional submission to death than from the listless swaying resulting from stark physical trauma and reminiscent of praying Muslims.

Like the golem, whose etymological origins are equally murky (“unformed”? “foolish”? “redemptive”?),<sup>74</sup> the *muselmann*, perhaps, according to Ryn and Klodzinski, Muslim-like in his unconditional submission, perhaps in his lethargic swaying, nevertheless offers insight into the zombie and its attendant discourse. Whereas Agamben highlights the *muselmann* for his muteness, calling attention to the *muselmann* as the ultimate witness who cannot speak, the zombie reorients the value of the *muselmann*, rescripting the *muselmann* as someone who in fact *can* speak, and who moreover, as the living dead, is the only figure who can offer a complete testimony to the horrors of the Holocaust.

### The Comic Response

Although the Golden Age of comic books included an eruption of both horror comics and superhero comics, the critical response to the two comic book trends differed immensely. In May 1940, Sterling North, editor of the *Chicago Daily News*, denounced comic books as “a poisonous mushroom growth...guilty of a cultural slaughter of the innocents” (Diehl 81). North attempted to build a case against all comic books, but his campaign was checked by the start of World War

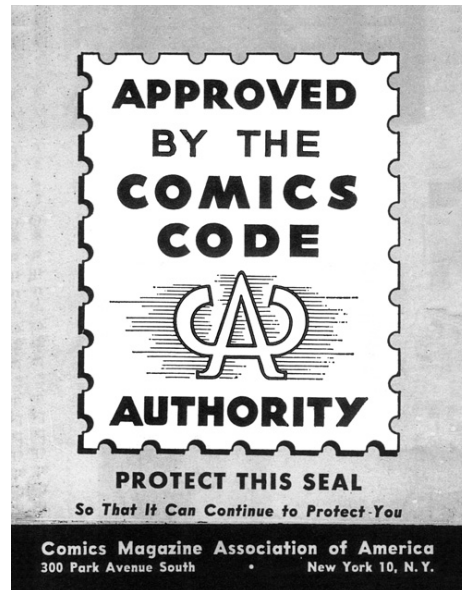
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<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 1's discussion on the etymology of the word “*golem*,” which can imply a degree of foolishness in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish slang, but may also have been corrupted from the Hebrew word “גאֵלְנוּ,” meaning, “our redeemer.”

II and the political difficulty of attacking the actions of Superman without appearing to be siding with the Nazis and fighting against “truth, justice, and the American way.” Public concern over comic books and their effect on children only resurfaced after the close of the war, in 1948, with the crusade of psychiatrist Dr. Fredric Wertham, who began attacking comic books, which he realized were habitual literary fare among his young patients and thus, he concluded, the cause of their deviance and maladjustment. In his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent*, Wertham indicted particularly EC’s horror comics, and their “smutty, unwholesome [depictions of women] with emphasis on half-bare and exaggerated sex characteristics” (Wertham 52), claiming they were a direct cause of juvenile delinquency. Wertham identified themes he felt were of a particularly destructive nature, including eye injuries, blood sucking, desecration of the dead, violence against the police or other authority figures, branding, stoning of victims, and female bondage.

Wertham’s outcries garnered public attention and on July 1, 1948, in response to growing public unrest, the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers (ACMP) was born. They adopted a code to regulate the content of comic books and created a seal of approval for comics that were appropriately censored. Wertham’s findings also generated city ordinances banning certain publications. In 1948, the ACMP released their “Publishers Code” which forbade, among a long list of items, portrayals of crime that might weaken respect for established authority, portrayals of sex or wantonness, and portrayals of divorce as humorous or glamorous. The ACMP’s “seal of approval” was largely irrelevant, however, as many publishers refused to join the organization. Other publishers, including EC Comics, joined the organization, but soon terminated their participation. In 1954, after the publication of Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent*, which spurred congressional hearings and a mounting tide of public criticism, the ACMP disbanded and was reborn as the more powerful and more conservative Comics

Magazine Association of America (CMAA). The CMAA, represented by the Comics Code Authority, set forth a detailed code by which comic book publishers were forced to abide in order to attain the CMAA seal of approval, which had become a necessity in order to ensure distribution.



CMAA seal

Horror comics were certainly graphic, grisly, and gory, but they offered a portrayal of a very grim and war-torn reality in a way Superman comics never did, in a way Superman comics intentionally *overlooked*. And as a result of their gruesome panels, horror comics were particularly censored and targeted by the Comic Code, highlights of which clearly indicate the extent of its censorship:

1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.



2. If crime is depicted, it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.
3. Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.
4. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal shall be punished for his misdeeds.
5. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gunplay, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.
6. No comic magazine shall use the word "horror" or "terror" in its title.
7. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.
8. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.
9. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.
10. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.
11. Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.
12. Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.
13. Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.
14. Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

15. Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.
  16. Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.
  17. Sex, perversion, or any inference to the same is strictly forbidden.
  18. Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.
- (Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Comic Books, and Juvenile Delinquency, Interim Report, 1955)

In outlawing vampires, ghouls, and werewolves, along with the words “crime,” “horror,” “terror,” and “weird,” the CMAA directly targeted horror comics and their major publisher, EC Comics, which notoriously depicted torture, agony, sex, profanity, and gruesome crimes.<sup>75</sup>

As it grapples with the war and with the Holocaust, EC Comics’s salaciousness and gore was merely a single facet of its politics; if superhero comics promoted an optimistic view of the possibility of assimilation and encouraged the silencing of destruction, EC Comics repeatedly confronted controversial issues such as racism and anti-Semitism (as in “Hate”). Bill Gaines’s tussles with Judge Charles Murphy, the face of the Comics Code Authority, reveal the political bent of EC Comics. In a well-noted example, Judge Murphy ordered alterations to EC’s science

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<sup>75</sup> The public’s growing distaste of horror comic books led to a series of comic book burnings, which historian Digby Diehl describes ironically as “of course reminiscent of the Nazi years” (*Tales from the Crypt: From Comic Books to Television*). Concerned families piled the offending comic books into fire pits and set them ablaze; biblioclasm represents the ultimate silencing – the destruction of the written word. Anti-comic book activists, by burning horror comic books, were engaging in a tradition of literary purging in which the Nazis similarly partook. On April 6, 1933, the *Deutsche Studentenschaft* proclaimed a nationwide “Action Against the Un-German Spirit,” calling for a literary purge of all literature that did not uphold the purity of German language and Nazi ideology. On May 10, 1933, more than 25,000 volumes of “un-German” books were burned in joyous, nationalistic ceremony. Moreover, Hitler hoped to silence the Jewish population, not only by burning their literature, but also by feeding Jews into crematoriums, physically incinerating Jewish communities.

fiction *Weird Science* #18, a 1953 comic entitled “Judgment Day,” which features a human space investigator, a representative of the Galactic Republic, who travels to an alien planet to determine whether the alien beings have evolved enough to join the Galactic Republic. He discovers two alien species – orange robots and blue robots – who are functionally identical, but live entirely segregated lives, and thus determines that due to the aliens’ bigotry, they are not evolved enough to join the Galactic Republic. He returns to his ship and in the final panel, removes his helmet, revealing “beads of perspiration on his dark skin twinkl[ing] like distant stars” ([Feldstein, Al (w), and Joe Orlando (i)] “Judgment Day.” *Weird Science* #18 [April 1953], E.C. Comics). Judge Murphy, uncomfortable with the racial politics of the piece, demanded that the black astronaut be removed. Bill Gaines “immediately picked up the phone and called Murphy. ‘This is ridiculous!’ he bellowed. ‘I’m going to call a press conference on this. You have no grounds, no basis, to do this. I’ll sue you.’ Murphy made what he surely thought was a gracious concession. ‘All right. Just take off the beads of sweat’” (Diehl 95).



Final panel of “Judgment Day” (*Weird Fantasy* #18, 1953)

Wanting to call as little attention as possible to the clearly racial allegory EC was depicting, Murphy's request underscores the tensions between EC Comics's frank discussions of polemical issues and the Comics Code Authority's aspirations to silence those discussions. EC Comics received more correspondence than ever before over "Judgment Day," including a letter from Ray Bradbury, who suggested the comic be "required reading for every man, woman, and child in the United States" ([Bradbury, Ray (w)] "Cosmic Correspondence" *Weird Fantasy* #18 [March-April 1953], E.C. Comics). Nevertheless, "Judgment Day," which ultimately ran in its original form, was the last science fiction comic book EC ever published.

However, as horror comics were being suppressed, censored, and publicly burned, superhero comics were being promoted and sensationalized. The Comics Code Authority proudly stamped their seal of approval on DC and Marvel creations, propelling Superman to mass distribution: "patriotic heroes like Minute Man and Uncle Sam, who more or less wore the American flag as their costume, had their day in the sun during this era, equating the superhero's moral code with solid American ideals" (Kaplan 59). Superman donned red, white, and blue and fought for truth and justice against evil and for American ideals. Superhero comics were escapist fare, conjuring up superpower after superpower to defeat ever-increasing evil. Critical response to horror comics, with their detailed depictions of violence and retribution, resulted in censorship and an eventual tapering off in favor of superheroes, whose superhuman strengths prevented the violence and retribution so prevalent in horror comics from ever occurring.

These dual comic book trends – horror's grim violence and the superhero's sensational escapism – provide popular representations of the tragic Holocaust *muselmann* and the folkloric golem. In several regards, the golem and the *muselmann* face each other from antithetical poles: the golem derives from mythology, the *muselmann* from stark historical reality; the golem is

characterized by superlative strength, the *muselmann* by devastating weakness; the golem's inclusion in the zombie rubric offers a hopeful dimension – a messianic possibility, an orderly resolution – to apocalypse, while the *muselmann* points to zombie's underlying contagion and forces an embrace of the state of disorder. Yet these two contrary figures find themselves in dialogic tension around the act of witnessing, and particularly as the act of witnessing occurs in American popular culture in the wake of the Holocaust.

While the golem-like Superman can prevent the grim reality of war, it is the living dead *muselmann* who proves the true witness. And EC Comics's depiction of the living dead suggests more specifically that the ability to be both living and dead is the prerequisite for a complete witness. *Tales from the Crypt* #30 (June-July 1952) features a Jack Davis comic entitled "Gas-tly Prospects!" Introduced by the Crypt-Keeper and set in 1848 in the heat of the Gold Rush, the comic is narrated in first person by protagonist Jeff "Whitey" Whittiker, who describes his journey: after a month of successful prospecting, Whitey is set upon by a competing prospector who "whips out his Colt '45" and shoots Whitey in the gut. The prospector then stabs Whitey, who dies --- and continues his narrative: "I knows that I'm dead..." The prospector buries Whitey, who "roll[s] into the grave and land[s] face up starin' at him...Purty soon I'm all covered, an' layin' nice an' cozy in my grave!" As the comic continues, Whitey begins to decompose, and the frames become more and more graphic. His bulbous nose grows skeletal, his shock of white hair lies flat, "the crawlin' things start workin' on me!" Whitey testifies to the process of his own death and decomposition, leaving his murderer increasingly anxious at Whitey's living deadness, at its unnaturalness: "It...it ain't natural! Lay down! You're dead!" Desperate to destroy Whitey's testimony, the prospector drowns him, and Whitey recalls, "the

water starts fillin' into my guts, an' gurglin' into my lungs! Some nosey fish come 'round...peerin' at me! One of 'em takes a nip at my hand!" Finally, the prospector's frustration reaches a peak – "Why in tarnation don't you stay dead?" – and he sets Whitey's corpse on fire. Whitey bears witness to his own incineration: "The heat is terrific! ...I can hear my water-logged body a-hissin' an'a-poppin'! I guess I blacken up a bit, and the water in my rotted clothes dries out! Soon they start to burn! I kin sense somethin' strange goin' on inside me" ([Davis, Jack (i)] "Gas-tly Prospects." *Tales from the Crypt* #30 [June-July 1952], E.C. Comics).

Whitey's living dead testimony about being burned recalls the handwritten narrative<sup>76</sup> buried in the Auschwitz crematoria by Zalmen Gradowski, a member of the *Sonderkommando*,<sup>77</sup> who was forced to aid with the disposal of gas chamber victims:

The hellish fire, extending its tongues like open arms, snatches the body as though it were a prize. The hair is the first to catch fire. The skin, immersed in flames, catches in a few seconds. Now the arms and legs begin to rise – expanding blood vessels cause this movement of the limbs. The entire body is now burning fiercely; the skin has been consumed and fat drips and hisses in the flames (Gradowski).

A zombie, Whitey resolves the Agambenian lacuna of witnessing. The living dead can bear witness, can testify truthfully and completely. As they unsettle the living around them (who

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<sup>76</sup> Written in Yiddish, these, along with other notes written by members of the *Sonderkommando* are now housed at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>77</sup> A German term meaning "special unit," the *Sonderkommandos* were work units of Nazi death camp prisoners, composed almost entirely of Jews, who were forced on threat of their own deaths, to aid with the disposal of gas chamber victims. Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany established nearly 20,000 camps used for a range of purposes including forced labor, transit, and extermination. On March 7, 1941, German Jews were ordered into forced labor, crowded into cattle cars, and transported to camps where they were subject to a selection process. Those who were selected to live were divested of all their property, clothing, and jewelry (including gold fillings), shaved from head to toe, tattooed, provided with an ill-fitting uniform, and sentenced to hard labor. Eventually, in light of the "Final Solution," gas chambers were established to facilitate mass killings of Jews using Zyklon-B gas, and *Sonderkommandos*, among them Gradowski, were responsible for burning the gassed bodies in crematoriums.

inevitably and desperately attempt to design their own testimonies), the living dead account honestly (though unnaturally) for both life and death

*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene I offers an explicit take on the zombie as witness, as Horatio says: “A little ere the mightiest Julius fell, / The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead/ Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets” (I.i.113-115). Just before Julius Caesar’s assassination, corpses ran into the streets shouting. A foreshadowing, but moreover a testimony to Caesar’s impending death, this is the paradox of the living dead: they want to deliver a message but can only squeak and gibber. The figure of the zombie itself, thereby, becomes the witness. Not necessarily what it says, but the mere fact that it exists positions the zombie as the ultimate mute witness: witness not because of its muteness, as Agamben suggests, but because of its living deadness.

Perhaps the zombie of horror comics is not mute, as Agamben suggests, or silent, as Diner recapitulates, but rather muted, or silenced. As the ultimate witness to the Holocaust, the zombie, both living and dead, a witness in its very existence, is suppressed, censored, and publicly burned. The bifurcated aftermath of the dual 1950s comic book trends reflects interestingly on the United States’ response to the Holocaust and its impact on popular culture. Both the style and the content of horror comics indicate a layered parallel to the Holocaust: a clear cycle of sin-retribution-and-restoration which implies, as Roskies depicts, a uniquely Jewish response to catastrophe; graphic scenes of torture, rape, violence, and murder; artistic stasis as a reaction to trauma; and depictions of the uncanny and the living dead. In contrast, superhero comics provide the ultimate antidote to injustice: golem-like superheroes, whose superpowers and outsidership protect the Jewish community and prevent the sheer possibility of a Holocaust from ever occurring. The divided response to the dual trends of comic books – the

attacks by the Comics Code Authority and by the public, the eventual censorship of the horror comic book and promotion of the superhero comic book – points to a disturbing conspiracy of silence with respect to the Holocaust. The multi-tiered relationship between horror comics and the Holocaust, Superman and the golem, suggest the silence after the Holocaust is perhaps not the solid myth Hasia Diner argues it is. American Jews may have written about the Holocaust in their newspapers, prayed about it in their liturgy, talked about it in their social groups, but they censored it in their comic books. In the realm of popular culture, the brutality of the Holocaust was silenced in favor of the American superhero – the reinvigorated golem – the possibility of an outsider who, “faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound,”<sup>78</sup> could protect the community via the fantasy of assimilation and integration.

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<sup>78</sup> A phrase coined by Jay Morton and first used in the *Superman* radio serials, the Max Fleischer animated shorts of the 1940s, and the TV series of the 1950s.



## CHAPTER IV

### **Final Families: Sacrifice, Rebirth, and the Zombie as More than Mere Apocalypse**

In her seminal work *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, Carol Clover defines the “slasher” film using five identifying markers: killer, locale, weapons, victims, and shock effects. The slasher film is a subgenre within the horror genre. It features a killer who is indestructible, “palpably arrested in [his] development” and coded as feminine (Clover 27); a “Terrible Place” (Clover 30) in which the victim inevitably finds herself or himself trapped and forced to fend off the killer; weapons: knives, hammers, axes, ice picks, hypodermic needles, red hot poker, pitchforks” (Clover 31); victims who are typically female and who are sexual transgressors; and effects used to shock the audience.

Clover develops the term “Final Girl” to describe a salient trope in slasher films – the typically virginal or sexually unavailable girl who outlives her sex-crazed peers and is forced to confront the film’s villain/s on her own:

The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. (Clover 35)<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The Final Girl is a longstanding trope in horror film. Examples of Final Girls include: Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1978), Alice from *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980), Sally Hardesty from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), and Nancy Thompson from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984).

The Final Girl is the main character. She is not sexually active, she is watchful, intelligent, and resourceful, and she is above all, “boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine... her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself” (Clover 40). For Clover, gender is the underlying narrative of the horror film; she reinterprets Laura Mulvey’s classic male-centered identification process of the sadistic-voyeur<sup>80</sup> as a process of the masochistic-voyeur by shifting the identification to the Final Girl.

As the investigating consciousness of the horror film, the Final Girl moves the narrative forward by assuming both the role of hero (she wards off the killer and survives her friends) and the role of victim (she is unfailingly pursued by the vicious killer), giving new weight to her ultimate act of horrific revenge. Moreover, the Final Girl is inextricably linked to theories of audience identification, and Clover reads the audience identification in a horror context as fluid across gender lines. Clover contends that the horror film villain is often a male whose sexuality is in crisis, and that the Final Girl is masculinized through phallic appropriation in her confrontation with the killer. Because a male audience is forced to identify with a young female character in an ostensibly male-oriented genre (horror), Clover asserts that horror, and specifically the slasher film, raises questions about the relationship between the genre and feminism. Ultimately, Clover argues that the Final Girl must exhibit a masculine element, which she adopts by utilizing a phallic weapon, and a feminine element in her experience of abject terror. The Final Girl then embodies an important contradiction: she is the apotheosis of

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<sup>80</sup> This concept is elaborated in Mulvey’s 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey identifies two ways cinema looks at women, both of which presuppose a masculine gazer: a sadistic-voyeuristic look, wherein the gazer is displeased by the female lack and so sees the woman punished, and a fetishistic-scophophilic look, wherein the gazer is displeased and so fetishizes the female body in whole or in part.

stereotypical conservative attitudes of the ideal woman – virginal, practical, conscientious – while simultaneously compelling a mostly male audience into cross-gender identification with a woman’s abject terror in the climax of the film.

For Clover, the slasher film depicts a broken family, a sick family. The killer in slasher films is always linked to “the sick family – in which the mother is conspicuously absent” or overly demanding (Clover 27). Sick families in slasher films have “conspicuously absent” or “clinging, demanding” (Clover 26) mothers, and therefore sons who grow up to be killers, but are “palpably arrested [in] their development” (Clover 27). Clover describes killers in slasher films as suffering from either gender confusion or sexual disturbance, offering as her prime example Norman Bates from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960). At the end of *Psycho*, Norman (Anthony Perkins) is in custody and the psychiatrist assessing him explains that Norman has introjected his mother so completely that she has become part of him. Norman himself is not the killer, but rather, “the mother half of his mind” (*Psycho*) kills Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) when Norman finds himself aroused by her. A male with a demanding mother, in gender distress, becomes a killer: this, for Clover, is the underlying motif of the slasher film, the exemplary sick family on which the slasher film rests.

Clover links the broken slasher family to the “new family” of the sixties and seventies: “woman-headed families, families with working mothers, for whom ‘sufficient’ female figures are more plausible than they might have been to an earlier generation” (Clover 231). In contrast to the slasher family’s sick mothers and wounded children, the “new family” provides a strong maternal counterpart. Where the slasher film’s mother is absent (as in the case of Tobe Hooper’s *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* [1974], which features a strong family dynamic, but one very overtly

devoid of a maternal presence) or overbearingly present (as in the case of *Psycho*), the mother figure in the “new family” is flawlessly present and a capable familial leader.

If the slasher film is about the sick family, the zombie film, a second subgenre of the horror film, though one that emerged earlier than the slasher film with *White Zombie* in 1931 (the first slasher film is widely thought to be *Psycho* [1960]), offers an antidote to the broken slasher film. Clover’s assessment of the “new family” provides only half a cure: it strengthens the maternal figure without healing the wounded child. The zombie movie, however, offers a familial rebirth. The zombie not only bears testimony to the past, as discussed in Chapter 3, but it is moreover hopeful in its relation to the future. The zombie bends genres and restructures institutions, inserting itself between overused tropes and undoing familial bonds. It links the very institution of family to the genre of horror and then unravels them both in its creation of a new family: the family of the post-apocalyptic future. The zombie subgenre complicates the theory of the Final Girl; in fact, it displays a marked shift from Clover’s model. Clover’s Final Girl confronts a killer, the product of a sick family unit, surviving the deaths of all of her friends and taking on masculine features and weapons in order to move from victim to hero and take a mostly male audience along with her. The zombie film, in contrast, offers a solution to the sick family: destruction of the sick family and a new familial order, a Final Family. The zombie forces the broken family unit to destroy itself in order to make way for a new order of family. Zombie narratives adopt a father or father figure, who is forced to sacrifice himself or be sacrificed in order to give way to a reborn Final Family with the tools to confront post-apocalyptic reality. If Clover’s model emphasizes womanhood, the zombie model, with its emphasis on sacrificial fathers and on Final Families, reorients the focus toward a dominant paternity and a call for a new familial order.

The zombie film furnishes a completely new order of family by first destroying the primary nuclear familial institution. The device of having a family member kill another family member is widespread in zombie film and fiction; what appears to be the ideal family unit (mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives) is forced to destroy itself. George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) provides an originary model of familial destruction that is later taken up by dozens of zombie films. In *Night*, a collection of families is boarded up together in an old farmhouse, fighting for survival and surrounded by zombies: Harry Cooper (Karl Hardman), his wife, Helen (Marilyn Eastman), and their daughter, Karen (Kyra Schon); Barbra (Judith O'Dea), who has been separated from her brother, Johnny (Russell Streiner); Tom (Keith Wayne) and his girlfriend, Judy (Judith Riley).

From the outset, the families evince a kind of disunity: Harry and Helen are constantly arguing, Barbra has been separated from Johnny and is left in a mostly catatonic state. Karen has been wounded and spends the entirety of the film in the basement. The sole figure holding the families together is Ben (Duane Jones), the only familialy unattached character, the character who, as a black man, comes to symbolize a particular racial tension, and also the character who takes control of a quickly crumbling situation, slapping Barbra to her senses, wresting a gun from Harry, boarding up the farmhouse, formulating a plan for escape. The family unit here is clearly a broken one. Juxtaposed with the zombies, who work together to surround the farmhouse and penetrate it from all sides, the human families cannot quite cooperate enough to survive the zombie attack, though Ben repeatedly begs Barbra and the others, "we'll have to work together. You have to help me."

The film uses space, designating inside versus outside and upstairs versus downstairs, to highlight the fractured aspect of the family. The zombies are outside and the humans are inside;

the interior of the farmhouse signifies human space, while the exterior of the farmhouse signifies inhuman space. Initially, the farmhouse offers promise. Until Barbra finds an unlocked door, she is terrified and the film's music reflects this: cacophonous horns blaring. Barbra then makes her way in to the farmhouse, locks the door, and physically embraces the house, literally hugging the doorway. For the first time in the film, the music stills, reflecting Barbra's own stillness as she tiptoes through familiar home spaces. However, upstairs and downstairs come to represent the very fissure within the familial structure; as the zombies outside grow more unified, the humans inside grow more fractious, and the once-comforting indoor space is divided into upstairs and downstairs. Harry Cooper declares the cellar is "the safest place" while Ben argues, "the cellar is a death trap." Harry versus Helen, Ben versus Harry: the disorder manifests physically as upstairs versus downstairs. Even Tom admits, "nothing's gonna get done with them down there and us up here." And because the families cannot cooperate, cannot blend the spaces in the farmhouse, the outside slowly leaks into the inside as the zombies make their way in to the farmhouse and consume the humans within.

The family unit is broken in part because each individual within the unit brings a level of dysfunction in to the family. The women – the wives, girlfriends, mothers, and daughters – when separated from their male partners, are all weak. Barbra is left catatonic when Johnny is attacked. Ben repeatedly shakes her and asks, "Is there a key?" "Do you live here?" But Barbra huddles in a corner, shivering and silent. Judy is helpless without Tom. When he leaves to unlock the gas pump, Judy follows him in an act of desperation and is responsible for both of their deaths. Helen Cooper is an ineffectual character, unable to save her daughter, unable to help board up the house. Karen Cooper lies sick on a bed in the basement. The men – the fathers, boyfriends, husbands, and brothers – are all sacrificial victims. Johnny is sacrificed so Barbra can survive; he

puts himself between her and the first zombie, fending off an attack and allowing Barbra to flee. Harry is sacrificed to feed his own daughter's craving for human flesh. Tom is a literal sacrifice, consumed by fire. And Ben is the final sacrifice; shot through the head, even this father figure does not survive. Romero critiques family on every level: from the individuals that comprise it to the nuclear unit to the very institution. Family here is broken and must be erased to allow for a new familial order.

By the end of the film, the familial institution has disintegrated entirely. Karen attacks Helen with a spade and eats her dead father's flesh. Barbra sees a zombified Johnny outside and is attacked and killed by her own brother and his entourage of zombies. Judy and Tom are killed by a gasoline fire because Judy refuses to let Tom complete the task Ben has set for him. Ben survives the longest. The family unit implodes, leaving not, as Clover suggests, a Final Girl, but rather a father figure – Ben – who survives the onslaught of familial deaths because of his own ability to relinquish or stand outside of the nuclear familial unit. However, as a father figure himself, Ben too is ultimately sacrificed, shot through the head by the town sheriff and his posse, making way for a new familial order.

Within the context of *Night of the Living Dead*, the world left behind during and after Ben's death is particularly racially charged and indicative of the kind of critique Romero is making via his depictions of the living dead.<sup>81</sup> It is not merely the institution of family that needs to be completely destroyed and rebuilt in *Night of the Living Dead*, but the larger human

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<sup>81</sup> It is worth noting that the character of Ben was originally written as a crude-talking trucker, and casting Duane Jones as Ben created an accidental racial nuance to the film. Talking about the film, Romero explains: "Consciously I resisted writing new dialogue 'cause he happens to be Black. We just shot the script. Perhaps *Night of the Living Dead* is the first film to have a Black man playing the lead role regardless of, rather than because of, his race" (Kane 32). Nevertheless, the film's racial implications are unmistakable, and in fact, the film is so closely (albeit accidentally) tied to the Civil Rights movement that its editing was completed on April 4, 1968, and as George A. Romero and co-writer John A. Russo were driving to New York to sell the film, they heard the news of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination on the radio.

community of which family is functioning as a microcosm. Throughout the film, zombies are referred to as “things,” as “bugs,” as less than human. And when Ben questions Harry Cooper about how he could possibly have remained down in the cellar despite hearing Barbra’s screaming, Harry replies: “could have been those *things* for all we knew.” The zombies are things, are reduced to the inhuman, and here, Harry suggests, the humans can be easily misidentified as zombies. There really is very little difference between a person and a thing in this film and this lack of clarity becomes, for Romero, a way in which to discuss race. Early in the film, Sheriff McClelland (George Kasana) gives advice for how to stop the zombie plague – advice that ultimately foreshadows Ben’s death: “Well, there’s no problem. If you have a gun, shoot ‘em in the head. That’s a sure way to kill ‘em. If you don’t, get yourself a club or a torch. Beat ‘em or burn ‘em. They go up pretty easy.” In the film’s final scene, Sheriff McClelland and his posse, traipsing through the field around the farmhouse, spot movement coming from a window and shoot Ben in the head, mistaking him for a zombie and underscoring once more the tenuous line between human and inhuman.

The film is clearly (though perhaps unintentionally) in dialogue with the major Civil Rights issues that were certainly a part of its historical context. As the credits roll at the film’s end, grainy images of Ben’s body being carried from the house and burned in a pyre are projected onscreen. The implications of a group of white men walking through a field with shotguns, shooting, dragging, and burning a black man very clearly recall the kinds of newsreel footage of mob lynching and Ku Klux Klan violence against blacks in the South being shown in the 1960s. Duane Jones himself was responsible for securing the film’s ending: “I convinced George that the black community would rather see me dead than saved, after all that had gone on, in a corny and symbolically confusing way... the double jolt of the hero figure being black



seemed like a double-barreled whammy” (Kane 36). Though Romero did not write the role for a black actor, Jones insisted that during the filming Romero “take note of [his race]” (Kane 35). The undercurrent of race in the film therefore creates an account of a society, a world, that requires destroying. *Night of the Living Dead* critiques family, both in its literal instantiation and in its reference to a larger, bigoted human community, and suggests that in its current broken state, its only hope is a zombie apocalypse.

*Night of the Living Dead* is only the first (and perhaps best known) example of a zombie film featuring a family that destroys itself: zombies killing humans, humans killing zombies. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) features a tenement scene in which a zombified husband attacks his wife. In *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), the titular Shaun’s (Simon Pegg’s) mother turns into a zombie and Shaun shoots her. In Peter Jackson’s *Dead Alive* (1992), Lionel Cosgrove (Timothy Balme) cuts his way out of his mother’s body, destroying her in order to survive. In *28 Weeks Later* (2007), an infected Alice (Catherine McCormack) is put under quarantine. Her husband Don (Robert Carlyle) visits her secretly. They kiss, infecting Don, who then kills Alice. *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) features Dr. Robert Morgan (Vincent Price) who refuses to burn his dead wife’s body. She returns to attack him and he is forced to kill her. Romero’s 2009 film *Survival of the Dead* amplifies the device by featuring two feuding families, the O’Flynnns and the Muldoons. The Muldoons keep their undead “alive,” chaining them in their homes. The O’Flynnns kill their undead, and are now looking to kill the Muldoons for refusing to kill their undead loved ones. In Michael Soavi’s *Cemetery Man* (1994), She (Anna Falchi) is killed by her undead husband while having sex on his grave with Francesco Dellamorte (Rupert Everett). In *Pet Sematary* (1989), Gage Creed (Miko Hughes) dies accidentally. His father brings him back to life. Gage then kills his own mother and is killed by his father. In *Quarantine* (2008), Briana

(Joey King) bites and infects her mother, Kathy (Marin Hinkle). And more recently, the device appears in the current AMC zombie television series *The Walking Dead* (2010 - ), when, in episode four, “Vatos,” Andrea (Laurie Holden) cradles her dead sister in her arms, and is then forced to kill her as she turns into a zombie.

The notion of family continues to evolve in Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), a sort of sequel to *Night of the Living Dead*, titled accordingly, and set three weeks after the initial zombie virus takes hold, but following an entirely new set of characters. We are initially introduced to Francine (Gaylen Ross), who quickly establishes herself as the maternal figure in the film’s Final Family. The film opens in a newsroom and, amidst the panic and mayhem, we are told that “citizens may no longer occupy private residences, no matter how well protected or well-stocked.” As in *Night of the Living Dead*, space – in this case, private and public space, but also indoor and outdoor space and upstairs and downstairs space – is intimately bound up with family. Shots of the quickly disintegrating newsroom are intercut with shots of a SWAT team forcibly evicting tenants from a tenement building. The domestic space has been infiltrated and evacuated, and all that is left is the public domain. While the divide between public and private space is breached, the Final Family gathers: Francine joins her boyfriend Stephen (David Emge), and they collect two SWAT team members, Roger (Scott H. Reiniger) and Peter (Ken Foree), a black man,<sup>82</sup> and depart in a stolen helicopter for safety. We quickly learn that Francine is pregnant, and Stephen and Francine comprise the nuclear family unit: father, mother, and

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<sup>82</sup> A mere decade after the Civil Rights Movement, *Dawn of the Dead* was not the first film to feature the possibility of an interracial union, but it was one of a very slim handful of movies. Hollywood was still adjusting to a post-Civil Rights reality, and as late as 1983, in a Gallup Minority Rights and Relations poll asking Americans if they “approve or disapprove of marriages between blacks and whites,” more than half of Americans disapproved (gallup.com). Filmed independently and off the Hollywood grid, Romero’s movies are notably progressive, casting a black man as the lead in *Night of the Living Dead*, and suggesting the possibility of an interracial union in *Dawn of the Dead*.

Francine's unborn child. But over time, and through the use of space, the film undoes the nuclear family unit, sacrificing the father figure in order to reconstitute the family.

Whereas Barbra, Helen, Karen, and Judy in *Night of the Living Dead* were ineffectual female characters, alternately clingy and catatonic, unable to contribute to the functionality of the family or to create a safe space, *Dawn of the Dead*'s Francine undergoes a marked shift, first from the ineffectual female characters in *Night* to her own effective role, and then within *Dawn of the Dead* itself as she evolves from a helpless and trapped mother-to-be to a powerful and integral link to survival. At the beginning of the film, Francine needs rescuing. An employee at a local news station, she is helplessly trying to keep her colleagues on the air when her boyfriend, Stephen, appears and carts her away in a helicopter where they are joined by Roger and Peter. After they land on the roof of a shopping mall, the four characters carve out a domestic space, hidden away in a storage unit near the roof of the mall. Francine is then left alone in the domestic space, without a gun, while the men – Stephen, Peter, and Roger – go off in search of supplies, to lock down the shopping mall, and to eliminate the zombies. When a zombie shuffles in to the makeshift apartment, Francine is forced to rely on the men to save her.

As the film develops, Francine evolves, gaining in confidence and shedding her helplessness in favor of strength. She addresses the stereotypical housewife role with sarcasm: "I would have made you all coffee and breakfast but I don't have my pots and pans." Despite her pregnant state, Francine draws herself up among her male counterparts and insists that they treat her no "differently than you treat each other." She counts herself among the men: "there's four of us, okay?" and asserts her own voice, her own role in the decision-making. She refuses to be a "den mother for you guys," and demands they teach her how to use a gun and fly the helicopter.

By the film's end, Francine no longer resembles the women from *Night of the Living Dead*. She has packed a getaway bag and learned how to fly the helicopter. Two of the three men have been killed. She is left with Peter, who had initially told her, "you're not coming with us until you learn how to handle yourself," but who is now entirely reliant on Francine for his own survival. Whereas Peter lingers in the apartment, unwilling to leave behind the domestic space they have created, Francine flees the zombies and makes her way to the helicopter without hesitation. Hardly catatonic or ineffectual, Francine becomes the hope for the post-apocalyptic future: physically carrying a child and symbolically flying the new family – Peter, Francine, and the unborn child – to freedom. The final scene is a hopeful one, as the helicopter flies through the parting of the clouds.

As in *Night of the Living Dead*, space in *Dawn of the Dead* plays a significant role in marking the evolution of the familial unit. Like *Night of the Living Dead*, the distinction between inside and outside here becomes the barometer by which to measure the disintegration of the nuclear family. When Stephen, Francine, Roger, and Peter first arrive at the shopping mall, they land on the roof and carve out a space for themselves to live: a storage unit filled with rations and supplies becomes their home. They work to cordon off the mall from the outside, using semi trucks to block the entrances, and eliminating the zombie threat inside the mall. There is then a clear distinction between inside and outside, and almost immediately following, Francine is revealed to be pregnant. When the spaces are distinct, when the zombie threat is eliminated, the nuclear family emerges.

Over time in the film, the storage unit becomes an increasingly domestic space. As Francine's pregnancy develops, the space in which the nuclear family resides takes on a domestic air. Initially, the storage unit is cold, lined with stacks of boxes. Peter and Roger wall it

off to protect the family from any possible attacks, and it becomes a space that is not a space, a space with no discernable entrance, hidden behind a false wall. Time passes, and the family brings goods from the mall into the shelter: “You should see all the stuff we got!” After Roger gets bitten, we are again drawn into the domestic space. Peter and Roger have shed their SWAT fatigues in favor of civilian clothing. Roger is lying in bed and beside him a cardboard box functions as a makeshift nightstand. More time passes, Roger dies, Francine is now perpetually dressed in a pink housecoat and slippers, visibly pregnant. We see the gradual development of the living space from a bare shelter to a full apartment: a lamp, a refrigerator, a dining room table, bedrooms with beds and nightstands, magazines strewn on an unmade bed, a television, a couch, a coffee table with a deck of cards. As the distinction between inside spaces and outside spaces is strengthened, as complacency and security grows, the nuclear family develops.

However, the third act of the film brings a breakdown of public and private spaces. Inside and outside are no longer separate spheres; and as the outside comes in, the nuclear family dissolves. As a safe space, the mall becomes a space of luxury and materialism. Outside, the zombies paw at the doors to get in, indicating the divide between inside and outside: inside is a human space and outside a zombie space. But the zombies want to breach the divide between inside and outside, human and zombie. Peter explains: “They’re after the place. They don’t know why, they just remember. Remember that they want to be in here.” The zombies are “after the place,” desirous of the inside space occupied by the humans. In a television report, a scientist, Dr. Rausch, describes the breakdown of the divide between human and human, “we are down to the line, folks. We are down to the line. There are no divisions among, among living...” and he is interrupted. He repeats the word “line” in an effort to uphold a quickly crumbling boundary, and he is interrupted by a slew of newspeople unable or unwilling to hear about the lack of

“divisions” between the living and the dead. As the line wobbles, so does the familial institution. Stephen designs a fancy “date night” dinner for Francine, and proposes to her, ready to seal the nuclear family unit in the bounds of matrimony, but Francine refuses: “it wouldn’t be real.” In this world without borders, familial and familiar institutions are no longer real.

When a motorcycle gang breaks through the barriers separating inside and outside, and begins to loot the mall, the borders are no longer clear. The gang brings with it hordes of zombies, infiltrating the safe inside space and wreaking instant havoc. Merchandise is torn from the walls and flung over guardrails, motorcycles drive through the mall as though it were a speedway, further emphasizing the breakdown between inside and outside. Peter returns to his SWAT fatigues, relinquishing the hold domesticity has had on him throughout the film. He maintains the dialogue about space, insisting that the motorcycle gang is only “after the *place*. They don’t care about us.” Stephen, however, sees the mall as an extension of his own familial state and, desperate to maintain dominion over the inside, human space, repeats “it’s ours,” drawing attention to the space as “ours,” as uniquely human.

As human and zombie commingle and the outside infiltrates the inside, the father figure is sacrificed and the nuclear family crumbles. Stephen is attacked by zombies as he attempts to climb into the elevator shaft. A zombie himself, Stephen then leads the zombies to the false wall protecting the human apartment, completing the breach of the inside human space; the father becomes the bearer of disease, enacting the very spatial slip between inside and outside that comes to signify familial destruction. Once the nuclear family is rent, Francine must reconstitute the family unit. The figure of the zombie makes it possible for hope to emerge, for a revised human order, a new order of family. Initially, Peter is suspicious of Francine, asserting, “I just like to know who everybody is,” taking charge and leading the fight against the zombies, making

decisions and leaving Francine helpless and reliant on her male counterparts. By the film's end, however, Stephen's fatherly sacrifice erases the line between inside and outside and forces a new family into existence, a family that embraces interracial possibility and strong femininity, a family that consists of a black man and a pregnant, assertive white woman who flies a helicopter.<sup>83</sup> The final scene of the film shows the clouds parting to make way for the helicopter: a clear image of hope; this reconstituted family, this strong woman, this interracial union, bears the possibility of a future.

Seven years after the release of *Dawn of the Dead*, Romero directed *Day of the Dead* (1985), a clear extension of the "Dead" trilogy, and a film that explores the progression of the zombie plague from its origins in *Night of the Living Dead*. *Day of the Dead* depicts a world in which the human population has been reduced to a bare minimum, a small group desperately performing experiments on zombies in an effort to find a cure, to secure hope for the future of humanity. Although *Day of the Dead* follows an entirely new set of characters, several clear images from the beginning of the film link it directly to *Dawn of the Dead*. *Dawn of the Dead* closes with Francine and Peter taking off in a helicopter, escaping the zombie horde, and *Day of the Dead* opens with Sarah (Lori Cardille), a scientist, Miguel (Anthony Dileo Jr.), a military operative, John (Terry Alexander), a pilot, and Billy (Jarlath Conroy), an electronics and radio expert, in a helicopter flying over South Florida. Moreover, just as *Dawn of the Dead* emphasizes the possibility of an interracial relationship, pairing Francine and Peter as the final hope for humanity, *Day of the Dead* similarly establishes interraciality as integral to human survival:

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<sup>83</sup> A mere decade after the Civil Rights Movement, *Dawn of the Dead* was not the first film to feature the possibility of an interracial union, but it was one of a very slim handful of movies. Hollywood was still adjusting to a post-Civil Rights reality, and as late as 1983, in a Gallup Minority Rights and Relations poll asking Americans if they "approve or disapprove of marriages between blacks and whites," more than half of Americans disapproved (gallup.com). Filmed independently and off the Hollywood grid, Romero's movies are notably progressive, casting a black man as the lead in *Night of the Living Dead*, and suggesting the possibility of an interracial union in *Dawn of the Dead*.

Sarah is a white woman, Miguel is Latino, John is black, and Billy's accent demarcates him as conspicuously foreign.

Toward the end of *Dawn of the Dead*, the camera pans through the “apartment,” and shows Francine keeping track of the days with a series of calendars pinned to the wall, each past day marked with an “X.” *Day of the Dead* opens with Sarah sitting in a room with a similar calendar, past days marked with “X”s. Sarah is a sequel to Francine; if Francine begins *Dawn of the Dead* as the helpless extension of *Night of the Living Dead*'s Barbara, Helen, and Judy, and ends the film as the strong savior of mankind, Sarah opens *Day of the Dead* just where Francine leaves off. A scientist responsible for finding a way out of the zombie plague, Sarah gives orders and takes charge. Even her boyfriend, Miguel, admits, “I know you're strong, so what? Stronger than me.”

Like Romero's earlier films, *Day of the Dead* establishes from its opening sequence a series of cracks, tears in the family structure. The premise of the film: two teams – a team of scientists and a team of military personnel – have been sent down into an underground mine in the face of the zombie apocalypse in order to find a solution to the zombie problem, some scientific answer, using military resources, that would address the worldwide devastation and stop the spread of the zombie plague. Miguel is military and Sarah is a scientist, and the two forge a relationship, drawing criticism from both camps. As a family, Miguel and Sarah call attention to the fissures within the family unit. At the beginning of the film Miguel is collapsing from stress and fatigue and Sarah is mothering him. Despite his protests, she injects him with a sedative and Miguel, in anger, lashes out, “you made me feel like a piece of shit!” The representative family, Sarah and Miguel, like the families in *Night of the Living Dead*, evince



their own failure. Sarah figuratively emasculates Miguel by forcibly injecting him with a needle, Miguel argues with Sarah; the two cannot cohere as a single unit.

A microcosmic family, Sarah and Miguel represent a larger schism in the film's human community; the military and the scientists are perpetually at odds with one another. Sarah begs, "maybe if we tried working together, we could ease some of the tensions. We're all pulling in different directions." The military resents its responsibility to bring fresh zombies for the scientists to experiment on and the chief scientist, Dr. Logan (Richard Liberty), is secretly using dead military bodies in his experiments. The army captain, Rhodes, (Joe Pilato) threatens to execute any scientist who refuses to obey his command: "they'll get court-martialed, they get executed." Sarah sees the community's mutual need; the army needs the scientists' experiments to offer hope of survival and the scientists need the military personnel in order to continue their research. "We need each other," says Sarah, "can't we all just get along?" But the family here, like the family in *Night of the Living Dead*, is already fractured. Miguel resents Sarah for emasculating him; the military resents the scientists for putting their lives at risk; and the scientists resent the military for their failure to support and respect scientific innovation.

Space in *Day of the Dead* is not as well defined as it is in either *Night of the Living Dead* or *Dawn of the Dead*; and as a result, the distinction between human and inhuman signified by the distinction between inside and outside is also blurred. In *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, human and inhuman are demarcated by space: inside spaces, like the mall and the farmhouse, are distinctly human spaces and outside spaces are inhuman spaces. In *Day of the Dead*, space is divided into above ground and underground, but both the humans and the zombies occupy the above ground and the underground spaces. Above ground, the zombies run free, and while the humans are bound by a fence, they often take a helicopter up and over the

fence in search of survivors, mingling with the zombies above ground. Below ground, the scientists and military have converted an old mine into a survival bunker, replete with a laboratory for scientific research, a mess hall, and bedrooms. But the humans are not alone in the mine. They share the space with zombies; several zombies have been dissected and experimented upon in the laboratory, one zombie lives in the laboratory as Dr. Logan's "pet" experiment, and dozens of zombies occupy the far reaches of the mine shaft where they are captured by the military and brought to the laboratory for experimentation.

Not only are the physical spaces ill defined, the humans and the zombies represented by those spaces are difficult to distinguish. The military treat the scientists and the zombies with equal disdain, objectifying Sarah and making fun of Dr. Logan and his research. The soldiers fight and yell, grunt like animals, and climb over each other in the mine's hallways. Dr. Logan warns, "how are we going to set an example for [the zombies] if we behave barbarically ourselves?" In fact, the zombies have begun to display what Dr. Logan refers to as "the bare beginnings of social behavior, of civilized behavior." During a meeting at which the scientists and the military personnel are brought together to discuss the scientific progress, Rhodes finally explodes: "this is a fucking war!" And what isn't clear is whether the war is between the humans and the zombies or between the factions of humans living together in the mine.

Dr. Logan's pet project in the film is his work with a particular zombie he names "Bub." As Dr. Logan explains, "I call him 'Bub.' That's what the Lodge fellows used to call my father." Dr. Logan's explanation amplifies the film's focus on fraternity and fatherhood, by calling attention to his own father and to his father's participation in the Lodge, or Freemasonry, which is a distinctly male organization. His explanation moreover links his own zombie experiment to his father's name, drawing together the human and the inhuman and linking them to the familial,

to the father. Bub is a domesticated zombie. He listens to music, reads books, uses a razor and a toothbrush, knows how to load, lock, draw, and shoot a gun. He has memories of his human life, remembers that he was in the military and, when faced with Rhodes, salutes him. Rhodes is instantly offended; he sees Bub's humanity and grows defensive at the increasingly blurred lines between human and inhuman. Dr. Logan explains that "civil behavior is what distinguishes us from the lower forms. It's what enables us to communicate, to go about things in an orderly fashion without attacking each other like beasts in the wild," and while Bub exhibits "civilized behavior," communicating with Dr. Logan, physically picking up a telephone and saying "hello, Aunt Alicia" into the receiver, Rhodes and his army behave like "beasts in the wild," attacking the scientists and each other at every turn.

Human and inhuman are further muddled at the level of the body. The zombie plague is transmitted through the bite; humans are bitten by zombies and infected, their bodies in part being ingested by zombies, in part becoming zombified. The zombie is always tied to the act of consumption, to consuming: an element perhaps made most clear by *Dawn of the Dead's* linkage of the zombie's cannibalistic consumption and the Capitalistic consumption symbolized by the mall setting. It craves human flesh. Dr. Logan assesses that this need is a deeply rooted one, and one that has nothing at all to do with nourishment: "it wants food, but it has no stomach. It can take no nourishment from what it ingests." The desire for human flesh here is a desire for humanity; the zombie wants to be human and, in the case of Bub, begins to re-humanize. The human body thus becomes part of the zombie body. This act is manifested literally in the film as Dr. Logan feeds the flesh of dead military personnel to Bub and his other test case zombies, who ingest the human flesh as they grow more civilized, or human.

Throughout the film, the military refers to Dr. Logan as “Dr. Frankenstein,” a moniker that links *Day of the Dead* to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and draws the two texts together around the issue of family. In *Frankenstein*, Victor is halfheartedly a father figure, engaged in the reanimation of life without maternal influence (though betrothed to the lovely Elizabeth, he repeatedly turns her away, deferring their marriage which is never consummated). As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Victor initially aspires to create life, to produce “a new species [that] would bless me as its creator and source” (Shelley 32). He sees himself as a father, predicting that “no father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their’s” (Shelley 32).

However, Victor’s aspirations are tainted by two miscalculations: he mistakes the reanimation of death for the creation of life, searching initially for the “elixir of life” (Shelley 22) but creating instead a “miserable monster” (Shelley 35), and he produces life without maternal effect. Victor’s “miserable monster” craves the maternity his birth lacks and commands Victor to create an Eve, but Victor cannot bring himself to allow for the possibility of maternity of any kind in this narrative of reanimation, and, “thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew” (Shelley 115). Victor literally rends the possibility of maternity in pieces. And Victor’s monster, once so carefully collected and arranged, so contained by the categories of “life and death [which] appeared to [Victor] ideal bounds, which [he] should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world” (Shelley 32), breaches the “ideal bounds” of life and death Victor painstakingly establishes in its creation and murders Elizabeth on their wedding night.

Victor's reanimation of death – the monster he produces without a maternal presence – results in disorder, in the breach of “ideal bounds,” and in violence. However, the figure of the living dead rewrites violence as love (in the golem's reorientation of Benjaminian divine violence), and disorder as the antidote to violence (in Matheson's living dead, which force us to embrace disorder in the face of violent order). Thus to read *Frankenstein* as merely advocating a heteronormative structure – one in which father and mother could produce an orderly child, but father alone is only capable of producing violence – is to overlook the role of Frankenstein's monster. For Frankenstein's monster, violence is an act of love – he loves Safie DeLacey and therefore must destroy her cottage by fire when his love is not returned – and disorder as the answer to a violent world order – he breaches “ideal bounds” because the world of boundaries refuses to create a space for him: “even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am quite alone” (Shelley 154). Violence and disorder here are aligned, and from Victor's perspective, both are the product of an unholy creation; but for the monster, the two are acts of love (violence) and reparation (disorder). Like the golem, the monster expresses love through violence and like Matheson's vampires, the monster rights the world order through disorder.

Both violence and disorder in *Frankenstein* are produced by the same father figure whose presence, whose *sacrifice*, in the zombie genre is most likely to ensure familial survival. Victor here eschews maternity in order to produce a violent, disorderly response in his reanimated progeny, highlighting several major themes that are taken up by the zombie genre: the dominant paternal figure, the reanimation of death, and the relationship between disorder and violence. Dr. “Frankenstein” Logan offers an updated version of Victor: the reanimation of death by a father figure who embraces both paternity and maternity. *Day of the Dead* is a narrative in

which disorder is bred by and ordered by disorder: by the disorder of the patriarch who becomes both patriarch and matriarch in order to birth his “miserable monster,” and who, in the face of the uncontained violence, accepts his maternal role, and promises his disorderly child, as the Maharal promises the golem: “with you, with you, I will not – will not leave” (Leivick 250).

Dr. Logan accepts his paternal role, but moreover, sees himself as a mother to Bub: “mother is very proud of you, very, very proud indeed. You did quite nicely today.” Because Dr. Logan embraces his own paternity and maternity, Bub is initially a very different creature than Frankenstein’s monster. Frankenstein’s monster is a single disorderly figure, “quite alone,” in a very orderly world. Bub lives in an underground mine with both humans and zombies; and Dr. Logan, who is physically always disheveled and disorderly and covered in blood, who blurs the boundaries between matriarchy and patriarchy and whose research blurs the boundaries between living and dead, embraces Bub’s disorder, his status as both living and dead. Bub is not constantly in search of a world that will accept him, because he lives in one. But the military, outraged by Dr. Logan’s experiments, kills the scientist; in an effort to create order, unwilling to accept the disorder Dr. Logan has created, the military force an ordered hierarchy into place: military, then scientists, then zombies. Left to contend with a world of military order, Bub is bereft. And, like Frankenstein’s monster, Bub attempts to enact love by violence, to undo ordered violence by disorder. He shoots Rhodes in the shoulder, and then in the leg. Rhodes stumbles down a hallway, staggering like a zombie, evincing the breakdown of the line between human and zombie and reintroducing disorder into the mine. A group of zombies then take hold of Rhodes and start consuming his flesh, creating further disorder. Finally, Bub salutes Rhodes and walks away, asserting that living dead disorder has taken command of the military order. Like *Frankenstein*, *Day of the Dead* presents violence as an act of love and disorder as the

antidote to a violent order. The living dead – Frankenstein’s monster, Bub – rewrite the terms here, introducing a violence that can be read as love and a disorder that can be read as necessary to survival.

Whereas in *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, space acts as the signifier for humanity (or lack of humanity), in *Day of the Dead*, space is particularized; rather than the mere designation of inside and outside, *Day of the Dead* engages the very particular space of the archive, and the act of archiving, in order to represent the dismantling and reorganizing of the institution of family. The initial shot in the film is of a calendar, of the tracking of days, the marking of time. Sarah is in many ways the archivist of the film. She admonishes the military over their haphazard record-keeping: “you’ve got to write them up! It’s essential! How the hell are we supposed to keep track?” Interestingly, all of the film’s underground scenes were filmed in a former mineshaft near Wampum, Pennsylvania, which had been converted into a long-term storage facility for important documents. The location itself is an archive, and Sarah’s project is one of archiving. John finally tells Sarah that her archive is precisely the reason they will not survive: “we don’t believe in what you’re doing, Sarah.” The project of family and the project of archiving are mutually exclusive. John acknowledges the overlap between the Wampum mine and the *Day of the Dead* fictional mine as he lists everything the mine houses:

Man, they got the books and the records of the top 500 companies. They got the Defense Department budget down here. And they got the negative for all your favorite movies. They got microfilm with tax return and newspaper stories. They got immigration records and census reports and they got official accounts of all the wars and plane crashes and volcano eruptions and earthquakes and fires and floods and all the other disasters that interrupted the flow of things in the good old

U.S. of A. Now, what does it matter, Sarah, darling, all this filing and record keeping. We ever going to give a shit? We even gonna get a chance to see it all? This is a great big 14-mile tombstone! With an epitaph on it that nobody gonna bother to read. Now here you come, here you come with a whole new set of charts and graphs and records. What you gonna do? Bury them down here with all the other relics of what once was?

The record-keeping, the archiving that Sarah is so intent on maintaining, is, as John attests, “a great big 14-mile tombstone.” It is a relic of a dead society, an homage to institutions that no longer have relevance.

In *Day of the Dead*, where there is order and recordkeeping, there is no hope for the future. John positions the archive in opposition to the possibility of family: “So long as there’s you and me and maybe some other people, we could start over, start fresh, get some babies. And teach them, Sarah, teach them never to come over here and dig these records out.” If the archive here signifies family, the mine, as an archival example, needs to collapse to allow for a new future; the institution of family must be reworked, and the new order of family, the “babies,” must never “dig these records out,” must break entirely free from the institutional relics of the past.

In the final scene of the film, Sarah, John, and Billy have escaped the mine and are living together on an island, a family reborn and without the trappings of the old familial institution. Sarah has left her well-worn, well-archived calendar behind in the mine and has begun a fresh count. Four days in. The old records are gone. This is a new life, a new family. The broken family with which the film opened – the fissure between army and science, between Sarah and Miguel – has been destroyed in order to make way for the Sarah-Billy-John family, a family with



no resemblance to the nuclear Sarah-Miguel family. This new family embraces interraciality in the character of John, a black man and helicopter pilot, the only character with the technical skill and knowledge to fly the remaining humans to safety. This new family embraces homosociality in the relationship between John and Billy, the radio expert. Though certainly fatherly toward and protective of Sarah, John and Billy are not sacrificial father figures; they separate themselves from the battle between the army and the scientists and from the heteronormative role of father figure that Miguel represents in his relationship with Sarah, and instead create a literal home together, a domestic space in an abandoned RV they call “The Ritz.” Eschewing the heteronormative unit of one male and one female this new family replaces the heteronorm with a triad: a reconstituted familial order.

In all three Romero films, the family turns on itself; father figures are sacrificed, and become responsible for bringing the infection into the “home” space, forcing the damaged and damaging old institutions into destruction and allowing for the possibility of a family that survives the apocalypse. *Dawn of the Dead*'s Stephen, who sees the mall as an extensive domestic space to which he has laid claim, is infected by a zombie bite and then leads a mass of zombies to the false wall Peter so carefully erected to protect their home. Stephen – the nuclear family's father figure – is the one responsible for destroying the very domesticity that was holding the possibility of a Final Family back. The father here becomes the bearer of the plague, enacting familial destruction in order to allow for a rebirth of the family.

*Day of the Dead*'s Miguel's sacrifice is more of a self-sacrifice. His arm is bitten by a zombie and though Sarah amputates his arm immediately and cauterizes the wound, the threat of contagion is terrifying. Rather than allow the wound to heal, Miguel climbs out of the mine and sabotages the wiring that enables the mine platform to raise and lower. He then opens the gates,

allowing a horde of zombies onto the premises, crosses himself, positions himself on the elevator platform as though he were Christ being crucified on the cross, and lowers the platform, bringing the zombies into the human living space. Miguel sees himself as a martyr, as a Christ-figure, and the platform as his crucifix. He is not only the male counterpart of the nuclear family he and Sarah have established, he is the ultimate Father figure, a god who destroys and renews. And like Stephen in *Dawn of the Dead*, Miguel here is responsible for destroying the living space and allowing for the rebirth of a Final Family. He sacrifices himself for the future, allowing dozens of zombies into the mine to destroy the archive, to spread contagion through the archive, and to wipe clean the familial slate for Sarah, John, and Billy to start fresh.

The zombie thus enables a brand new familial structure. *Night of the Living Dead's* zombies bring into stark relief the cracks in the old familial structure; fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives are all broken and need to be destroyed entirely via the sacrifice of the father figure, Ben. *Dawn of the Dead's* zombies heighten the domestic sphere and highlight the nuclear family in the context of the post-apocalypse, again demonstrating the need for the sacrifice of the father and the restructuring of the familial unit. And *Day of the Dead's* zombies widen the scope of the broken family to include the larger human community – the scientists and the military – requiring Miguel's ultimate sacrifice in order to destroy the archive and move a brand new Final Family into the future.

The notion of sacrifice, and particularly the sacrifice of the father, is very much at the heart of the zombie film. The word “sacrifice” dates to the mid 13th century from the Old French *sacrifise*, the Latin *sacrificium*, from *sacrificus*, meaning “performing priestly functions,” from *sacra*, meaning “sacred rights.” The sacrifice and the sacred are in constant dialogue; sacrifice intimates a who or what being sacrificed, its recipient is etymologically an implied deity, its

scope is both vague and traditional. In his work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben explores an obscure figure of Roman law, the *Homo Sacer*, in his attempt to reorient the analysis of society and culture on the centrality of the law, and considers that the “sacred man” is simultaneously a “bad or impure man” (Agamben 71), a being not worthy of sacrifice and one that can be killed with impunity. *Homo Sacer* exists on the threshold between life and law, outside and inside: a very particular interstice in which the lines between these categories are not only ill-defined, but indistinguishable. Abandoned by the sovereign, the *Homo Sacer* is concurrently already dead (“whoever is banned from his city on pain of death must be considered as dead” [Agamben 105]) and propelled into the realm of the threatening; the already dead are resurrected in the form of the bestial threat, their very existence posing a danger to humanity. The *Homo Sacer* embodies the tension between sacredness and sacrifice in that he is sacred precisely because he falls outside the realm of sacrificial possibility. This contradictory figure – dehumanized and devalued while occupying the important space in which life and law blur together, unworthy of ritual sacrifice while warranting immediate destruction, already dead and on the verge of dying – is perhaps made most inexorably visible through popular cultural depictions of the zombie.

Richard Matheson’s novel *I Am Legend*, along with its film adaptations, underscores the notion of sacrifice, and particularly paternal sacrifice, as it relates to the living dead. Set in the distant future year of 1976, *I Am Legend*, discussed more elaborately in Chapter 2, tells the story of Robert Neville, the sole survivor of a vampire pandemic borne by mosquitoes. A narrative saturated in the fear of contagion, in the strict demarcations between human and inhuman, diseased and healthy, normal and abnormal, *I Am Legend* has been lauded as a classic, and Matheson as the modern day Bram Stoker; but as a transitional text and the progenitor of the

modern zombie, Matheson's *I Am Legend* nonetheless warrants inclusion in the exploration of the zombie's relation to contagion and disorder. Matheson's vampires may draw on the Stoker-esque tradition of garlic-phobic, folkloric vampires, but they also bear attributes more nearly resembling the modern zombie, and in fact engender the features now associated with the rise of the zombie in American popular culture. *I Am Legend* clearly refers to its creatures as vampires, asking early on, "is the vampire so bad?" (Matheson 32) and basing protagonist Neville's system of defense on a combination of practical and superstitious vampire lore, including wooden stakes, garlic cloves, mirrors, and daylight. Neville sees himself as the modern Van Helsing, reading "his copy of *Dracula*" and rewriting the tradition, disposing of *Dracula*'s "hodgepodge of superstitions" (Matheson 28) in favor of a more effective scientific approach. But despite their apparent status as vampires, the novel's creatures, reduced by a vicious plague to a violent population, are widely considered to have influenced the zombie genre by popularizing the notion of a worldwide apocalypse brought on by disease.

A text about vampires that has inspired a myriad of films about zombies – most iconically, George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (both Matheson and Romero highlight the relationship between sacrifice and family) – Matheson's novel has been directly adapted to (and credited in) three films: *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *The Omega Man* (1971), and *I Am Legend* (2007). Taken on its own, each film adaptation of Matheson's novel brings to bear a host of unique historical and social allusions, and moreover, presents the zombie in relation to sacrifice, to the *Homo Sacer*, and to family. Whereas in Romero's films, the zombie represents hope solely for the human community and human family, as the zombie destroys the old institutional standards and clears the way for new ones to emerge, the Matheson adaptations shift slightly away from a human-centric future, presenting a hopeful outcome not only for the

humans but, in some instances, for the living dead themselves who are not, like Bub, mere catalysts for a human resurgence. The sacrifice of the father figure in service of the family grows even more pronounced in the Matheson adaptations, which emphasize the need for a paternal sacrifice in service of the survival of an entirely new familial paradigm, and one that is not necessarily human.

Directed by Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow, *The Last Man on Earth* presents two distinct depictions of family: the fantasy of a past, dead family and the possibility of a future, living dead family. Robert Morgan (Vincent Price), renamed from Matheson's Robert Neville, opens the film by underscoring the distinction between the living and the dead: "another day to live through," he murmurs in his voiceover, calling attention to his daily routine of living and the ways in which it is distinct from the nightly routine of the dead. Morgan is a father and a scientist working on a vaccine, who refuses to "accept the idea of universal disease," refuses to believe the plague overtaking his community is airborne. He watches his daughter, Kathy (Christi Courtland), fall ill and die and burns her according to the state mandate, but when his wife, Virginia (Emma Danieli), catches the plague, he refuses to burn her and buries her instead. The nuclear family crumbles, mother and child falling victim to the very living dead plague that will force a new familial structure into being. Morgan playfully calls his wife "Virge," a homonym for "verge," and indeed she represents the edge of humanity, the border between the living and the dead. An unburned body, she returns to life and revisits Morgan at home, clawing at the door and whispering, "let me in, let me in, let me in."

Morgan not only aligns the living with the day and the dead with the night, he moreover considers the living – his own life – as an act of the *present* day and associates the dead with the *past* and the family he has lost. He allots a portion of his day to watching projection reel movies

of his dead wife and daughter, alternately laughing and crying at the images, and further highlighting the discrepancy between past and present, living and dead. But while Virge initially represents the border between the living and the dead, she is finally killed and burned, and Morgan relocates her to the world of the past. Then he encounters Ruth Collins (Carolyn De Fonseca), a vampire who is part of a burgeoning society of the dead who have discovered a vaccine, “defebrinated blood plus vaccine,” that feeds the vampire germ, keeps it isolated, and prevents it from multiplying. Their new vaccine allows them to live in the daylight, in the world of the living. Morgan represents the potential father of humanity, the “last man,” and Ruth comes to represent the future, the period of the living dead.

Morgan is caught between two familiarly-designated periods: his obsession with the past (his wife and daughter, the dead) and his encounter with the future (Ruth, the living dead). At the end of the film, Ruth explains to Morgan that she represents a group in the process of reorganizing society, of preparing a way into the future, and that Morgan will never be able to move into the future. Morgan’s position, his “legend,” explains Ruth, is that he is “a monster.” To be between families, to be without a family, is monstrous; and the monstrous Morgan must be sacrificed in order to ensure the survival of the future family. After offering his virus-immune blood to Ruth, to provide a possible cure for vampire plague, Morgan is captured by the new society, a society born of the living dead plague, that impales him and leaves him to die on the church altar: clearly and symbolically sacrificial. In the final shot of the film, Ruth exits the church, stopping to soothe a crying baby, and murmuring, “don’t cry, there’s nothing to cry about. We’re all safe now, all safe.” The Morgan monster, the last man on earth, the father of not only his own family, but of potentially all of humanity, has been sacrificed to protect the living dead, the children, the possibility of the future in familial form.

The biggest departure from Matheson's original source material, *The Omega Man*, directed by Boris Sagal, features a plague with a human origin: a global conflict with bacilli-carrying missiles, germ warfare. *The Omega Man* rescripts the relationship between the family and sacrifice in its depiction of three families and two important sacrificial moments. More overtly than either of the two other film adaptations, *The Omega Man* names its villains "The Family": a cult of albino mutants, infected by a bacilli-carrying biological weapon, whose goal is the destruction of technology. Despite their physical deformities, The Family sees itself as human and Neville (Charlton Heston) as the monstrous other: "Remember, The Family is one. But him, that *thing*, that creature of the wheel, that lord of the infernal engines, the machines." The Family embraces their familial humanity and rejects Neville as a "thing," a "creature," a victim of technology. In contrast to The Family, who constantly reaches for a time before, a past existence free of the vices of technology, the film presents the possibility of a future family, those who have been infected but whose disease is progressing at a much slower rate, a group comprised predominantly of children and led by Dutch (Paul Koslo) and Lisa (Rosalind Cash), two adults who make free use of technology, using lights, motorcycles, and a variety of weapons at their disposal to fight off The Family and protect the children.

Each family is led by a father-figure: Matthias (Anthony Zerbe), the lead villain, acts as a father to The Family, offering inspirational oratory and leading The Family in a combination of violent acts of destruction and strict courtroom justice. Neville ought to function as a father to the future family: he is immune to the virus and can offer them protection, he maneuvers through the city streets killing Family members in a grotesque display of virility and masculinity, and he engages in an affair with Lisa, the children's maternal figure. However, whereas Matthias accepts his paternal role, Neville never fully does. The idea of reproduction leaves him laughing

maniacally, and the children perceive him as a deity, not a father. They alternately fear him (“You know what, Mister, you’re hostile. You just don’t belong... at times you scare me more than Matthias does”) and are in awe of him (“are you God?”), but do not love him.

Negotiating between The Family and the future family is a third family, defined by its biological relationship. This third, biological family is comprised of Lisa and Richie (Eric Laneuville), a brother and sister who used to belong to The Family and are now part of the future family. At various points in the film, the two siblings move between families, identifying alternately with The Family and the future family. Even as she leads the future family, Lisa acknowledges, “I’m part of The Family.” Like *The Last Man on Earth*’s Robert Morgan, the state of in-between cannot sustain itself, and ultimately must be sacrificed in order to ensure familial survival; thus as Richie approaches Matthias to persuade him to take a healing serum, Matthias perceives his approach as an affront and slays Richie in the courthouse. Richie dies in service of The Family: “The Family is all, we have cleansed the world, outside of The Family there is nothing at all” [spoken by Matthias]. To allow the infiltration of technology is to allow for the movement between families, to accept the in-between, and Matthias leads his Family via a strictly non-technological set of ideals, bent on cleansing the world of mechanical possibility.

Just as Richie is sacrificed for The Family, Neville is sacrificed for the future family. In the final segment of the film, Matthias stands on Neville’s balcony, looking at Neville below, positioned beside a fountain. Matthias is able to impale Neville with a spear, and Neville slumps against the fountain’s cross statue, in clear depiction of a Christ-like death. As he dies, Neville hands Dutch the bottle of serum derived from his untainted blood, knowing his blood will transubstantiate and nourish the future family, which gathers together and leaves the city behind, even as he is crucified. And like Richie, who is sacrificed for his liminality, Neville is sacrificed



for being in-between: a leader but not a father, a deity whose legend is the potential for salvation but only through self-sacrifice.

Like the other film adaptations, *I Am Legend* (directed by Francis Lawrence) engages the relationship between sacrifice and family. Set in 2012, the film depicts the aftermath of a genetically-engineered measles virus variant meant as a cancer cure that mutates into a lethal strain and kills 90% of humanity, leaving the remainder to degenerate into hairless, aggressive, cannibalistic, light-sensitive “Darkseekers.” The film depicts either two or three families, depending on the version (the version that was released theatrically was edited from the original cut, which offers an alternate ending). Both the theatrical and the alternate version present two families marked by time and by biology: a past, nuclear family (Robert Neville [Will Smith] – father, Zoe [Salli Richardson] – mother, Marley [Willow Smith] – daughter, Sam – dog), and a future family with no biological connection (Robert, Anna [Alice Braga], Ethan [Charlie Tahan]). The alternate ending presents a third family: the “Darkseeker” Alpha male (Dash Mihok) and his Alpha female (Joanna Numata).

The nuclear family disintegrates almost immediately. Zoe and Marley die in a helicopter during a chaotic quarantine of Manhattan, and Neville is left alone, holding Sam. Throughout, the film emphasizes the theme of loneliness: Neville moves through an empty New York City, placing mannequins in various storefronts, naming them, and interacting with them. Each day, he sends an international broadcast, closing with, “if there’s anybody out there, anybody, please, you are not alone.” And when he finally does encounter another human, a human immune to the virus – Anna – she tells him, “you’re not so good with people anymore, are you?” The nuclear family is replaced by Neville, Anna, and Ethan, an unrelated surviving child, none of whom have any biological ties to one another, but who, in tandem, have the ability to save the world: Anna

and Ethan are both immune to the virus, and Neville, a military virologist, has the scientific aptitude to distill a vaccine.

In the theatrical version, Neville sacrifices himself to the fantasy of the past in order to allow the future family to continue. Like the Neville (and Morgan) from the earlier film versions, he is caught between the fantasy of the past and the possibility of the future, and, in his position of liminality, he must sacrifice himself in service of the future family. He, Anna, Ethan, and the cure for the virus, are trapped in the face of an impending wave of Darkseekers, and Neville sends Anna and Ethan with the cure to safety as he holds a photo of his dead wife and daughter, cementing his position as between the past family (photo) and future family (Anna and Ethan). He then pulls the pin from a grenade and throws it into the room of Darkseekers, exploding along with them in order to protect Anna and Ethan. As the film closes, Anna is heard in voiceover: “In 2009 a deadly virus burned through our civilization, pushing humankind to extinction. Dr. Robert Neville dedicated his life to the discovery of a cure and the restoration of humanity. On September 9th, 2012 at approximately 8:49pm, he discovered that cure. And at 8:52, he gave his life to defend it. We are his legacy. This is his legend. Light up the darkness.” Though far more cloying than the endings of the other two adaptations, this ending is perfectly in line with the relationship of sacrifice to family portrayed in the previous two films: a man caught between two worlds defined by the familial standard is sacrificed in service of the survival of the final family.

The alternate ending, however, presents a different perspective. The standoff is the same: Neville, Anna, and Ethan stand behind plexiglass, facing a room of Darkseekers led by the Alpha male Darkseeker. The Alpha crashes against the plexiglass, and then rubs his hand against the glass, creating the image of a butterfly, a recurring image throughout the film. Neville is reminded of his dead daughter, Marley, whose last words to him were, “Daddy, look, it’s a

butterfly!” as she fluttered her hands together just before the helicopter crash. Neville recognizes the humanity in the Alpha, sees that his aggression is a result of his search for his Alpha female (on whom Neville is experimenting, and who holds the key to the viral cure). Neville sacrifices the Alpha female, and the possibility of a cure from his experiments, to the Darkseekers, bridging the gap between the two families – Darkseeker family and human family – erasing the interstice and allowing both families to continue. The film then closes with Alice’s reiteration of Neville’s ubiquitous broadcast, “you are not alone,” underscoring the familial rebirth. The Darkseekers are not alone, the humans are not alone, there is familial connection all around.

Sacrifice denotes many elements: the sacred, the human, the godly, the survival of the family. In Romero’s films, sacrifice is required in order to repair the broken family, in order to destroy the old institutions and renew the human community. In three film versions of Matheson’s novel, sacrifice is a necessity for preserving the family unit. These films seemingly present worlds in which in-between spaces are monstrous (or godly) threats that must be eliminated to ensure the survival of children, the continuity of the human race, and the perpetuity of the living dead. But the alternate version of *I Am Legend* appears to call all that into question, advocating a position in which the in-between is precisely the space through which the future possibility can be achieved: the space of the butterfly as it flits from human daughter to Alpha Darkseeker, the space of a family not defined by chronology, biology, or procreation, the space of coexistence, of survival, of rebirth, of the living, the dead, and the living dead. The zombie, like the *Homo Sacer*, exists on this very threshold. Between sacrificial and sacred, between living and dead, the zombie requires a sacrifice, the sacrifice of a past mode of thinking, of a family marked by biology, by societal ideas and ideals, by the past, and gives way to a Final Family, the birth of a completely redefined familial space, brought about by the promise of the

living dead.

Family has been central to the zombie film from the days of the early Romero creations. Romero's zombies amplified the fissures in an already breaking family unit and forced father figures to sacrifice themselves or to be sacrificed in order to allow for a familial rebirth and the survival of a new Final Family. The image of the Final Family moreover appears in dozens of films from the zombie subgenre. In 1989, Mary Lambert directed *Pet Sematary*, an adaptation of Stephen King's novel of the same name. From its very opening, the film highlights the nuclear family, as the Creed family – Louis (father, Dale Midkiff), Rachel (mother, Denise Crosby), Gage (son, Miko Hughes), and Ellie (daughter, Blaze Berdahl) – moves from Chicago to the small town of Ludlow, Maine. The move from the city to suburbia, the lens on building a new home, further emphasizes the focus on family here, and Rachel unbuckles a sleepy Gage from the car and tells him, “decided to wake up and see what home looks like, huh?” Gage is then killed in a car accident, revealing initial fissures in the nuclear family as mother, father, daughter, and son become mother, father, and daughter, rent apart by the death of the baby. By the end of the film, the nuclear family is destroyed entirely as a zombified Gage murders his mother and is killed by his father. Distraught by the destruction of his nuclear family and his home, Louis sets about to ensure familial rebirth. He burns his home completely, wiping clean the traces of home and of family, and then begins the process of reanimating Rachel to birth a new family, promising her “It'll be alright, Rachel. I promise.”

In addition to his original *Dead* films, George Romero directed three more *Dead* movies, each of which features Final Families: *Land of the Dead* (2005) depicts two sets of families – a human Final Family and a zombie family, *Diary of the Dead* (2007) features a Final Family comprised of students making a horror film at the time of the outbreak and banding together to

record the epidemic as it unfolds, and *Survival of the Dead* (2009) depicts two feuding families with different approaches to surviving the zombie apocalypse. Romero's 1973 film *The Crazies* (1973) opens with the literal destruction of the nuclear family, with a father who attacks his own wife and burns his children alive, and results in the emergence of a Final Family; its 2010 remake features a similar Final Family. Like Romero, horror director John Carpenter, perhaps best known for his role in popularizing the slasher film, directed several zombie films with Final Families, including *The Fog* (1980) and *Prince of Darkness* (1987). And Lucio Fulci, a prominent Italian director of zombie cinema, directed *City of the Living Dead* in 1980, which showcases a Final Family in the characters of Peter Bell (Christopher George) and Mary Woodhouse (Catriona MacCall), who travel together to Dunwich, England in order to close the portal of hell.

The zombie subgenre moreover includes several genres of its own, subdividing zombie films in which the dead are reanimated and begin to attack the human population spreading a plague of cannibalistic living dead into a variety of treatments. "Viral" zombie films are a group of films about viral infection that spreads through the human population apocalyptically and radically devastating the world. Like films about the reanimated dead, "viral" zombie films similarly feature Final Families; examples include George Romero's *The Crazies* (1973), Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), its sequel, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's *28 Weeks Later* (2007), and Hal Barwood's 1985 film *Warning Sign*. Zombie films also take the guise of the "zom-com," or zombie comedy, a subgenre of the zombie genre that features the living dead in the context of a comedy; the stakes are the same – the human population is at risk of infection and extinction – but the context ranges from slightly humorous to outright zany. Zombie comedies that feature Final Families include Dan O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), Fred Dekker's

*Night of the Creeps* (1986), Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981), directed by Sam Raimi and its 1987 sequel *Evil Dead 2*, Peter Jackson's *Dead Alive* (1992), also called *Braindead*, Bob Clark's *Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things* (1972), and Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), a British zombie comedy that derives its humor in part through references to other films, television shows, and video games, and an obvious parody of and homage to George Romero's films and culls numerous lines, scenes, and background details from *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, and *Day of the Dead*.

By applying semiotics to media texts, by analyzing popular culture as a text, John Fiske's book *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989) offers a possible explanation for the abundance of zombie films featuring the same familial motifs, and moreover, for the way in which the larger horror genre is pervaded by film sequels and remakes of classic films:

Popular culture is marked by repetition and seriality, which, among other effects, enable it to fit easily with the routines of everyday life. Magazines are published weekly or monthly, records played constantly, television organized into series and serials, clothes worn and discarded, video games played time and again, a sports team watched game after game – popular culture is built on repetition, for no one text is sufficient, no text is a completed object. The culture consists only of meanings and pleasures in constant process. (Fiske 126)

In fact, the process of returning to the theater to revisit characters or themes anew does drive much of the horror film industry. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Day of the Dead*, and *The Crazies* have all been remade, providing longstanding audiences with contemporary versions of their favorite zombie films, welcoming a new generation of viewers into the fold, and giving producers and studios a built-in audience and a projected profit.

Repetition is certainly a core element of horror film culture and horror's "meanings and pleasure [do consist of] constant process"; even today, screenings of classic horror films at revival house theaters or projected on the wall of the mausoleum at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles, California draw crowds of hundreds of hungry fans, excited to revisit their favorite films.

The family unit thus continues to be the central focus in contemporary zombie films. Ruben Fleischer's 2009 zombie comedy *Zombieland* opens in an America devastated by a zombie apocalypse, and is narrated by "Columbus" (Jesse Eisenberg), a young man who is torn between his self-imposed rules for survival and his underlying desire to reconnect with his family. Columbus believes he has survived the apocalypse because he "had the advantage of never having any friends or close family. I survive because I play it safe and follow the rules. My rules." Being alone and following the rules are the necessary precursors for survival. As in *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, and *Day of the Dead*, humanity in *Zombieland* is bound up with space, or place. And like *I Am Legend*, the film so heavily emphasizes the role of aloneness, it refuses to name its characters, calling them instead by their hometowns: Columbus, Little Rock, Tallahassee, Wichita.

However, though Columbus' survival may be predicated on his being alone, he simultaneously desires a family and sets off for Columbus, Ohio to reunite with his own family: "I've always been kind of a loner. I avoided other people like they were zombies even before they were zombies. Now that they are all zombies, I kind of miss people. So, I'm on my way from my college dorm in Austin, Texas to Columbus, Ohio where I'm hoping my parents are still alive. Even though we were never really close, it would just be nice to see a familiar face." Family is imperative here, though at the same time, like the broken families in Romero's *Dead*

films, it is fundamentally broken. Upon discovering that his hometown has been decimated by the zombie plague, Columbus recalls that though he had been “hoping [his] parents [were] still alive,” he now realizes how dysfunctional his family actually was: “I’m not sure what’s more tragic, that my family is gone or the realization that I never had much of a family to begin with. Either way I can’t pretend that whatever I’m looking for I’ll find by going home. I have no home.” In the wake of the zombie-afflicted destruction, Columbus becomes cognizant both of the relationship of home to family and of his own family’s elemental brokenness. He “never had much of a family to begin with.”

Not only is the original family structure broken, *Zombieland* moreover presents the same need for sacrifice as its earlier zombie film counterparts, though here the sacrificial object is updated. Whereas the Romero films and the Matheson adaptations require a sacrifice of the father, here the object of sacrifice is broadened to include any member of the original family unit. Columbus’ parents are sacrificed; the dialogue between Columbus and Wichita (Emma Stone), in which Wichita describes Columbus’ hometown as “a total ghost town, burned to the ground” highlights the image of a sacrificial fire, and positions Columbus’ parents as the sacrificial offering. One night, Columbus, Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson), Wichita, and Little Rock (Abigail Breslin) sit and talk about the best and worst parts of “Zombieland,” the now devastated United States. Tallahassee confesses his own familial sacrifice: his son, Buck. Tearfully, Tallahassee shares photographs of Buck: “I’ll tell you, I never thought I could love anything like Buck, just the day he was born, I just lost my mind... we were two peas. He had my personality, my laugh, my appetite.” The sacrifice of parents, the sacrifice of children: the nuclear family is sacrificed in *Zombieland*, destroyed by the living dead in order to make way for a familial rebirth.



The film uses the recurring motif of the Twinkie to capture the link between the sacrificial death of the nuclear family and the rebirth of the Final Family. Tallahassee combs the country for Twinkies: “in fact the only thing he was more obsessed with than killing a zombie was finding a Twinkie.” To Tallahassee, Twinkies represent the past, the link to childhood innocence and to the memory of his lost son: “Something about the Twinkie reminded him about a time not so long ago, when things were simple and not so fucking psychotic. It was like if he got a taste of that comforting childhood treat, the world would become innocent again and everything would return to normal.” The Twinkie allows for a world in which Buck survives, and Tallahassee needs to believe that he will find the final box of Twinkies, “the last box of Twinkies that anyone will enjoy in the whole universe,” because the Twinkie signifies normalcy, innocence, a return.

However, Tallahassee’s search for the final Twinkie is constantly met with failure. The world has accepted Buck as sacrificial, has destroyed the nuclear family, has rent the link to the past. Tallahassee finds Sno-Balls, destroyed boxes of Twinkies, substitutions and empty promises. He cannot undo the past, cannot “return to normal,” cannot revive Buck. The Twinkie, like the family unit itself, ultimately evolves from a signifier of past innocence to the image of the future and the bearer of the Final Family. As the Final Family draws together, the film implies that family building requires work. When Columbus meets Tallahassee, the two draw guns on each other. Columbus is in need of a ride, Tallahassee has a car, but they are both too wary to bond. Tallahassee finally agrees to take Columbus in but warns him, “no names. Keeps us from getting too familiar.” And though Columbus is grateful, he confesses, “even though teaming up wasn’t my style, I figure I’d be safer with Tallahassee.” When Columbus and Tallahassee meet Wichita and Little Rock, the two girls scam the men out of their vehicle and

weapons. Columbus wants to move on, to find another car, to avoid familial connection. In his voiceover he wonders, “why don’t we just forget about those girls and head home?” Home, the space typically associated with family, is the antithesis of a relationship with Wichita and Little Rock. Over time, and over a series of encounters, Columbus, Tallahassee, Wichita, and Little Rock band together in an act of survival until Wichita and Little Rock break free under their mantra: “trust no one, just you and me.” The two girls head for a local amusement park, Pacific Playland, rumored to be the only zombie-free zone in the United States.

Pacific Playland, however, is far from zombie-free, and in the film’s third act, the Final Family finally coheres: Wichita and Little Rock acknowledge that they need Tallahassee and Columbus, and the four of them work together to evade the encroaching zombies. After distrusting each other throughout the film, the Final Family accepts that they need to work together to ensure survival. In the film’s closing scene, Little Rock throws Tallahassee a single – the last – unopened Twinkie, and Columbus’ voiceover concludes, “we had hope. We had each other.” As the Twinkie flies through the air, Columbus realizes that the nuclear family has always been broken, was never “much of a family to begin with,” but that Tallahassee, Wichita, and Little Rock “were the closest to something I’d always wanted but never really had: a family.” Because of the zombie and through sacrifice, the broken nuclear family is destroyed and then reborn as the Final Family, a collection of individuals who come to rely on each other in order to survive. Columbus acknowledges: “that’s me realizing that those smart girls and that big black truck and that big guy in that snakeskin jacket, they were the closest to something I’d always wanted but never really had: a family. I trusted them and they trusted me.” What distinguishes the humans from the zombies in this film is family, and particularly Final Family, because “without other people, well, you might as well be a zombie.”

*Zombieland* emphasizes the way in which survival is predicated on eliminating the old ways and starting fresh. The old familial model – the nuclear family – of father, mother, and child is destroyed by the zombie, giving way for the emergence of the Final Family, a family united not by biological bonds but by a common desire for survival. *Zombieland* uses the motif of “rules” in order to underscore the erasure of old institutions and the reformulation of new ones. Columbus narrates the film, and opens with a voiceover that lists his set of 47 rules for surviving Zombieland. Throughout the movie, each time Columbus enacts a rule, a graphic arises onscreen delineating the particular rule being followed. He cautiously avoids a public restroom and the pop-up text onscreen reads “#3 beware of bathrooms.” “#1 cardio” emerges onscreen as Columbus runs through a parking lot being chased by zombies. Interspersed with his recital of the rules, Columbus reveals a host of phobias and insecurities. He is afraid of germs and refuses to use a public restroom. He has irritable bowel syndrome. He is terrified of clowns.

Columbus’ rules hold him together; that is, until he meets Tallahassee. As the Final Family begins to emerge, Columbus’ rules no longer matter; like the disorder in Matheson’s *I Am Legend*, disorder, or rule-breaking, in *Zombieland* becomes precisely the means by which to survive. Columbus starts to stretch before heading down a cliff (“#18 limber up”), and Tallahassee asks him whether limbering up is in line with the natural order of the world: “You ever see a lion limber up before it takes down a gazelle?” Columbus realizes that his approach to survival might not function as well in the context of his new family. By the end of the film, Columbus is forced to relinquish altogether his rules, and his obsession with his rules, in order to ensure the survival of the Final Family. At Pacific Playland, he races to save Wichita and Little Rock and encounters a zombie clown. Forced to face his fears, Columbus realizes he must let go of his most important rule: “#17 Don’t be a hero.” After a brief hesitation, the onscreen pop-up

text erases the word “don’t” leaving only the exhortation: “be a hero,” and Columbus attacks the clown and reunites the Final Family. Survival is not the result of an obsession with the rules; survival entails the erasure of old institutions, of old rules, and the birth of new families and new heroes.

Most recently, the image of the destruction and rebirth of the family in the context of a zombie apocalypse has been featured in the very first big budget Hollywood zombie film to-date, Marc Forster’s *World War Z* (2013). A film adaptation of Max Brooks’ 2006 novel of the same name, *World War Z* stars Brad Pitt as Gerry Lane, a former United Nations investigator forced to take a worldwide journey in order to stop a zombie pandemic. The family unit is an integral element in *World War Z*; the entire film revolves around Gerry’s attempt to save and be reunited with his family. But as with so many earlier examples in its genre, *World War Z* presents a nuclear family unit with cracks, a family threatening to fall apart. As the Lanes make their way through the quickly deteriorating city of Philadelphia, they are briefly separated in a grocery store and barely cling to one another as they race through the city, evading the panic of the zombie plague. Taking refuge in a local building, they meet another family: a mother, father, and their son, Tomas (Fabrizio Zacharee Guido). Tomas’s family welcomes the Lanes for the night, offers them food and shelter. As mother, father, and child, existing in the safety of their home, they represent the ultimate nuclear family. Yet almost immediately, Tomas’ family is destroyed: zombies enter their home, Tomas flees with the Lanes, and his parents are infected. Ultimately, *World War Z*’s narrative hinges on a broken family; Tomas’ family’s destruction spurs the Lanes to fight harder to escape the growing infection and Gerry must then separate from his family, leaving them in the care of the United States Navy, while he travels the globe in search of the origins of the zombie plague.

From the outset of the film, family is tied to space – namely, home – much the way it is in Romero’s films, and, as in Romero’s films, when the home space is breached or abandoned, the family unit is weakened. The narrative opens in the Lanes’ home with a focus on the family. Mother and father are in bed, two small daughters rush in to their parents’ bedroom and leap into bed. The family gathers in the kitchen for a pancake breakfast. The familiar homey details are accentuated; home and family are bound up with one another as the family moves from one room to the next, beginning the day, sharing a bed and then a breakfast table. The instant the family exits the domain of the home, the stakes of the film change. *World War Z* very quickly becomes a film about contagion and survival. The zombies change the landscape, scattering the family unit. On the city streets, the Lanes have to fight to retain a sense of togetherness. They are constantly being torn apart. Karin Lane (Mireille Enos), Gerry’s wife, carries one daughter, and Gerry the other. They stop in a supermarket to gather supplies and lose sight of one another. United in an RV, they must coax one of the daughters through an asthma attack, fearing for her life. Individual quiet homey moments are broken up by moments in which the family exits the home sphere and is left fending for basic survival. Similarly, Tomas’ family exists as a family in a home until the home is breached, rending the family and sending Tomas in search of a new family unit.

Like the earlier prototypical zombie films, *World War Z* presents the sacrifice of the father as the catalyst for the rebirth of the family. Gerry is initially loath to leave his family. He has just secured their safety on a Naval ship off the coast of New York and does not want to leave: “I can’t leave my family.” Family becomes the bartering tool in the conversation as the naval commander warns Gerry, “Don’t believe your family is exempt when we talk about the end of humanity.” Forced by the United Nations to trace the origins of the virus in an effort to

find a cure, Gerry flies to South Korea, to Jerusalem, and to Wales. He encounters the remains of Patient Zero and a military operation barely holding on to their secure bunker in South Korea, a completely quarantined city and a seemingly infallible wall that finally falls to the zombies in Jerusalem, and, after a plane crash, he is finally diverted to a World Health Organization building in Cardiff, Wales. At the WHO, Gerry finds a team of scientists who have tried every conceivable experiment to subdue the zombie virus – unsuccessfully.

Having abandoned his family and repeatedly subjected himself to danger, first in South Korea and then in Jerusalem, Gerry once more positions himself as a target. He conceives of a plan to infect the human population with a lethal disease that would enable them to camouflage themselves from the zombies who are looking for healthy hosts to whom to transmit their virus. He makes his way through a zombie-infested area of the WHO building to locate the necessary infectious serum and then, trapped, chooses to infect himself as a test case. Gerry puts his own life at risk; the other WHO scientists comment on the fact that whether his test is successful or not, he is doomed, either by virtue of having injected himself with a lethal infection or by virtue of being trapped in a zombie-infested part of the building.

Gerry's sacrifice ultimately provides hope both for his own family and for the human community at large. The film closes with a montage of newsreel footage from around the world, reporters lauding the foreseeable end to worldwide infection, the possibilities inherent in Gerry's "camouflage" technique. By injecting himself with diseases, the human community effectively camouflages itself from the zombie virus. In addition to providing worldwide hope, Gerry's sacrifice compels a familial rebirth. While in Wales, Gerry discovers his family has been moved from the safe haven of the Naval ship off the coast of New York to a refugee camp in Nova Scotia. As he arrives in Nova Scotia, Gerry realizes his original family unit has evolved. The

Lanes have not only taken on Tomas as part of their family – he huddles in with Karin and the two daughters in a familial portrait, waiting to welcome Gerry by boat – their home, the marker of familial wholeness, has changed drastically. Whereas the film opened in a domestic space, a small apartment with a tight-knit family unit, the film closes in a refugee camp, a space for those without homes, and a family that has expanded to include others similarly dislocated from their homes.

The role of the home with respect to the family is buoyed by the film's exploration of the tropes of movement and stasis. Almost immediately from its outset, the film is frenetic. Two small girls rush in to their parents' bedroom and leap into bed. The family hurries in to make a pancake breakfast and then rushes out the door. In many ways a departure from earlier zombie films, like *Night of the Living Dead*, which barred its protagonists indoors in a farmhouse, a cellar, a shopping mall, a mine, *World War Z*'s Gerry cautions another scared family, "movement is life." According to Gerry, those who stand still are at a far greater risk of contracting the zombie virus than those who move. However, movement and stasis are not nearly as clearly drawn as Gerry implies. His family leaves their home and once in the car, their movement stalls completely. Traffic. And while the family sits, stilled, unmoving, the world around them starts to move uncontrollably and frenziedly. The relationship between the humans and the zombies in the film revolves around movement.

Gerry moves his family from the car to the street to an abandoned RV, to a supermarket, to an apartment building, a roof, a helicopter, and a U.S. Navy ship off the coast of New York, where they stay moored for the majority of the film until they are finally relocated to a refugee camp in Nova Scotia. Gerry himself, in an effort to trace the virus, moves from the Navy ship to South Korea to Jerusalem to Wales and finally reunites with his family in Nova Scotia. However,

though Gerry claims that “movement is life,” his family is actually safest when they are moored, static, when they are “home.” The opening scene in which the Lanes are in their apartment, the length of the film in which they are given refuge on a Navy ship docked off the coast of New York, and the closing scene in which the family is reunited at a refugee camp are the three moments in which the family’s lives are not at risk. Movement from the apartment to the street introduces sudden powerful risk, and Gerry’s movements across the globe put both his own life and the lives of his family, whose safety is dependent on his survival, at risk.

Moreover, in a massive departure from the early Romero zombies, which shuffled slowly through spaces, those moving the fastest in *World War Z*, those climbing in hordes over walls and rushing maniacally through streets and past doors and underneath platforms, are the undead. So movement here is not life, but rather death, or undeath. Gerry’s initial statement, “movement is life,” appears to contradict the reality; his family lives most easily when they are static and movement not only threatens life but is perpetuated by the living dead. As the film draws to a close, Gerry, in voiceover, states, “this isn’t the end. Not even close.” In a film that blurs the consequences of movement and stasis, and of life and death, ends are not ends. The virus moves, quickly overriding cities, countries, entire nations and populations. The humans move through cities, fleeing terrifying zombies and the sure threat of death. Humans move and are still and move again. Zombies move and grow dormant and move again. And the effect of all this movement and stasis, of movement across populations and stasis across viral walls, of movement up and over walled cities and stasis in carefully monitored laboratory units, is an end that is not an end. The conjunction of Gerry’s statement about movement as life and the reality of the zombies as the prime movers suggests that Gerry is unconsciously acknowledging the power of the living dead. The zombie’s movement here catalyzes life, catalyzes the rebirth of the familial



unit. The movement of the living dead is in fact responsible for birthing new life. When the lines between human stasis and zombie movement have not been firmly drawn, when we can peek through the viral façade and tap the humanity that lies beneath, there can be no conclusion, “not even close.” Thus the zombie is not the bearer of an apocalyptic end, of a conclusion, but rather of a new beginning, a new conception of family.

In contrast to Clover’s *Final Girl*, zombie narratives adopt a father figure, who is sacrificed in order to make way for a Final Family that can confront post-apocalyptic reality. The zombie’s lack of containment, its representation of the “abnormal,” galvanizes a dramatically patriarchal response, a sacrificial response, as the response most likely to induce survival. Fathers, like *Night of the Living Dead*’s Ben and Matheson’s Robert Neville and *28 Days Later*’s Frank assume the role of sacrificial victim to ensure the survival of those around them. While Clover’s model emphasizes womanhood, the zombie model, with its emphasis on the sacrificial father, reorients the focus toward a dominant paternity: a paternity, however, that embodies a similar confluence of masculinity and femininity as the Final Girl. Clover’s Final Girl uses phallic weapons, adopts masculine names and attitudes, is fluid across gender lines, strengthening the role of the mother while allowing for male audience identification. The zombie film’s fathers, in their sacrificial acts, adopt a maternal role, the role of one who births a family. And whereas Clover’s Final Girl begins to heal the broken family, strengthening the maternal figure, but failing to heal the wounded child, the zombie film offers hope in a total familial rebirth.

The zombie is in fact an emblem of hope, an easily overlooked characterization amid the destruction and chaos of the apocalypse. The zombie provides an antidote to the broken family, inspiring a model for a new family: the family of the post-apocalyptic future. Zombies, like the

*muselmanner*, bear witness to a fraught past, to a history, to a Holocaust. Zombies in twentieth century film and fiction forcibly destroy broken institutions to allow for rebirth. What seems like apocalyptic disorder, in the case of Matheson's living dead, is in fact the counter, the solution, to the violence of order. What seems like living dead violence – in the case of the golem, in the case of Frankenstein's monster – is really an act of love – a position from which to eradicate violent order and birth a final family and a future.

## CONCLUSION

In his study of the Western world's fascination with horror, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*, James B. Twitchell dismisses the zombie, but in so doing, offers an understanding of the very significance and ubiquity of the living dead:

The zombie myth seems flawed by its lack of complexity. The zombie is really a mummy in street clothes with no love life and a big appetite. Both are automatons; neither is cunning nor heroic. They simply lumber about (Karloff called it "my little walk"), shuffling their feet like dateless high school students before the prom. As opposed to the vampire, who is crafty, circumspect and erotic, these two cousins are subhuman slugs...

The zombie is an utter cretin, a vampire with a lobotomy, and this is what has tended to make [all the films following *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943)] little more than vehicles of graphic violence, full of people (usually men) poking each other and then occasionally eating them. The zombie is so shallow... even Abbott and Costello refused to meet with him. (Twitchell 261, 266)

The zombie is certainly marked by a "lack of complexity"; however, I would argue that it is this very lack that drives its pervasiveness in popular culture. If, as John Fiske claims, popular culture "consists only of meanings and pleasures in constant process," the "meanings and pleasures" of the zombie lie precisely in its flatness, and in our ability, as producers and consumers of popular culture, to imbue that "lack of complexity" with significance. As Mark McGurl insists, "they do make for good allegories, their very flatness propelling us into speculation about what they might mean 'on another level'" (McGurl 4). The zombie's "lack of complexity" *is* its significance. It is

batted about in the realm of popular culture, produced, serialized, remade, and consumed, because it can stand in for anything we choose. In the case of this work, the zombie is a commentary on the institution of family. If the family is a microcosm of society, zombie films are commenting on society's need for restructuring. Cataclysmic change is necessary; the world – the family – is so broken it requires apocalypse. Matheson, Romero, and their zombie successors suggest that the best chance for survival is for the nuclear family, for society, to destroy itself from within and rebirth itself anew.

This project began as a comparative one, one in which the zombie was merely the tool with which to examine the multifaceted relationship between Jewish literature and history and American popular culture. It developed into an appreciation for the ways in which the zombie offers insight into a larger post-apocalyptic American context, including works by H.G. Wells, Cormac McCarthy, and Colson Whitehead, insofar as it highlights the role of disorder, the plague, and the living dead in shaping not only our understanding of modern biopolitics, but also of the American canon. To consider the range of zombie popular cultural materials and locate them squarely in the context of the American canon would carry far-reaching social implications, certainly: implications regarding biopolitics and populations and the acknowledgement of the asymptotic relation between things and persons and the consequent human failure to treat persons as persons and not as things. More so, and importantly, the zombie offers a window into a narrative about canonicity, and more pointedly, about the way in which zombie film and fiction can be read as part of an American literary canon. As it draws cultural studies into the realm of American literature, the zombie not only expands the boundaries of the canon, but also allows for an investigation at the site of expansion and the uncomfortable result of a canon that includes zombies.

In fact, the zombie is an apropos figure for a study in American literature; in his recent seminal text on the zombie, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*, Kyle William Bishop identifies the zombie as “fundamentally an *American* creation” (Bishop 12). Although it originated in Haiti as a terrifying possibility of the voodoo tradition, the zombie very fluently immigrated to the United States as an equally terrifying figure and quickly became a part of the American horror zeitgeist. Today, the zombie is better known for its American adaptation as a flesh-eating ghoul than for its voodoo origins. Bishop parses the reasons behind the fear of zombification in a Haitian context – reasons that illuminate the zombie’s popularity in its American context and the way in which it has been appropriated as an American horror icon:

The very concept of the voodoo zombie, and, perhaps more importantly, the process of zombification itself, functions in Haiti as a repressive ideological apparatus primarily because of the fear it instills in the faithful peasantry. Because of both their hybridized belief system and their cultural history of imperial repression and enslavement, native Haitians readily fear zombie mythology and folklore, seeing it as both the potential return to slavery and as a violation of the Christian ideal of personal agency. (Bishop 59)

While these anxieties stem from Haiti’s position as a colonized nation, they have been amended in an American context, influenced by America’s more dominant position as an imperial power. In 1887, when amateur anthropologist Lafcadio Hearn first published his ethnography about Haitian zombies, “The Country of the Comers-Back,” in *Harper’s Magazine*, the scars of the American Civil War and the traces of slavery as an essential part of the American economic and social system were still very vivid. Once a colonial entity itself, the United States, now an

autonomous presence touting its values of freedom and equality, was easily horrified by the zombie myth and its threat to personal agency. Moreover, the mainstream American public found the enslavement of white Christians by dark-skinned “natives” abhorrent; the zombie preyed upon deep-seated social paranoia at a time when the United States was establishing its authority on Haitian soil.<sup>84</sup> This collective social guilt, along with newfound national and longstanding religious tenets and racial anxieties, “paved the way for zombies to ‘invade’ the United States in the form of ethnographic accounts, literary narratives, and, eventually, feature films” (Bishop 60). As a folkloric Haitian figure transformed by American anxieties into an American popular cultural icon, the zombie is a uniquely American representative of the monster bevy and thus an appropriate object of inquiry in a project on American literature and popular culture.

When George A. Romero originally conceived *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), the film’s ending was a bleak prospect. According to the original screenplay, after having outlived the human remnant, Peter and Francine, fleeing a horde of impending zombies, were not to make their iconic heroic escape. Rather, Peter was to shoot himself in the head and Francine was to stand up into the whirring helicopter propeller blades, decapitating herself. But Romero abandoned his original concept, and replaced it with a famously *hopeful* conclusion: Peter shoots his way through the crowd of zombies and climbs into Francine’s waiting helicopter. As the zombies amass on the helipad, the helicopter flies into a break in the murky clouds overhead, bearing mother, fetus, and father figure to safety, and more importantly, to the symbolic hopeful space between the clouds.

I think Romero saw something in the zombie that few others seem to. Romero is widely

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<sup>84</sup> The United States occupied Haiti in 1915 and retained influence on Haiti’s external finances until 1947.

referred as the “Grandfather of the Zombies.” There is widespread appreciation for the way in which he rebranded the zombie, plucking it from its Haitian voodoo roots and repositioning it in the United States as a cannibalistic ghoul. There is widespread acknowledgement of his films’ place in the horror genre. There is widespread appreciation for the way in which “Romero zombies” have, forever after, marked the zombie subgenre. Romero entered the horror filmscape in 1968, when the release of *Night of the Living Dead* was met with mostly scathing reviews. *Variety* denounced the film for being an “unrelieved orgy of sadism” (Higashi 184). The *New York Times* referred to the film as a “junk movie” (Canby 49). Only a handful of reviewers noted *Night of the Living Dead*’s power. *Film Daily* described it as a “pearl of a horror picture” (Higashi 175), and even Roger Ebert finally admitted that he “admires the movie itself” (Ebert). From the outset of his career, Romero has been offering a new understanding of the zombie: one that is often denounced, criticized, unappreciated.

I have spent many years and even more pages building an argument about the zombie. Traditionally, the zombie is the bearer of apocalypse. I have asked my professors, colleagues, and students for input: “what do you think of when I say ‘zombie’”? Invariably, the words “apocalypse,” “destruction,” “cannibalism,” “the end” all enter the conversation. The zombie is always the end. But in this project, I have rewritten violence as love, disorder as salvation, and erasure as productive, and in so doing, have shifted the zombie’s position. My dissertation refers to this shift as “hopeful.” I received a challenging comment by a reader about how the zombie really only seems to be hopeful for humankind; the zombies themselves are kind of sacrificial victims. And though I am not so certain this is always the case for all zombies everywhere (what about the recent *Warm Bodies* [2013], which features a zombie survivor who saves the world out of love for his human girlfriend?), I would argue that sometimes what characterizes something or

someone as hopeful is not that they themselves are survivors, but that they give others the opportunity to survive. Historically, popularly, literarily, there are not many zombie survivors. Zombies are, as McGurl argues, the lumpen monsters, and they pay the working class price of baring their shoulders for the more distinguished monsters (and maybe all of humanity) to stand on. But in all their sluggishness, in all their shuffling sacrifice, zombies are, I think, far closer to a sort of beginning than an absolute end.

There is a way in which the margin and the interstice are often conflated. The edge and the in-between are both overlooked spaces, both fringe spaces, both spaces that shore up the weighty “real” spaces with their sideline unrealities. There is a long, rich discourse around margins and interstices. As literary scholars and close readers, we are all so careful to read around the outside, beneath the bottoms, within the white spaces between words. These spaces are often the richest source for literary analysis. The figure of the zombie draws together the margins and the interstices, revealing a messianic potential in the overlap of these two spaces. The zombie always exists in the margins. Geographically, it shuffles either outside the city limits (or the limits of the shopping mall or the home or the spaces characterized by humanity and human survival). The zombie also always exists in the interstices. Physically, it appears both dead – decaying, rotting flesh – but also alive: moving, emitting sounds (in some cases, speaking), consuming, emoting (as in the case, for example, of *Day of the Dead*’s “Bub”). The zombie is both human and inhuman, both living and dead.

In many ways, the zombie is simply misunderstood. The zombie is always marginalized and always in-between. It wavers between living and dead. It shuffles between human and inhuman. And it inhabits, simultaneously, the space of the apocalyptic and of the messianic. There are not many zombie survivors; but whether they survive or not, zombies always



irrevocably change the world around them. The space of the between, the space of the margin – these are powerful spaces. From its position on the edge and in the between, the zombie enables the reconceptualization of violence as love, of disorder as salvation, of erasure as productive, and of the living dead as an emblem of hope.

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*The Golem*. Dir. Paul Wegener. Perf. Paul Wegener, Rudolph Blümner, Carl Ebert, Henrik  
Galeen. 1915. Film.

*The Golem: How He Came into the World (Der Goylem: wie er in die Welt kam)*. Dir. Paul  
Wegener. Perf. Paul Wegener, Albert Steinrück, Lyda Salmonova, Ernst Deutsch. 1920.  
Film.

*Halloween*. Dir. John Carpenter. Perf. Donald Pleasence, Jamie Lee Curtis, P.J. Soles, Nancy  
Loomis. USA. Falcon International Productions, 1978. Print.

*Hell of the Living Dead. (Virus - l'inferno dei morti vivent)* Dir. Bruno Mattei. Perf. Margit  
Evelyn Newton. Italy. Anchor Bay, 1980. Film.

“Homecoming.” *Masters of Horror*. Dir. Joe Dante. Showtime. 2 December 2005. Television.

*I Am Legend*. Dir. Francis Lawrence. Perf. Will Smith, Alice Braga. USA. Warner Bros.  
Pictures, 2007. Film.

*I Walked with a Zombie*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. Perf. James Ellison, Frances Dee, Tom Conway.  
USA. RKO Radio Pictures, 1943. Film.

*Jaws*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss, Lorraine Gary.  
USA. Universal Pictures, 1975. Film.

*Land of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Simon Baker, John Leguizamo, Dennis Hopper,  
Asia Argento, Robert Joy. USA. Universal Pictures, 2005. Film.

*The Last Man on Earth*. Dir. Sidney Salko. Perf. Vincent Price, Franca Bettoia, Emma Danieli.  
USA/Italy. MGM, 1964. Film.

*Man of Steel*. Dir. Zack Snyder. Perf. Henry Cavill, Amy Adams, Michael Shannon, Diane Lane.

USA. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013. Film.

*A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Dir. Wes Craven. Perf. John Saxon, Ronee Blakley, Heather Langenkamp, Amanda Wyss. USA. New Line Cinema, 1984. Film.

*Night of the Creeps*. Dir. Fred Dekker. Perf. Jason Lively, Steve Marshall, Jill Whitlow. USA. TriStar Pictures, 1986. Film.

*Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Duane Jones, Judith O'Dea, Karl Hardman, Marilyn Eastman. 1968. DVD. Elite Entertainment, 2002. Film.

*Nightmare City*. (original titles: *Incubo sulla città contaminate*, *La invasion de los zombies atómicos*). Dir. Umberto Lenzi. Perf. Hugo Stiglitz, Laura Trotter, Maria Rosaria Omaggio. Italy/Spain. Anchor Bay Entertainment, 1980. Film.

*The Omega Man*. Dir. Boris Sagal. Perf. Charlton Heston, Anthony Zerbe, Paul Koslo, Rosalind Cash. 1971. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2000. Film.

*Pet Sematary*. Dir. Mary Lambert. Perf. Dale Midkiff, Fred Gwynne, Denise Crosby, Brad Greenquist. USA. Paramount Pictures, 1989. Film.

*Phantasm*. Dir. Don Coscarelli. Perf. Michael Baldwin, Bill Thornbury, Reggie Bannister, Kathy Lester. USA. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1979. Film.

*Prince of Darkness*. Dir. John Carpenter. Perf. Donald Pleasence, Jameson Parker, Victor Wong, Lisa Blount. USA. Universal Studios, 1987. Film.

*Psycho*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Perf. Anthony Perkins, Janet Leigh, Vera Miles, John Gavin. USA. Paramount Pictures, 1960. Film.

*Quarantine*. Dir. John Erick Dowdle. Perf. Jennifer Carpenter, Jay Hernandez, Columbus Short, Greg Germann. USA. Screen Gems, 2008. Film.

*Rabid*. Dir. David Cronenberg. Perf. Marilyn Chambers, Frank Moore, Joe Silver, Howard

Ryshpan. Canada. New World Pictures, 1977. Film.

*Re-Animator*. Dir. Stuart Gordon. Perf. Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Abbott, Barbara Crampton, David Gale. USA. Empire Pictures, 1985. Film.

*Resident Evil*. (alternative title: *Resident Evil Genesis*) Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Michelle Rodriguez, Eric Mabius. UK/Germany/France/USA. Screen Gems, 2002. Film.

*Resident Evil: Apocalypse*. Dir. Alexander Witt. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Sienna Guillory, Oded Fehr. France/Canada/UK/USA. Screen Gems, 2004. Film.

*Resident Evil: Extinction*. Dir. Russell Mulcahy. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Oded Fehr, Ali Larter. USA. Screen Gems, 2007. Film.

*Resident Evil: Afterlife*. Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Kim Coates. USA. Screen Gems, 2010. Film.

*Resident Evil: Retribution*. Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Michelle Rodriguez, Kevin Durand, Sienna Guillory. USA. Screen Gems, 2012. Film.

*The Return of the Living Dead*. Dir. Dan O'Bannon. Perf. Clu Gulager, James Karen, Don Calfa, Thom Mathews. USA. Orion Pictures Corporation, 1985. Film.

*Shaun of the Dead*. Dir. Edgar Wright. Perf. Simon Pegg, Kate Ashfield, Lucy Davis, Nick Frost. UK/USA/France. Universal Pictures, 2004. Film.

*The Student of Prague*. Dir. Stellan Rye, Paul Wegener. Perf. Paul Wegener, John Gottowt, Grete Berger. Germany. 1913. Film.

*Superman: The Movie*. Dir. Richard Donner. Perf. Christopher Reeve, Marlon Brando, Gene Hackman, Margot Kidder. 1978. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2006. Film.

*Survival of the Dead*. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Alan van Sprang, Kenneth Welsh, Kathleen

Munroe, Devon Bostick. USA. Optimum Home Entertainment, 2010. Film.

*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Dir. Tobe Hooper. Perf. Marilyn Burns, Paul A. Partain, Edwin Neal, Jim Siedow. USA. Vortex, 1974. Film.

Vatos.” *The Walking Dead*. Dir. Johan Ranck. AMC. 21 Nov. 2010. Television.

*The Walking Dead*. By Frank Darabont. Perf. Andrew Lincoln, Jon Bernthal, Sarah Wayne Callies, Laurie Holden. AMC. October 31, 2010. Television.

*Warm Bodies*. Dir. Jonathan Levine. Perf. Nicholas Hoult, Teresa Palmer, Rob Corddry, Dave Franco. USA. Summit Entertainment, 2013. Film.

*Warning Sign*. (alternative title: *Biohazard*) Dir. Hal Barwood. Perf. Sam Waterston, Kathleen Quinlan, Yaphet Kotto. USA. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1985. Film.

*White Zombie*. Dir. Victor Halperin. Perf. Béla Lugosi, Madge Bellamy, John Harron, Joseph Cawthorn. USA. United Artists, 1932. Film.

*World War Z*. Dir. Marc Forster. Perf. Brad Pitt, Mireille Enos, James Badge Dale, Matthew Fox. USA. Paramount Pictures, 2013. Film.

*Zombie Flesh-Eaters*. (original title: *Zombi 2*) Dir. Lucio Fulci. Perf. Tisa Farrow, Ian McCulloch, Richard Johnson, Al Cliver. Italy. Blue Underground, 1979. Film.

*Zombieland*. Dir. Ruben Fleischer. Perf. Woody Harrelson, Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone, Abigail Breslin. USA. Columbia Pictures, 2009. Film.