

2008

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Recommended Citation

Castellana, Christina (2008) "Holding On to Self: The Masculine Drive in "Investigating Jericho" and I Am Legend," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 10 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol10/iss1/4>

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Cover Page Footnote

Christina Castellana is a graduate of the University of South Florida. An avid reader and a passionate writer, she hopes to publish her own novel some day. She currently lives in St. Petersburg, FL where she is a reporter for the Northeast Journal.

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Vampire literature deals with the human condition. Vampires are the quintessence of human fears and fantasies, and the stories about these mysterious creatures draw a fine line between the undead and the living. Vampire literature speaks to the human condition especially when the characters remain true to their convictions. A writer may want to change the characters' paths in order to suit the writer's desires, but this only retards the characters from completely developing as real and tangible people. In “Dear Frontiers: Letters from Women Fantasy and Science Fiction Writers,” Chelsea Quinn Yarbro writes that every fiction writer should create characters that follow, without interruption, their own paths to triumph or doom (71). Morton Symes from “Investigating Jericho” and Robert Neville from *I Am Legend* are characters that stay true to who they are and fervently believe that their efforts, though seemingly delusional from the reader's standpoint, will prove triumphant in the end. Both authors (Yarbro and Richard Matheson respectively) allow their main characters to lay the narrative bricks that form the path to their own, individual destinies. These characters' dedicated pursuit to maintain a routine comfort zone in their rapidly shifting realities proves that they cannot and will not change who they are despite the changes that occur around them.

In “The Gilda Stories: Revealing the Monsters at the Margins,” Miriam Jones asserts that this resistance to change pushes the main characters into the margins of their realities (153). Symes' and Neville's individual efforts to remain unchanged force those in their surroundings to shift reality without them; and this change displaces both, forcing them to exist in the outer limits where they will face the consequences of their choice to resist this cultural shift. Symes and Neville fervently believe their efforts to save their towns will prove fruitful and triumphant; however, this is impossible when both men become displaced minorities in their new worlds.

Symes is an interesting character because his mind operates in only one mode. His life revolves around numbers. He is comforted by numbers because they are predictable and stable. As long as there is a formula to follow, Symes can solve any problem. When something unfamiliar, unpredictable and unnatural occurs, Symes tries to justify these happenings through the terms that rule his work and his life. How can the problem be vampires when the mathematical probability of these creatures actually existing is slim? Symes' logic is marred by his philosophically narrow mind. His desire

to cling to his ideas shows that he clutches order. This drives him as an IRS agent and as a man because that is what he does best – nothing can tamper with his mission.

Symes' goal is to raise this little New England village from the depths of economic despair: "I have to be prepared to work with these people on their terms, Mr. Brewster. I don't want them to think that we have no sympathy for their plight, or that we're punitive in our methods. These people need our help, sir. They need social services and housing grants and emergency funds to keep the whole place from turning into a graveyard" (Yarbro 301). He does not realize that the village is already a graveyard full of the undead. One might say that Symes' efforts are commendable to an extent, but his attempts to save the village meet with defeat because what he thinks the problem is and what *is* actually happening are not the same.

Symes is driven by the idea of achieving hero-status. He wants the respect of his boss and praise from the people he wants to save: "He permitted himself a flight of fancy: his work with the townspeople had earned him their respect and possibly the affection of some, and he was regarded as their welcome outsider on his annual returns. Returns. He chuckled at his own mental pun" (Yarbro 289). Symes' motivation is selfish: he wants to be idolized for his investigative and mathematical skills. On the contrary, his beliefs about this poor village are completely off-mark and do not add-up; in the end, he becomes the fool who will not accept or realize his fate. As Joan Gordon suggests in "Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth: The Vampire in Search of Its Mother," "The victim loses its identity and life to the extent that it invites its victimization" (52). This is just one equation Symes cannot figure out – even though the answer is fang-deep into him.

Like a bloodhound on the hunt, Symes enjoys investigating Jericho. He applies his investigative algorithms to everyone he meets until he figures out how they fit into his puzzle. Once he meets Hewlitt Wainwright, the mystery behind Jericho's drastic decline is reduced to one sentence: "With or without the embellishments, the story was basically a simple one: when the mill was closed, jobs and money disappeared, and most of Jericho was lost" (307). The Wainwrights, coming from old money, have been supporting the villagers for years. This explanation creates a tidy, compact conclusion for the IRS investigator. The absence of a healthy economy in Jericho is wrapped around Symes' mind like a practical python slowly killing its prey. Morton Symes is so utterly focused on his task that he cannot see what is really happening, even when it happens to him:

The room grew darker and darker as the three of them conversed. Morton soon began to lose track of what he was trying to say...He noticed his host and hostess hovered close to him, which he decided was flattering, since it was not typical of New Englanders. He could feel them bend over him ... Ilona Wainwright fussing with his tie to loosen it, her stare boring into him as she did. "Not too much, my dearest," Morton heard Hewlett say, "Not all at once, remember." (308)

After Ilona feeds on Symes' blood they take him to the room in the Inn where he is staying. He wakes up the next morning feeling terribly ill and weak; his fingers shake

as he tries to shave – “when he was through he had several minor nicks, including one on his neck that bleed more persistently than the others” (309). One would think that as an investigator, Symes would take his condition more seriously; but on the contrary, he is so blinded by his mission that he cannot see. Instead of reviewing the events from the night before, he thinks his “waxy pallor” (309) is due to a poor diet, and later finds himself indulging in a heaping helping of steak tartar.

Perhaps Symes truly wishes to understand what is happening to him, but he cannot because his mind cannot fathom something that seems ridiculous and archaic. To think that vampires are periodically drinking his blood is ludicrous because it sounds too folkloric. Symes comes from an age of computers, calculators, and sheets filled with rows of precise numbers that represent life; he believes numbers buttress the very existence of the universe and all its inhabitants, so when there is an absence of numbers, there is an absence of life and the chaos that springs from this absence of order works to destroy the inherent formula of the universe.

Symes sees himself as a crusading deacon of advanced society, and feels it is his destiny to save the dilapidated, backward town of Jericho. Consider the biblical injunction “Cursed before the LORD be anyone who tries to build this city – this Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!” (Joshua 6.26). Symes views the lack of currency and credit cards as a problem that endangers the very foundation of capitalism, and to save this poor town from the clutches of economic turmoil is to repair and preserve the will and strength of the American industrialists. The IRS is an economic watchdog and when it sniffs out something foul, it is quick to retaliate. Ilona came from a cold and desolate Carpathian castle and created her own Carpathian village across the shores where commerce and capitalism are not required for her survival. Symes believes he is fighting the breakdown of capitalism, but his real threat is Ilona and her assailing version of communism in which human blood is both food and currency. He is confident that the omnipotence of numbers will quench his sexual desires: “How he longed for his computer screen and the safe haven of dependable, sensible, bloodless figures. The impression of Ilona Wainwright’s curving mouth and brilliant eyes could be exorcized by columns of numbers” (317).

Perhaps the reason for Symes’ unflinching ignorance and inability to analyze his predicament originates from his childhood. When Hewlett Wainwright asks Symes what he did on Saturday afternoons as a child, the IRS agent replies that he was a boy scout. Hewlett, on the other hand, spent many of his younger years seeking refuge in the movie theater. Hewlett enjoyed films like *Godzilla* and *Dracula*, movies that Symes had never seen. This dissimilarity in childhood activities explains why Symes is unaware of what is happening to him. Hewlett was exposed to films that portrayed the possibility of mystical creatures. He was exposed to the fantastic, and the fantastic came true. Movies about myths and the unnatural were not a practical part of Symes’ life in any shape or form. Instead, he spent time learning about the ways of the woods and occasionally went to the roller-skating rink. Ideas of blood-sucking vampires never entered his mind because he was raised differently. “[My parents] believed that children should be outside, doing

wholesome things when we weren't in school" (318). Thus he spent his days in the sun while Hewlitt spent his days in dark theaters, watching mysterious, alluring and unconventional creatures on film.

Symes' upbringing and incessant reliance on mathematical truth are the reasons for his present circumstances and his unceasing defiance of the Wainwrights. From his perspective, the idea of being a vampire's victim is something too preposterous to imagine:

For the first time, Hewlitt became impatient. "Damn it, man, are you really as ignorant as you appear? Are you really unaware of what has happened to you?" "I...don't know what you're talking about. And if," Morton went on, suddenly certain that all these peculiar sidesteps were intended to keep him from his investigation, "it's your plan to withhold the figures the IRS has requested, you're going to be very disappointed." (319)

When Hewlitt finally tells Morton Symes that he, his wife and the whole town of Jericho are vampires, Symes reacts the only way he knows how: "'It's ridiculous,' said Morton flatly. 'You'll have to come up with something better than that. And if you persist with so absurd a story, you will not find the IRS at all sympathetic'" (320). Symes never budes from his beliefs; he remains strong in his convictions, true to his identity and suffers the consequences of trying to resurrect a place that wants to be left alone.

Akin to Morton Symes, Robert Neville in *I Am Legend* also wants to be a super hero – perhaps even a savior. He sees his town overtaken by the undead and he works to reclaim his land and his human identity through ceaseless routine. Even though Neville is unaware of his being forced into the margins of his reality, he is able to maintain some sort of consistency with how he lives his life and how he kills those who want to take his life. Although his role has shifted from factory worker to vampire slayer, his new occupation does not change his character: like Symes, the core characteristics that govern his individuality remain true – discipline, self-reliance, self-motivation, unwavering ideology, consistency and the drive to survive are simply applied under different circumstances.

He performs his required tasks daily: "All afternoon he made stakes. He lathed them out of thick dowelling, band-sawed into nine-inch lengths. These he held against the whirling emery stone until they were as sharp as daggers. It was tiresome, monotonous work, and it filled the air with hot-smelling wood dust" (Matheson 16). It may be monotonous routine, but it is stable work. In these chores Neville finds some security in believing that he is doing something worthwhile, especially since it gives him a sense of control; he may not be able to control the happenings outside, but he has the power of choice when it comes to deciding what to do while in the confines of his own house. Neville has the choice to hail the white flag and march into the arms of the dead seductresses, but he does not because he cannot – he forces himself to remain true to what he believes is right. The only way to save his life is to make stakes everyday and

hang new strings of garlic cloves twice a week (16). It is because of his determination to survive that he is forced into the edges of reality.

Miriam Jones suggests that the disenfranchised become the monsters that linger in the margins (153). The fact that Neville refuses to change labels him as the hunter instead of the hunted, the villain rather than the victim. In order to stay alive, Neville vanquishes the undead during the day. He believes he is right in his actions, but since he is the only one left of his kind, he becomes the minority and the outsider. “They mean to execute you. Even though you are wounded. They have to. The people have been out there all night, waiting. They’re terrified of you, Robert, they have you. And they want your life” (168).

If Neville had allowed his undead wife to drink his blood, and make him undead, there would be no legend. It is his unwavering belief that he is right and they are wrong, and his unflinching desire to stay alive that make him legend; even when he is captured by the undead, his convictions remain and he accepts his fate. In history, we remember those who die for their beliefs, and Robert Neville will be remembered as a human monster who executed hundreds for his delusional pursuit of normalcy.

When Neville faces the new people, he sees that he is the “abnormal one now” (169). He sees the fear and anguish in their faces, and he realizes that to them, he was the vampire – he was the one who struck during the day and left in his path an array of death. “He knew that, like vampires, he was anathema and black terror to be destroyed. And, abruptly, the concept came, amusing to him even in his pain...I am legend” (170).

Symes and Neville are characters that honor consistency. At the end of both their stories they become vampires because their ideologies are immune to change – they cannot mentally shift when their worlds experience a cultural shift. By no means could they have anticipated such an ending, but it was inevitable since they never pivoted from their principles. Sometimes surprise endings occur when the characters change their mind and their position, but neither Symes nor Neville ever hesitated or faltered from their beliefs. The two men remained passionate about their values and true to their cause, but instead of achieving hero-status, they both ruptured and became symbols of ignorance and defeat.

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