

Pandemic Pastoralism

The Legend of the Lone Survivor in American Literature

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The devastation wrought by pandemics has led writers to imagine a world devoid of humanity. Empty streets and deserted houses manifest the fear that when a disease is contagious enough to infect everyone, no one will be left alive. No one, that is, except the lone survivor. As the protagonist of Katherine Anne Porter's (1939) semi-autobiographical novella of the 1918 flu pandemic puts it, "[d]eath always leaves one singer to mourn" (240). The protagonist is referring to an (invented) spiritual that lends its title to the novella, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"; and indeed, the legend of the lone survivor draws some of its authority from biblical archetypes. The allusion here is to the Book of Revelation and, to a lesser degree, The Book of Job, but it is important to note that the implications are secular rather than eschatological: there is no final judgment at the end of Porter's novella, just loneliness. Survival thus lends poignancy to the devastation; it also adds a plot, ensuring that the end of the pandemic is not the end of the story.

This paper argues, perhaps counterintuitively, that stories about the aftermath of pandemics are versions of the pastoral. Pandemic pastorals are (nearly) void of humanity because they imagine infection leading to the worst-possible conclusion in order to depict the end of civilization from the perspective of someone who knows what life was like before. Because the worst-case scenario is not the end of the story, it provides a contrast that allows the pandemic to operate as a symbol in two complementary ways:

First, the cityscape, denuded of its inhabitants, serves as a diagram of society at its final stage of development. That diagram is synchronic, or frozen in time, and it is read or interpreted by someone who is a product of civilization but who now lives in a post-civilized space. The view of civilization from an outside (but still sophisticated) perspective is central to pastoralism.

Second, the empty city serves as a cordon sanitaire between the vector of infection, which decimates civilization, and the trajectory of the narrative, which constitutes the survivor's tale. This separation is essential because infection, in these narratives, is both a means and a symbol of transmission. The premise here is that language is like a virus when it spreads uncontrollably; indeed, all sorts of social in-

teraction can prove infectious and take on the natural inevitability of disease. Nature (in the form of disease) thus stands in contrast to civilization and emerges as a destructive force within it. The survivor, having passed through infection to the other side, speaks a language that has, in effect, been immunized. He or she stands on the other side of the cordon sanitaire. The pandemic pastoral thus offers a kind of a cure to social ills, but one that comes with a melancholy disclaimer: It is sometimes easier to contemplate the end of civilization than to reform it.

Three Historical Sources

Contemporary pandemic narratives build on biblical tropes and on two secular figures, one historical and the other fictional, who are Job-like in their suffering but not their faith. They also register a secular view of contagion put forth by an eighteenth-century philosophical treatise that helped establish the reformist agenda of pandemic pastoralism.

The historical lone survivor is Squanto, the last of the Patuxet, whom William Bradford mentions appreciatively in his journal of early American colonization, *Of Plymouth Plantation* ([1651] 1981). Squanto survived the decimation of his tribe and could help the Pilgrims colonize the “new world” because he had been kidnapped and transported to Europe before his tribe was infected by disease (probably smallpox transmitted by explorers) (Cook 1997, 255–257). Returning after years of captivity to find his people gone, he taught Bradford and company to live off a land that seemed promised to the Pilgrims because it had already been cultivated (Bradford 1981, 87–91, 98, 108–127). The first generation of colonists, already exposed to smallpox during their childhood, had an immunological advantage over the natives. They interpreted this advantage religiously, taking the landscape, conveniently cleared of its inhabitants, as a judgment from God. Their own offspring, however, were not exposed in childhood and therefore proved susceptible to periodic outbreaks when ships landed carrying the disease. Bradford complained that subsequent generations lacked the religious fervor of the original colonists. Perhaps this had to do with their lack of immunity. In any event, Squanto endures in literature not as a religious but as a secular figure, opening the gates to a pastoral landscape that is half paradise, half wilderness. Versions of this lone survivor would later turn up in Westerns in the figure of the sidekick (Chingachgook, Hiawatha, Tonto): the last member of a vanished race whose role is to introduce white pioneers to native ways (but not to induct them into a native community).

Squanto, like the sidekicks modeled after him, suggests two things about pandemic narratives: 1) that the lone survivor provides a communicative but not a communicable link from the time before the pandemic to the time after, and 2) that the

survivor crosses a frontier in time (before and after the plague) that seems to be patterned on the pastoral's frontier in space (civilization and wilderness).

Pandemics create the conditions for the pastoral when empty streets and houses go back to nature and animals start to inhabit dwellings built for people. This was a common theme in landscape painting of the nineteenth century, and one that received renewed attention during the recent lockdowns (Torgovnick 2022). If the deserted landscape suggests a version of the pastoral, pastoralism also provides a useful model for stories in which the end of civilization, which is to say the end of history, does not coincide with the end of time. The pastoral is a setting, but it is also a structuring device, allowing authors to map the frontier in time onto a frontier in space, civilization and its *aftermath* (the empty cityscape) onto the coordinates of civilization and its *other* (the countryside, the wilderness). Another way to put this is that pandemic pastoralism spatializes the end of history as landscape (empty buildings) and personal itinerary (the survivor's path). The end of history is not an apocalypse – it is not the end of the story – but a threshold event that transforms a collective calamity into a symbolic journey. On one side is civilization in its death throes, on the other empty ruins. The lone survivor, in crossing that threshold, moves through and makes sense of the ruins, transposing their significance into a personal – and less complicated – register.

Frank Kermode's ([1967] 2000) observations in *The Sense of an Ending* can serve to sharpen the contrast between the apocalypse and pandemic pastoralism's version of the end of history. Kermode argues that literary narratives “escape from chronicity” by bringing the end of the story in relation to the beginning (50). This is a pattern he usefully characterizes as a weak or naïve apocalypse: narrative is a sequence that doubles back on itself, commenting on its own development (8–18). The end and the beginning stand in symbolic relation to each other in any narrative that is not a mere chronicle of events. Thus, Kermode argues that the apocalyptic structure of narrative is preoccupied with endings in a way that is “time-redeeming” (52). It is my claim that pandemic pastorals offer a partial exception to this rule because they do not redeem the past, which is to say civilization, rather spatialize it as empty landscape. This provides the setting for pastoral simplification.

The First Pandemic Novel

The link between traditional pastoralism and pandemic pastoralism is confirmed by the novel that gives the figure of the lone survivor another moniker – the “last man” – and develops him into a protagonist. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* ([1826] 1994), the first pandemic novel, takes its title from its catastrophic ending, when a plague wipes out the entire human population with the exception of Verney, a former shepherd who has been civilized by a character (Adrian) modeled on Shelley's recently

deceased husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley: “I was an untaught shepherd-boy, when Adrian deigned to confer on me his friendship” (ix, 451). Mary Shelley could have given her hero any vocation. Why a shepherd? I would argue that Verney’s idyllic background helps her plot the historical implications of a pandemic onto the spatial dimensions of the pastoral.

In *The Last Man*, time *after* the end of civilization resembles the space *beyond* the boundary of the city insofar as both constitute civilization’s other. However, civilization’s other is not civilization’s opposite. This is evident in the irony that Shelley’s child of nature has already been civilized, but only to see all of civilization, including his mentor, perish. He is accompanied by a dog, which will also establish itself as standard trope in post-pandemic literature. The dog’s behavior is similarly ironic, which is to say civilized in ways that stand out against the backdrop of the catastrophe:

My only companion was a dog, a shaggy fellow, half water and half shepherd’s dog, whom I found tending sheep in the Campagna. His master was dead, but nevertheless he continued fulfilling his duties in expectation of his return....Riding in the Campagna I had come upon his sheep-walk, and for some time observed his repetition of lessons learned from man, now useless, though unforgotten. (467)

The sheepdog raises an addendum to the previous question about the shepherd: why does Shelly give her survivor a trained dog? The answer seems to lie in the cliché that owners resemble their pets. The last man, as a former shepherd, is like the sheepdog in his connection to rural life and in the persistence of his training. Neither one of them is wild, but both are connected to nature, and their fateful meeting reveals that both have been “civilized” in ways rendered obsolete by the pandemic (but indispensable to its narration). The pandemic puts a stop to history, understood as the story of civilization, but the survivor is a transition figure, bearing witness to the time *before* through his training. Because the narrative places the end of history in the timeline of the plot, it needs a protagonist who can record his memoir (the project is announced in an adjacent paragraph) in the same way the sheepdog herds sheep – performing “lessons learned from man, now useless, though unforgotten.”

Here is how Verney describes his motivation to record his memories:

I also will write a book, I cried – for whom to read? – to whom dedicated? And then with silly flourish (what so capricious and childish as despair?) I wrote,

DEDICATION
TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD.
SHADOWS, ARISE, AND READ YOUR FALL!
BEHOLD THE HISTORY OF THE
LAST MAN. (466)

The irony here, implicit in the apostrophe “arise, and read your fall,” is related to the other ironies structuring the narrative. The child of nature is civilized to witness the end of civilization in the same way the sheepdog is trained to herd sheep for no master and the dead are invoked to read of their own demise.

Verney pretends to address the dead here, but it is really Shelley addressing her readers. The “lessons learned from man” are not useless, but their currency must be denied (by the narrative) to transmit the emotional intensity of Verney’s predicament. We apprehend the poignancy of survivor’s emotions by pretending not to be his audience. This enables the pretense of a lyrical mode of communication that consists of the survivor talking to himself. This peculiar mode of address personalizes history by traversing the threshold of extinction, transforming the fate of civilization into a personal lament that, once again, cannot find a receptive public in the story world if it is to have any emotional impact on its actual readers.

Herein lies the difference between the time-redeeming function of the naïve apocalypse and the simplification strategy of the pastoral. The pandemic pastoral limits the communicability of disease by pushing it to the nth-degree, with one exception. Readers are not a part of the survivor’s immediate community and therefore do not catch what he or she transmits; but we do learn from his knowledge (Squanto) or apprehend his emotions (Verney). The difference here is between contagion and communication. If, as I will argue in a moment, the pandemic represents a social ill, the “cure” involves a shift in register from the communal/communicative to the non-communicable and personal.

Pandemics and the Ruined Cityscape

As I already mentioned, pandemics create the conditions for pastoral when nature begins to push through cracks in the sidewalk and wear away the edges of the urban grid. The reverse is also the case. Empty ruins seem to evoke the specter of the plague, a mode of destruction that – unlike earthquakes or war – leaves infrastructure largely intact. A decisive text here is Constantin Volney’s *Les Ruines, or Meditations on Revolutions and Empires* (1789), a philosophical treatise in which the author, contemplating the ruins of ancient civilization on the banks of the Euphrates, sinks into a pastoral reverie: “The shepherds had led the camels to their stalls,” Volney remarks, before observing that deer now inhabit the former palaces of kings (2). The pastoral setting having been established, the narrator is visited by a “Phantom” or “Genius” who explains that human beings are responsible for the downfall of civilization. This sounds like divine judgment, but the Phantom emerges to explain that humans bring about their own demise. The plague is not a divine scourge but the symbol of a social ill. A standard translation provides this phrasing for Chapter 8, “The Sources of Evil in Society”: “Thus that very principle of self-love, which, when

restrained within the limits of prudence, was a source of improvement and felicity, became transformed...into a contagious poison....Yes, ignorance and the love of accumulation, these are the two sources of all the plagues that infest the life of man!" (20) Other translations substitute different words for "contagion" and "plague"; nevertheless, Volney seems to have played a role in forging the symbolic link between destructive human interaction and contagion. His book was extraordinarily influential – so much so that Thomas Jefferson translated all but four chapters before becoming President of the United States, then handed the rest of the job over to the poet and diplomat Joel Barlow. Significantly, Volney's *Ruins* is one of the books read by the Frankenstein monster in the novel Mary Shelley published before *The Last Man*. The monster is also a kind of lone survivor.

Volney's conceit reflects some basic assumptions of Enlightenment medical and political thinking. The countryside was safer than the city in plague times, and when the "state of nature," that common postulate of social contract theory, did not provide clear guidelines about how to improve society, it at least created an imaginary escape hatch and a conceptual baseline from which to contemplate social decay. Volney's treatise helped transform these principles into the formal conventions of pandemic pastoralism. In the story he tells of the rise and fall of civilizations, contagion serves as a metaphor of society gone awry but also as the threshold event producing the conditions necessary for a simpler life. There is thus a homeopathic element to pandemic pastoralism, with sickness representing the problem but also leading to a kind of a cure. That cure is conceptual: neither Volney, nor the other authors considered here seriously proposes depopulation as a corrective to social ills. They are not Malthusian. The empty landscape is a thought experiment whose point is not the end of civilization but a change in perspective from the historical to the personal. Volney's narrator is not infected by the self-love he ascribes to most of mankind; he is simply alone with his "Genius."

Pastoral Simplification

If sickness is a symbol of social ills, both isolation and spatialization are simplification strategies that limit its spread (compare Gessner 2013, 227–228; Kimpel 2013, 205). Simplification is a key element of the pastoral, which presents an alternative to the complexity of civilization, not because it is natural but because it is cultured in a straightforward way. As William Empson ([1935] 1974) puts it in his classic study, "The essential trick of the old pastoral...was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way)" (11). He summarizes this as "the pastoral process of putting the complex into the simple" – a formula adapted by Leo Marx in his classic study of

American pastorals, *The Machine in the Garden* (Empson 1974, 22; Marx, 1967, 4–11). The shepherds living an idealized rural life are simple but not primitive; they speak the sophisticated language of the court (or in Marx are cognizant of the latest technological developments) for a cultivated audience. Empson terms this “the use of heroic language about the pastoral swain” (69). If Leo Marx is right in claiming that nature has always served as an American cultural ideal, then the city decimated by a pandemic (for instance in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn*) is its recurring nightmare (Marx 1967, 4). The lone survivor, because of his isolation, is the swain of the secular apocalypse. His language is sophisticated, as is his knowledge, but the setting he inhabits has been simplified through depopulation.

There is a moralistic side to pandemic pastoralism. Susan Sontag famously cautions against treating illness as a metaphor *because* it leads to moralizing: “So indispensable has been the plague metaphor in bringing summary judgments about social crisis that its use hardly abated during the era when collective diseases were no longer treated so moralistically....” (Sontag 1991, 142). The point is well taken: from a medical perspective, disease is not a symbol but a pathology; it does not call for allegory but for diagnosis and treatment. Nevertheless, the *communicability* of disease seems to evoke some of the dangers inherent in *community* and *communication*. Sontag draws attention to this with the phrase “language is a virus” (153). Today we speak in a similar way of messages or videos “going viral.”

In approaching illness as a metaphor for communication spreading out of control, it is important to recall that *communicable* diseases and *communicative* symbols circulate in different ways. Diseases thrive in tightly packed populations and tend to collapse society into a biomass; communication is structured and mediated in ways that facilitate the transmission of messages over distance. That we can read about diseases without catching them is one obvious result of this difference. The pastoral setting in which a survivor is no longer contagious because he or she is alone, is the fictional expression of the basic fact of publication and the media: communication is not the same as physical contact.

Two Limit Cases

Even a brief literary history of American contagion has to include Poe, but his stories are the exceptions that prove the rule. Poe denies any distance between contagion and communication, symptom and symbol, and hence closes off the space of the pastoral. The pandemic tales “King Pest: A Tale Containing an Allegory” ([1835] 1990a) and “The Masque of the Red Death” ([1842] 1990b) establish some of the conventions of pandemic narratives, but they either feature no survivor or a survivor who is not alone. They refuse to treat the pandemic as a threshold event, instead representing sickness as an allegory of social control or its opposite, anarchy.

“King Pest” is a story about escaping sickness by disobeying authority. “The Masque of the Red Death” sees in authority a cure that is just as bad as the disease. In the first tale, symptoms are mere symbols to be ignored in the spirit of anarchy; in the second, symbols are symptoms that, through a kind of sympathetic magic, produce the disease they are supposed to prevent. Like the authors who will follow, Poe uses the pandemic to project a simplified version of society, but he does not posit anything beyond or after civilization. The end of history is the end of time, not because of some final judgment – there is simply no difference between contagion and communication in Poe, no way to transform the end of history into the beginning of a story.

In “King Pest” two drunken sailors on shore leave in fourteenth-century London duck into the quarantined section of a city (these are the plague years) to avoid paying their bar tab, thus shirking their debt and disobeying the edict of the king – an act of insubordination that is punishable by death (Poe 1990a, 297). The irony is that one kind of death (sickness) seems to be the only alternative to the other (execution). The power of the king is not so different from the power of disease.

After making their way through a nightmare landscape of the dead and dying, the sailors encounter another ruler – the eponymous King Pest – who seems to be a nightmare version of the actual sovereign. He welcomes them to his drinking party on the condition that they consume a gallon of liquor “on bended knees” while toasting “to the prosperity of our kingdom” (301). True to their roguish nature, the sailors refuse to pay deference to any form of authority, defeating King Pest and his ghoulish court after refusing to “drin[k] the health of the Devil” and asking God to “assoilzie” or forgive their debts (302). The archaic word links injustice to infection and both to all forms of control. King Pest is the doppelgänger of the king who quarantines an entire section of the city and punishes disobedience with death. He is also a version of the devil or the grim reaper. This doubling, which suggests all power is satanic, is the story’s major structuring device and what distinguishes it from the pandemic pastoral. There is no space *beyond* the frontier – the quarantined section of the city is the mirror image of the social world – and no time *after*. The contagion does not produce an alternate vision of a simpler life; it simply reveals power structures for what they are: a form of disease.

All of King Pest’s ghoulish companions, who bear the word “pest” in their names, have deformed limbs or exaggerated physical characteristics, symbolizing the symptoms of various ailments. Ana-Pest, a woman whose beauty is marred by a syphilitic nose, is the king’s consort. After defeating King Pest, the sailors kidnap her and escape back to the non-quarantined side of the city, acquiring a principle of aesthetic composition (anapest is the name of a poetic meter) and, one suspects, spreading the disease. The sailors, however, seem to be immune, and the characteristics of the lone survivor are distributed between the comic duo, who are like the comedians Laurel and Hardy in their complementary physical characteristics and temperaments (one

fat and short, the other skinny and tall; one phlegmatic, the other hectic [296]). This is another form of doubling – one that prevents any kind of sympathy or identification with a main character and hence blocks the personal register that is built into pandemic pastoralism. The point of Poe's story is not to translate contagion into an emotion that the readers can apprehend. On the contrary, the antics of the sailors suggest that symptoms, properly regarded, are merely symbols without the power to do "real" harm. They can be ignored in the same way the sailors ignore their debt, the King of England, his quarantine, and King Pest, whom they accuse of being nothing but a ham actor (302).

If symptoms are merely symbols, and authority is just a performance, then health and justice lie in anarchy. The roguish sailors thus personify a libertarian rejection of public health measures: language is not a virus, but virus is merely language, or in today's parlance, fake news. Again, Poe's short story deploys most of the elements of a pastoral without qualifying as such because there is no *after* the pandemic, no other side of the frontier (here the *cordon sanitaire*) – both are just "allegorical" (to use Poe's term in the title) extensions of life under a sovereign monarch who views all disobedience as "treason" (302).

"The Masque of the Red Death" constitutes a volte-face in Poe's assessment of the relation of symbols to symptoms, but one confirming his distrust of authority. The source seems to be a Heinrich Heine story about a super-spreader event in Paris in the early nineteenth century. Perhaps the death toll made Poe reconsider his earlier fantasy about simply ignoring a pandemic. It is also worth noting that Poe wrote this story at a time when his wife was sick and he was financially strapped (O'Grady 2020).

In this short story, symbols *are* symptoms, and the attempt to totally exclude disease – in art and by decree – merely reproduces it as a social ill. The ruler is named Prospero, after the magician-duke from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and when the plague strikes his dominion, he retreats into a sealed fortress with his court. Like his namesake, Prospero uses art to magically create a world apart. He exercises absolute political and cultural control, and his zero-plague policy seems at first to be effective. He throws a costume ball to celebrate his victory over the disease – prematurely it turns out (Poe 1990b, 461). The color-coded rooms in his palace follow an elaborate design that turns red and black in the final chamber – the very colors that the "red death" inflicts upon its victims. Prospero's taste is decadent, but it also suggests a link between art and magic (the black art). The authoritarian ruler is thus a figure of the author who seeks to ward off sickness through symbolic means: the "anapest" of the sailors has become the art-for-art's-sake style Poe called "arabesque" ("King Pest" appeared in the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* [1840]). When an uninvited guest dressed as a plague victim makes his way to the final chamber, it is difficult to distinguish his hue from the effects of Prospero's décor (462). Prospero is outraged

at the hint of actual disease at his costume party. He unmasks the intruder in front of his shocked guests, only to find no face, no body beneath the bloody shroud.

This is the moment the contagion spreads, wiping out everyone in the fortress. The climax evokes a pre-epidemiological understanding of disease, where the pathogen is indistinguishable from its symptoms. (The masque or ball is not a virus, but a virus, insofar as it manifests itself through symptoms, always wears a mask [461].) It also suggests that symbolic attempts to control symptoms, here evoking the colors of the disease to magically ward off its ill effects, are futile. There is no escape, which means there is no survivor – the “mask” conceals nobody and nobody survives to tell this tale (unless the narrator is Death itself [464]). This story subverts pastoralism, canceling the temporal and spatial distinction between civilization and its other (civilization is just another name for sovereign power, and Death is the ultimate ruler). There is no *outside* or *after*: “And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all” (464).

These two stories are not pastorals but they stake out the generic limits of pandemic pastoralism. Their fairy tale-style effects a related symbolic strategy – one patterned on the schematic description of culture rather than an escape, over the threshold of disease, to a simplified cultural landscape. Poe’s decidedly non-idyllic approach to disease helps establish the personal attributes of the lone survivor, whose character establishes a relation of communication to communicability. When symptoms turn out to be mere symbols, survivors triumph heroically over disease by simply ignoring it. When symbols are symptoms, which is to say when culture is sick, there is no aesthetic space of resistance and characterization approaches the point where the face disappears behind the mask. Both tales are skeptical of social and cultural attempts to control disease, and both caution against decadence, i.e., escaping the ills of civilization through art, which is presented as the pendant to despotism. The fairy tale quality of the stories, set in antique times and places, distinguishes them from the other narratives in this study, which employ the techniques of the pastoral to simplify and draw attention to particular features of actually existing society.

Three Case Studies: London, Porter, Matheson

By collapsing the distance between symbol and symptom, and closing off the possibility that the world *after* is different from that of the plague, Poe closes off the space of the pastoral. His stories are allegories of control, not narratives of threshold events. The other authors in this study use the threshold event of the pandemic to shift the register from social problems to personal journeys through simplified space. The problems symbolized by imaginary pandemics include the savagery of civilization in Jack London ([1912] 2018); wartime propaganda and groupthink in

Katherine Anne Porter (1939); and racism in Richard Matheson (1954). It is my argument that while the problems depicted in pandemic pastorals change over time, the formal characteristics remain consistent.

Jack London: "The Scarlet Plague"

Jack London's "The Scarlet Plague" ([1912] 2018), which alludes to Poe's "Red Death" in the title, is set in 2073, about half a century after a pandemic decimates the planet. Narrated by a former Berkeley English professor once known as James Smith but now called Granser, it traces the collapse of civilization into a few remaining hunter-gatherer tribes whose members are ignorant of their history (London 2018, 27, 34). This reversion-to-the-primitive is a common theme in London, who is best known for stories about dogs who turn out to be wolves beneath the skin. In this novella it is not the cultivated who survive, with the lone exception of Granser, but those who can thrive in a world where life is nasty, brutish, and short. The lesson of the pandemic is that men are wolves to men; its corollary is that civilization makes them so:

And I knew, now, why it was that the fleeing persons I encountered slipped along so furtively and with such white faces. In the midst of our civilization, down in our slums and labor-ghettos, we had bred a race of barbarians, of savages; and now, in the time of our calamity, they turned upon us like the wild beasts they were and destroyed us. And they destroyed themselves as well. (85)

Though the "whiteness" of these faces will turn out to be significant, Granser is partially exaggerating for dramatic effect. Civilization produces savagery, but the savages do not destroy themselves. His own grandsons are primitive, and gleefully so: "the boys were true savages" (15). This is one of many hints that the relation between civilization and savagery is more complex than meets the eye. Indeed, invisibility turns out to be the key issue distinguishing civilization from savagery, and later good savagery from bad savagery. Civilization is complex because it masks power. In the savage state, on the other side of the pandemic, power is obvious and what is invisible does not exist. At least that is what the savages think.

Granser, who has witnessed the fall of civilization, is more knowledgeable than the primitives who are his immediate and unreceptive audience. When his grandsons unearth an old coin, he tries to help them understand money, numbers, and letters, but the young savages complain he is "always making believe them little marks mean something" (9). The irony of course is that these are the same little marks that must be decoded by the reader if the story is to make any sense (and by the author if he is to profit from his writing). We have already seen a similar kind of irony in "the last man's" invocation of his presumably dead audience.

Granser, as storyteller, finds himself in the thankless position of trying to make the savages believe what they cannot see; besides the value of the coin, this includes “wireless dispatches” (55), flying machines, and the germs that destroyed civilization and rendered technological innovation immaterial (42). His grandsons categorically refuse to believe in the meaning behind writing, the germs behind disease, or the history behind the present moment (43). Their serial refusals, like Granser’s repeated frustrations, suggests that invisible forces – the forced concealed by civilization and those responsible for its destruction – are London’s point. These are the forces of communication and contagion, both of which are noticeable primarily in their effects. Germs circulate in densely populated regions and communication over great distances, but they are both linked to the growth of civilization. Granser puts it like this: “The easier it was to get food, the more men there were; the more men there were, the more thickly were they packed together on the earth; and the more thickly they were packed, the more new kinds of germs became disease” (50). He goes on to link population density with communication, for instance in this passage that recalls speaking on the “wireless”: “We talked through the air in those days, thousands and thousands of miles” (55).

The link between communication and contagion turns out to be the key problem in the time preceding the pandemic. Communicating over distance depends on the technological advancements that make increases in population density – and disease susceptibility – inevitable. How to separate the two in a way that retains the value of coins – and literature – without leading to their bankruptcy? This is where the pandemic comes in as a threshold event. The pastoral state following the collapse of civilization allows London to experiment with a kind of communication that is immediate in its oral register but ironic for his readers. The experiment leads to mixed results. By the end of the novella Granser is predicting the emergence of a society (like ours, only different) that does not contain the seeds of its own dissolution. However, he is frustrated by his audience’s inability to follow his train of thought, and this begs the question of how the savages, his grandsons, will ever advance from their primitive state.

To see how London uses the pandemic to separate communication from contagion, it is important to recognize how irony works in the novella. London depends on irony to convey both the accuracy of Granser’s knowledge and its irrelevance in his immediate context. The author is clearly on the side of the English professor when he laments the limited vocabulary (and knowledge) of his degenerate grandsons. The title of the novella and its main character both call the plague “scarlet,” though the boys make a point of adopting the more straightforward “red.” The simpler word is favored by the chief of the tribe, a former chauffeur who establishes his power by taking the daughter of his former boss as his wife and later murdering her – an injustice Granser never stops lamenting (23–24). The boys may be right to adapt their vocabularies to their context, but they are right in a way that reveals Granser also has

a point – a point they cannot see because the significance of his tale, like the other invisibilities, is hidden.

The chauffeurs of the post-pandemic world are literally in the driver's seat, but if they present a savage alternative to a world governed by the wealthy and the cultured, they also embody its hidden principle. London has Granser explain that the last American president, Morgan the Fifth, was appointed by a Board of Magnates (10). This anti-democratic "election" reflects the author's conviction – one shared by many Social Darwinists of his generation – that the strongest members of society always prevail. When a plague wipes out civilization, the strongest are no longer the richest but those with the biggest muscles and the fewest scruples about using them. Is the post-pandemic world less unjust? It is certainly less cultivated, which is to say more straightforward in its privileging of naked power. Granser is unhappy in this world, but it is London's customary literary terrain. The author, who was a bestseller, is like Granser in his interest in symbols and money, but he is known for stories that predict the end of civilization and "call" domesticated creatures back to the "wild." He is the swain of the secular apocalypse, the sophisticate hiding behind pastoral simplicity.

London is aware of this second-order irony. He inserts his name into the novel as a plot device, for instance when the major cities cut off communication rather than broadcast their collapse, "not permitting the word to go forth to the rest of the world that London had the plague" (56). In what sense might *Jack* London be said to have the plague? Perhaps his stories about the end of civilization do more than diagnose a problem. Perhaps they also spread the disease. London serialized his novella in *London Magazine* at a time when his career seemed to be waning. The location named in the title is more than a setting, it is also an admission, on the part of the author, that – like a modern-day prepper – he may be trafficking in the collapse of the civilization on which he depends for his audience. Granser laments a civilization that breeds its own destroyers; London made his living by popularizing the barbarian creed.

Predicting the victory of savages in a language and through a medium they cannot read, London aligns himself with Granser, but also with a group of deceivers who make a surprise appearance at the end: the medicine men. Just as London distinguishes between contagion and communication, he distinguishes between those who diagnose disease and those who try to explain it away. The ultimate irony of the novella is when Granser calls for the death of doctors: "The doctors must be destroyed," he says in an uncharacteristic call for violence, "and all that was lost must be discovered over again" (144). Here he does not mean the scientists who discovered germs before the pandemic but the medicine men who call themselves doctors afterward. They sell spells and fetish objects that cannot cure anything. Is an author closer to a doctor or a witch doctor? Does he traffic in mere symbols or in actual

cures? London diagnoses the sickness, but he does not want to be understood as deceiving the readers (or customers) who buy his symbolic objects/tales.

It is difficult for him to defend himself against an accusation that he raises. He does so by placing himself on the side of a simplified civilization that has purged itself of bad savagery and deception while retaining the good, simple life. This depends on distinguishing identification (the personal, which in this case will turn out to be the racial) from contagion (the cultural or communal). Near the end of the novel, Granser makes another surprise announcement, predicting (out of the blue) that “Aryans” will someday dominate the world again: “In time, pressure of population will compel us to spread out, and a hundred generations from now we may expect our descendants...[to engage in] colonization of the East – a new Aryan drift around the world” (142). This racist endorsement of white supremacy is hidden until the end, but it is the simplification London turns to in order to straighten out all the ironies that have been deviling both author and narrator since the announcement that civilization breeds its own destruction. While it is unclear how the “Aryan drift” would avoid problems like overcrowding, deception, and manipulation, in London the civilization to come will be superior to the one that has perished. Granser’s immediate audience does not believe what he says about invisible things, but they will nevertheless inherit something else that is invisible (in the sense of merely unstated or presumed) in this story: namely, the race of the author and his narrator. The ultimate irony here is that the *whiteness* that is supposed to rise victorious over the plague is what “spreads out” like a virus. The pastoral space between contagion and communication is contaminated by racism. Put otherwise, the plague provides a structure of transmission that allows London to imagine a purified, pastoral society – a society that blames its savagery on the “races” that do not manage cross the frontier of the pandemic, which in this case is identical with the color line. Identification in this novella is not just personal, in the way the readers (like London) are encouraged to identify with the narrator; it is a matter of group identity.

The novella remains true to the paradox, common in the pastoral, of a sophisticated author calling for the simple life, but with a violent twist: “Ten thousand years of culture and civilization passed in the twinkling of an eye, ‘lapsed like foam’” (71). The apocalyptic quality of “The Scarlet Plague” may have contributed to the legend – false as it turns out – that when London died a couple of years later, suicide was the cause (the actual cause was kidney failure). The despair evident in Granser’s lament might be interpreted as personal resignation writ large. However, it is also a survival-of-the-fittest parable that works to distinguish good authorship from bad medicine men and good savages from, alas, “inferior” races. Blackness is ultimately what is invisible here, concealed behind the red faces of those who perish by the plague and the pale faces of those who flee a savagery they have created – and then go on to conquer the world.

Katherine Anne Porter: "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"

Katherine Anne Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" (1939) is a partially autobiographical tale that provides one of the few fictional accounts of the influenza epidemic of 1918 (it also uses the symptom of paleness to symbolize race – something I will return to in a moment). Porter takes advantage of the conjunction of the epidemic and the war to treat contagion as a symbol of patriotism and pro-war propaganda. The main character Miranda, who is a stand-in for the author, begins to experience flu symptoms when the audience at a concert is encouraged to stand up and sing a patriotic song (Porter 1939, 188). The germs prove to be catchier than the tune. At first, she thinks her headache is the result of exasperation. She is tired of being plagued by patriots, such as the men at work (a local Denver newspaper) pressing her to buy Liberty Bonds, even though her salary has been cut (189). The Liberty Bond salesmen are described as having connections to the Lusk Committee (183, 207). Charged with investigating seditious (meaning communist or anarchist) activities, the committee was formed on the heels of WWI (in 1919) – and in New York, not Denver. This anachronistic detail serves to expand the symbolic resonance of the plot. Porter seems to be recounting her experiences during WWI (she worked at a Denver newspaper and almost died from influenza) to reflect her discomfort with the resurgence of patriotism right before WWII (the story was published in 1939). She would later write patriotic, or at least anti-German stories such as *The Leaning Tower*. But this particular novella echoes the sentiments of the character who asks, "Suppose I said to hell with this filthy war?" (186)

The question is rhetorical, but it is voiced for the benefit of Adam, the soldier who is Miranda's love interest. Adam is loyal and willing to serve his country but hardly more patriotic than his beloved. His ironic rejoinder, that there won't be any more wars after this one, echoes her skepticism while undermining Woodrow Wilson's rationale for sending troops to the war that was supposed to end all wars (201, 222–223). The private affinity between these two characters stands in stark contrast to the public sentiment of patriotism. At one level the story offers a clear endorsement of love over war. There are even asides, such as a rumor that a German submarine is spreading influenza germs on the coast, intended to show how the paranoia caused by warfare turns all public discourse infectious (206).

However, contagion is an ambiguous metaphor, describing how feelings circulate (for instance through patriotism) in the public sphere but also how they pass from one lover to another in private. Porter underscores the ambiguity by strategically invoking made-up blues songs and spirituals, which bring a seemingly gratuitous racial dimension to the narrative. There is the title of the story, supposedly derived from a spiritual that does not exist, and then a refrain, invoked by Miranda, which also has a false derivation: "The blues aint nothin' but an easy-goin' heart disease" (218). Porter seems to be invoking blackness as a symbol for love and

death, in short, for moments of passion in the affective but also existential sense, that threaten to subsume the individual into the beloved, the collective, or (as I will argue in a moment) the land of the dead. Porter's main point, however, is not about race, which is here fetishized as a cultural artifact and appropriated as a symbol of personal (and white) precarity. It is that patriotism and passion are both catching, so that turning to love as a refuge from war merely leads to bereavement. This is foreshadowed in the opening dream-sequence when Miranda imagines death as a pale suitor on a pale horse: "Ah, I have seen this fellow before. I know this man if I could place him. He is no stranger to me" (181).

Miranda demurs the date with the pale rider, but she goes out with Adam. The two male figures seem to become interchangeable at the end. When Miranda comes down with the flu at the concert they both attend, Adam nurses her until she is taken to an infirmary. Waking up after a close brush with death, she finds out that he has died of the flu after having been shipped overseas. The flu she catches at a patriotic event infects the lover who saves her from sickness and groupthink. Porter underscores the horrible irony with another dream sequence that shows Adam to be a "sacrificial lamb," as Miranda calls him (224). A conversation about protestant and Catholic prayer culminates in Miranda's incongruous pagan offering to "O Apollo" (239). Then, right after a discussion of the fake eponymous spiritual, which Adam claims to have "heard Negroes in Texas sing" (240), the two characters declare their love for one another, and Miranda falls into a troubled sleep:

Almost with no warning at all, she floated into the darkness, holding his hand, in sleep that was not sleep but clear evening light...arrows from the invisible bow struck him again and he fell, and yet he was there before her untouched in a perpetual death and resurrection. She threw herself before him...and the arrows struck her cleanly through the heart and through his body and he lay dead, and she still lived. (243)

When she wakes up, she describes this dream as "something about an old-fashioned valentine. There were two hearts carved on a tree, pierced by the same arrow – you know, Adam –" (243). This is cupid's arrow but also Apollo's arrow – the god she invoked before. Apollo is the god of healing, but Greek mythology tells that his arrows also transmit the plague. (It is in this sense that Nicholas Christakis borrows the metaphor *Apollo's Arrow* for his 2020 book on the Corona pandemic). The arrows pass through Miranda, who lives, but Adam catches the disease and dies. What is noteworthy is that the arrows only kill him after passing through her, and after the two characters have declared their love. She makes him vulnerable. When Miranda wakes up, she feels alone, in a deep, existential way, with no connection to other people, excepting the notes Adam has left (246). Here Porter opens the space between symbols and symptoms, contagion and communication, in a way typical of

pandemic pastoralism and in this case serving to underscore how writing takes the place of actual human connections, both in her own life (she was an avid letter-writer who had trouble maintaining relationships) and in her stories.

Writing and dreams, or writing *as* a dream: there is a sense in which this tale of a lone survivor is also a *Künstlerroman*. Another long dream sequence makes up the end of the novella. It contains Miranda's visit to the land of the dead, which ironically constitutes this novella's pastoral landscape. She knows the inhabitants, just like she recognizes death when he comes calling in the first paragraphs: "They were pure identities....each figure alone but not solitary...[but] something, somebody, was missing, she had lost something...left something unfinished" (254). Though Adam is probably the one who is missing – she has not yet recovered to read the final note and hence does not know that he is dead – the land beyond is a peaceful place where everyone is a lone survivor. This is a kind of a collective but it is not a community or a public – there is no danger of public passion (patriotism) or of private passion (love) because there are no groups or pairs, only "pure identities."

This land of pure, separate identities is preferable to the Armistice, a time of overriding national identity. Miranda experiences a sharp contrast between the two when she awakens from her sickness: "There was no light, there might never be light again, compared as it must always be with the light she had seen beside the blue sea that lay so tranquilly along the shore of her paradise" (259). Next time death comes for her it will be in the avatar of Adam, the stranger whom she recognizes at the beginning but who is still missing in her dream (263–264). Miranda thinks to herself, dreaming of a place that is the next best thing to isolation, "soon I shall cross back and be at home again" (263). Bereaved, she is actually already home, as the last line of the novella suggests: "Now there would be time for everything" (264). Eternity is now, though it is also predicated on a kind of distance or deferral. The pandemic pastoral of isolated "identities" living next to each other, but not with each other, has shown her a model of coexistence that is the opposite of contagion: it is the coexistence of pure communication, which is always predicated on a lack or distance between the word and its object or the word and its audience. The plot confirms her premonition that the joy she experiences with Adam has no future, but that is because it already exists, in a writerly form, in the present; her feelings are "pure poetry" but also "apocryphal" (207). Miranda, a young reporter modeled on her author, is the author of such poetry – poetry that identifies with the outsider status of (fake) spirituals – while keeping her distance from other people. The identity that is racialized in London is individualized in Porter, but in both cases, identification is the antidote to infection and the communal problems represented by race.

Richard Matheson: *I Am Legend*

Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) is perhaps the most well-known example of the last survivor legend. There are three filmic adaptations of the science fiction novel, with a sequel reportedly in the works. The first is an Italian production (*The Last Man on Earth* [1964]) starring Vincent Price and partly written by Matheson, who withheld his name from credits because he was dissatisfied with the final product. *Omega Man* (1971), directed by Boris Sagal, is the second adaptation. Starring Charlton Heston and Rosalind Cash and featuring what is reported to be the first interracial Hollywood kiss, it uses depopulation – as W.E.B. Du Bois did in his short story “The Comet” (1920) – as a pretext for interracial romance. The latest version is a film bearing the same name as the novel (2007). Starring African American actor Will Smith, it builds on the racial politics of its predecessor at the level of casting rather than theme.

Racism is the problem evoked by a pandemic that destroys most of the earth's population. As the previous examples suggest, race almost always plays a role in US-American pandemic fiction because the conflict between the promise of equality and the fact of discrimination is simply too egregious to ignore. Before discussing the link between contagion and racism, I want to point out that Matheson borrows other elements from his predecessors such as the pet dog (from Shelley) and a fake musical allusion (as in Porter). The death of the dog – also a key element in the filmic versions – leaves the main character, Robert Neville, feeling lonesome and receptive to the advances of a woman who is infected in the novel and the first film, and who is Black in *Omega Man*. The implication seems to be that vectors of emotion, like vectors of infection, cross all sorts of boundaries: those between species, social groups, and of course between the infected and the healthy. The fake symphony, attributed to the fictional Roger Leie, is called *The Year of the Plague* (Matheson 1954, 8). The shift in medium involved in ekphrasis involves another form of boundary crossing or contagion.

In composing *his* account of the plague years, Matheson clearly taps into an established set of pandemic conventions; what he adds to them is the gothic convention of the undead. In *I Am Legend*, infection turns its victims into vampires. Some of them are reduced to biological shells – more like zombies or automatons, really – who are driven to behave in predictable ways by the virus that takes over their bodies; others develop into a new “race” who learn to manage symptoms, such as sensitivity to the light and an intolerance for garlic, through adaptation and treatment. Neville does not grasp the difference between the two types of vampires until the end of the novel. For the bulk of the narrative, he spends his days killing the infected and looking for a cure that might bring some of them back to the land of the living.

When Neville hides at night the less sophisticated vampires turn the tables, mindlessly attacking his fortified house (always in the same way) and trying to lure

him outside. For automatons they are good at triggering his emotions. One of the attackers is his former friend, Ben Cortman, who seems to be happier now that he is dead (108). Neville, however, is especially susceptible to the women because “[a]ll the knowledge in those books [he spends a lot of time reading] couldn't put out the fires in him; all the words of centuries couldn't end the wordless, mindless craving of his flesh” (7). As the remark about “mindless, craving...flesh” suggests, Neville's sexual desire turns him into a kind of a zombie as well.

The reading helps Neville maintain self-control, but it is also part of his effort to solve, through research, the problem of vampirism. When not fighting, drinking whisky, listening to his hi-fi system, or fantasizing about vampire women, Neville attempts to separate legend from science in order to rationally explain the vampires' behavior (106). Here he is fighting centuries of superstition: “According to legend, they were invisible in mirrors, but he knew that was untrue” (16; 17). He also has to resist the religious hysteria that reaches its peak at the height of the pandemic (103), and the “yellow journalism [that] had spread a cancerous dread of vampires to all corners of the nation” in “pseudo-scientific articles” (105). Matheson is about as convincing at distinguishing Neville's findings from pseudo-science as London is at distinguishing Granser from the witch doctors. Neville “discovers” that while the vampire germ makes its victims sensitive to sunlight and garlic (two elements of the Dracula legend), their fear of the cross is just a bit of residual psychology left over from the legends the victims were familiar with when they were alive. Ben Cortman, raised Jewish, is sensitive to the Torah instead of the cross, as Neville tells Ruth, the woman he meets about halfway through the narrative: “A torah. Tablet of law, I believe it is....By using the torah, I backed him to the door and got rid of him” (129).

In his absurd struggle to uphold rationalism in the face of a vampire infestation, Neville shows himself to be deeply irrational: not only because some of the plot details could have been borrowed from Polanski's *Fearless Vampire Killers* (a Jewish vampire afraid of the Torah!), but because he has been deeply traumatized by his experiences. After he burns the body of his dead daughter in a firepit meant to limit the spread of contagion, all the infected children look like Kathy to him (15). He buries his wife Virginia, who then came back from the grave and has to be killed again – this time with a wooden stake (66, 138). The double murder/death of wife and daughter traps him in a chaos that he describes in terms of another pit, a pit of dualisms: “everything in the world seemed suddenly to have dropped into a pit of duality, victim to a system of twos” (65). The pit of duality also applies to the vampires, who are themselves split into two types, visible in mirrors, and mirroring Neville in their behavior. His speculations about traumatic “shocks” suffered by vampires might be justly applied to his own psychological state: “It could make them lonely, soul-lost slaves of the night, afraid to approach anyone, living a solitary existence, often seeking from the soil of their native land, struggling to gain a sense of communion with something, with anything” (105, 106; cf. 107).

For Neville the communion (holy or unholy) comes when a ghost seems to rise from Virginia's grave. It is Ruth, who later turns out to be a vampire, though she has hidden her ghostly pallor under dark make-up that is in effect a form of black-face (110, 125). When Ruth's identity becomes clear, she will warn Neville to abandon his home to avoid an organized attack from her compatriot members of the "new" race, but he remains stubbornly rooted – like the undead surrounding his house and with fatal consequences. The irrational attachment to place is underscored by an irrational attachment to the past that becomes clear when, prior to Ruth's revelation, Neville briefly considers marrying her and having children (128) and then calls her by his dead wife's name: "And he'd thought the past was dead. How long did it take for a past to die?" (137).

The past does not die in a novel about the undead. That is the point of the gothic convention. Neville's past haunts him, despite his efforts to remain rational, in the form of the revenant Ruth. The protagonist feels guilty for killing his own wife and child. Ruth makes him question his murderous rage and his so-called rationality, particularly when she reveals that the infected are still cognizant and that he has killed her husband and children in one of his rampages (135). The pandemic in this novel is a symbol of social conflict, as in London and Porter, but the conflict bears the stamp of its historical moment. The infected are racialized, though Ruth's blackface suggests this is a bit of a disguise, and Neville, whom Ruth later dubs "the last of the old race," is the quintessential angry white man, heavily armed, drunk on whisky, and driving around town in the precursor to an SUV (157).

I Am Legend was published the same year the Supreme Court handed down its ruling on *Brown vs. Board of Education* (a case that started making its way through the courts in 1951), at a time when interracial relationships were still illegal in some states. Neville picks up on the racialized language of the period when he describes the vampire question in the opening pages of the novel: "Friends, I come before you to discuss the vampire; a minority element if there ever was one, and there was one...Vampires are prejudiced against. The keynote of minority prejudice is this: They are loathed because they are feared...but, would you let your sister marry one?" (20–21). In considering the marriage question, which takes on a literal if short-lived significance in his relationship with Ruth, Neville confronts his own ghosts but also the ghost of racism, which despite the Supreme Court ruling, remained (and remains) undead.

If the gothic conventions evoke a chaos of dual (really multiple) hauntings, the pandemic works to simplify social conflict in ways typical of the pastoral. Because the vampire-hunting plot is in some ways more violent than death by contagion (though London may be an exception here), this pastoral is not only about inhabiting an empty cityscape but about emptying it – by killing the undead and disposing of their remains. While this might seem to stretch the meaning of pastoralism beyond the point of usefulness, the narrative does register the need to open a space be-

tween contagion and communication in the way we have seen in London and Porter. In Matheson, it is the firepit that offers an official antidote to the metaphorical “pit of duality”: “Everyone without exception had to be transported to the fires immediately upon death. It was the only way they knew now to prevent communication. Only flames could destroy the bacteria that caused the plague” (62). Burning the bodies, thus, is not a form of pastoralism, but it is supposed to lead to the time *after*, where the infection has marked the landscape but is no longer raging. Two forms of communication come into play in this passage: the communication or contagion of the disease, and the communication of the official decree (Neville’s own narrative, of course, is another form of communication). As official policy, the communication fails, as do Neville’s efforts to uphold reason and restore the old order. He throws his daughter into the burning pit but not his wife, but it does not make any difference either way. The plague spreads, pseudo-science contaminates rationalism, mercy killing mutates into murder, and Neville’s longing for his wife crosses the *cordon sanitaire* into necrophilia, or desire for the undead, which is troped as interracial desire. In short, communication collapses into contagion, which is why the lone survivor has to die, in spite of his bacteriological immunity.

But in dying Neville turns into a *legend* – and not only because he is more susceptible to legends and superstitions than he wants to be. The title *I Am Legend*, almost a posthumous utterance, is voiced by the protagonist as he lays dying in a jail cell – they are the final words of the novel. He has been captured by Ruth’s compatriots – those who have been infected but have learned to live with the disease. She gives him a suicide pill so he can avoid execution which they see as justice but he understands to be a superstitious act of violence. (“My executioner, he thought, the justice of this new society” [154]). The new society is not more just than its predecessor, but it does need to sacrifice its monsters. Ruth puts it this way in her final words to the man she could have loved, had he not killed her family: “In a way we’re like a revolutionary group – repossessing society by violence. It’s inevitable. Violence is no stranger to you. You’ve killed. Many times” (156). Neville hopes the “new people of the earth” will be better, but he knows that is not the case: “Full circle, he thought while the final lethargy crept into his limbs. Full Circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress forever” (160).

Sacrificing Neville does not purge the new society of the need for violence. On the contrary, the new people can kill monsters (Neville) and oppress others (their victims are the zombie-like vampires) in the same way Neville’s world could believe in vampires and repress racial minorities. The novel devotes nearly three pages to the new people’s prolonged murder of his friend Ben Cortman, a gratuitous act of violence prior to their raiding of Neville’s house. He resents seeing his friend killed by strangers, and “he felt more deeply toward the vampires than he did toward their executioners” (148–149). That Cortman is Jewish suggests that anti-Semitism sets the social coordinates for other forms of racism in this decade after the Holocaust.

Neville, in seeing his friend killed, finally identifies with the vampires who are his doubles, and we identify with him in his sympathy – especially now that he is a legend, and therefore undead in a different way. At the eponymous and nearly posthumous moment, this novel does follow the conventions of pandemic pastoralism: translating a social problem into the first-person sentiments of “I am” and the city into a diagram of race relations. Identification, at the personal and racial levels, is the alleged antidote to contagion.

Conclusion

I Am Legend brings up an issue that is central to this volume but was only raised intermittently in connection with the narratives analyzed in this essay. That is the issue of injustice. When injustice is systemic in the way that racism is systemic, it spreads beyond individual cases of prejudice and discrimination to infect an entire society.

The narratives explored in this essay represent this kind of systemic injustice as contagion. Poe’s stories demonstrate the possible range of symbolic responses to contagion: either the collapse of the entire system into despotism and disease (“The Masque of the Red Death”) or denial of the validity of authority (“King Pest”). Neither response offers a solution to the social problem, however, and neither is a pastoral. Pastorals mobilize contagion as a metaphor for social problems, but they push the spread of disease to the point where it becomes a threshold event. The lone survivor crosses the threshold from the time of social contagion to the time after, a time of depopulation, thereby shifting the symbolic register from the communal to the personal. Readers, cut off from the symbolic world of the fiction by a pandemic apocalypse that theoretically would have killed them as well, are asked to identify with the survivor – they do not catch the disease. This shift from the communal/contagious to the personal, usually in the emptied and schematized space of the city, is the essential feature of the pandemic pastoral.

This essay establishes the historical genesis of this feature of pandemic pastoralism, drawing on the writing of early colonists and the work of Mary Shelley and Volney. It then traces the conceptual boundaries of pastoralism through Poe, before providing close readings of three examples from the first half of the twentieth century. Further research would push this genealogy into the second half of the twentieth century. Particularly interesting here is Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* (2011), which uses the zombie-pandemic metaphor to respond Matheson in a way that complicates the connection between race, as a marker of group identity, and the radical individuation – perhaps *atomization* is the better word – characteristic of neoliberal employment practices.

Whitehead’s African American protagonist Mark Spitz – mockingly named after the Olympic gold medalist because he cannot swim – escapes numerous encounters

with the infected (their bite spreads infection) because when push comes to shove, he is willing to abandon all compatriots and go it alone. This anti-group aversion may be (ironically) post-racial, as the name of the white swimmer suggests. It is also the ultimate expression of pandemic pastoralism. The city is not the space of community for the lone survivor; it is like a diagram frozen in time. Mark Spitz, who often recalls the view of Manhattan from a relative's skyscraper apartment, grasps communicability for what it is: the danger of proximity in any community. The antidote, if that is the right word, is communication purged of all bodily contact; thus, one of Mark Spitz's fellow survivors arranges abandoned cars on the road into patterns she hopes will one day be deciphered from outer space. Pandemic pastorals provide that antidote, but only for readers who agree to engage in a collective fantasy of isolation.

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