Monster or Hero: A Post-Apocalyptic View in Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*

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Abstract

Human beings are surviving creatures. They will do whatever it takes to survive. However, as much as they are hell-bent on surviving, humans are also strangely fascinated with the concept of the apocalypse—that the world hosting us will one day cease to exist. This strange fascination with the apocalypse goes way back in history when ancient civilizations expressed their remarkable views regarding the apocalypse. The Mayans, for instance, foresaw the apocalypse thousands of years ago, when their calendar ended in 2012. Agitatedly, many people were globally closely anticipating the event in 2012. The apocalypse did not occur in 2012; yet, many people still wait for it to happen anytime soon. People's fascination with the apocalypse was also reflected in their literature. Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) is a good example of post-apocalyptic literature. In the current article, the author will start by setting the stage by discussing the philosophy of the post-apocalypse. Then, the author shall analyze the post-apocalyptic views in Richard Matheson's novel *I am Legend*. In the end, the author shall conclude with the feasibility of the post-apocalyptic scenario in the story, together with other possible scenarios in the world of literature. The present article aims to shed light on Matheson's scenario on the apocalypse, which significantly draws the reader's attention bearing in mind the COVID-19 scenario. So, to what extent does Matheson's apocalyptic scenario relate to our world today?
Keywords: Apocalypse, Post-apocalypse, Survivalism, *I am Legend*, Human Civilization

ملخص:

تم تصميم البشر ليكونوا مخلوقات تسعى للنجاة. سيفعلون ببساطة كل ما يلزم للبقاء على قيد الحياة. ومع ذلك، بقدر ما هم عازمون على البقاء على قيد الحياة، فإن البشر مفتونون بشكل غريب بمفهوم النهاية؛ بأن العالم الذي يستضيفنا سيتوقف يوما ما عن الوجود. في الواقع، يعود هذا الانبهار الغريب بنهاية العالم إلى الماضي في التاريخ البعيد حيث عبرت الحضارات القديمة عن آرائها الرائعة فيما يتعلق بنهاية العالم. على سبيل المثال، توقع شعب المايا نهاية العالم منذ آلاف السنين، حيث انتهى تقويمهم إلى عام 2012. كان الكثير من الناس في جميع أنحاء العالم متوقعين عن كثب الحدث الرئيسي في عام 2012. لم ينته العالم في عام 2012، ومع ذلك لا يزال الكثير من الناس يتوقعون حدوث ذلك في أي وقت قريب. كما انعكس افتتان الناس بنهاية العالم من خلال أدبياتهم. تعتبر رواية "أنا أسطورة"(1954) لريتشارد ماثيسون مثالا جيدا على أدب ما بعد نهاية العالم. في المقال الحالي، يبدأ المؤلف بتمهيد الطريق بالحديث عن فلسفة ما بعد نهاية العالم. بعد ذلك، سينتقل المؤلف إلى تحليل وجهات النظر لنظرية ما بعد نهاية العالم في رواية ريتشارد ماثيسون "أنا أسطورة". في النهاية، سيتوج المؤلف بجدوى سيناريو ما بعد نهاية العالم في الرواية، إلى جانب سيناريوهات أخرى محتملة في عالم الأدب. يهدف المقال الحالي إلى تسليط الضوء على سيناريو نهاية العالم لماثيسون، أين تكمن أهميته في مدى تذكير القارئ لأحداث كوفيد-19. إذن، إلى أي مدى يكون تجسيد سيناريو نهاية العالم لماثيسون قريبا من واقع العالم اليوم؟
الكلمات المفتاحية: نهاية العالم، ما بعد نهاية العالم، البقاء، أنا أسطورة، الحضارة الإنسانية.

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Introduction

An apocalyptic event strikes the world in which we live, leaving it more or less a lifeless wasteland that will most likely render it uninhabitable. There are countless scenarios for how the world might come to an end. The latter could come in the form of a nuclear war outbreak, where megacities would fall in a matter of days or even hours. The end could also take place as a result of a biological war, often with an unprecedented outbreak of a deadly virus, similar to what happened with COVID-19 a couple of years ago, paralyzing the entire world. The end could also take place, according to many conspiracy theorists, through their golden billion, believing that a cabal of rich and corrupt people is determined to drastically reduce the world's population by the millions, often by minimizing necessary resources and spreading poverty, diseases, and wars.

Post-apocalyptic fiction often tackles the possible scenarios of how survivors would live in a world after the major apocalypse left it a wasteland. Therefore, the apocalypse is not equal to the end of the world in a permanent way. Rather, it means that the world as we know it nowadays will end, leaving it in a state of desolation, often as the ultimate result of people's evil doings. In this sense, post-apocalyptic fiction deals with the mechanisms and strategies that would enable survivors of the apocalypse to survive. Romanzi (2023, p. 312) better describes the post-apocalyptic world, arguing that people in the post-apocalyptic world will have to survive; that "the few human survivors must fend off continuous attacks by the mutants and other violent communities, trying to defend themselves from the aggressive power of "savagery."

Based on the statement mentioned above, the post-apocalyptic world would be a wasteland, and survivors would have to struggle to navigate the different hazardous challenges imposed by the new post-apocalyptic environment. Life is not easy, nor will it be any easier in the post-apocalyptic world. Going through some of the possible apocalyptic scenarios mentioned earlier, survivors will have to deal with some of the most terminal scenarios that could jeopardize the very existence of the human race.

In the event of a nuclear war outbreak, survivors would have to deal with threats like acid rains, hazardous materials, contaminated waters, and countless genetic mutations that would inflict horrific diseases upon all living entities for thousands of years yet to come. A biological war outbreak could not be less deadly. In the event of a sudden outbreak of some miscellaneous pandemic, the genetics of many living creatures, humans included, could be irreversibly altered for thousands of years to come. There are endless atrocious scenarios lurking in the human race and the entire ecological system in the post-apocalyptic world, and none of these scenarios seem promising. The post-apocalyptic world is a wasteland anyway, and any other talk will be a schoolboy talk given the various warning signs, such as rapid climate change, endless political and military crises around the world, and the deteriorating social and economic situations of many countries around the world, making them vulnerable to the arising challenges. Again, all these well-founded fears and solid speculations have been well-reflected in the literature.

Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) is another example of a novel portraying an apocalyptic-surviving hero trying to make it through in a challenging, alienating urban environment. Matheson's brilliant portrayal of a possible post-apocalyptic scenario has entitled him to be one of the most talented writers who have succeeded in drawing a near-reality apocalyptic scenario, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought post-

apocalyptic novels back to the spotlight.

Matheson's *I Am Legend* was published in 1954, that is in the wake of World War II. During this period in the US, science fiction regained popularity, and numerous heroes were brought to light. These heroes had one mission which was to protect good and fight evil. That meant any threat menacing the continental US and its interests domestically and overseas. Shipley and Williams (2023, p. 107) assert that "*I Am Legend* was not the first post-apocalyptic last-man story, but it was published at a time when the threat of existential apocalypse in the form of nuclear war became real for everyone." During those turbulent times, the US was facing imminent threats, such as the ramifications of World War II, the Cold War, and socialism. Even when these threats seemed to many to be exaggerated and quite unrealistic, science fiction heroes had to fight against them, and the American public was charged and ready to join this honorable fight against possible evil.

Robert Neville, who took it upon himself to save the remaining members of humanity from dire extinction, is revealed to be immune from the deadly virus that has turned everybody on planet Earth into walking-dead vampires. Being the last surviving human being on planet Earth, Neville is determined to understand what led to the sudden, deadly outbreak of the virus. After plunging into an excessive series of experiments, he finally understands that the virus resulted from a vampirical bacteria that passed to humans through mosquitoes and storm dust.

In Matheson's novel, the tragedy lies in the fact that not only have the great majority of people turned into these creatures, so-called vampires but also that most of them were Neville's friends and neighbors who looked just as human as him. These vampires had the appearance of humans but non-human traits, such as intolerance towards sunlight and extreme vulnerability towards crosses, garlic, and holy water. After realizing their deadly weaknesses, Robert Neville does not hesitate to exterminate hundreds of vampires who were once his neighbors and friends and who were once humans.

The vampires in Matheson's novel are not essentially evil creatures. They are characterized as creatures driven by non-stop blood thirst. Yet, coming to look at it, these poor creatures were victims themselves. They did not choose to be turned into vampires; rather, they were victims of a deadly virus that dehumanized them. This is probably why, at the end of the novel, Neville accepts his fate to die at the hands of the vampires' community as an act of justice for killing hundreds of them.

Matheson's novel was a reflection of his times. The post-apocalyptic novel often rises in times of turmoil and crises. Triggered by sorrowful events like World War II and the Cold War, Matheson, in his way, foresaw the apocalypse around 1976, especially in light of the imminent threat of a nuclear thermal war; a threat still existent. According to the post-apocalyptic genre, life cannot go any further without a major apocalypse—without a reboot. The world has exhausted its vital resources; therefore, it deserves a second chance where creatures, humans included, would have to start over. According to Alt (2023, p. 904), "the apocalypse is already here, that we already inhabit the end of the world, and ought to explore new ways of living 'after' apocalypse." However, starting over may not be as easy as it sounds, for the post-apocalypse remains unknown to us, and endeavors such as Matheson's remain fiction-based scenarios that could constitute one percent of the real post-apocalypse.

In the present article, the researcher will strive to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the possible post-apocalyptic scenarios that may or may not take place

in the future?

2. Does fiction possess solid grounds upon which it builds its post-apocalyptic speculations? Or does it remain fiction and have nothing to do with reality?

3. In the event of an apocalypse taking place, what scenario is closest to reality?

In an attempt to find answers to these questions, the following objectives are aimed for:

1. The possible post-apocalyptic scenarios are biological war, nuclear thermal war, and a natural disaster triggered by climate change.

2. Fiction does possess solid grounds upon which it builds its post-apocalyptic speculations, for it is a reflection of its times of crises and turmoil.

3. The most probable post-apocalyptic scenario taking place is one that is triggered by a biological war, and COVID-19 backs up this scenario.

Post-apocalypse as Genre

Since the beginning of time, people have always been fascinated by the idea of the world coming to an end. This peculiar intrigue with the end of the world, besides its seeming thrilling side, is another fact of humans' mortality and their inclination toward the end. It is widely believed that life will cease to exist one day, at least in its present form; how and when is the main purpose of the current article? Believers in the post-apocalypse are strongly convinced that the post-apocalypse will soon take place, and the more the world becomes a hard and hostile place to live in, the closer the post-apocalypse becomes.

According to the believers in the post-apocalypse, a major apocalyptic event will be triggered by a thermal nuclear war, a biological war, a disastrous tsunami, an explosive meteor shooting down the Earth, a pandemic resulting from a virus escaping from some secret laboratory, aliens invading the Earth, a demonic invasion, etc. All these and other hundreds of scenarios would have to trigger the major apocalyptic event, which in turn would have to set the stage for the post-apocalypse. The latter would have to turn life on Earth into an uninhabitable and hostile wasteland.

People's fascination with these scenarios has gained increasing popularity, especially in literature, films, music, and even video games. In literature, the popularity of the post-apocalyptic genre has risen to its full potential. In only two decades, between 2000 and 2020, the number of post-apocalyptic novels published is staggering. Starting with Demons (2000) by John Shirley, Vampire Earth (2003) by E.E. Knight, Metro 2033 (2005) by Dmitry Glukhovsky, World War Z (2006) by Max Brooks, The Hunger Games Trilogy (2008) by Suzanne Collins, The Passage (2010) by Justin Cronin, Robopocalypse (2011) by Daniel H. Wilson, Zoo (2012) by James Patterson, Ectopia (2013) by Martin Goodman, Dawn of the Planet of the Apes: Firestorm (2014) by Greg Keyes, The Water Knife (2015) by Paolo Bacigalupi, Heartless (2016) by Marissa Meyer, The End We Start From (2017) by Megan Hunter, Severance (2018) by Ling Ma, The Last (2019) by Hanna Jameson, and Leave the World Behind (2020) by Rumaan Alam.

This unusual proliferation of post-apocalyptic fiction is strikingly odd. Another way of approaching the post-apocalyptic wasteland world is that it would probably be a den of monsters. If the apocalypse is viewed as the end or death of the world, then the post-apocalypse would probably be the house of dead people—in other words, monsters. In his book Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, Fredrick Nietzsche (2002) better

explains that trying to survive in a world of monsters or fighting them would lead everyone to be monsters themselves: "Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you" (p. 69).

Taking into account the fact that the post-apocalyptic world is going to be a lawless wasteland that is free from any governing body, such as the police or army, the chaotic nature of the post-apocalypse is another prominent feature of the post-apocalyptic novel. There is hardly any novel of the genre that does not portray the post-apocalyptic world as an uninhabitable place for normal people. Instead, this world is very often portrayed as challenging and a very dangerous place to be. Survivors in the post-apocalypse would have to endure even more horrifying atrocities than the major apocalypse itself.

As a genre, post-apocalyptic fiction is more inclined towards becoming gloomier, where the major events usually take place in macabre scenes. Since post-apocalyptic fiction often deals with the aftermath of the world, with the latter being destroyed by a major calamitous event, it usually involves events that would most probably be considered unforeseen and supernatural. According to the online Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.), the apocalypse is "a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, especially. on a global scale; a cataclysm. Also, in weakened use."

Furthermore, post-apocalyptic fiction is most often backed by biblical philosophy, as described in the revelation of St. John as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The latter would be resurrected to destroy the evil incarnated in the Anti-Christ. Thus, and once again in a chaotic world free from peace and order, post-apocalyptic fiction often tackles issues related to the eternal fight between good and evil. In this biblical battle, good would have to struggle to find its way through victory once and for all.

In this sense, post-apocalyptic fiction describes the harsh conditions survivors would have to live in the hostile ruins of the old world. The new post-apocalyptic world has to be entirely the opposite of the old world, and so luxuries pertinent to the old world, such as electricity, clean water, public transportation, abundant food, etc., are now longed for. But, most importantly, security systems no longer exist in the post-apocalyptic world. Since the old world society system has fallen, people are now in charge of their security and survival; for now, they are on their own.

Referring back to religious texts, Islamic eschatology has also provided significant prophecies to help survivors make it through the harsh and unfriendly conditions in the post-apocalyptic world. The holy Qur'an did not miss the opportunity to prophesy a major apocalypse, which is usually going to be the battle of a lifetime and is usually referred to in Arabic as Al-Malhama or Armageddon. This battle is one between good and evil, where goodwill most definitely triumphs over evil, and the world will be once again reconstituted and brought back into normalcy and order.

In addition, the post-apocalyptic genre often deals with the restlessness of man regarding a boundaryless society. In such chaotic times, boundaries will be lost, and once again, people will have to define their boundaries. People were always fighting to the death over land to define new boundaries where they would feel secure and have new meanings for their existence. In this sense, the post-apocalyptic man goes back to his colonial pre-existent nature, where he would plunge into an endless quest of colonizing and taming the new world brought

by the post-apocalypse. In her book *Undead Ends: Stories of Apocalypse*, Sarah Trimble (2019) argues:

> The frightening proliferation of possible worlds that arises from Post-apocalyptic terrain—the ruins Man makes but disavows. The narrative production of savage bodies and landscapes allows colonial Man to project excess and disorder as emanating from elsewhere—a projection that authorizes his violence. (p. 26)

Therefore, the once-longed-for utopian world is now nothing but a mere dystopian, unproductive, and uninhabitable wilderness, where man is no longer on top of the food chain. The post-apocalyptic genre seeks to project man-made, chaotic ruins emerging in light of the old world. In this new world, everyone and everything seem to be colliding and at the same time falling apart, and it is up to man to bring everything into order and place himself once again on top of all species. However, this is not as easy as it may seem, since the primary objective of man would be to try to survive and secure the daily basic sustenance of food and water.

Post-apocalypse: Reality vs. Science Fiction

As a genre, post-apocalyptic fiction is not regarded as a separate genre on its own. Instead, it is often considered to be a sub-genre of science fiction. The latter is a popular literary genre that gained popularity starting in the first half of the nineteenth century. The trend was mostly popularized by Mary Shelley's famous Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (1818). Science fiction is usually a genre where the author tries to convince the reader of possible scenarios, often involving scientific experimentation that usually goes wrong. Whereas, with post-apocalyptic fiction, the author often tries to convince the reader of possible and plausible futuristic scenarios, usually of a catastrophic and disastrous nature.

Post-apocalyptic fiction is rather different from science fiction in that the post-apocalyptic genre is closer to reality than science fiction. It draws in a near-rational image of possible future scenarios that often involve gloomy outcomes. In his book Maternity in the Post-Apocalypse: Novelistic Re-visions of Dystopian Motherhood, Mitchell (2002) better explains that "the post-apocalypse genre is a genre that by definition generates images of possible futures based on our choices today" (pp. 2–3).

Based on Mitchell's definition of post-apocalyptic fiction, the genre tends to draw attention towards futuristic possible scenarios based on the deteriorating man-made reality in the present. This means that, unlike science fiction, which is mostly based on fiction with a rare reference to reality, post-apocalyptic fiction only predicts a worse future, which is usually seen as the most probable outcome, often involving factual signs from the present. In this regard, it is safe to say that post-apocalyptic fiction is more real than science fiction could ever be.

In a time when science fiction is all about imaginary spaceships and aliens and supernatural paranormal activities, post-apocalyptic fiction focuses much on drawing a gloomier outline of the future, where people would transform into survivors, whose main mission in life besides changing the world for the better would be to provide the basic needs for their survival. No one knows for sure what the world would be like in the post-apocalyptic era; however, the post-apocalyptic genre has predicted many scenarios, and all of them mostly carry a dark and gloomier nature.

Moreover, delving more into the post-apocalyptic narrative, the latter is further dissected into multiple diverging discourses. Many post-apocalyptic fans prefer to believe that the major

apocalyptic event will be triggered by a major catastrophic calamity, such as a tsunami that would be provoked by a devastating earthquake or some unprecedented meteor striking Earth. However, this rhetoric strongly differentiates between an ordinary catastrophe, which is often localized, and a major globalized event that usually leaves devastating results. As Mary Manjikian (2012) puts it, "One man's apocalypse may be merely another man's ordinary day in the developing world" (p. 42).

In this regard, post-apocalyptic fiction deals with those catastrophic events that take place on a global scale, thus having more calamitous consequences, especially in the long run. Part of the reason why post-apocalyptic fiction has gained rising popularity recently, especially as compared to science fiction, is that post-apocalyptic speculations are often backed up with events already taking place in the present. Take, for instance, COVID-19, whose impact is still existent and quite fresh in people's memories even though it was over two years ago. The outbreak of the pandemic reinforced the conspiracy theories.

Many post-apocalyptic believers hold a firm belief that the major apocalyptic event will be the result of a man-made conspiracy. Like COVID-19, a lot of calamitous events are suspected to be some act of sabotage; however, many of them remain hard to prove. Somehow, a virus like Chicken Pox will be suspiciously released from some secret laboratory; that would result in the tragic deaths of millions of people (Atwood, 2003, p. 265). These types of mutated viruses usually have secret and unnatural effects, making the infected vulnerable to instant death.

In the end, the post-apocalyptic genre has blown the whistle on the factual dangers of an imminent apocalypse taking place. According to this genre, the world is running out of resources, especially with the number of the global population rising to the point where there would be no further room for the rapidly increasing population. The political world is raging, the global economy is colliding, and technology is advancing. It is only a matter of time before this technology turns against its creator. The technological apocalypse is another theory endorsed by the post-apocalyptic genre. According to this theory, a machine or some highly advanced computer would outsmart its human creators and ultimately turn against them, causing the entire modern civilization to crumble.

Post-apocalyptic Genre: A Reflection of Social Anxieties and Traumas

It is hard for any genre not to be in connection with its social context. As with any other genre, the post-apocalyptic genre is a reflection of its social context. By the time Matheson published I Am Legend (1954), already social, geopolitical, and military unrest was at its peak. The atrocities and traumas of World War II were still fresh and constantly haunting the memories of those who survived the war and even those who only heard about it. The haunted memories were even further disturbed by the emerging Cold War, which warned of a new ongoing conflict that could threaten the existence of what was left of human civilization, being global-scale thermal warfare.

The speculative genre of post-apocalyptic fiction is a direct critique of contemporary social and political situations. It is through this type of genre that the reader can read through the lived experiences of writers and their milieu (Mitchell, 2022, p. 13). In this regard, post-apocalyptic fiction becomes a window through which the reader can peek through, only to see that the fears and anxieties are well-founded and are a mere reflection of the traumas that haunted the memories of so many generations ahead to come.

As argued before, the post-apocalyptic genre is most often linked with traumas, anxieties, and fears, whether already experienced or about to be. In either case, fear is prevalent and very well-founded. Throughout history, people have experienced endless moments of unrest and distress. Especially for the past hundred years and up until now, more conflicts and unrest have been rising, contributing to the already-existent anxieties and thus fueling more trauma.

It is strange how the post-apocalyptic genre has picked up its popularity through the notion of anxiety and trauma. As much as the term trauma brings fear and unrest to people, the genre seems to be more favored because it reflects people's traumas and expresses their factual fears of what the future might hold for them: "The term "trauma" carries great currency, being used to describe a diverse and diffuse range of experiences, including war, natural disasters, terrorism, child abuse, cultural change, and social unrest" (King, 2012, p. 5).

Furthermore, it is commonly known that the post-apocalyptic genre is strongly connected to the two genres of science fiction and horror. It is also worth mentioning that it is hard to deal with the post-apocalyptic genre without referring back to the social context in the meantime. As argued before, the post-apocalyptic genre has gained rising popularity among people because it assuages people's anxieties and fears. A good example would be the post-apocalyptic genre in filmmaking. Numerous studies have shown that post-apocalyptic films have raised higher revenues as compared to other film genres.

Science fiction and horror films have witnessed lucrative production, gaining significant revenues. This unusual popularity of the genre drew the attention of many critics, who have pondered the secret behind its sudden popularity. As a result, these critics have concluded that the secret lies in the fact that these genre films are a product of their social context. The critics have also revealed that people's interest in these genre films is because these films reflect their own psychological and social anxieties and traumas (Wright, 1986, p. 60).

In addition, science fiction is arguably not about science at all. Many science fiction novels tackle issues of science experiments that often go wrong, thus creating some sort of monster. However, science fiction as a genre deals at its core with disaster. Post-apocalyptic fiction has, at its core, disastrous elements as well. Therefore, the post-apocalyptic genre is a reflection of social anxieties and traumas, however, on a large global scale. In other words, post-apocalyptic warfare tackles worldwide anxieties that usually result from global crises, such as pandemics or mass weapon destruction.

Global traumatic threats are best embodied in global nuclear thermal warfare. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II remain a constant reminder of what mass trauma is about. Nuclear thermal annihilation is probably the most feared imminent threat that remains looming on the near horizon. With the global geopolitical unrest, more fears and anxieties are rising, which are being reflected in the post-apocalyptic genre, whether through fiction or film.

In this regard, the notion of disaster inherent in post-apocalyptic fiction is strongly connected with trauma, wherein it "lurk[s] the deepest anxieties about contemporary existence" (Sontag, 1966, p. 154). Yet, disaster is not only about nuclear thermal annihilation threats; rather, disaster comes in other forms and shapes that the post-apocalyptic genre struggles to represent. And despite its gloomy nature carrying possible futuristic threats to mankind, the post-apocalyptic genre still proves to be gaining more popularity, thus taking it out of the conspiracy theory accusations.

Post-apocalyptic Element of Survivalism

The element of survivalism is prevalent in the post-apocalyptic genre. People who would survive the major apocalypse are often called survivors, for they would survive imminent threats. However, surviving the major apocalyptic event would be only the start, since survivors in the post-apocalypse would have to endure greater challenges and much more imminent threats. In this sense, surviving in the post-apocalypse would reach the point of trying to secure the daily minimum of food and water.

Besides the element of survivalism, the post-apocalyptic genre often broaches the topic of heroism. In the post-apocalyptic novel, the hero is usually a survivor who tries desperately to find a cure or a solution in a post-apocalyptic world that is already falling apart. Being a survivor himself, the hero not only has to secure the minimum of the daily stock of food and water but also has to devote the rest of his time to trying to find the possible causes of the major apocalypse, only to find a cure or solution by which to save the remaining humanity.

According to Mick Broderick (1993), hero mythology has been adherent to the post-apocalyptic genre since the 1980s (p. 373). However, Matheson's novel I Am Legend proves that hero mythology existed long before. In the novel, Robert Neville, a survivor, took it upon himself to study what caused the widespread pandemic that turned everybody he once knew into night-hunting vampires. However, as much as he hated to do it, Neville did not hesitate to terminate these vampires who were once his neighbors, family members, or friends.

With great remorse, he killed them to survive. In the end, it would be either him or them who died. On his routine of breaking into houses and searching for vampires to kill them, he found a vampire woman who looked human just like him. Dragging her by her hair, he throws her outside in the daylight, leaving her agonizing to death:

> All right, she's suffering; he argued with himself, but she's one of them, and she'd kill me gladly if she got the chance. You've got to look at it that way; it's the only way. Teeth clenched, he stood there and watched her die. (Matheson, 1954, p. 36)

This is a part of the survival issues the post-apocalyptic hero has to deal with. Being one of the last survivors on planet Earth and doing whatever it takes to survive and find a cure for the malignant virus, Neville turns into a legend, where he accepts his fate to be terminated by the same vampires he has been hunting for so long. Moreover, Robert Neville fits Broderick's description of a post-apocalyptic hero. Essentially, he was a male who rejected social conformities by refusing to be a part of the vampire group. In times when the vampires would gather every night around Neville's house in an attempt to dissuade him, thus forcing him to succumb to their demands, Neville refused the temptations and continued to hunt them down every time there was a chance for it.

To turn into a hero in the post-apocalypse, the hero must acquire a set of remarkable traits and sharp skills that would allow him to be the hero he desires to be. According to Broderick (1993), a post-apocalyptic hero is someone who has witnessed and survived persecution caused by forces of evil, such as rape, murder, or kidnapping of beloved ones. The post-apocalyptic hero has also witnessed crimes that he was unable to prevent. His main objectives are self-preservation and to survive in the wilderness through a set of skills and strength. While trying to survive, the post-apocalyptic hero is glad to fight the forces of evil whenever chance allows it. Broderick further explains that this type of hero often ventures to rescue innocent people

from the hands of evil, yet often by chance and not quite deliberately; this makes him awkward in the eyes of others (p. 378).

In the case of Robert Neville, he witnessed his little daughter's body being incinerated after she was infected. His wife turned into a vampire, and she was killed by Neville himself. In this sense, the vampires and what they represent as infectious diseases are somehow the direct cause of his afflictions. Refusing to be a part of them, despite their endless attempts to dissuade him, is a confirmation of him putting all the blame for his tribulations on them. In other words, Robert Neville became the vampires' obsession, and at the same time, the vampires were his. This reciprocal analogy is one of the post-apocalyptic hero complex tragedies, where good and evil are in an eternal relationship of obsession.

Therefore, and based on Broderick's description of the post-apocalyptic hero, Robert's tragedies and tribulations were, in a sense, the incentive for him to choose sides in the eternal fight between good and evil. By choosing to fight the vampires and not giving in to their constant temptations to join them, Robert once again proves himself capable of fending off the forces of evil. All by himself, Robert survived as any other hero would, and even with his death at the hands of the vampires, Robert turns into a legend, and once again, his nemesis loses.

Alienation and Otherness: Key Elements in the Post-apocalypse

Survivors of the post-apocalypse, mostly heroes, are essentially alienated and otherized. They are alienated from their previous world, from which they were plucked, and put in a desolate, melancholic universe where they would have to start over. The post-apocalyptic world is a wilderness of alienation and otherness in the sense that it transforms into an alien, lifeless world with entirely new challenges. Survivors would have to learn to adapt to the new environment all over again, which means it could take them another millennium to tame this new wild environment.

Living in a subverted new landscape, survivors in the post-apocalypse would not only have to endure the fact that their once-home is now an alien, dangerous planet, but also the fact that they would face the danger of dehumanization. In Matheson's I Am Legend, most people have turned into night-crawling vampires who are hell-bent on turning the remaining healthy ones into their kind. Robert Neville, who represents the last man standing, has become a legend in the sense that he chose to die rather than be dehumanized.

Survivors like Robert turn into heroes by otherizing and dehumanizing other survivors. In the novel, the vampires are also survivors. It is true that they died and then were reincarnated into vampires; however, to some extent, they were survivors in the post-apocalypse who were being otherized, dehumanized, and killed by survivors like Robert Neville. Starting from chapter one, Matheson (1954) referred to the vampires as "they." "On those cloudy days, Robert Neville was never sure when sunset came, and sometimes they were in the streets before he could get back" (p. 7). The same thing can be pretty much said regarding the otherized vampires; to them, survivors like Robert were also otherized and therefore considered a rightful target whenever chance allowed it.

Either way, the notion of dehumanization involves the total absence of order and social values, thus leaving whoever survives the apocalypse living in a total state of anarchy. Having said that, the apocalyptic event would not only obliterate most people but also social values and human codes, together with social systems such as institutions, police, the military, and so on.

Therefore, it would not seem unusual to observe people breaking through shopping malls or pharmacies and taking whatever they need when the apocalypse takes place.

The idea of otherizing the other shows how anarchy is prevalent in the post-apocalyptic world. For that matter, otherized entities such as vampires or zombies are usually portrayed as non-human. These creatures do not talk like normal people would; instead, they make sounds close to monsters. In addition, unlike human beings, and as a result of the disease, vampires have developed an unusual sensitivity toward sunlight, silver, and garlic. This is quite observed, especially when they die, where they would agonize in pain with their skin changing color and die immediately. However, these vampires were once humans, and catching the disease was their fault in the first place, they were not lucky enough to be immune like Robert and a few others left.

The strange thing is that uninfected survivors like Robert grew harsher, forgetting that these vampires were once his neighbors, friends, and family members and that killing them brought a certain kind of pleasure. In one of his daily routines of breaking into houses in search of them to kill them, Robert finds a vampire woman. After he drags her and gives her a good beating, he throws her into the sunlight to die in agony. While watching her suffer in pain, the disturbing scene brings him a certain satisfaction, and after she dies, "he straightened up with a thin smile" (Matheson, 1954, p. 36).

By enjoying the killing, Matheson warns that the post-apocalypse will only bring chaos and disorder. Robert, who is portrayed as a survivalist hero, is also reported to be anti-social in the sense that he detached himself from the otherized vampires; he did not even try to help them by trying to find a possible cure. Instead, he immersed himself in the game of who would kill the other first. Robert also detached himself from other human survivors when he forgot his main mission of finding other human survivors; instead, he was hell-bent on exterminating the maximum number of vampires, allowing himself to fall into their hands and eventually failing to survive.

Furthermore, to protect himself from the threats of the vampires, Neville barricades his house, turning it into a fortified fortress against possible dangers. This situation further alienates "Neville [the fact], which underscores his isolation and alienation and reaffirms understanding of trauma as producing social detachment that cuts off the survivor "from all human community" (King, 2012, p. 49). Failing to survive and adapt to the new circumstances and challenges, Robert fails as a hero to try to find a cure for the spreading virus. However, he transcends to become a legend, refusing to succumb to the vampires and becoming one of them.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the post-apocalyptic genre has proven to be effective in drawing the speculations closest to reality. According to this genre, it does not matter which post-apocalyptic scenario would take place, as much as the fact that it would take place. The post-apocalyptic world would be a desolate, lifeless, and hostile environment, a fact that calls for a hero. The latter would also be a survivor in the first place, and it is up to this hero to survive and fight against the forces of evil. One of the hero's main missions would also be to find a cure or a solution to the major problem that caused the apocalyptic event in the first place.

In Matheson's I Am Legend (1954), Robert Neville is portrayed as a complete hero by definition. He was essentially a survivor; he was also fighting against the forces of evil

embodied in the vampires, and he was trying to find a possible cure for the spreading pandemic by trying to study and locate the bacteria causing the virus. Furthermore, like any other hero, Robert's tragic incidents include witnessing his only daughter's body incinerated after she was infected, and then his wife turning into a vampire and having to kill her himself. All these sorrowful events helped shape the hero he became.

However, in becoming a hero, Robert was further detached from everything he once knew. Having survived many atrocities, he lost his social codes and plunged into a series of mutual acts of violence against the vampires. The latter became Robert's nemesis par excellence, and it was only a matter of time before one of them would terminate the other. Since Robert was one of the last human survivors, if not the only one left, he ultimately fell into the hands of his archenemies and accepted the fact that he was dying with honor, thus becoming a legend.

Matheson's post-apocalyptic scenario of a pandemic outbreak is shared by many other critics and writers. The scenario of biological warfare is most probable, especially in light of what happened two years ago with COVID-19. The outbreak of the pandemic brought back post-apocalyptic thoughts, thus diffusing deniers' thoughts on conspiracy theories. The pandemic, which brought the entire world to a halt for two years was no joke. Moreover, with China and Russia rising, nuclear thermal warfare is most unlikely to take place because it would only mean shredding the world apart. Therefore, biological warfare remains the closest to reality, where many people believe that COVID-19 was just its first-phase initiation plan.

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