Petter Skult

The End of the World as We Know It

Theoretical Perspectives on Apocalyptic Science Fiction

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Foreword

The topic of this thesis – post-apocalyptic fiction – is the result of a strange kind of life-long, albeit unconscious, fascination with the aesthetics, ethics and epistemics of the end of civilization. One point of origin for this fascination is, no doubt, my father's shelf, which among other works of fact and fiction contained a mint-condition copy of Barry Popkess's *The Nuclear Survival Handbook: Living Through and After a Nuclear Attack* (1980). From the moment I could read (in English), I perused this rather frightening artefact from the 1980s, and its earnest and oddly compelling depiction of the destructive power of an atomic bomb. It was, of course, hypothetical – although based on both data from nuclear weapon tests and from the only actual historical use of the bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the description of shockwaves, fireballs, firestorms and radioactive fallout falling on not some distant country but on your own home was telling a story that had not happened and that would, hopefully, not happen.

The book's presence in my father's bookshelf was, of course, a literal artefact of the decades in which my parents' generation grew up, but by the time I read Popkess's book, the spectre of nuclear warfare had already receded. For a while, the only apparent apocalypticism came from other forms of fiction, especially television. But after the turn of the millennium, there seemed to be a change of mood from the heady optimism of the 90s. New apocalyptic winds were blowing, bringing with them a renaissance of the zombie movie and of post-apocalyptic stories of all kinds. During the first decade of the new millennium, we were once again steeped in imageries of destruction. It did not need to be the bomb – it could be a virus, or aliens, or zombies – the important thing was that human civilization as we knew it was coming to an abrupt end. Except, of course, that it wasn't: as Popkess's book never needed to be quickly slipped into the pre-packed emergency bag before heading down to the shelter to hide from the bombs, our current apocalyptic mood is – one can hope – just another in a long line of endlessly deferred apocalypses. Even so, the subject continues to fascinate. Hence, this thesis.

Of course, inspiration is not enough. This thesis could not have happened without the support and help of a multitude of people and institutions. First of all I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Anthony B. Johnson and Jason Finch, for their invaluable help and criticism during every step of the

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1.   Introduction

The inspiration for this thesis was curiosity: I wanted to know why authors like Margaret Atwood and Cormac McCarthy, neither of whom had worked in the genre before, decided to write post-apocalyptic science fiction – Atwood in the *MaddAddam* trilogy and McCarthy in *The Road* – a form of fiction that I had hitherto associated with the pulpier kinds of science fiction, the 80s fear of nuclear war, and movies. That was in 2012, at a time when the current sense of apocalypticism was still in its infancy – a sense that has, arguably, reached new heights since then. By now, it should be a surprise to no-one that 'apocalypse' is a theme that is quickly picked up by anyone wishing to comment on the contemporary *zeitgeist*: everywhere one turns these days, there are articles and studies suggesting some kind of imminent disaster, whether connected to climate, politics or economics. A September 2013 article in *The Independent* (Connor 2013) references a study, led by names like Stephen Hawking, which lists various potential 'doomsday scenarios' that we face today. The scenarios listed include cyber attacks, especially on the world's electrical grid, bioterrorism, food shortages, pandemics, malign computers and runaway climate catastrophe: it reads like a plot-summary of Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (which I am analysing in this thesis). An article in the *New York Times* published in March 2016 quotes a paper co-authored by eighteen climatologists warning that it may already be too late to stave off climate change. Rather than the centuries-long, gradual warming that has been predicted until now, the new findings argue that "it could happen far more rapidly, with the worst case being several feet of sea-level rise over the next 50 years, followed by increases so precipitous that they would force humanity to beat a hasty retreat from the coasts" (Gillis 2016). A similar study by NASA, reported on by (among others) *The Guardian* in March 2014, "identifies the most salient interrelated factors which explain civilisational decline, and which may help determine the risk of collapse today: namely, Population, Climate, Water, Agriculture, and Energy" (Nafeez 2014). The essence of the study is that as the elites of the world amass more and more wealth at the expense of the poor masses, they become buffered against the environmental collapse that their exploitation is causing, and thus react too late to the impending catastrophe (examples of this happening before include the Roman and Mayan civilizations). Scarcity of water, energy and food, the report suggests, may create a 'perfect storm' and cause the collapse of industrialized civilization. Such a thing is what appears to have

happened in the post-apocalyptic wasteland of McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) – another of my objects of study. I will provide a short list of some further examples later on in this introduction.

This thesis is not exactly an answer to my initial query – the answer, once one begins studying the long and storied history of post-apocalyptic fiction, is the same as it would be at any point in time when there is in the air what Frank Kermode called 'a sense of an ending'. Disaster fictions, alongside fictions of the apocalypse and what comes after, are natural responses to the sense that one thing is coming to an end and another is beginning. Mary Shelley wrote *The Last Man* (1826) at the point when the Romantic Movement was waning, but also as a response to her own personal tragedies. Countless post-apocalyptic novels were written and published following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world waking up to a new reality. Today, as in any era during the past, we have our own fears, with climate often taking central stage. So naturally my question turned more towards getting a sense of the shape of the coming change, the way in which things were changing rather than why. Since this thesis is primarily concerned with literary analysis, most specifically of North American works of contemporary science fiction, my conclusions, thoughts and theories spring from the tradition of literary studies: as such, I will speak of the movement from modern to postmodern to post-postmodern as a literary phenomenon, but this is still closely connected to the changes occurring outside literature. Brian McHale argues in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) that postmodernism is set in an ontological mode, concerned with matters of creating and living in worlds. This is in contrast with the epistemic mode of the moderns, who were more concerned with knowledge, truth and lies. My central argument is that we have moved on from the ontological to what Lubomír Doležel – one of my central theoreticians – might call the axiological: a preoccupation with values and disvalues, and what we are prepared to do to protect or accomplish the former. Although a 'battle of the world views' – as W. Warren Wagar (1982) termed it – has definitely been in progress since at least the sixties, I would argue that the battlefield has changed in response to an increasing sense of imminent crisis – the postmodern making way for the unaptly named 'post-postmodern'. The elevator pitch for my thesis could perhaps be summarized as such: in a post-postmodern world, truth is less important than opinion, but this does not free opinion-holders from the responsibility of preventing catastrophe. Therefore, the curation of opinions leading to possible worlds that are *not* post-apocalyptic wastelands has become the most important role played by the engine of culture in the post-

postmodern era; and this is a central reason why the writing and reading of post-apocalyptic narratives, which *do* posit such failures, is so important.

I have chosen my theorists mainly based on their utility – their works allow me to construct a dictionary of terms I can use to argue my thesis cogently – Bakhtin's work on the chronotope, and possible worlds theory (with Lubomír Doležel's *Heterocosmica* (1998) in the centre) are my main theoretical inspirations. Their theories do, however, make it difficult to separate my analysis of the literary text entirely from an analysis of the (historical) text of the surrounding world. But, as I shall argue later, one change between the distancing effect of postmodern fiction and the post-postmodern is an increased sense of presence, a sense that what you write and how you influence the world with your words is in fact the most important way you *can* influence the world, and that seeing a work as a part of the world it is produced in is an absolute necessity. I will, in the main, avoid drawing any explicit connections between the events in the political world and the events in the text, except when the writing makes it implicitly obvious. The works are, after all, works of *science fiction* – and thus straddle an interesting line between requirements of absolute verisimilitude (as in realist fiction) and escapist fabulation (as in, arguably, much fantasy fiction).

This thesis is divided into five distinct parts, each building on its predecessor: chapter one is the present introduction, which provides a brief summary of the thesis to come. Chapter two is a literary-historical description of the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction, from its first exemplars to the present day. This both references older research and goes beyond it: and as to date there have been very few few studies of the entire history of the genre, the chapter ends with an analysis of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) and Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1979) as two examples of 'postmodern apocalypses'. In chapter three I introduce my theoretical background: M.M. Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, and possible worlds theory, with Lubomír Doležel's *Heterocosmica* as my main source. I also end this chapter with two small analyses, focused on Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) as an example of 'glimpsing the post-postmodern', and the reception of the PC video game *DayZ* (2012) as one possible venue of future study. In chapter four, I analyse Margaret Atwood's decade-spanning *MaddAddam* (2003-2013) post-apocalyptic trilogy, specifically as a set of novels showing the turn towards the axiological. In chapter five I read Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) as an example of a reaction to the fear of impending apocalypse and of how McCarthy turns towards what I term the axiological in order to make sense of it. Throughout, I will of course argue the thesis I have outlined very briefly above.

1.1. Post-apocalyptic fiction vs. Disaster fiction

Before continuing to the history of post-apocalyptic writing, however, I wish to take a moment to establish what exactly it is that I mean when I say 'post-apocalyptic', as it is not an entirely simple term; I also briefly want to discuss the difference between 'post-' and merely 'apocalyptic' fiction. The term 'post-apocalyptic fiction' itself consists of three words that both require and do not require an explanation. Taken at face value they are self-explanatory: fiction about the/a world after the/an apocalypse, in the vein of Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) or Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014). Yet if looked at more carefully, we find that each word complicates the next. 'Post-'' implies the progression of time, a period *after* something – post-colonial, post-modern, post-feminist, post-9/11 – in this case the 'apocalypse'. But what constitutes an 'apocalypse'? The original Greek meaning of *apocálypsis,* 'a lifting of the veil', or a revelation, sits side by side with the more earthly meaning of 'armageddon', 'catastrophe' or 'holocaust' – the end of the world (as we know it). The 'post-' makes the word almost oxymoronic: what does it mean if something comes *after* the end? What is an end if it is not 'the' end? Wherefore 'apocalypse'? The third part, 'fiction', further complicates the issue. The term 'fiction' is not used for (post-)apocalyptic religious writing, like the Revelation of John in the Christian tradition but rather, as argued by Kermode (2000) fiction is "for finding things out". Unlike (religious) myths that are stable and fixed, fictions "change as the needs of sense-making change" (Kermode 2000: 39). Fictions are, above all, secular and imagined, yet one could easily speak of 'post-apocalyptic narratives' as being religious and post-revelatory – i.e. not fictional but real, like any number of religious and mystical visions of Armageddon, true prophecies of the future to come. Likewise, apocalyptic narratives might also encompass the kinds of studies I briefly referred to earlier, which through the lens of science rather than religion also envision future possibilities – the postmoderns, surely, would see these two as analogous. But I am very emphatically interested in *fiction* that is self-aware as such, rather than attempts at genuine prophecy – as prophecy is much more potentially damaging than fiction. As James Berger points out, "[o]nce the prophetic words have been uttered, the event may as well have occurred, for it must occur. In the mind of the believer, it *has* occurred" (Berger 1999: 138, original emphasis). Post-apocalyptic *fiction* plays with such notions of prophecy, revelation and disaster, all the meanings of the word 'apocalypse', yet it remains fiction, and should be read as such. Central to reading fiction today – any fiction – I argue, is the ability to hold two conflicting

notions in one's mind at once: believing the fictional world to be real, while remaining aware that it is not. This is the central conundrum of the genre, and the reason why reading it becomes increasingly urgent in times of change and rupture.

Another important distinction to make concerns what is often called disaster fiction, or even what might be termed 'apocalyptic' fiction – fiction that depicts or represents the moment of rupture, when the old is shaken until it shatters. This is fiction that often describes the spectacle of tsunamis, meteor strikes, alien invasions, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes that characterize the popular image of disaster: stories that by necessity tend towards the immediate. They end just as the heroes have survived the catastrophe and overlook a changed world (or, as is often the case, a world restored to normality). On the one hand, as Susan Sontag argues in her polemic "The Imagination of Disaster" (1966), they shake us out of our banal everyday life with images of spectacular destruction, explosions and acts of heroism; on the other, they inure us to these same images, making the apocalyptic the everyday, taking the edge off the apparent catastrophe that is modern life (from poverty, disease and hunger to acts of terrorism and war). Sontag says: "we live under continual threat of two equally fearful, but seemingly opposed, destinies: unremitting banality and inconceivable terror" (Sontag 1966: 224), arguing that the fantasy of disaster fiction can help alleviate both, by on the one hand allowing a kind of "[release] from normal obligations" while also "[providing] an outlet to cruel or at least amoral feelings" (Sontag 1966: 215) – giving us, in other words, a welcome imaginative break from our boring everyday life and a vicarious enjoyment of the destruction of everything associated with that life. Apocalyptic fiction can in this sense be dangerous, as it tends to be unreflective of what the actual cost of the disaster that was just perpetrated (on the movie screen, in the novel) would be. On the other hand, every post-apocalyptic tale must contain within it an apocalypse, and they are as such a gateway into new, revelatory ways of thinking, paths to real change as the structures of the old have been stripped away and are ripe for replacement. As such, the recent interest in all manner of disaster fictions is not in itself indicative of a desire for real change, although it does point to a desire for *some* change: a wish that our current existence not only will, but *should*, come to an end. Frank Kermode spoke of 'the sense of an ending' in 1967, around the same time Susan Sontag wrote her article on disaster fiction, articulating the shift towards postmodernism. Whenever there is change, as I will argue later in this thesis, there is fiction that extrapolates that change and turns it into something world-ending – so too at the present moment.

I mentioned earlier that I would give a brief list of some recent examples of post-apocalyptic fiction; it is a list that would need to be constantly updated, and will thus seem immediately outdated when it sees print. Popular media tends to reflect the zeitgeist, and looking through just the recent high-grossing Hollywood movies, one finds that the end of the world and its close relative, dystopia, is very much in fashion. Examples include *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015) quadrology of movies, *The Matrix* (1999-2003) series, the rebooted *Planet of the Apes* (2011-2017) series, *I Am Legend* (2007), *Wall-E* (2008), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Terminator Salvation* (2009), *The Book of Eli* (2010), *Oblivion* (2013), *Zombieland* (2009), *Warm Bodies* (2013), *World War Z* (2013), *28 Weeks Later* (2007), which is a sequel to Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), the *Resident Evil* series (2002-2012), and *Children of Men* (2006), as well as (for example) the Steven Spielberg-directed TV series *Falling Skies* (2011-2015) and the massively popular AMC series *The Walking Dead* (2010-). This selection covers all kinds of apocalypses, from machines (*Terminator* and *The Matrix*) or apes (*Planet of the Apes*) taking over to nuclear war (*Mad Max*), alien invasion (*Oblivion, Falling Skies*) and zombies. Another form of popular entertainment where the post-apocalyptic narrative has become omnipresent is in video games. An extremely limited list of recent titles would include the *Gears of War* (2006-) series, *Half Life 2* (2004), *The Last of Us* (2013), *Left for Dead* (2008) and its sequel *Left for Dead 2* (2009), *Metro 2033* (2010) and its sequel *Metro: Last Light* (2013), *Dead Island* (2011), *Dying Light* (2013), *Rage* (2011), the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* series (2007-2009), *The Walking Dead* series (2012-), *Fallout 3* (2008), *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010) and *Fallout 4* (2015). Many, such as *The Walking Dead* and *Metro 2033* are based on other media – graphic novel and novel respectively – but the large majority of video games narratives are independent of outside sources (although *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* is inspired by both the novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky and the later Tarkovsky *Stalker* movie). Video game apocalypses, just like their movie counterparts, cover the whole gamut of possible ends: zombies (*The Last of Us*, *Left 4 Dead*, *The Walking Dead*, *Dead Island*), aliens (*Gears of War, Half Life 2*), nuclear war (*Metro 2033, Fallout 3*), and even a meteorite (*Rage*). *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* in actuality belongs to a subgenre dealing with spatially limited apocalypses, in this case the radiated wasteland surrounding the Chernobyl nuclear power plant; another example of this is *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), set in a post-apocalyptic Dubai which has been entirely swallowed by the desert.

Within the world of novelistic fiction some recent examples include Justin Cronin's *The Passage* (2010), *The Twelve* (2012) and *The City of Mirrors* (2016); Hugh Howey's *Wool* series (nine books total, 2011-2013), Max Brooks's *World*

War Z (2006), Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006), Stephen King's *Cell* (2006) and Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2015). The apocalypses in this small selection range from a militarized vampire virus running rampant (Cronin), a nanoengineered doomsday device (Howey), zombies (Brooks), flooding caused by global warming (Self), cell phones (King) and a regular virus (Mandel). Nuclear war is conspicuously missing, but the meme of apocalypse as a human creation is stronger than ever. *Wool*, Cronin's vampire novels, and King's *Cell* all to varying levels of explicitness place the blame on human action; in *World War Z* the plague itself is natural (as described in Brooks's 'prequel', the 2003 *Zombie Survival Guide*), but the lack of an appropriate response from the governments of the world is to blame for the pandemic. In addition to the small selection of recent novels listed here, there are naturally the ones that I will give special attention to in this thesis, namely Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy consisting of *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). Atwood's apocalypse has been instigated by one single person, the scientist Crake, whose purpose appears to have been to replace humankind with his own engineered species of humans more in tune with nature. Its nature as a kind of hybrid between old-school science fiction and Atwood's postmodern, feminist views makes it a perfect example of the kind of 'post-postmodernism' I wish to discuss in this thesis. *The Road* is a bleak tale of a father and son trying to survive in a world destroyed by an unknown apocalypse – both survive physically, and as human beings. In addition to these, I will – as mentioned – analyse in less detail Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) and Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) as examples of post-modern apocalypses, as well as briefly mentioning and discussing a host of other relevant works of fiction, particularly in my chapter on the history of post-apocalyptic fiction.

2. A Brief History of the (Post-) Apocalypse

2.1. Defining Apocalypse

This thesis is largely concerned with secular apocalypses, but I would argue it is nigh impossible to disentangle the religious from the secular entirely, especially when dealing with the charged word 'apocalypse'. The idea of apocalypse discussed in this thesis is, of course, Western, and all the authors can be assumed to have been influenced, however atheistic they may be, by the dominant religion of Christianity. Mircea Eliade argues in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954) that before the Abrahamic religions essentially invented linear time, catastrophes or apocalypses were never seen in any way as final by ancient man: they were merely cleansing Deluges or the ends of Great Years which would be followed again by a regeneration and renewal of mankind in an eternal cycle. In this way, Eliade says, the 'terror of history' (military defeats, genocides, cruelties, suffering) could be kept at bay. It was when the ancient Hebrews decided to give their constant defeats a *historical* significance, as the manifestations of Yahweh's wrath, that the concept of a final end was born: "Thus, for the first time, the prophets placed a value on history, succeeded in transcending the traditional vision of the cycle (the conception that ensures all things will be repeated forever), and discovered a one-way time" (Eliade 1954: 104). This was later picked up by both Christianity and Islam and, significantly for this study, by their literature. Helen Gardner (1971), discussing tragedy as aa Christian phenomenon, points out that there is a way to make a "sharp and crude distinction between two attitudes that a religious spirit may take towards the chances, changes and calamities of this life": one is what she calls the "mystical" – by which she means the various great religions of the East such as Buddhism and Hinduism – the other "the Christian". In the mystical attitude, the idea is that suffering comes from within, from our attachment to the physical rather than the spiritual world and that our soul is "imprisoned in matter". Redemption then is "escape from the world of time and the flesh" – in Hinduism the concept of Nirvana. The Christian attitude, on the other hand, equates suffering with sin, especially universal sin – something that is inescapable and has to be accepted and endured and in fact gives meaning to "our experience in this world"; redemption through suffering. This then becomes something in which the tragic poet can find inspiration in.

The doctrine of reincarnation and cycles in many of the religions of the East hints more at the "comic pattern" of the "continual flow of life, of decay and renewal through the generations" rather than the "tragic pattern of resolution in a final conclusion" (Gardner 1971: 94-95). The post-apocalypse, as the paradoxical name suggests, somehow manages to escape easy classification: in a cyclical universe there is little point in speaking of apocalypses, since everything regenerates and we are thus always in a 'post-apocalypse', yet in a linear universe time and progress itself stops with the apocalypse. Thus, post-apocalyptic fiction breaks with both the comic pattern and what Eliade (1954: 85) terms the "annulment of time" that formed the basis of ancient man's attitude towards history and the corollary of history – progress.

For a very long time the word 'apocalypse' merely denoted the religious apocalypse at the end of time: the conception of an apocalypse *sans dieu* is very modern indeed. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* claims that the first usage of 'apocalypse' in its prosaic meaning of "a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, esp. on a global scale; a cataclysm" is from 1894; the word 'apocalyptic' is first used in this meaning in 1918, relating to the First World War, whereas 'post-apocalyptic' in the prosaic form is found as late as 1982, relating to the second *Mad Max* movie. Aris Mousoutzanis (2009) in his opening paragraphs about 'apocalyptic sf' quotes Walter Benjamin, who claims that the concept of progress itself is based on catastrophe, that "[p]rogress implies the destruction of an existing state of affairs so that it can be replaced by a new one"; it is then, as he goes on to point out "hardly coincidental that the earliest examples of futuristic narratives now considered to be precursors of apocalyptic sf appear at a crucial cultural moment for the project of modernity" (Mousoutzanis 2009: 458), citing the anonymous *Reign of King George VI* (1793) and Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *The Year 2440* (1771) as precursors of the genre. W. Warren Wagar in *Terminal Visions* (1982) argues that the earliest example of post-apocalyptic secular fiction, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), "could [not] have been produced in earlier centuries, or at any rate before the last few decades of the eighteenth" (Wagar 1982: 16); the reason, according to Wagar, being the "secularization of the Christian hope" (Wagar 1982: 18). As to why the 'Christian hope' became secularized, the answer might lie in the modern concept of progress, particularly in its scientific guise. Fiona J. Stafford's study of the Last Man myth (1994) offers a comprehensive timeline of the kinds of advance in scientific, cultural and theological thinking during the early to late eighteenth century that eventually led to the secular idea – very central to post-apocalyptic narratives – that the human race might one day become extinct. Ketterer (1974: 94) argues

that the invention of the nuclear bomb "completed the process of secularization that apocalyptic thinking has undergone since medieval times", and bringing with it a slew of new literature about man-made apocalypses, from Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) to Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959).

At this point one might already be able to discern a few possible divisions within the genre, based largely on time. If the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction came about as a consequence or result of modernity, although 'modernity' itself is difficult enough to define (and some, such as Bruno Latour, claim we have 'never been modern' in the first place), this seems like a good starting point for discussing the secular apocalypse. That said, earlier religious or mythological apocalyptic thought has had and still has a considerable influence on the genre – although Mary Shelley's apocalypse is staunchly secular, there have been many works since, including as late as Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) or Justin Cronin's *The Passage* (2010), where overt religious elements figure. A third, more recent evolution is what Wagar (1982: 136) terms the 'irrational' – postmodern post-apocalypses written by authors like Doris Lessing (*Memoirs of a Survivor* [1974]), Paul Auster (*In the Country of Last Things* [1987]) and J.G. Ballard's oeuvre of post-apocalyptic tales, including *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Crystal World* (1966) and *The Burning World* (1964). Each of these types of fiction requires a slightly different approach, yet all fundamentally seem to scratch the same catastrophic/revelatory itch that makes the genre so recognizable. As such, apocalyptic thinking can usefully be divided into a number of historical phases, each making up a part of the sediment of the genre: the mythical and religious, which forms the bottom layer and which ends when what Eliade terms the Eternal Return is broken, when the concept of time transitions from circular to linear (within the Western tradition) and when 'history' allows for a 'post'. The second phase could be identified with the beginning of the project of modernity (which, one might argue, only became possible with linear time), but especially the critical transitional period during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when ideas of geological time, racial extinction, evolution and technology spawned both the dystopian genre and started the inevitable process of killing God, and when the concept of 'serious fiction' as Moretti (2006) defined it became viable, if only because it allowed the counter-genre of science fiction to be born. This is also the period when the first widely-acknowledged works of secular post-apocalyptic fiction were written, namely Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and Richard Jefferies *After London* (1885). The third period is that of the post-nuclear bomb, ranging from 1945 to 1991, the end of the Cold War, which introduced the inescapable

spectre of man-made destruction, allowing for an end of the world that was entirely without God – although rarely escaping intimations of the divine despite insisting on the profane. Within this period, post-apocalyptic fiction took on its contemporary form, entering into the Culture Wars in a way that few other fictions could: its themes of life-after-apocalypse/death, the lack of (or, alternatively, sudden appearance of) the divine, and its capacity to criticize both modern and postmodern modes of thought making it a particularly vital genre. Concurrently with this we have the postmodern or irrational post-apocalypses wherein "[t]he world is not", any longer, "the coherent, reasonable, knowable, humanly meaningful order disclosed either by cold science or warm poetry" (Wagar 1982: 136). This is not to say that works of fiction cannot belong to several of these periods, or be written in one period yet belong to another; for instance George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) can be read as an update to Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), both of which detail the return to savagery in America after a devastating plague, told from the point of view of the 'last of the Americans', while E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909), a story of a vast man-made machine that shelters its inhabitants from the unwelcoming outside world, eventually usurping the place of God (and subsequently failing, dooming all inside), has much more in common with narratives about the dangers of man-made technology. Naturally, the postmodern literary experiment is very far from universal even in the West, with the majority of post-apocalyptic fiction (or, indeed, any fiction) being written within the last few decades having none of the identifiers of 'postmodernity' (aesthetically, at any rate). As such, the historical overview will be slightly disjointed, perhaps ultimately describing 'classes' of post-apocalyptic fiction rather than distinct historical periods – albeit classes that have their specific origin in a specific real-world chronotope.

2.1.1. The Religious Apocalypse

As noted above, in this thesis I am mainly concerned with what I term the 'secular post-apocalypse', that is to say an apocalypse that does not literally interpret a religious text or, if it does so, is nonetheless 'fiction' in the sense that it is not to be read as a literal prophecy of the future central to organized religious practice of some kind. The simplest way of making this distinction is by relying on Frank Kermode's separation between myth and fiction from his *Sense of an Ending* ([1967]]2000), in which he also calls upon Eliade:

> Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time, *illud tempus* as Eliade calls it; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, *hoc tempus*.
>
> (Kermode 2000: 39)

Kermode warns us that "[f]ictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive". The example he gives is anti-Semitism, but it seems that religious thought also falls into this category of 'total explanations' – or at least they get close enough for the purpose of this study. In other words, for something to be considered fictitious it cannot be presented as fact: whereas John of Patmos's visions are read as actual prophecies of a truth to come, someone writing about the fictional end of the world (even if that fiction seems more likely than the four horsemen of the Revelation of John) is self-avowedly fictional. Assent, or consent, is the most important element of it: the reader *assents* to treating the fictional as actual during the act of reading, and after reading the reader may pick and choose which parts they wish to treat as valuable. Myths, by contrast, only allow for absolute assent: all or nothing. This however does not mean that religious ideas of apocalypse do not influence secular ones, nor is this meant as some kind of literary-historical claim that there has always been a direct separation between what Kermode terms myth and fiction.

It is however unavoidable that old religious models resurface whenever one discusses the apocalypse, even when focusing on secular fiction, which is what I intend to do. Since the body of work I will be studying is entirely confined to the Western hemisphere, more specifically the Anglophone world in the West, the religious model is unsurprisingly most often connected to Christianity and the apocalyptic imagery that stems from the Bible. The religious study of end times, *eschatology*, literally the 'study of last things', can be approached in a number of ways. Leigh (2008: 3-4) has summarized four possible types, based on John Davenport's categories: *prehistorical protoeschatology*, *ahistorical soteriological eschatology, fully apocalyptic eschatology and radically historical eschatology*. Essentially, these all correspond to various stages of Eliade's ideas of cyclical and linear time, and his theory that ancient man's main interest lay in *avoiding* the 'terror of history' and the irreversibility of time all together by turning all activity into a repetition of mythical acts (thus bringing about the Eternal Return).

> Basically, if viewed in its proper perspective, the life of archaic man (a life reduced to the repetition of archetypal acts, that is, to categories and not to events, to the unceasing rehearsal of the same primordial myths), although it takes place in time, does not bear the burden of time, does not record time's irreversibility; in other words, completely ignores what is especially characteristic and decisive in a consciousness of time. Like the mystic, like the religious man in general, the primitive lives in a continual present.
>
> (Eliade 1954: 86)

In this kind of eschatology (i.e. the first of Davenport's categories), all apocalypses are reduced to regenerative cycles, like the cycles of the moon waning and waxing: it marks time, a 'month', but each month is the same. The second of Davenport's categories, *ahistorical soteriological eschatology* still operates within cyclical time, except that eschatology now provides "a soteriological function" (Leigh 2008: 3) - that is to say, it offers the potential for salvation and escape from the cycle for an individual, while the rest of the world remains 'trapped' – as an example one could take the Buddhist or Hindu concept of Nirvana. This kind of cyclical time often follows the idea of a deteriorating set of ages – the Greeks' golden, silver, bronze and iron ages, the great 'kalpas' of Hindu mythology, ending with the Kali Yuga, and the final age of the Mayas that caused such a hubbub around 2012 – generally, the current age is the final, most corrupt age, soon to be followed by a regeneration and return to a golden age.

By the third category, *fully apocalyptic eschatology*, one might finally speak of an apocalypse as I have previously defined the word. It corresponds to Eliade's idea of linear time, of time having an end rather than being an endlessly repeating cycle (of harvest, reproduction, death, regeneration); in essence "we might say that, among the Iranians as among the Jews and Christians, the 'history' apportioned to the universe is limited" (Eliade 1954: 129): the utopian beginning or golden age will come again at the end, but only once, rather than being repeated endlessly. This is the vision of the end for the Zoroastrians, the Jews and the early Christians – the followers of Zoroaster being perhaps the original 'inventors' of this kind of eschatology. Zoroastrianism, in its original form, was largely non-prophetic – humanity was put on this world by the creator to do battle with evil, a battle that could go either way dependent on our actions: here Zoroastrianism mainly functions as a precursor of the Biblical/Manichean concept of good versus evil, with the creation of a 'devil' figure (Angra Mainyu or Ahrimann, 'Evil Spirit') doing battle with a 'god' figure (Ahura Mazda or Ohrmazd, 'Lord Wisdom'). Historical circumstances, which scholars have been able to map out by comparing the different written accounts of Zoroastrian dogma, conspired to change the original message through the repeated invasions and conquests of the Zoroastrian homelands by foreign cultures and religions, a pattern that was later

repeated for the ancient Hebrews. What this gave rise to was a crisis literature of sorts, "the view that communal suffering was part of a predestined scheme of things" (Kreyenbroek 2002: 52).

> At times of national calamities, tales of this type were probably often told at all levels of society, offering explanation, comfort and hope. Thus, it seems, a recognizable apocalyptic genre developed, purporting to recount prophecies foretelling the disasters that had in fact already befallen the Iranians, but also telling of decisive changes of fortune which were destined to restore the community to its previous glory in due course.
>
> (Kreyenbroek 2002: 52)

Thus, history itself becomes a thing of importance, although what (for the Iranians) constituted contemporary apocalyptic events are in fact projected into the future. As Kreyenbroek (2002: 55) concludes, what was essentially a "vague notion that Good would eventually vanquish Evil" led, as a result of repeated conquests and catastrophes, to true "millenarian speculations: a predestined 'moral' future for the world".

That is not to say that apocalyptic thinking of this kind is always equally in vogue: Robert Wilson (2002) points out that within the Christian and Jewish tradition, apocalyptism has generally been popular during periods of oppression rather than during times of stable religious rule. Although he says the fluctuating interest is "difficult to explain with any precision", he theorizes that the reason might simply be that since apocalyptic prophecies "rely on direct revelation rather than revelation mediated through ecclesiastical teachers and officials" this type of revelation tends to be "perceived by religious leaders as a threat if it appears to challenge the stability of established religious communities" (Wilson 2002: 57). In this way, apocalyptic thinking seems to be used as a tool for gaining political power or for dealing with a crisis or trauma of some kind on a societal level. Consequently, those kinds of religious apocalyptic thinking in which the apocalypse is projected into the future become tools for oppressed or minority groups to empower themselves, and this has been the case since the beginning of recorded history. D.H. Lawrence for example was a vociferous critic of such varieties of apocalyptic thinking: according to him, the Revelation of John is above all "the revelation of the undying will-to-power in man" (Lawrence 1980: 67), written for and by the 'weak', those who would want nothing more than to bring about the end of the world itself just for a chance to sit on the heavenly throne. "If you have to suffer martyrdom, and if all the universe has to be destroyed in the process, still, still, still O Christian, you shall reign as a king and set your foot on the necks of the old bosses!" (Lawrence 1980: 67).

The final category, *radically historical eschatology* is the final elaboration of this, as now history and the end of time are "teleologically related" (Leigh 2008: 129) – the kind of eschatology perhaps best illustrated by Dispensationalist theology, popularized by the Protestant minister John Nelson Darby in the late nineteenth century, wherein earthly events can be read as portents of the end. In sum, according to Amy Johnson Frykholm: "Dispensational premillennialism, as scholars came to call this form of prophetic belief, made order from seeming chaos, put God in charge of human history, and designated a privileged place for believers" (Frykholm 2004: 16). Within linear eschatological thinking there are obviously manifold variations, especially within the various Christian denominations and doubly so within the various protestant churches of the US and elsewhere. I specifically mention the United States because it is in many ways there that apocalyptism in its religious sense still blooms strong; consider the popular *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, which depicts the Rapture (an apocryphal idea that the righteous will be 'raptured away' prior to the apocalypse, a kind of pre-judgement VIP pass directly to Heaven) as Dispensationalists see it, all the way to the final battle between the come-again Christ and the Antichrist. The first book, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* was published in 1995, and over a decade and 15 books later with millions of copies sold concluded in 2007 with *Kingdom Come: The Final Victory*. In the meantime it inspired a bevy of spin-offs, movies, TV-series and even video games.

The central aspect of all forms of religious eschatological thinking is that they are essentially attempts to combat what Eliade terms the 'terror of history'. As Frykholm (2004) points out with regard to readers of *Left Behind*, they practice a reading where "the contemporary moment [is read] through the lens of its apocalyptic end":

> Political events, diplomatic missions, wars, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters are not random, but woven into a complex narrative about the world's approaching end. This method of interpretation structures the readers' understanding of the world they live in. It offers coherence to what might otherwise appear random and secures for them a very specific and special place in world history.
>
> (Frykholm 2004: 106)

This is what confers meaning on otherwise senseless events and structures the reader's minds and world views. Eliade defines the 'terror of history' in somewhat oblique terms, but essentially it is the realization that taken at face value, history (the temporally ordered, irreversible series of events that make up our everyday lives) is devoid of transcendental meaning, and that most grand

narratives (religion, Marxism) are attempts to imbue it with meaning in order to tolerate "the dramas of oppression, the collective sufferings, deportations, humiliations, and massacres that fill universal history" (Eliade 1954: 149). By the end of the book Eliade himself retreats from the terror of history into an Abrahamic faith, claiming that it is only "by presupposing the existence of God" that modern man can defend himself against both 'freedom' (existentialism) and become convinced that "historical tragedies have a transhistorical meaning, even if that meaning is not always visible for humanity in its present condition" (Eliade 1954: 162).

The other strictly religious alternative to Abrahamic faith in Good vanquishing Evil is to follow D.H. Lawrence's suggestion. As mentioned above, Lawrence considered the apocalyptic tradition of Christianity to be the religion of the collective, yet powerless, masses: a religion of fear, weakness and collectivism. He contrasts the loving, 'aristocratic' and renunciating religion of Christ and the Apostle John with the writings of John of Patmos, whose main message he claims is '*Down with the strong!*'

> Of the positive side of Christianity, the peace of meditation and the joy of unselfish service, the rest from ambition and the pleasure of knowledge, we find nothing in the Apocalypse. Because the Apocalypse is for the non-individual side of a man's nature, written from the thwarted collective self, whereas meditation and unselfish service are for pure individuals, isolate.[…]It is repellant only because it resounds with the dangerous snarl of the frustrated, suppressed collective self, the frustrated power-spirit in man, vengeful.
>
> (Lawrence 1980: 73; italics in original)

The alternative, according to Lawrence, is a return to the cosmos, a refusal of reason, starting with sun, moon and planetary worship. Lawrence sees history as a progression of 'dragons' symbolising cycles, the good dragon turning into the evil dragon by the end of the cycle. "And the Logos, the good dragon of the beginning of the cycle is now the evil dragon of today" (Lawrence 1980: 125) and must thus be slain. He appreciates the supposed lost knowledge of the ancients, their "great and intricately developed sensual awareness, or sense-awareness, and sense-knowledge" of the universe brought about "by instinct and intuition, as we say, not by reason […] the connection was not logical but emotional" (Lawrence 1980: 91). The final sentence of his work, in stark contrast with Eliade's, is: "What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen"

(Lawrence 1980: 149). Lawrence wrote *Apocalypse* in the winter of 1929-1930, at the mid-way point between the invention of the nuclear bomb and the end of the First World War. Later on thoughts like his would be picked up by a succession of cosmos-worshippers, including the counter-cultures of the 1960s and the idea of the coming Age of Aquarius. Lawrence's idea of sun-worship (and all that follows) may well be a solution to the linear eschatology of Christianity, but it remains a purely religious endeavour (although as Lawrence would have it, no literature is possible without religion, and furthermore he sees post-Newtonian physics as similar to the cosmos-worship of the ancients). It seems, then, that as far as religious eschatology is concerned, we can come no further: a return to sun-worship, or an in-the-face-of-everything adherence to (Christian) faith that there is in fact a God.

2.1.2. The Apocalypse of Modernity

> The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern', 'modernization', or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers. Ancients and Moderns.
>
> (Latour 1991: 10)

The narrative of modernity is an ongoing one, and even though many have already claimed a transition into a 'post'-modern era, a perhaps equal number of critics would claim we are merely living in 'late modernity' – or, as in the case of Latour, that we have 'never been modern' in the first place. Although apocalypses – in the form of historical terrors like invasions, plagues, ecological collapse – have abounded through time, Western modernity is its own species of ongoing apocalypse. For as James B. Collins and Karen L. Taylor (eds.) put it in the introduction to *Early Modern Europe* (2006: 2), "Virtually no important institution or fundamental belief of the European world of 1450 survived intact in 1650": everything that had seemed solid became, through religious wars and socio-political rewritings of the European world, something new, something more 'modern'. That, of course, is merely the early modern period: Marshall Berman (1988) identifies the post-revolutionary years of 1790s onwards as the middle modern period, and the twentieth century as the third and final period, when modernity became a truly global phenomenon, partially through the socialist movement that swept the world (Berman 1988: 17). The years cited may seem somewhat arbitrary, and pinning down when exactly 'modernity' began (or, for that matter, ended – if one can realistically claim such a thing) is

not simple. One traditional year is the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 which marks the end of the Middle Ages. Another possible contender would be the discovery of the New World in 1492, which began the era of colonization and discovery. Another, perhaps more pertinent for the literary world, was the first printing of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455; by 1517, that same technology was used to disseminate Martin Luther's 95 Theses, thus beginning the Reformation. By the seventeenth century, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes had laid the foundation of the modern state and the social contracts that governed it. Whatever the year or event used to mark it, the modern world was ushered in by the Renaissance (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries), the Reformation (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) and the Enlightenment (seventeenth century onwards): new philosophies, economic, religious and social theories that created what Latour has called the Great Divide between the Ancients and the Moderns.

Latour's own definition of modernity and Enlightenment, as much as he claims we never reached that point, is however quite useful. He claims the Enlightenment was essentially the act of separating the world of 'things' from the world of society and politics: the 'object' from the 'subject'. Moderns, Latour writes, are above all defined by this ability to separate: Nature (which can be studied through science) and Society (or politics) are made into two distinct categories, and separated from the 'crossed-out God' – a divine will necessary for the spirit but safely removed from both the natural world and the world of politics. A modern, according to Latour, is someone who is capable of the feat of doublethink that constitutes this separation while at the same time (at will) oscillating between the three as necessary: nature both is and is not transcendent, we both can and cannot control it; society is likewise both transcendent and immanent – we both are and are not entirely free, dependent on whether God is or is not present (Latour 1991: 36-37). This approach is what allowed the moderns to conquer the world of the Ancients, who were left as the literal losers.

When Hernán Cortéz defeated the Aztec Empire in 1521, he did so on the corpses of upwards of forty percent of the population of what would become Mexico, killed by European smallpox (Carrasco 2010: 109). He also did so at the expense of virtually the entire civilization of Central and South America, a civilization we can now only study through archaeology, its literature, culture, language and religion having been rendered nearly extinct. The Aztec Empire shares the fate of every other previously great civilization in America, from the Maya in the south to the Iroquois in the north, wiped out by the pattern of colonization and exploration that perhaps constitutes the largest modern

apocalypse, in both senses of the word. The result was a widening, not just of the economic and cultural reach of Europe, but also of mental horizons – a widening that, eventually, would lead to the rise of the early modern novel, increased secularization, and eventually post-apocalyptic fiction. From a literary-historical point of view, a good example of these apocalyptic changes is the shift in the concept of utopia. Religious 'utopias', such as that promised in Heaven, or conversely the Utopia of Eden, the Golden Age or the time of the antediluvian immortals in Mesopotamian myth, were often conceived of in rather simplistic terms: akin to the Sugarcandy Mountain described by the raven Moses in George Orwell's *Animal Farm,* a literal pie in the sky for those animals who work hard for the humans. These earliest utopias were essentially the products of what Claeys and Sargent (1999: 2) would call "social dreaming"; "simplicity, security, immortality or an easy death, unity among the people; unity between the people and God or the gods, abundance without labor, and no enmity between human beings and the other animals". When Sir Thomas More coined the word 'utopia' in 1516, what he did would prove to be a significant step on the way towards the secularization of future spaces. Utopia could only exist because the New World gave it space to exist: as Reis and da Silva (2006: 9) say, a "*somewhere* is always predicated for utopia's nowhere": even if the utopia is an invention of the mind, there needs to be space for it in the real world. Utopian fiction takes a step beyond social dreaming into somewheres that are not merely gifts from the gods but rather are at least partially the result of human endeavour. The word 'utopia' (or 'outopia') meaning 'no-place' is a deliberate pun based on the homophone 'eutopia', meaning 'good place'. It is in the pun itself that the distinction between old utopian ideas and More's new kind of utopia is made apparent: a no-place is an imaginary place, not a Heaven or Hell on some metaphysical plane that a believer would by necessity construe as 'real'. A utopia is a possible (good) future for the real, historical human beings in this world, and they can and will be built by human social engineering, not acts of God.

Claeys and Sargent (1999) divide utopias conceived after More 'invented the genre' into four distinct periods that combine thought and time, and also map out the changing modern (apocalyptic) landscape: religious radicalism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, voyages of discovery during the sixteenth century and the discovery of "primitive" peoples, the idea of progress through science from the seventeenth century onward, and finally the revolutionary movements in France and North America during the eighteenth century which projected the need for social justice onto a national scale (Claeys and Sargent 1999: 3). Whatever the background, utopian fictions all in one way or another

reflect and support the great project of modernity, which is based on the concept of progress (both within science and society, Latour's twin categories) and the death (or crossing-out) of God. Utopian fictions, however, experienced a sharp decline in the late modern period, and from the twentieth century and beyond have virtually vanished, replaced by the now-ubiquitous dystopia. The word 'dystopia' itself is of contemporary origin, but one might argue it has always been extant within the concept of utopia itself: a utopia is only utopian insofar as it can be compared to a surrounding, less utopian (and thus essentially dystopian) world. Post-apocalyptic fiction has, from its origin, been rife with dystopian elements. In Shelley's *The Last Man*, disease eventually leads to a situation where "decorum was violated, and the evils, which hitherto adhered to an advanced state of civilization, were doubled" (*The Last Man*: 217): a roundabout way of describing the rape, murder and drunken debauchery of a world dying. *After London* (1885) by Richard Jefferies, describes a society which has descended into the barbarism of feudalism after an unknown apocalypse, erasing all the progress of industrialization. Although famously inspiring William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890), which featured an agrarian, proto-socialist society as utopian, I do not believe Jefferies intended the feudal slavery, tyrannical kings and senseless anti-scientism of *After London* to be read as utopian (although a surprising number of critics disagree): at one point the protagonist, the son of a Lord and thus nobility himself, even though his house was impoverished, was forced to live and work among the grooms and other lower-class people during his adventure. At this time he "recognised how feebly [society] was held together by brute force, intrigue, cord and axe, and woman's flattery. But a push seemed needed to overthrow it" (Part 2, Chapter 18): a call for revolution and change, not passive acceptance of a supposed utopian society. Erika Gottlieb in her *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (2001) points out that whereas utopian fictions still retained a tenuous connection to Christianity and the linear, but God-mandated, vision of history offered by faith, dystopian fiction finally severed that bond:

> If the central drama of the age of faith was the conflict between salvation and damnation by deity, in our secular modern age this drama has been transposed to a conflict between humanity's salvation or damnation by society in the historical arena. In the modern scenario salvation is represented as a just society governed by worthy representatives chosen by an enlightened people; damnation, by an unjust society, a degraded mob ruled by a power-crazed elite. Works dealing with the former describe the heaven or earthly paradise of utopia; those dealing with the latter portray the dictatorship of a hell on earth, the "worst of all possible worlds" of dystopia.
>
> (Gottlieb 2001: 3)

Gordin, Tilley and Prakash (2010) add to this definition by pointing out another difference between utopias and dystopias, in that no dystopia is ever an actual antonym of a utopia: a society "planned to be deliberately terrifying or awful". Rather a dystopia is a "utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society": very much resembling "the actual societies historians encounter in their research: planned, but not planned all that well or justly" (Gordin, Tilley and Prakash 2010: 1-2). The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek similarly criticizes Communism and the Utopian project, speaking of the "obscenity of the barbarian violence which sustains the public face of law and order", calling it "background noise", the erasure of which is "the very core of utopian dreaming" – in other words, to dream of utopias is to ignore or erase the brutal violence of imposing this 'utopian' order on the population, the topic of most classical dystopias (Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *1984*). Dystopias, if read from an Eliadean point of view, project the ultimate terror of history, an extrapolated version of what may be in a world with no checks and balances (i.e. a divine will), without the chance for regeneration or return to a simpler past.

2.1.3. First Post-Apocalypses: 'The Last Man' and the Culture Cycle

From a cyclical-religious point of view, we already live in an eternal post-apocalypse, usually at the end of some great era at the cusp of regeneration, or else simply in a post-mythological no-time where we symbolically return to the ideal past in our rituals, celebrating the non-passage of time through seasons, the movement of heavenly bodies and the cycle of death and life. From a linear-religious point of view, we are all merely waiting for the ultimate end of history, when the appointed lot of human time here on Earth runs out, after which there can be no post-apocalypse aside from the narrow definition of an eternity in heaven or hell. Modernity, as discussed above, removed God's finger from the progress of history, and by doing so offered the possibility for a different teleological 'end of history': a utopia or dystopia made by man. This is the point where post-apocalyptic fiction becomes truly viable, in projecting a future state for humanity after a society-altering cataclysm that does not – generally – involve a deity. I have already briefly mentioned Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* and Richard Jefferies's *After London* as early examples of the genre, and it is not entirely wrong to see them as the two potential ur-types of post-apocalyptic fiction. Jefferies is largely concerned with society and its relationship to technology, whereas Shelley's work deals with the fear of extinction.

Fiona L. Stafford's *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (1994) cogently explains the reason why, at the beginning decades of the nineteenth century, there was suddenly an onslaught of 'the last of the race' narratives, including Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), which was one of many works on the same subject, all written around the same time: Jean-Baptiste Francois Xavier Cousin de Grainville's *The Last Man*, translated in 1806, Lord Byron's poem "Darkness" (1816) which may have inspired both Scottish poet Thomas Campbell's "The Last Man" (1824), an unfinished drama by Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1823-5), and a satirical ballad by Thomas Hood (1826). At the same time artists such as John Martin, J.M.W Turner and Francis Danby all produced sublime artwork depicting the end of time, some of which (notably John Martin's *The Deluge*) was viewed by Shelley at the time of her writing (Williams 2000: 107). Stafford (1994) sees the sudden influx of last-man narratives as authors capitalizing on the already extant idea of the 'last of the race' as a metaphor for their own status in a rapidly changing cultural and literary context: "a figure peculiarly attractive to writers who felt they had outlived their cultural milieu and were left stranded in an uncongenial age" (Stafford 1994: 199); the catalyst in the case of Mary Shelley, as critics such as Williams (2000) and Elmer (2009) have pointed out, being the twilight of the Romantic movement (Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron having both passed away not long before Shelley wrote the novel).

Prior to Shelley, the extinction of the human race was obviously a possibility – in fact an inevitability – but only in the religious sense. The major question Cousin de Grainville's *The Last Man* asks is whether the last man should copulate with the last woman and continue the human race, or let it die out. Having decided against propagation, God is finally free to let the Final Judgement begin; the extinction of the race being merely the point when the appointed amount of history runs out, and the final return to utopia could be enacted. A few years before Shelley published *The Last Man*, French geologist George Cuvier published his 1813 *Essay on the Theory of the Earth*, positing within it the existence of multiple apocalypses in the past based on geological and paleontological records, which had led to mass extinctions and massive changes in geography. Cuvier suggested that their cause lay in periodic deluges, like the one in Mesopotamian or Biblical myth, but the implications were more far reaching:

> For although it appeared to authenticate the Scriptures by proving the Deluge a historical event, it also diminished the Mosaic account by making the Flood seem merely the most recent of a series of catastrophes experienced by an earth of immeasurable antiquity. Cuvier's systematic palaeontology also struck a death-blow to the already weakened tradition of fixed species, by proving once and for all that entire species could vanish from the world, while new ones came into existence.
>
> (Stafford 1994: 186)

Not only does this new science prove that the Earth is not 6000-odd years old, but that humankind has not existed on it for longer than the blink of an eye, which removed humans from their previously highly vaunted position at the top of Creation, instead reducing them to just another species at risk of extinction. In 1853, the Epic of Gilgamesh was discovered in what is present-day Iraq, the eleventh tablet of which contained what seemed to be an independent retelling of the Biblical Flood myth. Cregan-Reid (2009) recounts some of the reactions contemporaries had to the discovery, ranging from reading it as "proof of the reality of Noah's Flood" (Cregan-Reid 2009: 227) to the suggestion that the Epic "may – like the book of Genesis – belong to a broader, older tradition" (Cregan-Reid 2009: 229) – namely that of myth and legend. It is ironic that the idea of apocalypse as divine was undermined by one of the oldest stories of apocalypse itself, if for no other reason than it having given rise to the suggestion that the Scriptures themselves were now suspect. This apocalyptic thought-pattern found its ultimate expression in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* published in 1859, which finally "brought about the 'death of Adam'" (Stafford 1994: 289) and made "survival independent of God or any form of moral control" (Stafford 1994: 291).

The apocalypse described by Jefferies, and later Jack London in *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) is slightly different: it is the post-apocalypse of halted or reverted progress, an expression of doubt towards the changes wrought by technology in society, as opposed to a straightforward description of the extinction of the human race. For that reason, Jefferies and London belong to a different category than Shelley: that of science fiction. *The Scarlet Plague* is particularly significant in that it combines the last man ethos of Shelley with the reverted barbarian society of Jefferies. In it, London describes a post-plague world, set sixty years after a plague that wiped out nearly the entire population of the world, from which only a small handful of largely barbarian survivors remain. The narrator, an old man called Granser ('Grand Sir'), is a survivor of the eponymous plague, "the only person alive to have lived in those times (*The Scarlet Plague*: 4) – thus a 'last man' figure – and the story is his narration of the events of the apocalypse to his three grandsons – Edwin, Hare-Lip and Hoo-

Hoo. His grandsons remain largely uninterested and in any case only barely able to understand him, their language already 'degraded'. At one point they find a family of skeletons, plague victims who perished in the sand, and the boys begin knocking out the teeth in order to make a necklace. Granser declares:

> You are true savages. Already has begun the custom of wearing human teeth. In another generation you will be perforating your noses and ears and wearing ornaments of bone and shell. I know. The human race is doomed to sink back farther and farther into the primitive night ere again it begins its bloody climb upward to civilization.
>
> (*The Scarlet Plague*: 11)

The central conceit of the novel, then, is that of evolution; human and social – Lawrence I. Berkove (2007) describes it as London taking a stand against the Spencerian position on evolution (evolution as progress), siding instead with Huxley (evolution of the fittest). Granser used to be a professor of English, a man of high standing, yet some of the other survivors that he meets, notably Chaffeur, are brutes drawn from the lower classes of society, and it is these brutes who dominate the post-apocalypse: "Intellect and wealth might temporarily determine 'fittest' in certain situations, but brute strength might be fittest for others" (Berkove 2007: 15). During the apocalypse, it was from the lower classes that the roaming bands of looters and violent men who took to the streets and hastened the End came. Granser tells us that: "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" (*The Scarlet Plague*: 31). Berkove identifies this as another aspect of evolution, writing that London thought "[a]ll races, even the most 'advanced,'[…]have social levels: lower, relatively barbarian classes ('they'), and an upper, ruling class ('we') that is only shallowly civilized and that exploits this underclass" (Berkove 2007: 15).

In David Raney's view, *The Scarlet Plague* "frame[s] that period's debate over the complicated issues of class- and race-mixing" (Raney 2003: 392), but unlike Berkove's analysis Raney sees London as having a considerably more negative view on both of these issues. This is expressed in the names of some of the other tribes of the area: the Utah tribe, founded by one Johnson, "a strong man, with a will of his own" (*The Scarlet Plague*: 49), whose seed, Granser believes, "will grow into a strong tribe and play a leading part in the repopulating of the planet" (*The Scarlet Plague*: 49-50) is contrasted with the "Los Angelitos" and "Carmelitos", both descended from "the ancient Mexicans" and "very black" – their country, although good, "is too warm" (*The Scarlet Plague*: 50). As Raney (2003: 424) argues, "[i]t is not from the dark and

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indolent south, evidently, that humanity's saviors will arise". Rather, it will come through "a new Aryan drift around the world" (*The Scarlet Plague*: 50). That said, as Chaffeur and Granser's three grandchildren demonstrate, merely being Aryan does not confer special nobility: "Some will fight, some will rule, some will pray; and all the rest will toil and suffer sore while on their bleeding carcasses is reared again, and yet again, without end, the amazing beauty and surpassing wonder of the civilized state" (*TSP*: 55).

The Scarlet Plague presaged Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918) and later Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1934-61), both of which proposed a theory of culture cycles in the rise and fall of civilizations, including the inevitable fall of the west. Although the idea of cycles within human society can be found earlier (particularly in Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89)), Spengler (as Franz Borkenau (1981: 35) points out) put *culture* in the central role. The post-apocalyptic novel, in line with the changes in society, has gone from religious considerations towards the cultural: particularly with regard to the survival or death of civilizations or cultures, entirely outside the mandate of God. The 'Last Man' mythos describes a complete, secular end to history – the ultimate fear – but the alternative as described by Jefferies and London is one of degeneration and barbarism, followed (perhaps) by a re-emergence of civilization. This is as true of *After London* as of *The Scarlet Plague*: Caroline Sumpter (2011) for instance offers a Machiavellian analysis of the social system that the protagonist, Felix, of *After London* encounters in his travels; Jefferies having been a reader of Machiavelli. The most salient point she makes here is that according to Machiavelli, time is cyclical rather than progressive (Sumpter 2011: 327). The importance of this can be seen, interestingly enough, in the misappropriation of *After London* by William Morris. The barbaric, according to Morris, must not be seen as a regression, but rather a natural evolution. Sumpter writes that "Morris chose to find a progressive history, which validated his own revolutionary optimism, in the conclusion of Jefferies's romance" rather than the Machiavellian reading "in which the future of humanity is destined to be 'just the same'" (Sumpter 2011: 328). The novel ends with Felix becoming the lord over otherwise apparently perfectly free, pastorally idyllic shepherds, and ordering them to construct a fortified tower as his seat of power, which seems to suggest that "the rise of the city state and cycle of acquisition looks set to begin again" (Sumpter 2011: 328). *The Scarlet Plague*, as we could see above, follows a similar sentiment of cyclical progression, a necessary teleological path from the primitive to the advanced (and possibly back again).

Franz Borkenau's *End and Beginning*, which was published posthumously in 1981 but largely written in the 1940s and 50s, is a critique of Spengler and Toynbee and a reworking of their theories of the cyclic rise and fall of cultures (or civilizations). Borkenau opposes the Spenglerian notion of civilizations being 'monads' that do not affect one another, and elaborates on Toynbee's ideas on 'affiliated' civilizations. He places a particular emphasis on the 'barbaric interludes' between high cultures, finding in them a regenerative vitality. In his view, it is what he calls the antimony of death, a series of "conflicting attitudes towards death" (Borkenau 1981: 64) that marks each culture generation, and for him each high culture passes through a transformation of this attitude (from the denial to the acceptance of death) during its lifetime. Borkenau proposes two possible "end phases of a high culture": they either ossify, meaning they no longer progress and can no longer provide anything meaningful to humanity (Borkenau gives the Jews as an example of one such culture), or then they become disrupted (usually by the invasion of outside forces) and relapse into barbarism together with most of the systems that upheld the higher cultural elements ("writing, systematic thought, and state organization"), including the "systems of dealing with the antimony of death" (Borkenau 1981: 81). A high culture typically 'accepts' death, or at least has a system to deal with it – e.g. the Egyptian embalming process that ensures immortality to the nobility – but during the interval between cultures the disruptive process causes a "regression to the primitive" (Borkenau 1981: 81). This regression, according to Borkenau, is largely expressed as a resurgence of the denial of death: each man considers himself immortal, and all death comes as the result of murder (whether magical or physical) "and this leads to the conviction that everybody is a murderer" (Borkenau 1981: 82). Borkenau, however, considers this barbaric interlude to be something ultimately positive: not all progress is lost, and the culture that rebuilds itself from the "atavistic horrors" (Borkenau 1981: 83) of the barbaric interlude does so with increased vitality. In this sentiment we see a kind of secularization of the previously theological notion of regeneration. If *The Scarlet Plague* and *After London* are not exactly positivistic, their cycles nonetheless describe a kind of inevitable rise and fall, which naturalizes the apocalypse (and its attendant horrors) as a part of a grand historical cycle. In this way it is possible, again through the idea of cycles, to alleviate the terror of history, even without God. This is a notion which, as we shall see, soon becomes more problematic.

2.1.4. The Post-Nuclear Apocalypse

> In essence, the choice today is either the psychical and probably also physical perdition of humanity, since mankind now possesses the means to achieve the total self-destruction implied in some creeds, or a – by historical standards – quick triumph of a determined death transcendence. In other words: it is probable that the present phase of death acceptance, nay death embracing, will no longer develop into a full culture cycle
>
> (Borkenau 1981: 93)

I ended the previous section with Borkenau and start the next with him because, writing in the post-World War Two era, he seemed to have come to realize the present era might very well be one that puts an end to the seemingly inevitable cycles of cultures. The 'means' he speaks of is evident: the atomic bomb. In a 1951 essay titled "Will Technology Destroy Civilization?" Borkenau claims that the "crisis of our age is much more than [simply one of many cyclical crisis in human culture]: it is the second great phase in the development of civilization" (Borkenau 1981: 454). He is writing at the same cultural moment as Eliade, who saw the choice of combating the terror of history as one between nihilism and faith: Borkenau however, in his slightly earlier essay "After the Atom: Life out of Death or Life in Death?" (1947) proposes the rather alarming idea of letting nuclear war occur as a solution to the threat of the (in his view) stagnant, ossified and totalitarian East: "disintegration is the only possible prelude to further growth" (Borkenau 1981: 447). He ends his later 1951 essay with a hint as to what might be the 'second great phase', and I note it here because it is an effective combination of Lawrence's and Eliade's solutions: science and technology, he says, produce truths that "are a universal possession of humanity, because they are not only human truths, but in accord with cosmic reality"; truths that "can be lost sight of in chaotic transitional periods" but that, "after having been purged in the fires of a great cultural change" will "really begin to shine forth" (Borkenau 1981: 458). These cosmic truths are, in short "the stamp of divinity upon creation", and prove that "faith in progress" is "in the end only a faith in God's positive working in history – and not outside history" (Borkenau 1981: 459). This position brings into focus the kinds of questions the world was faced with directly following the post-bomb era, and the kinds of questions that are still being asked today: the opposition between faith and science, or what faith-in-science means. It also the question that post-apocalyptic fiction increasingly began asking itself in this period: is scientific truth immortal, and if it is, does it point towards God? Or will the apocalypse reveal the inner nothingness of the idea of truth itself? Borkenau represents one end of the spectrum, joined by a

multitude of other similar thinkers. On the other side, we have the postmoderns. This, I argue, is the central battlefield of the nuclear age and the Cold War: the culture wars.

Borkenau pointed out that, especially in Germany, this positivistic view of science has come under attack. He may here be referring to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose seminal work *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), has remained influential up to today. In it they put forward an impassioned argument against the very concept of enlightenment, science and progress, and in doing so initiate the post-modern critique of modernity. Horkheimer and Adorno likened the enlightenment to totalitarian dictatorships, claiming its reliance on the science of mathematics and its proffered complete understanding of the world being akin to a position in which "the trial is prejudged" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 18), because it allows for no contrary opinions. They consider the Enlightenment the originator of a Nazi Germany which used it to justify its excesses and terrors, its new barbarism: "For those at the top, shrewd self-preservation means the fascist struggle for power, and for individuals it means adaptation to injustice at any price" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 71). Reason itself thus only leads to oppression, especially when "harnessed to the dominant mode of production" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 72): capitalism. In that vein they criticize what they call the 'culture industry' (particularly TV, cinema and radio, i.e. new media) for the "reproduction of sameness" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 106): anything untried is a risk, everything is determined by consumption, art is now merely commercial, entertainment now only serves to dull the consumer's senses to the terror society is inflicting on them and so on. The postmoderns, however, also needed to find a way to deal with the antimony of death – the simultaneous awareness that death is inevitable while constructing elaborate systems to combat that fear — or the terror of history, and they too wrote novels concerning the end of the world. These novels, written by the likes of Doris Lessing, J.G. Ballard and Paul Auster, emphasise the absurd and irrational in the end of the world, while often focusing on issues like language, the role of women, and the psyche, as opposed to straightforward societal concerns. They can be seen as commenting on Horkheimer and Adorno, rather than Borkenau, and such, I will discuss them at more length later.

Most post-apocalyptic novels of this period, however, would hardly describe themselves, or be described by others, as somehow 'post-modern'. Nonetheless, they all embraced the same question of what progress and technology means, what it means if the march of modernity is halted, and what happens after. The most significant one that furthers the older 'last man' theme

in the nuclear age is without a doubt Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), in which the plague is replaced by an equally deadly cloud of radiation that by the end of the novel wipes out all life on Earth. Another example of the 'last man' type is Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), in which the bomb is not the direct cause of the apocalypse, but an indirect one: nuclear radiation mutating a 'bacillus' that turns people into vampires, with Matheson's protagonist as the last (legendary) human. *On the Beach* evolves the last man theme by adding human culpability, but only in the sense of a warning against letting the proliferation of nuclear arms go unchecked: the apocalypse is ultimately caused by accident, a powder-keg situation that went out of hand, rather than the planned destruction of the world. In *I Am Legend*, some form of humanity continues in non-feral vampires, and it is this theme that the writers of post-apocalyptic novels latch on to: the survival of society after the end. Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959) is a straight take on surviving nuclear war in America seen through the eyes of a small community that miraculously escapes both direct hits by the bombs themselves and deadly radiation long enough to be, in effect, 'rescued' by the surviving American government. Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) is a cyclic epic, where the only constant is a monastery of monks while the rest of mankind goes from nuclear conflagration to nuclear conflagration over a period of 1800 years. Paul Brians in his *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* (2008) details an absolutely staggering amount of works that deal with nuclear war in various ways, many of them variations on the theme of post-apocalyptic barbarism, mutation from radiation and the re-emergence of something new. Brians generally divides the stories into two categories: those set directly after a nuclear holocaust, and those that consider the long-term consequences of nuclear war (Chapter 4). He considers the number of 'last man'-type stories in the vein of Shute to be very rare: the large majority describe the future societies built up after the apocalypse. Here we see the themes that are associated with the post-holocaust world crystallize: an abandonment of sexual norms (particularly monogamy), a neobarbarian return with all its atrocities, the dissolution of democracy, the disappearance of technology and its rediscovery and, finally, the role of religion. What becomes apparent when reading about post-nuclear holocaust novels and comparing them to other works, such as J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) and John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956) – which are not nuclear catastrophes (the apocalypse caused by a solar flare melting the polar ice caps, plague, and a grass-killing plague respectively) is that they largely deal with the same set of issues despite the fact that the apocalypse is wholly different. Although the apocalypse can now be caused by

human hand, the only effect it seems to have had is bringing the fear closer to hand: it serves as an excuse for any form of end-of-the-world scenario. The secular world itself has become apocalyptic.

2.1.5. The Culture Wars

> Terminal visions, like all artifacts[*sic*], argue the premises of a given *Weltanschauung*. At the same time, they supply us with a glimpse of the *Weltanschauung* in what may be its darkest or brightest aspect: when those whose minds it shapes imagine the end of the reality that it interprets, or look forward to an eschatological moment in which that reality may be gloriously and wholly transformed. Can there be a more strenuous test of what the world view means than occurs in the contemplation of the end of the world being viewed?
>
> (Wagar 1982: 132)

As we can see, the religious cycle gave way to a cultural cycle, the notion that civilizations rise and fall and that the fall of our own civilization may well be overdue – or that its collapse is at hand by our own making. The reality of the nuclear bomb allowed post-apocalyptic fiction to thrive as the idea of the end of the world was easily transferable from the very real threat of nuclear war to some alternative: comets, solar flares, plagues. What became the object of interest was the post-apocalypse, what came after the collapse of society as we know it. And in that post-apocalypse, increasingly during the 60s, 70s and 80s, we see the rise of a true battle of world views. The apocalypse becomes a revelation of the true character of the world; perhaps the apocalypse finally shows the hand of God in History as in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and *The Stand* (1978); perhaps it is merely a bump on the road towards ever-increasing progress, as in *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977) and *The Postman* (1985). Or perhaps it allows for an internal, psychological revelation, as in *The Drowned World* (1962) or *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) which stretches the limits of the rational. This mirrored the struggle that was taking place in society at the same time, namely the so-called culture wars which were (arguably) the most noticeable expression of post-modern sentiment outside the Academy.

Wolf-Meyer (2004: 5) argues that the point of post-apocalyptic literature as a whole is to explore "the ability of society to retain and strengthen ideological constructions (i.e. culture) after devastation of the population, and what significance can be attributed to this – and the retained ideologies", essentially arguing that the simplifying effect of the post-apocalyptic cultures become a kind of representative of some particular ideology or culture – or world-view. In his opinion, there are two main questions being asked by American post-

apocalypses; matters of religion and matters of capitalism and the struggle between them (Wolf-Meyer 2004: 5). Capitalism and technology have represented one side of the culture war equation since C.P Snow's *The Two Cultures* (1961) at the very least, and although one might wonder whether religion is representative of the other side of the coin, it fills that role very well within the genre of post-apocalyptic science fiction, in that it is generally conflated with the idea of 'irrationalism'. What is more, as previously mentioned, religion and faith (whether in traditional Christianity or in the 'cosmos' à la Lawrence) have been suggested as an alternative to the potentially destructive force of science. Farah Mendlesohn (2003) points out that religion in science fiction in the US was "at best" treated with "polite contempt"; it was "the Other", "the backward and the primitive" (Mendlesohn 2003: 264) – this following widespread liberal secularization in a nation that was still in many ways staunchly Christian. The political activation of the religious right in the US starting from the 1980s turned the question of religion in science fiction from a kind of anthropological 'visiting the natives' to a considerably more bitter cultural and political battle between left and right, conservative and liberal (Mendlesohn 2003: 273) – or, in other words, manifested itself in terms of culture wars. As a rule, science fiction authors tend towards the 'rational' and 'scientific'. The overall feeling seemed to be that "religion is not only dangerous and misleading, but that sentient beings are generally too weak-willed to reject it" (Mendlesohn 2003: 269). Žižek (perhaps a little glibly) reiterating a point made by Steve Weinberg, claims that "without religion good people would do good things and bad people bad things, only religion can make good people do bad things" (Žižek 2011: 97). Within post-apocalyptic science fiction religion in various guises is almost invariably the spectre of the Other, the enemy, reflecting the contemporary culture wars that continue to this day.

The culture wars are expressed in novels like *The Postman* (1985) by David Brin, *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977) by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle and *The Stand* (1978/1990) by Stephen King. In only one of these – *The Postman* – is the apocalypse caused by nuclear war, and even then only partially (as nuclear winter, famine, and disease also played their part). *Lucifer's Hammer* imagines that the world has been struck by a comet and describes the struggles of the survivors, its focus being on one group of (mostly white) farmers (aided by scientists and astronauts) and their battle against a group consisting of army deserters, crazed preachers, Black Power activists and environmentalists. In *The Postman* the protagonist uses a US Postal Service uniform he scavenges to make people believe the United States survived the apocalypse, a belief necessary to rally the people against a horde of survivalists who would usher in a feudal dark

age devoid of technology. In *The Stand*, the most famous of the three novels, an accidentally released weaponized superplague kills most of the population of the earth (creating a situation analogous to nuclear war, but without the radiation and destroyed cities). The survivors, instead of following the pattern established in previous post-plague narratives (e.g. *The Scarlet Plague*, *Earth Abides*), start to experience dreams that direct them towards one of two camps: one in Boulder, Colorado, governed by God, the other in Las Vegas, Nevada, governed by Satan: King's apocalypse is both catastrophe *and* the revelation that God operates 'in' history.

The Stand is in many ways the most interesting take on the culture wars; unlike the other two mentioned above, King takes the side of 'religion' or irrationality, not science and technology. Although the war is not strictly between 'science' (usually represented by technology) and 'anti-science' here – the Boulder community is not averse to getting the lights on – there is a definite battle between rational and irrational. One of the protagonists, the sociologist Glen, calls the Adversary "the last magician of rational thought, gathering the tools of technology against us" (*The Stand*: 922) – including missile silos containing nuclear weapons. The apocalypse, Glen claims, means "the age of rationalism has passed", being replaced instead by "Dark magic […] A universe of marvels where water flows uphill and trolls live in the deepest woods and dragons live under the mountains. Bright wonders, white power. […] The lifetrip" (*The Stand*: 922). In other words, Lawrence's great dragon Logos has finally been vanquished; Borkenau might be less pleased though, as Glen explicitly blames rationalism and science for the apocalypse, defining "Rationalism [as] the idea we can ever understand anything about the state of being. It's a deathtrip" (*The Stand*: 921). He finishes with these dire words: "*At the end of all rationalism, the mass grave*" (*The Stand*: 921) a statement redolent of Horkheimer and Adorno's opposition to the enlightenment project. This anti-rationalism of King's has been noted in scholarship on the author, e.g. by Morrison (1992), who claims that "One of King's primary agendas in this SF epic of secular apocalypse is to critique that most potent of secularizing forces, rationalism" (Morrison 1992: 147). The point here is indeed 'secularizing': again, rationality and religion cannot, apparently, coexist: the Devil, then, is given his due as the ultimate denier of God.

2.1.6. Into the Post-modern

As this brief historical overview shows, apocalyptic fiction in the religious era, and post-apocalyptic fiction in the secular, are primarily reactions to *change*. If

Eliade is to be believed, the first change – and thus the first apocalyptic reaction – came from the invention of linear time. Subsequent ruptures and changes, notably modernity, created their own apocalyptic reactions which were then expressed through literature. The schism between the religious and the secular is one that continues to the present day, but – as the culture wars show – neither side put up a solid front. Despite appearances, modernity is not so much a battle between ancient man and modern man as a constant struggle between a great, disparate variety of different groups of people, ideologies, belief-systems and world-views. This is, perhaps, where post-modernism comes in. In looking beyond the secular, science-based rationality of the Enlightenment, the postmoderns found nothing but confusion: and this confusion engendered its own apocalypses. But unlike the apocalypse of the ancients or moderns, the apocalypse of the post-moderns took on a different kind of finality: perhaps inspired by the universal and total death promised by the atomic bomb, the 'post' in 'post-apocalypse' became diluted, turning instead into a kind of perpetual, on-going apocalypse. But this on-going apocalypse posed a problem: what would the postmoderns do about the perennial problem of the 'antimony of death', the 'terror of history'? In the next section, I will discuss what is realistically our present-day: the on-going postmodern apocalypse, through the analysis of two archetypically postmodern cases: *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo and *In the Country of Last Things* (1987) by Paul Auster.

2.2. The Postmodern Post-Apocalypse

Literature in the main experienced what might be termed a 'postmodern turn' starting at some point in the 1960s and continuing for several decades, arguably into the present day. This turn had a profound effect on literature and literary criticism, and no genre escaped it: it started the 'New Wave' of science fiction, which involved authors like Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard, Doris Lessing, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler and countless others who started writing science fiction which delved into completely new areas, including psychoanalytical, feminist and post-colonial discourses, and considerations of the ultimate nature of reality. These are examples of how the postmodern turn was expressed. But encapsulating what 'postmodern' is in a few words is not straightforward, especially as its definition varies between disciplines (postmodern architecture, where the term originated, has little to do with postmodern literature). If one were pushed to provide such a definition, it might go something like this:

postmodernity (or postmodernism, or any of the other minor variations of the same term) is above all a reaction against modernity and its narratives of scientific and technological progress leading towards Utopia: postmodernity, rather, emphasises that the world is made out of an endless multiplicity, and that each of us have our own, equally valid, subjective point of view. This then means that categorically claiming something is objective truth is at best chauvinistic, racist and entitled, at worst the kind of oppressive violence that created the Stalinist gulags, the concentration camps or any other historical atrocity the source of which can be traced back to 'modernism' in one way or another (this would be the view of e.g. Horkheimer and Adorno, which we have already covered). Postmodernity rejects binaries (particularly gender binaries) and espouses radical hybridity and relativity. Even 'science' in the empirical tradition was not considered exempt (see e.g. Ullica Segerstråle's work on this), leading to the culture wars that raged until the 1990s within the Academy. In rejecting the grand narratives of scientific progress on one hand and established traditional practices (patriarchy, organized religion, capitalism) on the other, postmodernity however found itself in a dead-end of Baudrillardian simulacra, radical relativism, and nihilism which, arguably, became the end of the postmodern experiment. In literature, this was expressed in a relatively brief period from the 1960s to, perhaps, the mid-90s, during which one might find 'aesthetic' postmodern novels and novelists, often thriving on the sheer novelty of it. The aesthetics of a postmodern novel might include things like pastiche, merging high and low culture, authors figuring in their own novels, experiments in style/content, such as including pictures, comics, collages or otherwise breaking from the traditional image of the novel, linguistic experiments, but also a certain preoccupation with the psyche and psychoanalysis. Today, the aesthetic postmodern movement has largely died down (although it is still possible to find contemporary 'postmodern'-styled novels), but the grander political and social effects of postmodernism survive. What remains is not the aesthetics, but the sentiment: everything can and should be questioned; even science and rationality, and anyone who is not questioning the *status quo* can be assumed to be speaking from a position of oppressive power (typically that of Western white males). Postmodern fiction is often the fiction of minorities, repressed or unknown, whether it is sexual, ethnic, linguistic or political in orientation.

It is important to note that it was during this time from the 1960s to the 1990s that was the 'first' golden age of post-apocalyptic science fiction (if one counts the present two decades as the second), spanning from the post-World War Two years to the present day. But despite this the vast majority of Cold

War apocalyptic imagery hardly belonged to the aesthetic post-modern, as discussed briefly in previous sections. Post-apocalyptic novels that may be argued to belong to the aesthetic post-modern include Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), which as mentioned I will discuss later, Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) which I will also discuss in a later chapter, J.G. Ballard's suite of post-apocalyptic novels, especially *The Drowned World* (1962), many of Philip K. Dick's novels, particularly *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968, the inspiration for *Blade Runner*) and *Dr. Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along After the Bomb* (1965), Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980) and Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* series, particularly the first in the series *Dawn* (1987), which deals with humanity's fate after a devastating nuclear war. Although the genre itself is much older than the postmodern turn, it was, as I have discussed earlier, born out of modernity and has evolved alongside it. In fact, the notion of apocalypse or post-apocalypse itself can and has been used to discuss exactly what both 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' is, as whatever comes after the ultimate death of modernity (through an apocalypse) must be post-modern. Wagar (1982) divides apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction into three separate periods or types which reflect the post-apocalyptic authors' own view of what the end of modernism would entail: the romantic, the positivist, and the irrational (a term he acknowledges is contentious). Romantics, as we have discussed with Shelley and Jefferies, would not be all that shaken over the end of modern civilization, the jump back to pastoralism surprisingly being easy for them (or, at the very least, so they would have us think). Positivists in the main would argue for the inevitable return of civilization in the face of its destruction, Jack London being an early proponent, and this is a view that I would say the majority of writers in the genre hold. The third category is what might be called the postmodern. Wagar identifies Nietzsche, Freud, Herman Hesse and Sartre as "seminal irrationalists" (Wagar 1982: 136), the thrust of their argument being that "[t]he world is not the coherent, reasonable, knowable, humanly meaningful order disclosed either by cold science or warm poetry, and man is neither machine nor angel" (Wagar 1982: 136). Irrationalists are, in Wagar's view, marked by their opposition to positivism: "the modern world – the brave new world of science, mechanism, technocracy, industry, Taylorism, and what comfortable philistines smugly call 'civilization' – will not do, and cannot fall apart soon enough" (Wagar 1982: 137). This seems to correspond to what both James Berger and Teresa Heffernan, together with their theoretical inspirations in Jean Baudrillard, Horkheimer and Adorno and Fredric Jameson (among others), have identified as a kind of post-apocalyptic postmodern culture: grave doubts in the concept

of progress, technology, and Hegelian rationalism (especially expressed in a Freudian turn inward at the psyche), not to mention the capitalist system that goes with it, and a general 'sense of an ending'. Postmodernism is, in this view, *the apocalypse of modernism* – even without the overt, end-of-the-world scenario most post-apocalyptic narratives postulate.

That postmodernism equals the post-apocalypse (of modernism) is one of two possible ways of approaching the term or idea of postmodern post-apocalypse, which is the topic of this section. This is the route of James Berger (1999) and Teresa Heffernan (2008), who posit that in the post-World War II world, *everything* is essentially post-apocalyptic or post-traumatic, the concentration camps having irrevocably changed our notion of the power of progress or change, which forms the credo of the Moderns (as Latour would have it). Berger makes the point that, while apocalyptic writing exposes the "urge to purify and unveil the world to its final transparent nakedness" (Berger 1999: 38) – this simplicity is no longer possible in a postmodern world, at least not according to Baudrillard, who would say "[t]here can be no unveiling because there is nothing under the surface: there is only surface; the map has replaced the terrain" (Berger 1999: 9). One might make a canon of this kind of 'post-apocalyptic' literature out of novels (these examples taken from Berger's and Heffernan's books) like Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or Michel Houellebecq's *Les Particules élémentaires* (1998; translated as *Atomised* or *The Elementary Particles*) which in various ways try to deal with issues like trauma, consumerism, racism, mass-culture, feminism, sexuality etc., in the postmodern world, while also grappling with "desires to end discourse and representation altogether: to reach the discursive 'end of the world'" (Berger 1999: 45). The 'post-apocalyptic' part of this kind of literature is, rather, a literature of *failed* or *deferred* apocalypse (also in the meaning of revelation) – there can be no true apocalypse, no final revelation, because there is nothing behind the veil; or alternatively the apocalypse has already occurred in the past and we are traumatically attempting (and failing) to deal with it; or then the apocalypse cannot occur because we would not be able to understand it if it does – this postmodern approach to apocalypse is essentially a kind of textual game, often based on Derrida's vague notion of the 'yet unnameable' looming just ahead (Heffernan 2008: 22).

The second type of postmodern post-apocalypse is the kind among others Wagar and Ketterer write about, and the kind I am more interested in: if most post-apocalyptic fiction is science fiction (with the attendant requirements of rationalism), there is a small subset that can at best be termed 'postmodern science fiction': imagining, if you will, an absurdist postmodern end-of-the-world

scenario, with all that entails. Paul Auster, Kurt Vonnegut, Doris Lessing, Philip K. Dick and J.G. Ballard for example have all written fiction which belongs to this subset. These are post-apocalypses that, rather than hiding behind theory to block out the absolute terror of history, instead grapple with the problem of meaning presented by the erasure of the world. Douglas Robinson in *American Apocalypses* (1985), who writes specifically about American apocalypses (in the vein of Poe, Hawthorne, Emerson and Vonnegut), points out that these kinds of narrative are based on the realization that "the structure most in need of apocalyptic destruction was not the earth, not human existence, but the creations of his own imagination, his *fictions*, which obscured social realities even in revealing them" (Robinson 1985: 198). These fictions are primarily concerned with exactly that: reality, and our relationship to it – it is by losing everything we have taken for granted (our 'natural fictional world') that a new reality or relationship to reality may be revealed to us. In this, post-apocalyptic and post-modern fiction find common ground: both are about revelation. The difference lies in the nature of that revelation.

In this section, I will deal with both kinds of postmodern apocalypses: the failed or deferred apocalypse, and the realized postmodern apocalypse. The first kind I will discuss through Don DeLillo's 1984 novel *White Noise* which, although it feels dated when read today, nonetheless provides a surprisingly accurate image of pre-9/11 America. The second kind I will approach by discussing Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), published after his successful triptych *The New York Trilogy*. Auster's novel, typical of the aesthetics of postmodernism, wallows in various kinds of nostalgia and a sense of disconnect from history, yet if read as a science fiction novel through the notion of possible worlds, it can offer a tantalizing glimpse of a potential future: as opposed to the dead-end of *White Noise*. Before delving into these novels, however, I wish to briefly discuss in greater detail how postmodernism and post-apocalypse overlap.

2.2.1. Post-Modern = Post-Apocalyptic?

As I have mentioned earlier, Frank Kermode, in his seminal *Sense of an Ending* (1996), claims that post-modern fiction heralded the end of the Judeo-Christian teleological narrative going from Genesis to Apocalypse, and is thus no longer capable of producing true apocalypses, true endings. Teresa Heffernan, James Berger, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and many others have picked up on this 'sense of an ending'. It is, however, an end without an apocalypse in the classical sense, to quote the title of Eco's *Apocalypse Postponed* (1995); or

perhaps it has even been deferred indefinitely. As Baudrillard writes in *The Illusion of the End* (1994), we live in an "end-of-century moratorium, with its deferred day of reckoning" (Baudrillard 1994: 12). According to these theorists (Heffernan in particular), Postmodernism destroyed the last vestiges of modernist belief in a forward motion for humankind, leaving behind it only the ubiquitous 'postmodern confusion'.

Teresa Heffernan, in her *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (2008) very skilfully combines the thoughts of most of the aforementioned scholars in her theorization that the postmodern novel could in fact be called 'post-apocalyptic'. She is riding on the words of Theodor Adorno when she says of the Enlightenment dream that although "through the application of reason, science and objectivity one could determine universal laws, a process which would lead to the amelioration of Man and the civilizing of society", the dream itself is "shattered in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau" (Heffernan 2008: 8). She further quotes Jean Baudrillard when she recounts his disillusionment with the world, its pointlessness and lack of direction:

> The world is over. History is a spectacle of reruns. We cannibalize the past but have no vision of a future. [...] Apocalypse as the story of renewal and redemption is displaced by the post-apocalypse, where the catastrophe has happened but there is no resurrection, no revelation. Bereft of the idea of the end as direction, truth and foundation, we have reached the end of the end.
>
> (Heffernan 2008: 11)

She does not in her own words go beyond postmodernism, defining the postmodernists as those who "are left with the task of teasing through how the narratives of modernity, which rely on endings for definition, might be reimagined" (Heffernan 2008: 22-23). One such way is by accepting the shattered world for what it is: the lack of endings means an endless multiplicity of subjective narratives unconstrained by any one Modern ideal or Lyotardian grand narrative. Heffernan uses the notion of the modern nation as an analogue: "[t]he narrative of the modern nation, like that of Revelation, envisions the eradication of margins and the closing of gaps in the formation of a cohesive community that emerges fully formed at its end" (Heffernan 2008: 90). And she adds that "[a]pocalyptic narratives of nations, immersed in teleological arguments, introduce the problem of majorities and minorities, insiders and outsiders" (Heffernan 2008: 90). It is here that the post-apocalypse of postmodernity can find its proper expression: "if race, culture, customs, religions, nations divide humanity and are in any case arbitrary, there is nothing

at the core, at the origins of the universe – no foundation or first principle – that can hold it together" (Heffernan 2008: 96). Heffernan does not explicitly offer any way out of this – beyond a mere piecing-together of the remains – which is altogether typical of this approach to the 'post-apocalyptic' postmodernism. Apocalypse here reveals – nothing.

Likewise, in *After the End* (1999) James Berger claims that the postmodern condition is a post-apocalyptic one. But to him the apocalypse is something that has already occurred in the past, rather than something indefinitely deferred. He locates it in a number of real historical, traumatic events: the Holocaust, the genocide of the American Indians and slavery for example – although one might imagine any number of similar historical events colouring the literature of other nationalities (Berger is primarily concerned with American apocalypses). This is a slightly different approach as it carries with it the potential to move past the postmodern: trauma is not incurable. Berger, much like Heffernan, uses the shorthand of post-apocalyptic to as a way to discuss his view of the postmodern condition, additionally claiming that all of postmodern theory is 'post-apocalyptic', whether it stems from a reaction to the Holocaust or from something else:

> The enormously influential theories of the modern by Foucault and of the postmodern by Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Jameson all take as their starting point some cataclysmic and irrevocable shattering or flattening or decentering that infiltrates and rearticulates all areas of culture. The theories of the postmodern initiated by these thinkers diagnose a post-apocalyptic condition.
>
> (Berger 1999: 31)

Traumas, Berger claims, are expressed primarily through ghosts, a kind of ultimate witness. For as well as bearing a message, ghosts also *are* the message: "a sign pointing back toward a repressed or an unresolved traumatic event" (Berger 1999: 50). Opposed to ghosts are angels (endemic in American television during the 80s and 90s), also returned from the other side, but as healers: "an acknowledgement that the past is *too* much, that the wounds of the past can never be healed, can only be transcended" (Berger 1999: 53). A good example of Berger's different approach is his use of a real world example of an 'angel' in Ronald Reagan, or rather Reaganism, the political successor-movement of the actor-president. Berger characterizes Reaganism and neo-Reaganism (the dominant political platform of the Republican right in the US) as a reaction against the perceived threat towards American supremacy brought about by the counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 70s: "In the view of Reaganist or neo-Reaganist Right, the United States was perfect in its inception,

has always been perfect, and is perfect today – or would be but for the efforts of identifiable enemies at home and abroad" (Berger 1999: 134). The angel Reagan then battles the haunting ghosts from the past (including, one might suspect, the spectres of GIs killed in Vietnam), allowing his followers to 'transcend' whatever past traumas there might be, from the Holocaust to slavery, genocide and social inequality. Berger does not see these kinds of angels as a solution to the otherwise unsurmountable traumas of the past, as they are essentially lies. His stance towards the post-modern world is more political than aesthetic: "[t]he damaged, post-apocalyptic world is sustained by powerful institutions that benefit from the world as it is" (Berger 1999: 218). The solution (the very last sentence of his book) is "to recognize and create narratives that work through these symptoms and return to the apocalyptic moments that traumatize and reveal. At that point, new – more healthy and more truthful – histories and futures may be possible" (Berger 1999: 219).

It seems to me however that the post-modern stories he quotes and discusses throughout his book, albeit rife with ghosts and attempts to deal with the traumatized past (especially Toni Morrison's *Beloved*), are also incapable of transcending that past. If Berger is right – that the Second World War and especially the Shoah was the foundational traumatic event that, in effect, 'caused' postmodernism, then *apocalyptic,* rather than 'post-apocalyptic', would be a better term to describe the postmodern era. I argue this based on a theory on the sublime articulated by Alexander Regier (2010), which in turn takes its premises from the immediate response to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. Regier (2010: 358) claims that the Lisbon earthquake led to an increasing secularization and a tendency to explain catastrophes in terms of natural, rather than divine, causes – hallmarks of modernity, and another voice adding to the idea that ruins or catastrophes pave the way for new eras. The catastrophe, according to Regier, influenced thinkers from Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau and – significantly – Kant. It allowed them to express their new humanistic, often secular and revolutionary Enlightenment ideas.

There is a parallel in this to the apocalyptic birth of postmodernism. In his study of the immediate and the delayed reactions to the event, we see a fascinating pattern: at first it seems ungraspable, as evinced by the attempts of witnesses to describe what they had seen in letters and their apparent inability to do so. "[T]he reports correspondingly insist on how this material collapse goes hand in hand with a mental breakdown" (Regier 2010: 362), with terrified descriptions of collapsed houses and corpses, 'unimaginable destruction'. Their writing "mirror[s] the fragmentation of the city" (Regier 2010: 363). It is only when the ruin-gazers have had a chance to step back, to look upon Lisbon from

high above, that the writing and the event itself becomes (in Regier's words) domesticated and rationalized. This rationalization is effected through the sublime. "The ruins become foundational and serve as a stabilizing grounding in creating a discourse on the sublime" (Regier 2010: 365). The important thing to recall is that the sublime 'thing' itself is impossible to represent – the sublime is a representation of the 'thing', viewed from afar, a pleasure-pain sensation that is, ultimately, a rationalization of something that cannot be immediately understood. The sublime, Regier argues, is a way of working through trauma, of making a representation of it. The interpretation of the postmodern by readers like Heffernan, Berger, Kermode and Baudrillard, can be equated with these first confused letters from the disaster – perhaps a bit like Hershey's *Hiroshima* or much of Primo Levi's *oeuvre* – and it is only in the proper post-postmodern era that the full extent of the disaster of postmodernism can be properly viewed, from a distance. Postmodernism, thus, is not post-apocalyptic. It is apocalyptic. It is an immediate reaction to world-changing events (the Holocaust, the Cold War, the civil rights struggles), the expression of which is dazed and confused. When one is within the apocalypse proper, it appears endless, which is perhaps why so much postmodern scholarship, and the literature itself, refuses to see an end to the postmodern apocalypse. The novel I will analyse next to illustrate this, *White Noise*, is anti-apocalyptic: it still belongs to the era of confusion, as the ripples of the repressed catastrophe still make it difficult to communicate, marooning the reader in what is either a perpetual post-apocalypse or then (in my terms) a perpetual anti-apocalypse, a repeated failure to end the *status quo*. *In the Country of Last Things* on the other hand is, according to some critics at least, perpetually-apocalyptic, never allowing for the post-apocalypse. Both approaches are 'post-modern' responses to catastrophe, albeit different.

2.3. Anti-Apocalypse: Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985)

White Noise describes a clichéd plastic American society, where the TV or radio talk shows constantly buzz in the background creating a suitably eponymous personification of white noise, where the supermarket has been turned into a religious place, and the only idols worshipped are Hitler and Elvis. Academic émigrés from New York attempt to outdo each other in denigrating everything that might once have been sacred or private, and a massive Airborne Toxic Event briefly shakes things up without actually ever changing anything. In short,

White Noise is in many ways an exemplary Baudrillardian piece of postmodern fiction. Even, or rather especially, the great catastrophe that consumes a third of the novel – the Airborne Toxic Event – is a simulation even in its reality, driving home the essential postmodern dissociation of what is real and what is not. Above all, it is a study of the failed postmodern apocalypse in all its various forms, and a discussion of the postmodern reaction to this failed apocalypse.

White Noise is divided into three parts; Waves and Radiation, The Airborne Toxic Event and Dylarama. In each part, one might say that DeLillo deals with a different kind of postmodern apocalypse. The first part serves largely as an introduction to the characters, but does contain several important scenes – most of them in connection with the character of Murray. The second part comes closest to an actual apocalypse, as it details a release of the (fictional) chemical Nyodene D. near the Gladney's home, and the subsequent evacuation and the apocalyptic sensibilities of the evacuees. The third part, Dylarama, suddenly dips into science fiction territory, and details the seedy story of Jack's wife Babette acquiring (in exchange for anonymous sex at a motel) a drug named Dylar that supposedly cures the fear of death (although it fails in its intended purpose, it does have other effects, as Jack finds out when he confronts the mysterious creator of the drug in his motel room). I will deal briefly with each of these parts and their individual apocalypses, perhaps ultimately synthesizing a theory of the postmodern in the process.

Laura Barrett (2001) makes an argument in her article on intertextuality in *White Noise* that the protagonist of the novel, Jack Gladney, "moves from Modernism to Postmodernism in the course of the novel" (Barrett 2001: 110). In her view, Jack "yearns for stable and transcendent meaning, hence his academic reliance on the magic of language and his occupation as Chair of Hitler Studies" (Barrett 2001: 103). Hitler, Barrett says, is powerful partially because of his oratorical skills and almost magical use of language, but perhaps more importantly "Jack chooses Hitler studies because it enables him to trace a cultural nightmare — along the individual words that sparked it — back to a beginning, which also happens to be an end: death" (Barrett 2001: 104). This end, this apocalypse, is the one Heffernan and Berger speak of as well, i.e. the concentration camps and the aftermath of World War Two. According to the same logic it is the *last* such true end to have taken place – everything after is the endless post-modern 'post-apocalypse' (in the vein of Berger). It is no accident that Hitler, the embodiment of World War Two, is the person in whom Jack chooses to place his hope in – but, as Barrett says, ultimately this hope is misplaced as "the very Modernist narrative that Jack hungers for is replete with its own retrospection" (Barrett 2001: 106); nostalgia, in this case.

Jack is nostalgic, but so was Hitler, and as one goes back in history that nostalgia continues to be a factor, until entire mythologies (Golden Ages, Gardens of Eden and so on) are constructed around it. Realizing the emptiness of this nostalgia is one of the hallmarks of postmodernism, which is why returning to Hitler and a time before the great catastrophe of modernism is no cure.

Still, if Jack's journey is one from romanticism/modernism towards some kind of postmodern hybridity, there is another character in *White Noise* who is already as steeped in postmodernity as one can be, namely Murray Jay Siskind, a "visiting lecturer on living icons" and an "ex-sportswriter" (*White Noise*: 9-10) who wants to do the same thing with Elvis as Jack had done with Hitler. Elvis, of course, in many ways being the perfect example of the postmodern apocalypse: an end without an end, as the King lives on not only in endless processions of Las Vegas impersonators but also in the conspiracy-theory tinged notion that he never died. Murray, as a character, is almost too transparent, too farcical; everything he says seems to be borrowed from Baudrillard, Benjamin, or Derrida. A few pages after we are first introduced to him, Jack and Murray visit 'the most photographed barn in America'. Murray makes the following observations:

> "No one sees the barn," he said finally.
> A long silence followed.
> "Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn."
> He fell silent once more. People with cameras left the elevated site, replaced at once by others.
> "We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies."
> […]
> "What was the barn like before it was photographed?" he said. "What did it look like, how was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can't answer these questions because we've read the signs, seen the people snapping the pictures. We can't get outside the aura. We're part of the aura. We're here, we're now."
> He seemed immensely pleased by this.
>
> (White Noise: 12-13)

Heffernan calls this a "miniature essay on postmodernism" (Heffernan 2008: 48), which seems to me to be pretty accurate.

What Murray is discussing abstractly in the encounter with the barn is later made more concrete in the description of a near-crash of a plane, as told by an unnamed narrator at the airport in Iron City where Jack is picking up his

daughter Bee. The survivors (of the non-event, since there was no crash), nonetheless limp in "gray and stricken", "stooped over in weariness and shock, dragging their hand luggage across the floor" (*White Noise*: 89). The real tragedy is that no media comes and meets them, since "[t]here is no media in Iron City" (*White Noise*: 92). This lack of representation through the lens of television, it seems, invalidates their whole experience, makes it non-real: the best they can do is retell it to the waiting Gladneys. Earlier in the novel, the Gladneys watched an actual plane crash on TV, in excruciating detail with slow-motion repetitions, and then later the same day the family gathered in front of the TV to watch the "floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes" that were on. "Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (*White Noise*: 64). Later Jack asks his colleagues why "decent, well-meaning and responsible people find themselves intrigued by catastrophe when they see it on television?" (*White Noise*: 65). The answer, as given by Alfonse, the head of the department, is "because we're suffering from brain fade. We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information. […] We want them, we need them, we depend on them. As long as they happen somewhere else" (*White Noise*: 66). What is in fact going on is the same thing that was happening with the 'most photographed barn in America': by subjecting the catastrophe to the filter of television, it becomes a proper postmodern object that is only real *if* it is a representation.

In *The Illusion of the End,* Baudrillard writes about how the media, by reporting on events such as war or the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc (or, indeed, natural disasters), lend these events *credibility* – not truth – and in credibility, there is uncertainty. "The criteria for truth have been supplanted by the principle of credibility (which is also the principle of statistics and opinion polls), and this is the true guiding principle of news" (Baudrillard 1994: 54). Uncertainty (synonymous, apparently, with catastrophe) is, of course, one of the guiding principles behind postmodernism, as Lyotard (1984) points out:

> Postmodern science - by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, "fracta," catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes - is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word knowledge, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown.
>
> (Lyotard 1984: 60)

Baudrillard further speaks of how "[w]hen television becomes the strategic space of the event, it sets itself up as a deadly self-reference […]. The real

object is wiped out by the news – not merely alienated, but abolished. All that remains of it are traces on a monitoring screen" (Baudrillard 1994: 56). Hardin (2002) makes a comparison between Andy Warhol's repeated sequences of images (of car crashes, of celebrities, of cans of beans) and the televised disasters the Gladney family watches in *White Noise*: "Like Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series, the multiplication of images has deprived actual disasters of their effects. […] Death has been dullingly reduced to a mere image or picture" (Hardin 2002: 43). This is the postmodern apocalypse in the first part of *White Noise*, the incredible distancing effect that television and photography has: the very final scene of part one is one where Babette, Jack's wife, suddenly turns up in black-and-white on television to the consternation of Jack, who wonders nonsensically if she was "dead, missing, disembodied? […] [H]er appearance on the screen made me think of her as some distant figure from the past, some ex-wife and absentee mother, a walker in the mists of the dead. If she was not dead, was I?" (*White Noise*: 104).

The second apocalypse in *White Noise* happens in part two, titled 'The Airborne Toxic Event'. If the previous section in the book essentially questioned the reality of something that is not subject to repeated viewing and re-re-re-(etc)representational work, the cultivation of an 'aura', then this part questions the reality of even an event that *does* receive such excessive attention. What he wants to answer here is essentially 'what is real', which is in a way exactly the question the Airborne Toxic Event engenders. The Airborne Toxic Event begins with a tank car getting derailed, releasing a noxious plume of gas. Following that, we are given an interplay of radio news, hearsay, and actual observation as the cloud of Nyodene Derivative (a meaningless yet ominous name) slowly grows out of control, eventually forcing even the Gladneys to evacuate to a nearby Boy Scout camp, while the authorities attempt to control the situation. Despite the apocalyptic mood at the evacuation centre, nothing happens – a little more than a week later, they are back to normal, except for the squads of men in protective suits and chemical-sniffing dogs patrolling the streets. That, and the suddenly glorious sunsets, and Jack's potential future death due to a two-and-a-half minute exposure to Nyodene D. So in that sense, the whole event in itself was a false apocalypse, an illusion. This is, first of all, shown in the various nocebo effects Jack's children, Steffie and Denise, keep getting, all based solely on what the radio claims are the symptoms of exposure to Nyodene D; what makes it so obvious it is all simulation is that they lag behind – only after hearing about it on the radio do the symptoms appear. One particular symptom is *déjà vu*, which both of his girls get – for instance when they see a car wreck on the highway during the evacuation. Jack asks himself "Did Steffie truly imagine she'd seen the wreck

before or did she only imagine she'd imagined it? Is it possible to have a false perception of an illusion? Is there a true *déjà vu* and a false *déjà vu*?" (*White Noise*: 125-126). This kind of Baudrillardian disconnect between a simulated sickness and a dissimulated sickness is so clear that some critics, such as Leonard Wilcox, have read the novel entirely "in this light" (Heffernan 2008: 49).

Another disconnect between the real and the simulated comes at the Boy Scout camp, their site of evacuation. Jack's exposure to the chemical during a short pause to top up the gas in their car has made him nervous enough to go speak to an emergency technician, or what he believes to be an emergency technician. However, he quickly finds out that they are not, in fact, 'actual' emergency technicians:

> "That's quite an armband you've got there. What does SIMUVAC mean? Sounds important."
> "Short for simulated evacuation. A new state program they're still battling over funds for."
> "But this evacuation isn't simulated. It's real."
> "We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model."
> "A form of practice? Are you saying you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?"
>
> (*White Noise*: 139)

When Jack asks how it is going, the technician quite seriously replies that "[y]ou have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. [...] But that's what this exercise is all about" (*White Noise*: 139). Later on in the novel it seems that SIMUVAC has gotten the funding it needs, as Jack's children sign up for simulated evacuations performed in the streets. A loudspeaker says:

> We learned a lot during the night of the billowing cloud. But there is no substitute for a planned simulation. If reality intrudes in the form of a car crash or a victim falling off a stretcher, it is important to remember that we are not here to mend broken bones or put out real fires. We are here to simulate.
>
> (*White Noise*: 206)

In other words, if actual accidents were to happen during the simulation, it would be important to work around them so that they would "be able to work around them later when it counts" (*White Noise*: 206) – at some later simulated evacuation, perhaps? It is as if the SIMUVAC people would prefer all accidents to merely be simulated, and even when they are real still deal with them as if they were simulated – the ultimate 'truth' gleaned from this then must be that they *are* simulated.

The catastrophe, at least, is nothing that can be believed. It only lives on as simulation, and in the Nyodene D. Jack was exposed to – an exposure that may, or may not, lead to his death in fifteen, thirty years, at a time when he might well be dying of old age already. And with that, we move on to the third, and final, postmodern apocalypse: death itself. This theme is an ongoing one throughout the book, and in fact DeLillo's working title was *The American Book of the Dead*. There are several references, as Barrett (2001: 101) points out, to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* throughout: Murray compares the supermarket to it and Jack mentions that Hitler started reading it after his mother died. Hardin (2002) argues that the theme of death (even when commodified and made banal) is omnipresent not just in DeLillo's *White Noise* but in postmodernism in general, although it is more a preoccupation with so-called 'simulated' death. Baudrillard (in *Simulacra and Simulations*) points out the difference between "to dissimulate" (to lie) and to "simulate"; "To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have" (Baudrillard 1988: 167). The example he takes is an illness (a very pertinent example considering Jack's own exposure to the toxic chemicals): You can lie about being sick, but you can also *simulate* being sick. Merely lying "leaves the reality principle intact" whereas "simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false', between 'real' and 'imaginary'" (Baudrillard 1988: 168). The ultimate simulacra then would be God, the question being if "God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence" (Baudrillard 1988: 170). Here, we touch upon Slavoj Žižek's oft-repeated quote from Pascal/Althusser, namely of that "non-believer who just has to kneel down and blindly repeat the gestures of ritual, and faith will come by itself" (Žižek 1999: 105). The postmodern world then, according to Baudrillard, is one of simulation and simulacra, where the belief in some kind of real hiding behind dissimulation no longer applies: there *is* no fundamental truth, there are merely various forms of representation, simulations, rituals and so on through which we create a world that is, fundamentally, an illusion.

At the very end of the novel, there is a scene that is self-consciously clichéd in its execution: Jack, the disgruntled husband, seeks out the man who has been taking advantage of his wife in order to enact his revenge. When he finds him, a man named Willie Mink, the latter is in a state of delirium. Although the drug Dylar was supposed to eliminate the fear of death, it actually did something completely unrelated as a side effect, namely "caused the user to confuse words with the things they referred to" (*White Noise*: 310). So when Jack tells Mink, who pops Dylar "like candy" (*White Noise*: 308), something like 'falling plane' or 'hail of bullets', he acts accordingly, albeit in a "somewhat stylized way" (*White Noise*:

310) – adopting the crash position or trying to crawl to cover. Like some kind of bizarre structuralist-Saussurean thesis put on its head, the "transcendental power of words" (Elias 2011: 23) suddenly comes crashing back in full force, as sign and signified momentarily rejoin. Naturally, this is all merely happening in the mind of Mink, which brings us back to Baudrillard's question of simulation and simulacra – are these pills, Dylar, some kind of fast-track to a mind-set that came before simulacra (a 'somewhat stylized' mind-set perhaps), where words (signs) create an immediate signified: like a pre-symbolic Lacanian Real? And is this why Jack, the supposed modernist, is so eager to get his hands on them? What keeps the scene postmodern is that it remains simulated: there are no actual plane crashes or hails of bullets conjured out of thin air – only in the mind of Mink (yet, again, that doubt: what is the difference?).

Hardin (2002) observes that the simulacra of death *can* be punctured, which he feels happens when Jack is shot by Mink. At that moment "[d]eath has become tangible: no longer is death something to be seen on television, in the history books, or on a computer screen. Death is in/on him; it has penetrated him". This is merely a short moment though, and soon thereafter when Jack decides to rescue Mink instead of leaving him to bleed out (Jack had, prior to arriving at the hotel room, meticulously laid out a plan for how he would kill him) "death reverts back to simulacra because the rescue begins to sound like an overly heroic and melodramatic scene from television" (Hardin 2002: 47). For while, though, the simulacra of death almost reverts to pre-modern romanticism, as Jack finds the last Germans in Germantown: a clinic run by German nuns who patch up Mink and Jack. Jack asks, in a moment of rediscovered affinity for the romantic image of heaven as depicted in a picture of Kennedy and the Pope holding hands, what the Church thinks of it all today: "Is it still the old heaven, like that, in the sky?" (*White Noise*: 317). The nun's reaction, however, is opposite to the expected one: she calls him an idiot, tells him she and all the other nuns are nonbelievers, and adds that their belief is merely a pretension: "Someone must appear to believe. Our lives are no less serious than if we professed real faith, real belief. As belief shrinks from the world, people find it more necessary than ever that *someone* believe. […] There is no truth without fools" (*White Noise*: 319). To return to Baudrillard's simulacra, he divides the representative image of God (or the Afterlife in this case, represented by Heaven) into four different levels: the first "is the reflection of a basic reality", the second "masks and perverts a basic reality", the third "masks the *absence* of a basic reality" and then finally the fourth "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1988: 170; emphasis original) – or, to borrow another definition I

have found apt: "an exact copy of something that may never have existed" (Soja 1997: 27). God has, for Jack and most of the atheist world, passed into the fourth category a long time ago: God and His promised afterlife are merely simulacra, something with no basis in objective reality. However, they still nostalgically yearn for the first level, which is unfortunately impossible to return to. The nuns, then, represent the last vestiges of the third level, masking the absence of this profound reality through their pretence.

However, even this is temporary, as the nun rather nastily promises that she and her kin will not be around for much longer. What then, when the last vestiges of belief disappear from the world? Baudrillard (1994: 91) writes of how once the "higher decree" that ordains the universe is lost, "the cosmic order, like the human order, emancipated from God and all its finality, becomes shifting and unstable; it falls prey to entropy, to the final dissipation of energy, and death". What this death of the cosmic order – the teleological narrative also discussed by Kermode – means is that "[t]*here will no longer be an end*" (Baudrillard 1994: 91, emphasis in original), and we are back to the illusionary end, the final apocalypse/post-apocalypse/failed apocalypse of the postmodern condition. And despite all this, "[e]ven postmodernists die" (Hardin 2002: 48). All this faffing about turning death into kitsch and banality, presenting it as a simulacra, or claiming there is no more redemptive apocalypse collapses, just as much as anything else when presented with the stark reality of death: "postmodern ideology and culture only keep us immune until we are personally confronted with a bullet, AIDS, or a car hurtling at us. One can only be incredulous so long" (Hardin 2002: 49). Hence the need for Dylar, and the failure of Dylar: there is no way to get rid of the fear of death, even though it would be absolutely necessary for the ultimate victory of postmodernism.

DeLillo's novel, while being a perfect example of almost all the (trope-like) considerations of the failed-post-apocalypse-definition of postmodernism, also points out its flaw: the fact that we are not immortal or indestructible, which means that we are still as afraid of death as we have ever been. In a sense though, this is not a problem really, rather it functions as a sort of affirmation of postmodern aesthetics and ethics: we know God is a simulacrum, we know there is no afterlife, we fear death, but we try to make it less frightening by commodification (to Jameson's great consternation) – and we fail even at that. And so Fukuyama's end of history marches on, since only the atheist sensibilities of the great liberal democracies are able to push for the kind of technology – posthuman or otherwise – that is required to achieve any kind of functional, in-this-world immortality. And in the process, perhaps, a certain complacency creeps in, a certain belief that since the world has not ended yet,

and there is no God ordaining its end, it will never really end; or that even if it does, all we need is to cultivate enough apathy and nihilism to meet it without fear.

2.3.1. Perpetual Apocalypse: Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* (1987)

In the Country of Last Things (1987, henceforth *ICLT* in parenthetical references) came out after Auster's most famous early novels, *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986), which were compiled into the *New York Trilogy* (1987). *In the Country of Last Things* is largely free of the kind of postmodern aesthetic experimentation found in the *New York Trilogy* and rather "reasserts the traditional rights of the genre, exploring the real by the way of the invented" (Birkerts 1994: 67). It does, however, in many ways straddle the line between science fiction and postmodern fiction; Auster himself had no wish to call it science fiction; when faced with the question of it being labelled apocalyptic science fiction, he replied (in *The Red Notebook*) "[t]hat was the farthest thing from my mind while I was writing it" (Auster 1995: 113), and went on to point out how all the things depicted in the book were predicated on "things that really happened" (Auster 1995: 114). That said, it *is* science fiction, in a post-apocalyptic or, at the very least, apocalyptic, incarnation. The story is told in the form of a letter home, written by the protagonist Anna Blume, although there is little chance that this letter will ever reach its intended recipient. Anna has left her wealthy, well-off home in Europe in order to go looking for her brother, William, who was lost while reporting on the unnamed city across the ocean which is the *topos* of the novel. She never finds her brother, but she does find a city apocalyptically stricken by some unknown force – whether social, political or environmental is never explained – seated in a country which seems to be likewise afflicted. This metropolis, although it is never explicitly named, can be assumed to be New York City – some even going so far as to naming *In the Country of Last Things* "a phantom unit to what is, in effect, Auster's New York Tetralogy" (Washburn 1994: 63). Although it seems like the Old World, Anna's place of origin, is as of yet not touched by whatever it is that is afflicting North America (there is no mention of the United States), the totality of the apocalypse in the city cannot be questioned. There is very little government, people are routinely robbed, raped and murdered in the streets, streets and buildings collapse from lack of maintenance, and what trade there is seems to be largely based on scavenging and re-using old things: nothing new is built or created – even babies miscarry.

As post-apocalyptic novels go, *In the Country of Last Things* stands out in many ways. For one, there is no mention of the cause of the apocalypse, sidestepping one of the more common tropes of the genre, which is moralizing on the cause and consequence of, for instance, nuclear war. For another, it plays with both time and space in uncommon ways: although it is clear that we are still on the Planet Earth (presumably), there is no mention of the United States of America, of the World Wars, or Auster's contemporary world and its technology and things (none of the journalists are TV journalists, for instance, only print, no modern vehicles feature, etc.): as Niall Lucy puts it, "[i]t's as if fifty years had ceased to exist, as though all the objects produced across half a century had vanished" (Lucy 2009: 23). It is even possible that this effacement of history is on-going: when Anna at one point attempts to leave the city, she asks about the possibility of flying out, yet it appears that the locals have no idea what an airplane is, and in fact get combative when she presses the issue. As Anna says "It's not just that things vanish – but once they vanish, the memory of them vanishes as well" (*ICLT*: 87). Another particularity is that the apocalypse is, at least for the duration of the novel, local: the country and the city are clearly circling the drain, but it seems the rest of the world is not. In that sense, Anna's travelogue is a physical as well as a temporal one. She joins a populace that has lived in the apocalypse for at least a decade, while she herself is a fresh import from an unafflicted space and time: a time-traveller from a time when safety, airplanes and logic still existed.

In the Country of Last Things is a good example of the postmodern turn in the kind of post-apocalyptic narratives I am concerned with: narratives that postulate an actual end of the world and how the survivors react to the changed world. Maya Merlob (2007) argues that what marks the novel as postmodern is especially its relationship to time and space: rather than (like *White Noise*) rendering the notion of an apocalypse itself impossible, it makes the notion of a world *after* the apocalypse impossible by figuring the apocalyptic state itself as being interminable:

> The reality in the city is a postapocalyptic one, in which the intermediate stage of the tribulations, which was supposed to be a brief one connecting the old order to the new, millennial one, is the current reality. The tribulations are extended, stretched to the extent that they become the normal state, as it were, of everyday life in the city. This textual reality subverts the apocalyptic chain of events, undermining its temporal sequence by elongating the phase of the tribulations. As a result, the linearity of time, its progression toward the millennium, is amputated, displacing the sequential dimension of the narrative. Time is no longer teleological; it is not directed toward a certain goal and in fact denies progression altogether.
>
> (Merlob 2007: 27)

According to Merlob, and as we have already briefly touched upon above, time no longer being progressive and teleological leads to its "individuation" (Merlob 2007: 28), (which she calls durational time) meaning that the trauma of the apocalypse can no longer be placed safely into an objective past, but rather "maintains the event's uniqueness, hindering its comparison to other events" (Merlob 2007: 28). Time itself becomes subjective, historical time becomes meaningless, there is no "shared chronology" and it becomes impossible to "comprehend reality" since events cannot be anchored, situated, given an origin or a relation to other events (Merlob 2007: 28). She challenges Bakhtin's whole notion of the chronotope, claiming it is only applicable to the modern novel and cannot contain the postmodern novel due to this fragmentation of time (Merlob 2007: 29), but that this does not mean a return to Eliade's *in illo tempore* either – to the pre-historical, cyclical time that attempted to abolish history by the repetition of archetypes. As Merlob puts it "in the postmodern period, the abolition of time is a consequence of the individuation of time. [This] is no longer a transcendent category, but an immanent one that is limited to, and circumscribed in, the individual narrative" (Merlob 2007: 29). This lack of time, in Merlob's view, leads to a spatialized reading: "Because time does not move – forward or backward – the event exists spatially; its progression occurs on a spatial level" (Merlob 2007: 30). This, of course, is something among others Jameson has also said of postmodernism, engrossed as it is with the "spatialization of the temporal" (Jameson 1991: 156), which for a Marxist such as Jameson is especially alarming as it "take[s] away [the] capacity to think time and History" (Jameson 1991: 160). In this reading *In the Country of Last Things* can be described as inhabiting a spatialized, radically subjectivized present, a never-ending apocalypse where the past and the future occupy the same space.

I do not entirely agree with this reading, although it does have merit: the main problem with it is that the novel *does* progress, the plot *does* move from the point when Anna is fresh off the boat to the point when (after many tribulations) she attempts to leave the city behind. The city itself is Kafkaesque, but not unchanging. In Anna's description, it is constantly and chaotically being reorganized: when she arrives at the place her brother's newspaper office was supposed to be, she finds that there "was no building, no street, no anything at all" (*ICLT*: 18) – it had simply been erased (perhaps in a fire). She says: "In the city, the best approach is to believe only what your own eyes tell you. But not even that is infallible. For few things are ever what they seem to be, especially here, with so much to absorb at every step, with so many things that defy understanding" (*ICLT*: 18-19). One such incomprehensible thing might be the fact of the city's anonymous autophagy, its consumption of itself without being

witnessed: "Every day in the streets you hear explosions, as if somewhere far from you a building were falling down or the sidewalk caving in. but you never see it happen" (*ICLT*: 22). And neither does anyone else, it seems, Anna receiving only "a dumb stare or a shrug of the shoulders" (*ICLT*: 22) when she asks about it. This reorganization is part of why the city is so difficult to navigate: Pascariu (2013) argues that the city represents a postmodern labyrinth which is opposed to the traditional labyrinth which (however terrifying it may be) has in its centre a Minotaur - an ending:

> While most mazes constructed until modern times are centre-oriented, the opposite is true of *postmodern labyrinths*. Here, the terror of the Minotaur has been replaced with the terror of the void. A structure without centre is terrifying, it is unorganized and lacks any kind of balance; one can never know whether he/she has reached the end of his/her journey, and completed the quest.
>
> (Pascariu 2013: 681, original emphasis)

Again, in this reading Anna Blume's journey would be a postmodern one (a notion that gains traction when one considers that the working title for the novel was "Anna Blume Walks Through the 20th Century"), a journey through a labyrinth with no clear end. But again, this is not entirely true: the city *can* be navigated, and the story *does* end: with the presumed escape of Anna and her friends from the city – or then perhaps they were caught by the border guards and executed or sent to a labour camp. Either way, the story has an ending, whether happy or unhappy.

Merlob (2007) notes that the realization that the city does not recognize the existence of airplanes creates a kind of ontological split – in the vein of Alan Palmer's "ontological gaps" (Palmer 2004: 32) – which, in her view, creates another 'world' (aside from the post-apocalyptic city and the non-apocalyptic world from which Anna came): "Within the same space, there exist numerous incongruous worlds that form one discontinuous space" (Merlob 2007: 35). Historical reality, such as the characters of Ferdinand and Isabel referencing the "Spanish monarchs who had sent Christopher Columbus on his journey" further serve to open up new spaces: "Each reference is a representative of a different world whose infiltration into the text establishes it as a collage of spatial representations" (Merlob 2007: 36) – yet their historical context has been "erased, leaving the historical space devoid of any meaningful history" (Merlob 2007: 37) – a reference to the typical postmodern inability to properly parse history into meaningful wholes; since there is no end there is no beginning nor middle either, and if Ferdinand and Isabella (albeit not as Spanish monarchs but as struggling survivors) show up in an anonymous, crumbling

American city that their money indirectly helped create, then that is just something that happens. Merlob (2007) ends her analysis of the novel, and of postmodernism, by claiming that "[t]he form of the postmodern narrative is thus a derivative of the fragmentation and individuation of the traditional chronotope, the spatiotemporality associated with the master narrative. Both space and time disintegrate, dissolve into numerous, individuated chronotopes that subvert traditional modes of thinking about self and world" (Merlob 2007: 42-43).

In essence, the main question of the postmodern novel is whether or not it contains a 'centre': one can argue that *White Noise* does not, but I do not think the same argument can be made for *In the Country of Last Things*. When Anna signs off at the very end with "[t]his is Anna Blume, your old friend from another world" (*ICLT*: 188) it is a significant formulation by Auster. 'Another world' is indeed what we have experienced in this novel, just like in any piece of fiction: what this type of postmodern novel does, above all, is not point out the lack of higher referents or the fragmentation of the master narrative, but rather it embraces a subjective frame of reference: we each carry within us a possible world, our own reality, but that reality can be enlarged to embrace other realities – even, or especially, fictional ones. However, as demonstrated by both *White Noise* and *In the Country of Last Things*, any self-created world can, and will, be shattered through real-world death – the postmodern subject is not an immortal subject. Thus, even in postmodernism, the centre (of the labyrinth) is death. As Anna cautions early on regarding the 'language of ghosts', people who nostalgically daydream about the past: "You drag yourself from sleep each morning to face something that is always worse than what you faced the day before, but by talking of the world that existed before you went to sleep, you can delude yourself into thinking that the present day is simply an apparition, no more or less real than the memories of all the other days you carry around inside you" (*ICLT*: 10) – a bit like Berger's angelic redemptors, or why not climate change deniers, and equally illusory.

2.4.   Into the Post-Postmodern

Reading post-modern literature as anti-apocalyptic or perpetually-apocalyptic – rather than 'post'-apocalyptic – helps place it in its proper perspective. The changes wrought by modernity were so massive that large swathes of humanity are still actively resisting them, even while from within the Western, 'modern' world itself emerges another form of resistance in the form of the postmodern.

In the real world, outside academia and literature, postmodernism is perhaps best expressed as an ongoing struggle between political ideologies or 'values' (rather than the struggle between economic systems prevalent pre-1990): one ideological side might be opposed to 'gay marriage', abortion, anti-discriminatory laws, immigration and so on because they threaten the perceived stability of the system, whereas the other, 'postmodern' side strives for greater equality, multiplicity, expressions of difference and so forth. This horizontal movement is probably why thinkers like Eagleton and Jameson dislike postmodernism (or 'late capitalism') so much – it takes away from the (in their view) more fundamental socio-economic struggle in society. If viewed from the point of view Berger takes, however, postmodernism is essentially apocalyptic in that it systematically reveals and criticizes the defects of the monocultural modern state, while also attempting to address these issues. This does not seem to me to be the kind of post-apocalyptic landscape Heffernan or Merlob talk of, robbed of revelation and teleology. Rather, one might see the postmodern aesthetic as the apocalypse of modernity: revealing without being materially catastrophic.

Dystopian and post-apocalyptic *fiction* throughout time, on the other hand, has always been post-apocalyptic in a material sense and 'post-modern' in the true sense of the word: they have attempted to explore the aftermath of modernity; what happens when/if the modern world and all its powerful institutions disappear. Postmodernism can critique the modern political, economic and social rule, which it does very successfully, but it cannot accurately envision a truly 'post'-modern state (the closest might be the kind of anarchic alternatives proposed by e.g. Feyerabend) as an alternative to the modern state. Fiction is, as Kermode points out, for finding things out – and what fiction needs to find out presently is what comes next (the 'true' postmodern if you will, or in common parlance, the post-postmodern). Utopias, dystopias and post-apocalyptic fiction are all methods of doing this – even though no-one writes utopias any longer, unfortunately, seeing as a utopia does not seem like a realistic extrapolation of our current trajectory. Thus, dystopias and post-apocalyptic narratives, which postulate a true end of the dominant mode and consider what may come next – a simple return to what was, or something new? Even Feyerabend's anarchic communes may have a fighting chance if the current status quo is toppled, as have any other number of possibilities. As long as the notion of mortality and death remains, there is a centre to build around, no matter the aesthetic approach taken.

3.   Theorizing the Post-postmodern

It is too much to claim that the postmodern is somehow 'over': rather we are living in its true midst, finally. Its message of multiplicity, which in the 1980s or 90s could still only be sketched out in a vague manner, has now become the commonplace, especially in online communities. I am, of course, mainly speaking of the western world – there are many, many places one is hesitant to even call 'modern', although it is difficult to deny that they are being influenced by the manifestation of modernity. Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze describe the geography of the world as it stands as a battle between striated space and smooth space (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980), although they are more likely to identify with the smooth rather than the striated modern – the rhizomatic postmodern opposed to the rigid modern. In true postmodern fashion, multitudes exist: communities that live their lives lagging behind two centuries or more in technology next door to someone whose house turns on the heating automatically when it detects their smart phone approaching. Capitalism and consumerism compete or co-exist with eco-friendly living and environmentalism, both in their own way thinking of how to stave off the impending ecological collapse. Technological progress and legalizing gay marriage goes hand in hand with escalating global conflicts based on ancient tribal feuds. In the year 2019, we are officially living in the future.

It is unavoidable that the historical realities of the world influence its literature, but also that the critic's present reality influences his or her interpretation, whether the literature is contemporary with the critic or not. I do recognize the points that for example Berger and Heffernan made for me earlier in the thesis – that the apocalypse of modernity was a traumatic event which is still being felt world-wide. The Moderns, however fake-modern they might be to Latour, muscled in on the ancients centuries ago, but, arguably, it was not until the industrialized slaughter of the First and Second World Wars and the following Cold War that Western modernity became a universal fact – any place in the world being able to become a point of interest for either ideological politics or capitalist exploitation. Modernity was exported on the wings of capitalism (or communism), and tribesmen in Afghanistan suddenly found themselves fighting Soviet gunships with CIA-imported Stinger Anti-Air missiles. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama felt the victory of modernity was so complete as to declare an End to History. Postmodernism is the reaction – a reaction against totalizing ideas and an attempt to make room

for other points of view in a world dominated by a singular political, economic and (arguably) racial ideology. At least in the west, postmodernism has – to a degree – been a success, although it is difficult or near impossible to gauge what that really means, except in the sense that people today openly engage with issues that twenty or thirty years ago were confined mainly to academia. The postmodern condition is the reaction to a catastrophe it has taken several centuries to begin to fully understand, and scholarship will continue to untangle both the strands of modernist and postmodernist thought for a long time to come. But while this project is underway, there are already feelers in place for what comes next. Although postmodern scholars like to claim that postmodernism is the end of (secular) teleology, much as modernism was essentially the *start* of (secular) teleology (in the sense of Eliade), this seems like too simplistic a proposition: as if history would only have existed for a short burst of time between the Enlightenment and the bombing of Hiroshima! History exists, and is moving, even if only as a fact of physics. Currently, the movement of history is predicated around one major fact: catastrophe. Ecological, economic, political or social, Fukuyama himself in his 2006 rewriting of the original 'end of history' article admitted that catastrophe is the only possible way out of the 'end of history' he could envision himself: and that catastrophe is coming.

Not everyone considers post-postmodernism to be this catastrophist, of course. For example Jeffrey Nealon (2010: ix) sees post-postmodernism as an intensification of, and a mutation of, postmodernism, (much like postmodernism in relation to modernism) essentially a kind of extreme version of the old. I do, in part, agree with this, as there is no escaping the influence of postmodernism (or, at any rate, no way of doing so that does not automatically invite the bug-bears of old, from patriarchy to institutionalized racism). Nealon argues that post-postmodern literature is no longer attempting to go to "the revelatory 'part' in hopes of grasping the larger 'whole' […] rather, we now tend to start with the larger, post-postmodern whole (e.g., globalization), of which any particular part (say, postmodern literature) is a functioning piece" (Nealon 2010: 150). As he explains further on in his article, what this essentially means is that literature, and our academic interest in it, is no longer an outsider looking at the world from some distance, but simply another part of the globalized, late-capitalist machinery. If this sounds suspiciously familiar, Nealon's book *is* titled *Post-Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism*, with some rather clear allusions to Jameson's seminal work on postmodernism. Literature, or art in general, Nealon argues, becomes another part of the global economic flow of goods, services and capital (what he calls the "flat surface of

culture" (Nealon 2010: 153)). Again, I broadly agree with him: literature or art cannot exist outside the post- or post-postmodern capitalist cultural sphere. It must, as Nealon says, "be discussed in the same socioeconomic terms as downtown office towers, museum art, or hip hotels" (Nealon 2010: 153) although – and this is significant – despite being "*discussed* in those terms [it] doesn't mean literature [is] being *determined* by them" (Nealon 2010: 153, italics in original). What I interpret this to mean is that literature takes on what Nealon (borrowing from Heidegger) calls an 'equipmental' role, where literature and literary criticism can be "recoded from a stoic, prophylactic avoidance to a positive (maybe even joyful) form of critical engagement with contemporary biopolitical and economic life" (Nealon 2010: 154). This, in other words, could be a restatement of what I will argue in the next chapter is the defining aspect of post-postmodernism: a turn towards the axiological, a turn towards a value-based discussion that does not shy away from the fact that it is a living, breathing part of the social and economic reality of the surrounding world.

And what is that surrounding world, the *topos* of post-postmodernism? I argue that our reality right now is primarily a *science fiction* reality, where new technology is changing society at such a rapid pace that the only kind of literature capable of keeping up with the change and perhaps either anticipating it or, a more radical thought, actually re-directing the change, is science fiction. Marleen S. Barr (2006), in an article the title of which again references the 'cultural logic of post-postmodernism', claims that "post modernism has given way to post postmodernism; or, technological innovation causes what was once comfortably defined as science fiction suddenly to become real" (Barr 2006: 168), i.e. that the main cultural dominant of our age is science fiction. Her examples range from passengers in a potential airline disaster being able to participate in their own disaster in real time (through on-flight screens showing the news or through their own laptops and phones – thus side-stepping the problem the passengers on the flight to Iron City had in *White Noise*: today, everyone is 'media'), to cloning, to advances in medical technology, which all point to the new "centrality of science fiction" (Barr 2006: 172) in both literature, contemporary art and – this being Barr's main point – politics. Perhaps slightly tongue-in-cheek, she calls George W. Bush and his 'handlers' (in this, the article is showing its age, although I am sure she would argue the same regarding e.g. President Obama's policy on drone strikes – not to mention Donald Trump's presidential career up to now) "malevolent science fiction writers" (Barr 2006: 176), who deliberately tell lies and obfuscate the truth in order to "escape the confines of the obviously fictitious and to

adversely impact reality" (Barr 2006: 176). Her argument in short is that the 'fictions' told by the Bush government regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the like are examples of Hollywood-esque science fictions which, tragically, have been turned into political tools. This led to the wars which still today, a decade after Barr's article, affect the everyday life, politics and reality of the world, in the form of civil wars, destabilized governments and a terrible cost in human lives. The discussion is very near *White Noise* (a novel that, unsurprisingly, is also quoted by Nealon) and the various levels of Baudrillardian truth and untruth, and perhaps points at how De Lillo was definitely 'on to' something, some approaching trend. De Lillo did miss the mark in the sense that, in *White Noise*, the disaster turned out to be illusory, whereas the disasters wrought by the lies of the real-world politicos since then have been anything but. I think it is telling that, were one to imagine *White Noise*'s chemical spill, or the sub-plot regarding the pill Dylar, having amounted to some real, lasting change in the world (in the text), then it could easily have been classified as science fiction.

To that end, post-postmodern visions are very much needed. It is not enough to criticize the monolithic modern tradition and espouse some kind of radical hybridity: postmodernism cannot, as previous chapters have outlined, respond to the reality of catastrophe and death. Modernism, in turn, has great difficulty accepting anything but a straightforwardly forward-facing notion of 'progress': progress that is systematically stripping the planet of its resources and slowly making it uninhabitable not just for us, but for the large majority of our fellow species. Climate change created by human agency may already have set in motion the beginning and end of the Anthropocene, a term used by some geologists to mark the massive impact humans have had to the geology of Earth. The modernist answer to this is *Interstellar* (2014, dir. Christopher Nolan), where a global Dust Bowl scenario brought on by global warming obliges NASA to send explorers through a wormhole in order to find other colonisable planets and leave the Earth behind. The postmodernist answer is, naturally, nowhere to be found. The post-postmodernist answer is what we are interested in here.

3.1. The Post-Postmodern Post-Apocalypse

If one were to think of the evolution, or the history, of post-apocalyptic fiction, then it seems to me that there has been a movement from the notion of the epistemic – discussing the various ramifications of technology and knowledge –

to the deontic – the re-creation of various forms of social structures, whether futuristic or more ancient in nature – to, and this will be the thrust of my argument in this chapter, what Lubomír Doležel calls the axiological: namely the discussion not only of the values inherent in the causes behind the apocalypse, but more importantly in the new social, interpersonal and ethical order of the world after the collapse of civilization. The important thing here is the 'post' in 'post-apocalyptic'. I have argued that postmodern fiction is, if anything, *apocalyptic*, concerned with the immediate aftermath of a historical catastrophe – in this case perhaps the Second World War and its various long-lasting effects. As such it is chaotic and unpredictable, as apocalyptic – or *avant-garde* – art is wont to be. Of course there was also the anti-reaction, looking back at an earlier, simpler time rather than forward; which I discussed in my section on the culture wars. Looking back at the 'culture wars' now, it feels like the overwhelming conclusion is not that someone *won*, that the culture wars somehow ended in a victory for either side. Rather, it feels like they ended in a sort of stalemate reminiscent of another, earlier apocalypse, namely the First World War – trench warfare between a multitude of different factions, motivated by religion, ideology, politics, or money. As of the moment of writing, some of the highlights of 2016 include Donald Trump being elected president of the United States after a harrowing, mud-slinging campaign against Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton, and the United Kingdom voting to leave the EU with the margin of less than two percent, creating a bitterly divided country which threatens to further split as Scotland and Northern Ireland are considering leaving the UK altogether. The presidency of Donald Trump has, to date, been one of the most politically apocalyptic events of 2017 and 2018, and the repercussions of it are probably not yet fully seen (as is the case with all apocalypses). Whatever happens from here on out, it would seem the entrenched battle is going to continue, to the detriment of whatever actual, objective world there is.

This, then, is the point when post-postmodern fiction – or, rather, post-postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction – comes in, as an attempt to deal with the detritus the postmodern world is creating and leaving behind. Brian McHale, in his oft-quoted opus *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), argues that what marks the shift between modernist and postmodernist fiction is a change in 'dominants' (a term borrowed from Roman Jakobson), from a preoccupation with the epistemological (modernist) to the ontological (postmodernist). The difference between epistemologically and ontologically grounded fictions is essentially a difference in the kinds of questions the text asks us/we ask the text. Modernist fiction might contain questions such as:

> What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?
>
> (McHale 1987: 9)

Postmodernist fiction by contrast, McHale claims, is concerned with questions of a more ontological nature:

> What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?
>
> (McHale 1987: 10)

McHale goes on to discuss how postmodernist fiction in various ways highlights both the problems inherent in the projected, possible worlds of the novel and the analogous ones with the 'real' world. What is fascinating from our perspective is McHale claiming that "Science fiction, like postmodernist fiction, is governed by the ontological dominant" (McHale 1987: 59) in much the same way as detective fiction is the sister genre of modernist (epistemological) novels. Science fiction, he goes on to say, "by staging 'close encounters' between different worlds, placing them in confrontation, foregrounds their respective structures and the disparities between them" (McHale 1987: 60). The science fiction genre has, despite these striking similarities, "developed almost entirely independently of postmodernism's ontological poetics", along "parallel literary-historical tracks" (McHale 1987: 62). He goes on to discuss some of the shared traits between the genres and, throughout his work, keeps reminding the reader that in many instances the points he makes are equally applicable to postmodernist and science fiction works; something also pointed out by other critics who have taken an interest in science fiction (such as Westphal and Jameson).

I am not entirely sure however that it is fair to speak of 'science fiction' in this kind of monumental sense. Science fiction is, after all, as James and Mendlesohn say in their introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* not really a genre at all but "a discussion or a mode" (2003: 3). The argument is that science fiction can contain any number of other classical genres (romance, mystery, thriller, horror...) without being bound by them. However they do concede that "if sf does have an immediately recognizable narrative it is centred on what has been termed the 'sense of wonder'" (James and Mendlesohn 2003: 3). Wonder is

in many ways the antithesis of postmodernism, which is marked aesthetically by a sense of the mundane – wonder is a by-product of an earlier stage in the precession of simulacra, and not something that can be produced by the emptiness behind the veil. That is one difference. The other difference, I would argue, is in how science fiction and postmodern fiction approach possible worlds, which McHale very correctly points out is one of the central conceits of both postmodern and science fiction. Roberts (2000) speaks of "science fiction as a genre or division of literature [that] distinguishes its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live: a fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature" (Roberts 2000: 1). Lester Del Rey's succinct definition of science fiction makes a similar point: "*Science fiction is an attempt to deal rationally with alternate possibilities in a manner which will be entertaining*" (Del Rey 1980: 5, original emphasis). Alternate possibilities, what-if scenarios and ideas are common enough in postmodern fiction as well, but the difference lies in the notion of rationality, which I connect to Coleridge's notion of the willing suspension of disbelief. Michael Tomko (2007: 245) defines it as a contract between readers and writers in which readers willingly suspend their disbelief while reading the provided text, as long as this trust is rewarded at the end with some truth or insight. As Del Rey writes "[i]n a sense, the writer has made a promise to the reader: accept the premise which I have tried to justify and I will then follow through as logically as I can" (Del Rey 1980: 7). Postmodern fiction, as discussed in the section on *White Noise*, is rarely interested in truth or insight, unless that truth is something akin to the notion that 'there is no truth' or 'there is no revelation': postmodern fiction thrives on breaking the implicit promises fiction makes to the reader concerning communicability, truth and a logical order of things.

McHale discusses this in his presentation of one of the most distinct aesthetic tools of the postmodernist (and, to a degree, modernist) novel, namely the notion of *ontological hesitation*: which is often expressed as a hesitation between the traditional use of metaphor, metonym, allegory and so forth in texts, and the literalized versions of these. As an example (my own, rather than McHale's), one might write the sentence 'He was crawling out of his skin'. As a metaphor this implies intense discomfort, but in a postmodernist novel it might very well signify the character *literally* crawling out of his own skin – the 'hesitation' comes from the uncertainty: the reader cannot be sure of whether they are supposed to read it literally or not; McHale himself uses a similar example from Márquez's writing to make the point (McHale 1987: 134-135). What marks postmodern fiction as such is indeed the inability to 'resolve' the hesitation: in a modernist novel, as Todorov (often quoted by McHale)

points out, this kind of hesitation can resolve itself into "either the genre of the uncanny, in which apparently supernatural events are ultimately explained in terms of the laws of nature (for instance, as deceptions or hallucinations); or that of the marvelous, in which supernatural events are ultimately accepted as such—where, in other words, the supernatural becomes the norm" (McHale 1987: 74). Poe's "The Fall of House Usher" would be a work that resolves into the uncanny, while H.P. Lovecraft's horror stories become 'marvelous'. Another option for resolving ontological tension is by resorting to explanations by way of drugs or mental illness, "shifting the problem into an epistemological key" (McHale 1987: 137). This is something that, in particular, Philip K. Dick is known for, as Fredric Jameson points out in his *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005):

> Every reader of Dick is familiar with this nightmarish uncertainty, this reality fluctuation, sometimes accounted for by drugs, sometimes by schizophrenia, and sometimes by new SF powers, in which the psychic world as it were goes outside, and reappears in the form of simulacra or of some photographically cunning reproduction of the external. In general, the effect of these passages, in which the narrative line comes unstuck from its referent and begins to enjoy the bewildering autonomy of a kind of temporal Moebius strip, is to efface the boundary between real and hallucinatory altogether, and to discredit the reader's otherwise inevitable question as to which of the events witnessed is to be considered "true".
>
> (Jameson 2005: 350)

Jameson regards this common trope in Dick's work as working "to prevent the reestablishment of the reality principle and the reconstitution of experience into the twin airtight domains of the objective and the subjective" (Jameson 2005: 351) (Consider the very end of Dick's *Ubik* (1969), for instance, where we are left with the realization that even what we thought was the top-level 'real world' is in fact another half-life world of some kind). According to Jameson, however, this tendency is somewhat muted in *Dr. Bloodmoney - Or How We Got Along After the Bomb* (1965). For after all, "unlike the time warps and the time sags, the hallucinations and the four-dimensional mirages of the other books, atomic holocaust is a collective event about whose reality the reader cannot but decide" (Jameson 2005: 351).

The fact that the apocalypse must be global is part of the reason why post-apocalyptic fiction is so particularly well suited to bridging the gap between postmodern uncertainty and post-postmodernism. The ontological questions raised by apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic narratives are not about whether or not the event took place or whether the underlying cause is fantastic or not: even if one cannot agree on the history or reasons or causes for an apocalypse, it *has*

happened, it exists in that objective sphere where all the various subjective 'possible worlds' overlap (in fact, it would forcibly push together even distant worlds, as anyone refusing to believe the apocalypse is taking place would die). Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) describes London in particular and the world in general slowly succumbing to an unknown, unknowable cataclysm that seems to poison the air, forcing people to move northwards. Although the novel contains a fair amount of postmodern ontological experimentation – the strange girl Emily and her odd cat-dog pet Hugo that refuses to be categorized as either, and the mystical wall-portal that seems to reflect Emily's past yet is never really 'resolved' – the reality of the apocalypse (however mysterious) is indeed *collective*, "an idea coming into everyone's mind at the same time and without intervention from the authorities" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 11). It is not a single person's private apocalypse (although it is always that *as well*): the apocalypse is collective, global. This is curiously reflected in the term Lessing uses for the world beyond the alethically impossible wall: the 'private'. The novel as a whole could be divided between the narrator's forays into the world beyond the wall and how they relate to Emily and her blossoming into womanhood on the one hand (the private, subjective), and an almost entirely realistic description of an apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic society, dominated by youthful tribes and groups, forming on the 'pavement' outside the apartments (the objective). Emily, being both a part of the mysterious and unresolvable postmodern interior of the apartment *and* a crucial actor in the formation of the new, anarchic society of the outside, is of course the crucible around which the novel forms. As seems to be the norm in these kinds of postmodern apocalypse, the 'apocalypse' itself is also a kind of non-revelation. Lessing very appropriately terms it 'it', and it is not until half way through that she even attempts a definition of what 'it' is that is making people move north and west. Even then, however, the definition is far from concrete:

> But is it even possible to write an account of anything at all without 'it' – in some shape or another – being the main theme? Perhaps, indeed, 'it' is the secret theme of all literature and history [...] I am sure that ever since there were men on earth 'it' has been talked of precisely in this way in times of crisis, since it is in crisis 'it' becomes visible, and our conceit sinks before its force. For 'it' is a force, a power, taking the form of earthquake, a visit comet whose balefulness hangs closer night by night distorting all thought by fear – 'it' can be, has been, pestilence, a war, the alteration of climate, a tyranny that twists men's minds, the savagery of a religion. 'It', in short, is the word for helpless ignorance, or of helpless awareness. It is a word for man's inadequacy? [...] 'It,' perhaps – on this occasion in history – was above all a consciousness of something ending.
>
> (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 130)

This is actually a wonderfully succinct definition of apocalypse in its catastrophic form: 'it' must be something that, in some way, transcends mankind's ability to effectively counter it: 'helpless' and 'inadequacy' are the words Lessing uses (albeit, with a question mark after 'inadequacy'). Things are ending, and there is nothing to be done about it except to try and survive. Within the narrative 'it' manifests as "a sort of cloud or emanation, but invisible […] 'it' was an illness, a tiredness, boils"; but also "'it' was the price or unreliability of the electricity supply; the way telephones didn't work; the migrating tribes of cannibals" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 133). Thus, in the objective sphere, 'it' becomes an effacing of the modern, which is mainly represented by Lessing as 'they', and is embodied within the state authorities (who are powerless to stop 'it').

What remains after nearly everyone else has left are packs of roving, feral children: "The oldest were nine, ten" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 147). Despite attempts to help and assimilate them into the remaining 'civilized' society, the feral children refuse: instead they scavenge, scrounge and murder to survive. When brought into a house "they had no idea of a house as a machine. They wrecked everything, tore up the vegetables in the garden, sat at the windows throwing filth at passers-by like monkeys" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 150). They invade, and cannot be thrown out afterwards, defecating on the floors, trapping and eating rats, destroying the home-grown vegetable gardens (i.e. agriculture). It is at this point that it becomes clear exactly to what extent the post-apocalyptic society of the adults, however devolved from what had come before, was nonetheless still a machine – and the children, effectively, smash that machine. Yet the remaining 'civilized' survivors of the city cannot help but concede that "we could all see how familiar words could slip out of key – how quickly things could change…*Had* changed: those children were ourselves. We knew it" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 153). However, unlike many post-apocalyptic narratives, the children are never really harmed – the remaining survivors, especially Gerald, Emily's lover, keeps insisting that they are 'just kids', however violent and anarchic. The closest relative to these children might be the grandchildren in Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*, accused of being 'true savages' by one of the last remaining 'civilized' members of society; or perhaps the progeny of the 'last American' in George A. Stewart's *Earth Abides*, who believe that tying ribbons of different colours on their arrowheads will give them different powers.

Lessing's novel is considerably more complex than these brief paragraphs suggest, and a thorough analysis would merit a separate thesis. But what I wish to focus on briefly is how she treats the end of her novel, which has much in common with Auster's ending for *In the Country of Last Things*. For a literature

that ostensibly refuses closure, both Auster's and Lessing's endings are ambiguous but not overwhelmingly so. In Lessing, the survivors – the narrator, Emily, her cat-dog Hugo, Gerald and a gaggle of the feral kids they ended up caring for even after everyone else had left – all escape the suffocating 'it' through the narrator's wall. "We were in that place which might present us with anything" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 181) Lessing writes. And then, on the last page as they all follow Emily and Hugo, "showing them the way out of this collapsed little world into another order of world altogether" (*The Memoirs of a Survivor*: 182). Again, it is from one world to another that we move. Yet that other world is not disclosed at all. One world, the objective, has collapsed, and instead the characters are led into what is a subjective multiplicity offering 'anything'. In Auster, the world Anna and her friends escaped to was perhaps slightly more mundane, in that it was presumably the countryside outside the city, whereas Lessing's other world is indeed a 'place that might present us with anything', magical or mundane. Then again, we do not know what is outside the city in Auster – it may very well present his survivors, Anna Blume and the rest, with 'anything', which is what they hope for in their various dreams and stories.

Post-postmodern fiction, I contend, is what comes after this point: after the postmoderns have left what became the failed experiment of the city and of modernity. This follows quite naturally, as – I will argue – the apocalypse is marked by a collapse of the codified law and society which is then followed by a period of apocalypse during which anything is permitted, and finally, in the post-post-apocalyptic stage, a period of discovery, where new values and disvalues must be found in order to create something new. Post-modern apocalypses do not go that far: they merely pave the way, apocalyptically existing in the in-between space of perpetual subjectivity. But fiction, post-apocalyptic or not, cannot end here: that is antithetical to postmodernism as much as anything else. There has been a shift of dominants, from the epistemic to the ontological – both of which are still very much alive and well, incidentally – to something else. I would like to argue that it is a shift towards the axiological, and that the most important thing in our 'post-apocalyptic-post-modern' society is to rediscover values and disvalues, to create a new set of guidelines that allow us to function as a society and as people. The alternative, quite often, is embedded in the literature that explores these issues itself: catastrophe.

3.2. Making Possible Worlds

In this chapter, I wish to propose some solutions to the problems posed in the previous section: through the notion of possible worlds theory. This is both to give my reading a theoretical grounding, and to establish proper terminology when discussing my proposed shift towards value-based readings. Possible worlds theory was made popular through a book by the American philosopher Nelson Goodman, *The Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), which deals with everything from the way artists create worlds on their canvas to how physicists describe reality. He begins from the thesis that "[w]orldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking" (Goodman 1978: 6), which is also one of the more often quoted passages of his book. His theory is not concerned just with literary worlds, but with all worlds – the actual, in the arts, architecture, etc. The dividing line between a fictional and the 'real' world is the main focus of attention here, and the role post-apocalyptic fiction (and science fiction in general) plays in that discussion. Although it is not frequently approached from a Goodwinian perspective, I will also argue here that Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the *chronotope* is one of the earliest examples of this kind of thinking (if not *the* earliest). In the *chronotope*, which is a neologism combining the Greek words for time and space, Bakhtin gives us the tools and the language to deal with literature in both the axis of time and the axis of, for lack of a better word, content – what he calls 'space'. Chronotopes are both literary and real-world devices: the time-space of writing is as important as the movement of time and space within the narrative, not to forget the time-space of the moment of reading. As such, Bakhtin's chronotope is also a method through which one can create a 'Historical poetics' (the subtitle of his essay on chronotopes) of the genre, and therefore the section on Bakhtin will somewhat overlap some of the same literary-historical ground covered in the previous section. Bakhtin's theories of space and time mesh naturally with possible worlds theory, as Bakhtin makes very clear the distinction between the fictional and the real world, between possible and impossible spaces, and how we should approach the various pitfalls between the two. Possible worlds theory and Bakhtin's chronotope are, I will argue, an alternative to the Theory-styled reading of literature of the postmoderns, while still not discounting the major contributions of the postmodern era to literary reading – namely the notion of many, interconnected, subjectivized worlds.

3.3. Bakhtin's Chronotope

Bakhtin introduced the chronotope as a way to process "appropriated aspects of reality" – time, space, "actual historical persons" and so on, and, as the subtitle of his chapter on the subject makes plain, he sees the chronotope as a leg towards "a Historical Poetics" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). However, the chronotope is by no means a method by which one can naively equate the 'actual world' with the fictional world (what Bakhtin calls "naïve realism" [1981: 253]); rather the literary-artistic chronotope functions as a bridge between the two: "Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)" (Bakhtin 1981: 253). One example Bakhtin offers is the act of retelling an event after it has happened ("direct authorial discourse"): there is the space and time of the event itself, separate from the space and time of the *telling* of the event; if the event is retold in text, there is the space and time of the event, the space and time of the writing of the event, and the space and time of the reading; thus there is always a difference between chronotopes, even if they directly influence one another. "The represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents" (Bakhtin 1981: 256). As such, the literary-artistic time-spaces found in the novel (or in other genres) historically *reflect* the time of writing; these chronotopes are then adopted and adapted by later writers, allowing literary historians to map out the progress of a genre from its inception to its present state – at least in theory. The majority of the essay in which he introduces the chronotope, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (written circa 1937-38) focuses on ancient Greek romances and on Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and as far as Bakhtin is concerned he does not go much beyond Tolstoy and Dostoevsky with his 'historical poetics', which leaves the field open for other scholars to continue his work where he left off.

A chronotope, thus, describes a world by mapping out its use and coordinates in time and space – the only two absolutes posited by Bakhtin, i.e. that it is impossible to write a narrative without considering space and time and how they interact. If one would wish to, the chronotope can also be almost entirely divorced from its original purpose, which is an attempt at a historical poetics, and could be used solely as method of literary analysis: so to speak ignoring the real-world chronotopes that inspired the literary ones. As such, it can be used as a way of defining *genre markers* that are independent of historical time period: if this or that particular literary chronotope features, it is a sure

sign the work belongs to a certain genre.[1] Bakhtin himself says that "[it] can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions" (Bakhtin 1981: 85) and towards the end of the essay, after having introduced a wealth of chronotopes, he claims that these "lie at the heart of specific varieties of the novel genre, formed and developed over the course of many centuries" (Bakhtin 1981: 251). However one uses the idea, it is a powerful and useful device, and – in my view – an excellent introduction to the idea of multiple possible worlds.

What then does Bakhtin mean exactly by 'chronotope'? To start, here is his definition of the chronotope (note that Bakhtin also claimed at the time of writing that there are chronotopes in other academic fields; I am only concerned here with the 'literary artistic' chronotope):

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.
>
> (Bakhtin 1981: 84)

As the translators of *The Dialogic Imagination* say in their introduction, "[chronotope] is a category that no brief introduction (much less glossary) can adequately adumbrate" (Bakhtin 1981: xxxiii), which makes it difficult to clarify what Bakhtin means by the chronotope without repeating his entire essay verbatim. The way I have approached his text is by focusing on the descriptive aspects of the chronotope – observing those moments in the text during which, as Bakhtin says, "[an] event can be communicated; it becomes information" which makes the chronotopes the "organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel" (Bakhtin 1981: 250). This I see both on a macro and a micro scale – a novel might have a particular relationship to time and space that remains the same throughout, but it might also have smaller instances where other chronotopes interfere. One of his more extensive examples of a *macro*-scale time is the concept of *adventure-time* which he develops in the beginning of his essay, based on ancient Greek romances. Adventure-time is the duration of all the adventures between the start and the (happy) end of the novel, which nonetheless does not take any *biographical* time. This kind of time is still used (albeit less commonly) in for instance serialized

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[1] I do this in my article "The Post-Apocalyptic Chronotope" (2013), in Hernandez, Alannah (Ed.,) 2013. *Apocalypse: Imagining the End*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press: 65-74.

cartoons, where the same characters face similar events every day for fifty or more years (e.g. *Peanuts*, where none of the children ever grow up). Voltaire famously parodied this kind of time in *Candide*, where the hero of the story goes on a quest to find his loved one which spans continents, only to finally reunite with her years and years later when they have both grown old and ugly. Adventure-time is also in many ways the antithesis of how time functions in the post-apocalypse, where the march towards (biographical) death and the changes to a person and to a society are absolutely central to the narrative.

On the other end of the spectrum is the micro-level space time. One example is Bakhtin's *chronotope of the castle*, which I use both as an example of a chronotope and as an example of a micro-level chronotope sometimes used in post-apocalyptic fiction. Inside a castle "the traces of centuries and generations are arranged in it in visible form as various parts of its architecture, in furnishings, weapons, the ancestral portrait gallery, the family archives and in the particular human relationships involving dynastic primacy and the transfer of hereditary rights" (Bakhtin 1981: 246). Thus, the castle "has its origins in the distant past" and stories taking place in the castle have an "orientation" towards the past – his example being the Gothic novel. On the micro level, a scene or an occurrence in a novel featuring a castle or indeed any similar old building will have traces of this chronotope in it – of dynasties and heredity, of feudal lords and ancestors – while on the macro level an entire genre (such as the Gothic novel or some of the works by Sir Walter Scott) or at the very least a full novelistic world can function according to the logic of this one chronotope. As an example, in the post-apocalyptic novel *Survivors* (1976; based on the BBC TV series) by Terry Nation which details a world in which 99% of the population has died of an influenza virus, there is a subplot where the protagonist Abby meets the son of an Earl, Garland, who is fighting over control of his ancestral home against a group of squatters. The entire situation is framed in a clear backwards-facing way, Garland embodying the old ideal of the feudal lord or leader, unable to go beyond his ancestral 'castle' despite the vastly changed world. That, however, is only a small part of the novel, a micro-level chronotope suddenly appearing in the middle of the macro-level post-apocalypse. Bakhtin points out that this is the way most chronotopes work: some chronotopes may "envelope or dominate the others", but chronotopes are in fact "mutually inclusive" – they "co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (Bakhtin 1981: 252). As such, chronotopes are not structuralist absolutes, but rather closer to conceptual tools; a way of seeing what the author is doing with space and time in the

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narrative (and, additionally, how that space and time interacts with real-world chronotopes).

Early on in his essay on the chronotope Bakhtin gives what he calls a "typical composite schema of [the] plot" of a Greek romance, composed of similar "elements" or "motifs", which ultimately make up the chronotope (Bakhtin 1981: 87). After that he disseminates these motifs into spatial and temporal factors. Aside from the aspects of time and space, there is a third part to the chronotope which Bakhtin calls the "image of Man" – that is to say how human beings are influenced by the vagaries of time and space in the literary-artistic chronotope. The typical post-apocalyptic world can be analysed in a similar way, as I will demonstrate in the following section: a macro-level, rather than micro-level, chronotope of the post-apocalypse. I do not here say a schema of the post-postmodern post-apocalypse, as this schema remains surprisingly stable throughout history – it is in the details, on the micro-level, that the new chronotopes of the post-postmodern (as I shall argue) properly come to bear.

3.3.1. Chronos

The temporal aspect is, in Bakhtin's words, the "primary category" (Bakhtin 1981: 85) of the literary-artistic chronotope, and this largely holds true in the post-apocalyptic genre. Literary time is, of course, not simple: whereas in the actual world we are living from one moment to the next, experiencing the irreversible arrow of time that Eliade was sure ancient people feared, literary characters can experience time in any number of ways: they can live backwards (like the character of Merlin in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1958)), they can experience it extremely slowly (like Leopold Bloom's 16th of June stretching over 265,000 words in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)), or they can travel back and forth through it (like the Time Traveller in H. G Wells *The Time Machine* (1895)). Post-apocalyptic fiction assumes time is unidirectional: the 'post' in 'post-apocalyptic' denotes a time after an apocalypse, after the End of a/the World (as we know it), and offers no hope of return to a time before, no matter how much the denizens of said post-apocalypse may wish for it. This irreversibility of time is one of the most important and noticeable aspects of the genre, at least in the examples I am using – although there is hope for a cycle and a return to 'how it was', one cannot simply rewind the clock. Furthermore, this treatment of time creates two other time periods of importance: the pre-apocalypse and the apocalypse itself.

The pre-apocalypse is, almost invariably, either our present, or a near future that justifies the descent into apocalypse. The purpose of the 'chronotope of

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the pre-apocalypse' is, in essence, to give the readers a grounded, familiar starting point, whence things go through an apocalyptic change, ending up in the new reality of the post-apocalypse. Although post-apocalyptic fiction is fiction about a *future* (in practically every case), it differs from most science fiction, which often gleefully explores this future with all its inventions and novelties by focusing not on the future but on the past that led to it. If science fiction in the main is forward-facing, post-apocalyptic science fiction is decidedly backward-facing – an element of some importance to my discussion further on. I wish to discuss this notion by using versions of two of Bakhtin's chronotopes. The first is a form of what Bakhtin calls "*historical inversion*" – an element of the "folkloric chronotope". Historical inversion is another way of expressing Eliade's conception of the cyclic eternal return, which, as we recall, looks back at Golden Ages in the past that are soon to come again. As Bakhtin puts it: in the historically inverted chronotope "such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection" are located in the past, even though no such past necessarily existed in the first place. What this leads to is a time which is inversed, where "[the] present and even more the past are enriched at the expense of the future". The power of this kind of time comes from trans-positioning: "everything affirmative, ideal, obligatory, desired has been shifted, via the inversion, into the past (or partly into the present); en route it has become weightier, more authentic and persuasive" (Bakhtin 1981: 147). The modern post-apocalypse borrows this ancient form of temporal thinking, but only to a degree. As already discussed, in the post-Christian world, nothing can be a utopia, not even the pre-apocalyptic past. Historical inversion nonetheless lends the past (which is often, but not always, the author's and the reader's present) the kind of weight and persuasion it needs to be effective. To put it slightly differently: a post-apocalypse without a point of comparison in the pre-apocalypse is no longer post-apocalyptic, it is merely a tale about something fantastic and otherworldly – such as *The Planet of the Apes* all the way up until the end, when the hero discovers the Statue of Liberty in the sand, realizing the planet he was on had all along been Earth after an apocalyptic war, rather than the alien planet on which – throughout the narrative – we have been led to believe it has been set. With this in mind, it can easily be argued that the pre-apocalypse is, ultimately, the most important of the three time periods: without it, speaking of a 'post'-apocalypse is nonsense.

The second chronotope that I will use to describe post-apocalyptic time is what Bakhtin calls the chronotope of the ancient novel of travel.

> First and foremost we have at the center of the travel novel's world the *author's own real home-land*, which serves as organizing center for the point of view, the scales of comparison, the approaches and evaluations determining how alien countries and cultures are seen and understood (it is not compulsory that the native country be evaluated positively, but it must absolutely provide us with a scale and a background).
>
> (Bakhtin 1981: 103)

Bakhtin points out that it is not the alien countries we see (e.g. the prototypical post-apocalyptic wasteland) that are ultimately the most important thing in a novel of travel, but the author's homeland with which these strange lands are compared. In the post-apocalyptic novel, the 'homeland' is not situated anywhere else *spatially*, but rather *temporally*. It may be spatially distant as well, and post-apocalyptic novels are very commonly written as travel narratives, but this travel only serves to strengthen the temporal disconnect between the 'homeland' in the past and the present situation of the post-apocalypse. The most typical example of this disconnect appears whenever post-apocalyptic travellers come across remnants of their past homelands, which are generally in ample supply around them in the form of ruins. Sometimes the entire plot hinges on the discovery of some piece of the past. This is true in for example in *The Postman*, where the protagonist Gordon by chance finds an abandoned postal service vehicle from which he appropriates the postman's uniform and by extension his persona. It is initially a kind of play-acting (claiming to be from a reconstituted United States far in the east), but it soon becomes more than that. By promising a return to the past he essentially becomes a time traveller from the otherwise unattainable homeland, a figure of immense authority. Put in the terms of a travelogue, the post-apocalypse is time travel to a future which has become nigh unrecognisable.

But even though time in the post-apocalypse is backwards facing, the apocalypse itself is always a mover and a shaker, a reason for change. *The Last Man* (1826), which is to my knowledge the first properly secular novel in the genre, is an excellent example of this in motion. Shelley divided the novel into three volumes, each essentially describing one of the three periods. This is a fairly uncommon set-up and rarely replicated, as the pre-apocalyptic portion is generally not described in any detail as it tends to be unnecessary. In *The Last Man* the justification for the pre-apocalyptic volume might lie in the fact that the narrative takes place near the year 2100, which requires a certain deal of ground-laying; for example, England is transitioning into becoming a republic. However, for what is ostensibly a science fiction novel about the future, time appears to have stood more or less still. It is not until chapter two that it is

suddenly revealed that the novel takes place in the year 2073; in the first chapter we are given a bewildering description of Verney growing up wild and free somewhere in the English countryside, working as a shepherd and a poacher. "My life was like that of an animal, and my mind was in danger of degenerating into that which informs brute nature" (*The Last Man*: 12) Verney confesses. Eventually, he is 'rescued' by Adrian (a character modelled after Percy Bysshe Shelley) who, after finding out he is the son of his father's erstwhile favourite, takes him in. Aside from England becoming a republic and the King abdicating, there is precious little else that suggests the far-flung future: not even in that most swiftly evolving domain of warfare has any progress been made. When Verney describes the preparations for a battle with the Turks (in the very beginning of book two), it seems they are still using early nineteenth century battle formations: "[r]egiment after regiment advanced, their colours flying and bands playing [...] and [they] formed themselves into column and hollow square; while the pioneers threw up small mounds for their protection" (*The Last Man*: 142). There are bayonets and cannons and cavalry troops, sieges and swords, prisoner exchanges and galleys. As such, it is unnecessary to look at actual fictional year as having any significance; it is much closer to the timeless Greek romances in adventure-time that Bakhtin wrote of than the forward-facing science fiction of the modern day, or indeed even of *Frankenstein*.

This element of arrested or even stagnant time, however, is significant in the sense that it establishes the pre-apocalyptic period as being a period recognizably *present*. Rather than attempting to create a future-space of some kind, Shelley assumes almost no social, technological or political progress to be made in the 150 years from her time – and this from the writer who thought reanimating human flesh and making modern golems was within the grasp of contemporary technology! While regular science fiction already proposes time travel, this is time travel without time actually changing - that is, until the apocalypse strikes. This then is the transition into the apocalyptic time-space, at the beginning of volume two, which sees the narrator, Lionel Verney, and his sister Perdita travel to Athens to ransom the imprisoned Lord Raymond (the husband of Perdita, modelled after Lord Byron) from the Turks. Although the story continues to describe the interrelationships of the various characters, coupled with a plotline concerning the Athenian-Turkish war Raymond is embroiled in, Plague has now become a character as well. It is only now that *real change* begins to affect the world; the pre-apocalyptic chronotope, then, is one of stagnant or unchanging time, representative of the author's own chronotope, and this proves to be true more or less throughout the genre.

The post-apocalypse in *The Last Man* is a drawn-out affair, and it is difficult to pin down the exact dividing line between 'apocalypse' and 'post-apocalypse', except by studying how society changes. For example, not long after Verney has returned to his home in very close proximity to Windsor Castle he can already read in the newspaper that the city of Constantinople is being rebuilt by the Greeks, but that "the curse of God is on the place, for everyone who has ventured within the walls has been tainted by the plague". After the disease spreads to Thrace and Macedonia, "a cordon has been drawn on the frontiers of Thessaly, and a strict quarantine exacted" (*The Last Man*: 176). It is also now that, suddenly, space opens up briefly, only to close after a short reprieve: the narrator tells of stories of a dark sun in the East, of the plague striking America, of "the streets of Isfahan, of Peking, and of Delhi [that] were strewed with pestilence-struck corpses". This, of course, is all viewed from "our cloudy isle", "far removed from danger", despite "the daily arrival of vessels from the east, crowded with emigrants" (*The Last Man*: 179). The author almost immediately returns his gaze to his "own dear home", ignoring or attempting to ignore the "physical evils of distant countries" (*The Last Man*: 180). This comes to naught, as during the remainder of the novel the slow progression of the plague towards England is marked and remarked upon constantly, despite the official attempts at quelling the news. In an hitherto entirely stagnant world, spatially as well as temporally, the changes wrought by the plague are massive indeed, as more and more immigrants reach England. Verney and his friends turn their homes into refugee centres, and their parks and pleasure-grounds into farms, the deer of the royal forests "were obliged to fall for the sake of worthier pensioners" (*The Last Man*: 189). Thus, in a few spare sentences, the previously unspoiled milieu of early nineteenth century England was overturned in a kind of altruistic communism: "It was more common, for all who possessed landed property to secede to their estates, attended by whole troops of the indigent, to cut down their woods to erect temporary dwellings, and to portion out their parks, parterres and flower-gardens to necessitous families" (*The Last Man*: 189). What might be termed a *space of crisis* is formed as the previous world is metamorphosed by the new necessities created by the impending apocalypse.

The post-apocalypse comes bit by bit, as the third volume rolls around. After several years of the interminable plague ravaging the world and diminishing its inhabitants year by year, new types of people begin to appear. There is not only a raving, end-of-times lunatic, shouting "Death is among us!" (*The Last Man*: 210) but also the self-reliant and noble leaders of small communities who step in as the "fright and grief deprived the inhabitants of the

little wisdom they possessed" (*The Last Man*: 216). And, of course, among "the young, the thoughtless, and the vicious" other vices take hold: "decorum was violated, and the evils, which hitherto adhered to an advanced state of civilization, were doubled" (*The Last Man*: 217). At one point, and by now we are firmly in the post-apocalypse, a half-starved horde of Irish and Scottish, led by American émigrés (the Empire striking back indeed), descend upon England: "their lawless spirit instigated them to violence; they took delight in thrusting the possessors from their houses; […] till, the ruin complete in one place, they removed their locust visitation to another" (*The Last Man*: 237). At Windsor the Londoners make a stand, with "the remnants of such regiments, as could be brought through many losses into any show of muster". Even "music was not wanting: banners floated in the air, and the shrill fife and loud trumpet breathed forth sounds of encouragement and victory" (*The Last Man*: 238).

A pale comparison to the war with the Turks described earlier in the novel, with tattered remnants fighting what is essentially a disorganized mob of looters. This is an image that will reappear in the post-apocalyptic chronotope time and time again, but in Shelley's vision things are not so dire yet. Adrian manages to stop the bloodshed at the very last minute, by appealing to the common humanity of all parties: "You are dear to us, because you wear the frail shape of humanity; each one among you will find a friend and host among these forces. Shall man be the enemy of man, while plague, the foe to all, even now is above us, triumphing in our butchery, more cruel than her own?" (*The Last Man*: 240). This speech is also indicative of the first image of the post-apocalyptic Man, as described by Shelley: "One living beggar had become of more worth than a national peerage of dead lords" (*The Last Man*: 234). This, together with the previously established space of crisis-type reallocation of resources creates a "formation of less restrictive patterns of social cooperation" (Canuel 1998: 151) which, according to Mark Canuel (1998: 152), "characterize the logic of the liberal state": what Canuel (1998: 162) calls a "community of shared risk". This observation is canny, and forms an important part of the catastrophic mode of thinking that is still prevalent today (e.g. Slavoj Žižek's "intelligent catastrophe theory").[2]

Generally, apocalypses in novels are either described as single, nigh-instantaneous events (World War III, an asteroid hitting earth, a meteor shower causing blindness over the course of three days), or then as a series of

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[2] From a talk held at Penn Humanities Forum in 2010. Available on YouTube: Žižek, Slavoj. 2010. "Are all Catastrophes Virtual?" [Web video]. Available: http://youtu.be/BRe9zVq5kb0 [1.6.2012]

events taking place over a longer period of time (such as in *The Last Man*). One common conceit is that the time-space of the beginning of the story is already set squarely in the post-apocalypse, making the duration of the apocalypse itself irrelevant (e.g. *The Postman*). What is important is that the apocalypse is of such significance that a clear line is drawn between the time before and the time after: even in longer, more drawn-out apocalypses, there is almost always a point where the narrator says something to the effect of the beginning words of *World War Z*: "The first outbreak I saw…" (*World War Z*: 4) – the harbinger of the inevitable end. In fact, it is quite often the idea of time itself stopping that marks the transition. The first page of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) begins with Snowman-Jimmy looking at his broken wristwatch and declaring "Nobody nowhere knows what time it is" (*Oryx and Crake*: 3), while the ambiguously described apocalypse in *The Road* begins with "The clocks stopped at 1:17" (*The Road*: 54). What stops is, naturally, 'official time', clock-time, time as directed and purposeful, both in a religious and secular sense, marching forward towards the eventual teleological end-point. Whether modern and defined by railway timetables and afternoon commutes, or agricultural and defined by the cycle of harvest and feeding, the main, immediate effect of the apocalypse is on temporality. In *The Last Man*, Verney laments the state of post-plague England: "The fields had been left uncultivated, weeds and gaudy flowers sprang up […] the cattle unattended wandered over the fields and through the lanes; the tame inhabitants of the poultry yard, baulked of their daily food, had become wild" (*The Last Man*: 254). *After London* dedicates its entire first chapter to describing how the wilderness reclaimed England, a pattern repeated in *The Scarlet Plague* and later on in, for instance, Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), in which the protagonist Ish travels through a United States left empty and abandoned after a plague. Time reverts to descriptions of morning, day and evening, at least in the immediate aftermath of the apocalypse.

But, to reiterate, the most immediately noticeable and salient feature of post-apocalyptic time is its groundedness in a familiar time-space – a temporal home-land if you will – which is disrupted by the apocalypse to the degree that a definite 'after' is created. This naturally has an effect on the other two aspects of the chronotope, namely space and personhood; as Bakhtin points out, "biography is the crucial organizing principle for time" (Bakhtin 1981: 104) in these types of novels. In order to fully appreciate the 'time travel' taking place, an element of the biographical has to be included – usually a survivor's life from the pre-apocalypse, through the apocalypse, and into the new reality of the post-apocalypse. This is something I will discuss more in my section on personhood, but suffice it to say the biographical meshes with the evaluative

since, much like the novel of travel, not all post-apocalyptic novels by any means evaluate their 'homelands' positively. In many cases there can be heavy criticism of it, which is another typical aspect of the post-apocalyptic genre; commentary on the forces that caused the apocalypse in the first place. Naturally, this temporal/spatial homeland working as a frame of reference is intensely chronotopic in itself, comprising of elements of a temporal as well as spatial nature. To repeat: without this pre-apocalyptic temporal homeland, a story can hardly be termed post-apocalyptic at all, since we do not have any kind of frame of reference with which to compare. As a result, of course, historical real-world chronotopes will each by necessity create their own post-apocalypses, as their own point-of-origin will be very different. This treatment of time is also why the genre is so well-suited to dealing with change.

3.3.2. Topos

The topic of 'homeland', however temporal, underlines the interrelated nature of the chronotope. Although post-apocalyptic time is indeed different, it is only in connection with space that it becomes significant; or, for the purposes of our discussion, *place*. Bakhtin is not overly concerned with the distinction between the terms *place* and *space*, although his conception of *topos* seems fairly abstract. For instance, when discussing the Greek romances and the idea of adventure-time, he points out that the Greek romances take place in what is essentially "an *alien world*" (Bakhtin 1981: 101; Bakhtin's emphasis); a world with no immediately recognizable markers of either era or place "no matter where one goes in the world of the Greek romance, with all its countries and cities, its buildings and works of art" (Bakhtin 1981: 91). The space in the Greek romances is purely abstract – and vast: "In order for the adventure to develop it needs space, and plenty of it" (Bakhtin 1981: 99). The result is the chronotope of the Greek romance: "an alien world in adventure time" (Bakhtin 1981: 102). The space in post-apocalyptic novels, by contrast, is essentially the opposite: recognizable countries, cities, buildings and works of art are absolutely essential for placing the stories in their appropriate context. For the post-apocalypse, *place* is more important than space: the topos is not an alien world, but a familiar space – rendered unfamiliar and uncanny by the catastrophe.

The distinction between space and place within literary theory is generally made as one of levels of abstraction; the word *place* denoting an actual, real-world locality, often with a proper name as a referent, like the city of London or the San Joaquin valley in California. *Space*, on the other hand, tends to be

approached in a metaphorical manner, often as a mathematical or logical description of spatiality (length, breadth, width); time being its fourth dimension. Henri Lefebvre for instance makes a distinction between "the general (logical and mathematical)" and "the singular (i.e. 'places' considered as natural, in their merely physical or sensory reality)" (Lefebvre 1991: 16), although he does not make a categorical, or rather lexicological, difference between the words 'place' and 'space'. The one can bleed into the other, as for instance the cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues in his *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). According to Tuan the difference between the two can be made on the level of human experience: according to Tuan "space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan 1977: 6). To be in space, according to Tuan, is to be in the open, to be "free" but also, on the flipside, to be "exposed and vulnerable". Place, by contrast, "is a calm center of established values" (Tuan 1977: 54). Place can be considered something that exists within a wider space, while also allowing space a broader, more metaphorical interpretation. The broadest interpretation of space is also in a sense the scientific definition of it: the universe and everything that exists within it, including purely fictional worlds.

Unlike 'pure' space, concrete place in one way or another always has a *referent*, the real-world locality that stands as the model for its fictionalized re-presentation: "real spaces and fictionalized spaces coexist on the basis of a common referent", as Bertrand Westphal (2011: 97) observes in *Geocriticism*. Westphal describes three basic ways of approaching place and fictionality, based on the degree of correlation with the proposed real-world referent; "from zero to infinity" (Westphal 2011: 101); homotopic consensus, heterotopic interference and utopian excursus. *Homotopic consensus* is the closest to one-to-one representation, where for instance a fictional London converses directly with the real city; in practice, this means that "[e]very time the fictional representation is of the homotopic type, there is a risk of confusion between the referent and its representation" (Westphal 2011: 103). It is a matter of "compossibility", and it is generally in a post-apocalyptic narrative's interest that the pre-apocalyptic period is as homotopic as possible. *Heterotopic interference* largely concerns situations in which fictional 'heterotopias' intrude upon the real – for instance by making up European countries or English towns (Eliot's Middlemarch), by conflating one city with another, or various other strategies of allowing a fiction to co-exist with the 'real' world (Westphal 2011: 107). For most post-apocalyptic novels, this is limited to the typical literary strategy of inventing fictional streets, towns or even cities modelled after real places, such as the small town of Fort Repose in Florida where the characters of Pat Frank's

Alas, Babylon (1959) live out their post-WWIII existence, or Cimarron Street in Compton where Robert Neville lives in *I Am Legend* (1954). If the narrative "sets up a fictional world that reality does not really contradict or has not always contradicted" – i.e. if it describes a future world – then according to him it is already the 'regime' of utopia. This third category, the *utopian excursus* (utopia here used as 'no-place', not eutopia, 'good place')*,* concerns places "with no rigid designator" which do no point "to a referenced space of the world" (Westphal 2011: 108). He gives *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and *Lord of the Rings* as examples, although I would argue these two are strange bedfellows, as the city which was the setting for *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* was explicitly identified as London, Britain, by Orwell. It remains a useful category for *Lord of the Rings* and any other fantasy or science fiction novel which really does create a wholly alien place, but I would question the ease by which Westphal consigns all 'future' fictional worlds to it. The majority of post-apocalyptic fictions rely on the knowledge that it is not some alien planet or lost utopia that is being described, but *our world* after an apocalypse: the pre-apocalypse after all begins in the familiar present.

I would further argue that, especially for non-mimetic genres, place is a tool by which authors and readers can navigate what Alan Palmer (2004) has termed the "ontological gaps" (Palmer 2004: 34) that permeate all fiction. An ontological gap (or blank) as defined by Palmer is something that is missing within a fictional world without being explicitly mentioned as missing. As Palmer points out, "[n]o discourse could ever be long enough to say in its story all that could be said about the whole storyworld" (Palmer 2004: 34): we assume humans to have two arms and two legs and so forth also within fiction unless otherwise stated. Therefore, all fictional worlds are created largely through the cognitive supplementation (and deletion) of key aspects, one of those being recognizable places. Lubomír Doležel, who I will return to in the following section, puts it in simple terms: "the world is constructed by its author and the reader's role is to reconstruct it" (Doležel 1998: 21). Since all fiction is ontologically incomplete and thus needs to be 'filled in' by the author and reader in tandem, the ontological gap is made less acute by mentioning known places – cities, countries, roads or states. This is particularly significant for a genre such as the post-apocalyptic, which straddles the mimetic and the fantastical, as among others David Ketterer (1974) has argued (he makes no discrimination between *apocalyptic* and *post-apocalyptic*):

> Apocalyptic literature should be distinguished from mimetic literature on the one hand, and fantastic literature on the other. While mimetic literature addresses itself to reproductions of the "real" world, fantastic literature involves the creation of escapist worlds that, existing in an incredible relationship to the "real" world, do not impinge destructively on that world. *Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of rational extrapolation and analogy or religious belief) with the "real" world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that "real" world in the reader's head.*
>
> (Ketterer 1974: 13; original emphasis)

It is not undifferentiated space that is destroyed in the apocalypse and described in the post-apocalypse: it is our world. But in that destruction all that is not viewed, named or placed by the author becomes a sort of ontological gap in the reader's mind. They might know it exists, but their knowledge of what it looks like is likely to be out of date (in the novel's time-line) – it is, by now, almost certainly a ruin of some kind. Towards the end of *Earth Abides*, Ish sends his progeny on a car trip around post-apocalyptic United States, from their home in San Francisco all the way to Chicago (the road to New York being impassable). When they come back, they carry with them stories of tribes with strange customs having taken up residence in places like Los Angeles and "one of the old Indian pueblos near Albuquerque" whose "pattern of life was based on growing corn and beans as the Pueblo Indians had done for many hundreds of years" (*Earth Abides*: 220). Through stories like these even narratives where the focus is on a sedentary group we are given glimpses into the wider world. It is quite natural, then, that place – defined as a locality in our real world, a part of our actual world encyclopaedia, a place in which we are or can be actual residents – is of utmost importance for the genre.

The idea of known place becoming unknown space is one of the more uncommon aspects of how the genre functions, and is therefore very often the central narrative model of choice for writers. I have already introduced the idea of the post-apocalyptic novel being a kind of travelogue of an unknown future, and indeed the most common trope of post-apocalyptic novels is travel, whether far-ranging or local. Consider the beginning of John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), when our hero, William Masen, awakens in the hospital, finding nearly all the world blinded by a meteor shower he missed due to an eye injury. His first act is, obviously, attempting to find out what has happened: first by finding his way through the hospital, then through the (meticulously named and placed) streets of London, and finally venturing into the countryside. Although not all post-apocalyptic novels must be about travel, I have found that movement through space from the familiar to the unfamiliar is

very much a common thread through many post-apocalyptic novels. A fitting chronotope already described by Bakhtin is that pertaining to travel, encounter or – more succinctly – *the road*. The road is a perfect chronotope in that "[t]ime, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road)" (Bakhtin 1981: 244). In Bakhtin's definition, the road is a place of encounters, across class boundaries and probabilities, a place where anything becomes possible. Bakhtin furthermore points out that unlike the novel of travel (as discussed above), the road functions as a native place, "one that passes through *familiar territory*, and not through some exotic *alien world*" (Bakhtin 1981: 244). However, the post-apocalyptic road is by no means entirely analogous to Bakhtin's road: in the initial time travel from the homeland of the pre-apocalypse, whatever used to be familiar has now has now been irrevocably changed by the apocalypse in one way or another. What happens is that, due to the time-travelling aspect of the temporal homeland (i.e. the 'familiar territory' of the road), the two spaces – the past and the present – coalesce.

The form this takes is *the ruin*, whether of human beings or of buildings. One might even say that the primary *topos* of the post-apocalypse is the ruin. Bakhtin does not have much to say about ruins *per se* – his example of the chronotope of the castle is pertinent, but Bakhtin's castle is still a living thing (in the Gothic novel) which, although it calls upon the past and is oriented towards the past, is nonetheless still an active participant in the present, much like Garland's ancestral home in *Survivors*. Its past and the potential apocalypses it represents (i.e. a ruined castle) were already ancient by the time the first post-apocalyptic novels were written; as Bakhtin noticed "the traces of time in the castle do bear a somewhat antiquated, museum-like character" (Bakhtin 1981: 246). A ruined castle brings about a wholly different set of images than a ruined apartment building. The motif of the ruin is thus an indelibly *modern* phenomenon: it is the ruins of modernity we see in the collapsed apartment buildings, highways and abandoned vehicles of the post-apocalypse; in the oldest post-apocalypses by Shelley and Jefferies, ruins are few and far between, and the focus lies more on the changes in humans and nature, which is the 'next step' once all of modernity has been erased from the map. In the topology of ruined cities we find a very powerful expression of the post-apocalyptic chronotope. Brian Dillon's definition of the ruin forms a useful starting point for the 'chronotope of the ruin':

> Ruins embody a set of temporal and historical paradoxes. The ruined building is a remnant of, and a portal into, the past; its decay is a concrete reminder of the passage of time. And yet by definition it survives, after a fashion: there must be a certain (perhaps indeterminate) amount of a built structure still standing for us to refer to it as a ruin and not merely as a heap of rubble. At the same time, the ruin casts us forward in time; it predicts a future in which our present will slump into a similar disrepair or fall victim to some unforeseen calamity.
>
> (Dillon 2011: 11)

The post-apocalyptic road itself is often ruined, with broken bridges, cracked asphalt and covered in broken-down vehicles, and it frequently leads to ruined towns and cities, some inhabited, some desolate. To reiterate, as the selection of articles in Dillon's book points out, the aesthetics of ruins is specifically the aesthetic of the *modern* ruin: it is the ruin of modernity that we observe in the wrecked apartment buildings and abandoned factories. The aesthetic of the ruin is a subject that has garnered much attention, within literature, art and architecture, but as this is something that is more commonly viewed (in visual art, cinema, video games etc.) rather than described in writing, I will not focus much on the actual aesthetics of it; rather what is significant is the ruin, especially the ruined road, as a topological marker of post-apocalypse.

3.3.3. Personhood

The image of Man, or personhood, is the third and most interesting aspect of the post-apocalyptic chronotope, and the actual central motif of the genre as a whole: how and why do you survive? Although a question that has always been of self-evident interest, how to deal with death and survival – as I argued in the previous chapter on post-modern death – has become even more important during the transition into the post-postmodern era. Every novel, every author, sketches their own vision or visions of humanity in the post-apocalypse, and describing this vision is arguably the very purpose of a post-apocalyptic novel. A world is created, an alternate world, which is nonetheless connected through ruins and memories to the world the author and the reader recognize and remember, and then it is populated by people who have gone through the same changes as the physical spaces of that world. The post-apocalyptic chronotope is, as I have mentioned, surprisingly coherent when it comes to the aspects of time and space: most authors prefer to look at their world rationally, and rational extrapolation creates a ruined, post-modern world which is post-modern in the sense that the Modern world and its trappings have been wiped away. It is in the description of the survivor that the proper real-world chronotope of the author comes to the fore: Verney and his companions in *The*

Last Man never lamented the loss of electricity or of cars and airplanes, because they never had them; the characters of *Alas, Babylon* (1959) or *The Postman* (1985) did not lament the loss of the Internet, whereas this is a major part of the past of the characters in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014). But over the span of nearly 200 years of post-apocalyptic fiction, the characters themselves all end up in a world very similar to one another as far as technology is concerned – it is in the baggage they themselves carry over from the past that the differences in chronotopes manifest.

The most basic notion of humans in the post-apocalypse is that of *survivor*, meaning someone who has successfully circumnavigated the transition from pre- to post-apocalypse. For there to be any suspense, any narrative, there must be humans, and for there to be human beings in the post-apocalypse, some must have survived. Survivors are, of course, extremely powerful literary figures, much as they are in reality, although the characteristics of what a survivor is have no doubt changed throughout the ages. It is difficult to conceive the psychology of ancient survivors, especially as most of the research into the mind-set of a survivor is modern; shell-shock, or trauma, only became known after the First World War, for example. Berger speaks specifically of (real-life) survivors from concentration camps and the world wars and their narratives, but his thoughts could equally well be applied to survivors of the fictional apocalypse:

> The survivor and his testimony are invested with several distinct but related forms of authority. It is first epistemological, for the survivor has seen, and knows, what no one else could see and know. This authority of knowledge, or 'epistemic privilege', confers a kind of ethical authority, for the survivor's knowledge is often knowledge of a radical transgression of moral boundaries.
> (Berger 1999: 48)

The authoritative voice of the survivor is what gives voice to Bakhtin's historical inversion: they speak through personal experience of events in the past that have shaped the future – which is especially salient when that future is no longer recognizable, as in post-apocalyptic fiction. The survivors are the narrators of the travelogue of time and space, and it is often their temporal homelands to which comparisons are made (but not always). Post-apocalyptic survivors are different from survivors of accidents or war, however, in that the world of the post-apocalypse is quite often every bit as dangerous as the event (the apocalypse) that caused it. As such, the survivor is generally an active agent, and how they act and react to their new surroundings forms the central conceit of the novel.

There is of course something reassuring to the idea of surviving, but when applied to the global scale of an apocalypse, this kind of thinking can become dangerous. It belies the fact that *most did not survive*, risking that the entire narrative turns into a survivalist fantasy, starkly conservative in its outlook. Bosmajian (1990: 74) points out that such post-apocalyptic "[s]tories, especially in relation to catastrophe, reassure because they imply survival—whether of author, character, listener or reader". These kinds of reassuring survival narratives have been defined by Brian Aldiss as "cosy catastrophes", a genre that is particularly British in its appearance (the main proponent being John Wyndham of *Day of the Triffids* fame) and in which white, middle-class British men romp through the apocalypse as if it were an extended adventure in the Congo: "The essence of cosy catastrophe is that the hero should have a pretty good time (a girl, free suites at the Savoy, automobiles for the taking) while everyone else is dying off" (Aldiss 1986: 316). There are manifold examples of this kind of catastrophe, but most examples of this genre are generally not very good. Aldiss gives the rather hilarious example of *The Hopkins Manuscript* (1939) by R. C. Sherriff, wherein the Moon crashes into the ocean and the main protagonist Hopkins decides to weather the crisis by stacking his china in the cupboards and then ponder over the profound loss of the morning paper or the whistling of the milkman.

Cosy survivor stories allow for a particular type of individual – perhaps the kind envisioned by the various real-world 'prepper' types, who stockpile cans in their secret bunkers and who were mercilessly villainized in *The Postman*. In *White Noise*, this type of survivor is given its typical American description, during the Gladneys' evacuation during the Airborne Toxic Event. As there is a traffic jam, the Gladneys try to follow them in their own family wagon:

> Not ten yards away a group of men proceeded calmly to a Land Rover. They resembled instructors in jungle warfare, men with lean frames and boxy heads. They drove straight into dense underbrush, not only away from the dirt road but away from all the other cars attempting shortcuts. Their bumper sticker read GUN CONTROL IS MIND CONTROL. In situations like this, you want to stick close to people in the right-wing fringe groups. They've practiced staying alive.
>
> (*White Noise*: 157)

But within a few minutes, the Land Rover has disappeared and the Gladneys are forced to rejoin the others. There is, no doubt, a contingent of readers who read post-apocalyptic novels imagining that they will be the heroic survivor, the one who has prepared for it, who can react quickly enough and appropriately enough, who can save himself and his family. But the majority of us are not, and

will never be, the archetype of the prepper survivalist: not even the postmodern survivor of the non-apocalypse, although one can surely imagine the embarrassment the group in the Land Rover felt after the whole apocalypse literally blew over. I would like to propose a more contemporary alternative to this Robinson Crusoe-like survivor, namely the image of the traumatic witness. Much as the world itself constantly hearkens back to a pre-apocalyptic reality, so too must the mind-world of its traumatized survivors. Useful in this context is trauma theory, which is heavily based on Sigmund Freud's work, as interpreted by Cathy Caruth:

> Traumatic experience, in its very immediacy, involves a delay – it is the repetition of the earlier or the cowling of the later – and in this sense is itself a remainder, [...] : something that is 'ungrasped' not because it is simply too painful for understanding, but rather because it has remained in the very aftermath of the world—of meaning, experience, historical significance—that it has destroyed.
>
> (Caruth 2008: 125)

Both Caruth and Freud make very clear that the traumatic delay is unconscious. It stems from the suppression of the traumatic event itself, which only later manifests itself in various negative ways in a person's (or, indeed, a culture's) life. Traumatic witnesses are obliged to re-live and re-experience their past, which prevents them from ever reaching beyond into the future in any meaningful way. I would argue that at the point where the pre-apocalypse and apocalypse cease to matter, the narrative is no longer post-apocalyptic. It may well be dystopian, or perhaps some other sub-genre of science fiction, but one would be hard pressed to call it post-apocalyptic. The logical cut-off point is when the 'survivor' generation has died out and been replaced by their children, but this is not always the case. For instance in "By the Waters of Babylon" (1937) by Stephen Vincent-Benét, *Riddley Walker* (1980) by Russell Hoban and the more contemporary *The Book of Dave* (2006) by Will Self, the narrators are all members of iron age post-apocalyptic societies whose only relationship to the pre-apocalypse is through the ruins left behind coupled with a twisted mythology of the apocalypse: most of the work of connecting the current reality with the past is done by the reader, rather than the narrators. The witnesses are nonetheless traumatized in various ways, mostly through what remains of their religion: in each case mythology figures prominently, and in each case it is that mythology which in one way or another prevents the society from 'moving on' from their current state of barbarism. Some novels, such as Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) span a time from the end of the world in a nuclear holocaust to the complete recovery of civilization, but even

in this world there is no escape from the past: using in part the rescued and restored technical documents an abbey of monks have saved over the millennia, civilization repeats its mistakes and destroys itself again in nuclear fire. In that sense, it is not just the people in the world who are traumatized, but the world itself; traumatized, and doomed to repeat its mistakes. The characters in post-apocalyptic narrative are, thus, caught in an endless loop of repetition, the trauma that prevents them from moving on being the apocalypse. The space surrounding them – namely the ruins of their pre-apocalyptic reality – is constantly compared to a time that is now forever gone, thus rendering their individual trauma commensurate with the story world. The chronotope thus fulfils its role as the "meaning that shapes narrative" and renders the post-apocalypse communicable (Bakhtin 1981: 250). This traumatized world is, of course, the world that Berger and Heffernan argue constitutes our current reality.

How the survivors deal with their new situation differs vastly from story to story, as well as within the story itself: generally, the narrative of post-apocalyptic survivors is centred on the parameters of survival: whether it is envisioned in physical, mental or moral terns. In Stephen King's *The Stand*, the sociologist Glen Bateman gives a little composite recap of the way it is typically narrated:

> Shall I tell you what sociology teaches us about the human race? I'll give it to you in a nutshell. Show me a man or woman alone and I'll show you a saint. Give me two and they'll fall in love. Give me three and they'll invent the charming thing we call "society." Give me four and they'll build a pyramid. Give me five and they'll make one an outcast. Give me six and they'll reinvent prejudice. Give me seven and in seven years they'll reinvent warfare.
>
> (*The Stand* 470-471; italics in original)

The central thing to take out of this is that the survivor is never a monad: one is always defined in opposition to another, whether that other will be their lover, leader or enemy. The idea of 'self' and 'other' has become prevalent within theory, both within postcolonial and feminist studies, but it is also central to imagology, the study of (originally) national stereotypes (i.e. John Bull and Uncle Sam and the like) but currently also for the study of *any* kind of image-of-man within narrative. Within imagology, the terms used are the *auto-image* which is contrasted with the image of the other, the *hetero-image*. Broadly speaking, one can divide human beings within any story into two categories, as Dyer (1993), in his book on the role of stereotypes, does. One category is the *type* and the other is the proper *novelistic character*:

> [T]ypes, at this level of generality, are primarily defined by their aesthetic function, namely, as a mode of characterization in fiction. The type is any character constructed through the use of a few immediately recognizable and defining traits, which do not change or 'develop' through the course of the narrative and which point to general, recurrent features of the human world (whether these features are conceptualized as universal and eternal, the 'archetype', or historically and culturally specific, 'social types' and 'stereotypes'[…])
>
> (Dyer 1993: 13)

Novelistic characters on the other hand are distinct in that they are "defined by a multiplicity of traits that are only gradually revealed to us through the course of the narrative which is hinged on the growth or development of the character, and is thus centered upon the latter in her or his unique individuality, rather than pointing outwards to a world" (Dyer 1993: 13). This is of course only a fact in modern, post-Cervantes novel fiction; Bakhtin's Greek romances for instance were concerned with the *preservation* of typical characteristics rather than the development of them. That said, as Dyer (1993) further points out, the choice between a type and a character is an authorial one, his example being between discussing alcoholism as a personal problem or as a societal one (Dyer 1993: 14). In general one might assume named characters are to be read as characters whereas unnamed ones are not; thus the former (for example Gordon and his idealism in *The Postman*) are exceptions, whereas the unnamed masses represent whatever is 'typical'. For instance, again in *The Postman*, Gordon describes the various townsfolk in Oregon that he comes across as having been physically marked by the apocalypse: "Everywhere there were traces of those years. Faces pocked from diseases or etched from weariness and war. Two women and a man were amputees and another looked out of one good eye, the other a mass of cataracts" (*The Postman*: 48). Here, it is as if the post-apocalyptic traveller meets foreign nationals (albeit, as in the case above, the foreign nationals being the protagonist's countrymen).

Early on in their seminal work on Imagology, Beller and Leerssen (2007) discuss exactly how, on an individual level, stereotypes take form:

> When people from various countries and cultures meet each other, real experience and mental images compete. Earlier meetings with others shape our pre-expectations – which in turn predetermine further meetings with other Others. […] Literary texts also reduce the complex of various characteristics of an individual to a small number of noteworthy, salient aspects and characteristics. With collectives, which we subsume into one concept as groups, peoples or races, these emerge in the formulaic form of stereotypes.
>
> (Beller and Leerssen 2007: 7)

What Beller and Leerssen are saying is that stereotypes form as a result of 'real' experience and 'mental images' competing. These preformed notions, when put into writing, are then turned into merely a collection of the most noticeable characteristics – thus, a stereotype is formed. What we have in post-apocalyptic fiction in general is of course an entirely made-up set of characters, inhabiting a world that is akin, but hardly identical, to ours. This should not dissuade us from using this very real-world literary approach. Palmer (2004) argues that not only is literary characterization (which one can argue is a kind of stereotyping) very much like real-world stereotyping, it is also *a necessary part of how we perceive others*. In fact, he says, we build up the image of other people (both in fiction and fact) in exactly the kind of "continuing process" detailed above:

> [Characterization] consists of a succession of individual operations that result in a continual patterning and repatterning until a coherent fictional personality emerges. […] Characterization is an inference from an individual action, then, toward a supposed disposition or trait, and these are states of mind that extend over time.
>
> (Palmer 2004: 40)

This is the same pattern used for recreating the lost place of the post-apocalyptic chronotope: a previously known space (human minds) becoming, through the apocalypse, a kind of unknown continent that is then inferred and rediscovered through the narrative. One might note that when it comes to national stereotyping, the purpose of it is often the result of purposefully *ascribing* characteristics on a nation following some political or social agenda, as Neumann (2009) and Dyer (1993) both point out. Obviously the post-apocalyptic 'nation', if one may speak of such a thing, is already 'made up', but this does not change the underlying potential for an agenda. The question that needs to be answered then is whether the groups described by the authors of post-apocalyptic texts are supposed to be read as stereotypes (attached to an authorial agenda), or if they are the result of common literary characterization (as close as that may be to stereotyping – and which does in no way remove the potential of authorial agendas). It is, in essence, a thought experiment: what does it mean to strip a human being of everything they know and force them to re-evaluate everything about their own, and their society's, way of life? I will return to these questions later on in my analysis of Atwood's and McCarthy's novels.

3.4. Possible Worlds Theory

Throughout this thesis, I have been using and quoting the use of, the word 'world' in a variety of contexts. This has not been by accident. Although most of the theoreticians I have cited have probably not looked at the idea from the particular direction I intend to – possible worlds theory – the word is ubiquitous. In the post-postmodern space-time, the conception of 'worlds' in the plural is becoming increasingly important. Furthermore, approaching post-apocalyptic fiction through Bakhtin's notion of time and space being intertwined is a good starting point, but his attempts at a historical poetics is by now somewhat outdated. Time and space are useful starting points, but they are mainly useful for a static description of the post-apocalyptic narrative. I wish to further his project by adding a more contemporary approach to the chronotope through the use of possible worlds theory.

The term was originally used by logicians (influenced by Leibniz' notion of *possible world*) but has since then been appropriated by narratologists and literary theorists as a way of discussing fictional worlds – I have already mentioned Nelson Goodman as one of the earlier scholars in this field. Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck (2001) define it as such in their *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2001):

> The theory of possible worlds starts from the simple insight that certain situations could have developed differently or, to put it plainly, that the world could have been different. There are various opinions on the assignment of actuality to these possible worlds, but all philosophers who use this concept agree that non-actual possibilities can constitute perfectly coherent systems about which coherent utterances can be made.
>
> (Herman and Vervaeck 2001: 150)

What they recognize as central to the idea of possible worlds is so-called modal logic, which "investigates the possibility, impossibility, contingency, or necessity of propositions" (Herman and Vervaeck 2001: 149) – one of the main proponents of this kind of modality in fiction being Lubomír Doležel, whose *Heterocosmica* (1998) will be central to this section. What possible worlds theory really is about is, of course, worldmaking – how a fictional world is constructed, what its rules are, how it is different or similar to the actual world. As mentioned, I argue that Bakhtin's chronotope is one useful method by which one can approach possible worlds theory, but only if one consciously reads Bakhtin as a proponent of such: recall Merlob's (2007) contention at the end of her essay, which I quoted above but will quote again, where she claims that "[t]he form of the postmodern narrative is thus a derivative of the

fragmentation and individuation of the traditional chronotope, the spatiotemporality associated with the master narrative. Both space and time disintegrate, dissolve into numerous, individuated chronotopes that subvert traditional modes of thinking about self and world" (Merlob 2007: 42-43). As I have hopefully shown in this chapter, however such a thing as a single 'traditional chronotope' never existed. Rather, there has always been a multitude of them, working together, overlapping and co-existing – though this might be slightly difficult to fully grasp without also being grounded in possible worlds theory. Thus, the following section will further deepen the description of my chosen analytical tools by adding an understanding of possible worlds.

3.4.1. Accessibility and Recentering: Marie-Laure Ryan and Thomas G. Pavel

There have been many approaches to possible worlds theory, and although I am going to focus particularly on Lubomír Doležel's ideas from *Heterocosmica* (1998), I also wish to include insights from other scholars, such as Thomas G. Pavel in *Fictional Worlds* (1986) and Marie-Laure Ryan's *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001). Ryan places as great an emphasis on the actual world as Bakhtin does. In her definition the "sum total of the imaginable" is a set of possible worlds, all "structured by the opposition of one well-designed element, which functions as the center of the system" (Ryan 2001: 99); this centre being the actual world, and all other worlds surrounding it being possible worlds. The logic of for instance possibility-impossibility then has to do with accessibility, or how far from the centre these other alternative possible worlds are. Impossible worlds would "cluster at the periphery of the system", part of the system "yet unreachable" (Ryan 2001: 100). The problem, as she herself admits, is that it is difficult or impossible to define even the centre, the actual world, as something objectively true – some people believe in angels or UFOs, some people do not and this, de-facto, turns the supposed actual world into a cornucopia of possible worlds as well. Her solution is to posit a "hypothetical real world, existing independently of the mind", around which cluster spheres that are "the different personal versions of the 'absolute' center" belonging to individuals, cultures, etc. They overlap wherever there is consensus "as to what exists and what does not" (Ryan 2001: 101-102). Presumably then, a fictional world in which angels coexist with mortals will be more accessible to someone who truly believes in angels than someone who does not. Beyond these are worlds that are possible, "but nonactual", their distance from the personal centres depending on "how difficult it would be to enact them"; this is also a

chronotopic concern, as Ryan points out that a modern day reader would presumably find Macbeth considerably less possible than a contemporary Renaissance reader who might still have a certain belief in witches. In general, so-called 'realistic' texts would be the closest to the individual centres, while the more fantastic, fables, fairy tales etc. would be more remote. The interest in post-apocalyptic fiction, based solely on this notion, would suggest that a considerable number of people do not find the notion of the end-of-days to be that remote from their own 'centre'. The perhaps more interesting contribution to this is Ryan's idea of "recentering": a form of reading where "fiction functions as a space-travel vehicle" as opposed to a telescope. When reading a text through a telescope, Ryan says, you are still firmly planted in your current actuality: statements such as 'if X had happened then' would belong here. However most fiction says 'then X happened', which necessarily transports the reader into a world where that statement is a statement of fact. This then recenters one's actual world into the fictional one. "Insofar as fictional worlds are, objectively speaking, non-actual possible worlds, it takes recentering to experience them as actual – and experience that forms the basic condition for immersive reading" (Ryan 2001: 103).

This seems to be the gist of Pavel's (1986) idea of possible worlds as well, at least regarding the problematics between 'realism' and what does not seem to be 'real'. Realist fiction, in Pavel's eyes, is "not merely a set of stylistic and narrative conventions, but a fundamental attitude towards the relationship between the actual world and the truth of literary texts" (Pavel 1986: 46). Again, the chronotopic enters into this (and the concept of accessibility, which Ryan also uses): "The actual world as well as the relation of accessibility are different for the authors of medieval miracle plays compared to the author of a modern mystery novel" (Pavel 1986: 47). Thus when one reads a medieval story where a statue of the Virgin Mary speaks, one should perhaps still invoke the same kind of relationship to reality that we, the modern reader, would apply to a story about FBI investigators arresting drug dealers, which we would consider realistic at least in part. The notion of the post-apocalypse, as discussed earlier, relies on a modern view of history and on the notion of a progressive society that can become more or less 'advanced': the ancients, as indicated by whatever fragments of written history we still possess, went through apocalypses the magnitude of which we can scarcely imagine today, and – if Eliade is to be believed – survived them largely by denying the existence of history all together. In any case, as Auerbach (2003) argues in *Mimesis*, the ancient idea of verisimilitude was very different from the modern one, and this thesis is concerned with modern post-apocalypses, not the ancient, a-historical or religious apocalypse.

Postmodernity, as I concluded in the previous chapter, claims that the centre has been lost – the grand narrative splintered into a million different ones. The notion of accessibility and recentering is important in this context, as it allows for communication beyond and across the (supposedly new) multitudinous chronotopes, each unique to each individual in time and space. For literary theory, the most important question is not whether or not communication takes place (it does – through an overwhelming array of different media), but *how it takes place through literature*. This is what I will discuss next, using Doležel's idea of narrative modalities.

3.4.2. Narrative Modalities – Global Constraints

What may be immediately apparent is that these approaches are based on the idea that possible (literary) worlds in various ways depart from or change the actual world, yet are always connected to it – much in the same way that Bakhtin's chronotope always relies on the influence of real-world chronotopes as the basis of fictional chronotopes. Doležel's possible worlds theory has a slightly different approach however to the fictionality of fiction. First of all, he makes a distinction between two types of texts: world-imaging texts (I-texts) and world-constructing texts (C-texts). I-texts "are representations of the actual world", and are thus capable of being true or false: you can point at a news report and say it is wrong, or at a picture and claim it has been edited afterwards. C-texts, to which all fictional texts belong, are "prior to worlds; it is textual activity that calls worlds into existence and determines their structure" (Doležel 1998: 24). By making this strict distinction, Doležel attempts, at least in theory, to sidestep the constant dialectic between the 'actual world' and fictional worlds.

> Fictional worlds are not constrained by requirements of verisimilitude, truthfulness, or plausibility; they are shaped by historically changing aesthetic factors, such as artistic aims, typological and generic norms, period and individual styles. The history of fictional worlds of literature is the history of an art.
>
> (Doležel 1998: 19)

It says something about the typical approach to reading fiction that the above even needs to be said: obviously fiction can and does transcend plausibility and verisimilitude as all fiction is not mimetic or 'realistic'. In Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) for instance, one of the walls of the narrator's home can, for no discernible reason, turn into a portal accessing what appears to be the subconscious of her young ward, Emily; an entirely unlikely break in

the otherwise familiar description of post-apocalyptic society. Bakhtin is not unaware of the non-mimetic nature of fiction; he studied Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* after all; but what Doležel is stating is his starting point: fiction is shaped *by* the real world, but not *after* the real world. Post-apocalyptic fiction is generally science fiction, which means in brief that it tends towards verisimilitude or rationality while still offering up imaginary and fantastic things. One way of looking at it is through Darko Suvin's theory of science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 1972: 372), a literature he closely associates with myth and legend, utopias, Swiftian fables and so forth, the purpose of which has been to offer a *novum*, something new and strange. One of the commonest ways of doing this, according to Suvin, is through an "imaginary locality", such as in Swift's voyage to Laputa, which is presented through "factual reporting". The effect of describing clearly imaginary places as factual is "one of confronting a set normative system – a Ptolemaic-type closed world picture – with a point of view or a glance implying a new set of norms" (Suvin 1972: 374); not unlike Ryan's idea of recentering versus telescoping through language use. This, Suvin says, is the "attitude of *estrangement*" (Suvin 1972: 374). The term 'cognition', Suvin writes, "does not imply only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality. It implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment" (Suvin 1972: 377). In other words, by not 'homotopically' aping the referent, but rather portraying a new reality where the referent is in one way or another transformed (in this case, by apocalyptically destroying it), the desired effect of estrangement is produced in the mind of the reader, allowing reflection *on* reality rather than *of* it. Fiction, whether science fiction, postmodern fiction or mimetic fiction, is a reflection *on* reality – at least it ought to be – rather than *of* it: this is the fundamental difference between I- and C-texts.

Even C-texts, however, follow certain rules or constraints. Whereas Bakhtin argued that the primary constraints of fictional worlds are their treatment of time and space in comparison to contemporary real-world times and places, Doležel introduces another set of what he calls "global constraints" (Doležel 1998: 20): narrative modalities. To understand these, it may be necessary to quickly discuss his approach to worldmaking. Essentially, Doležel introduces a number of categories that build up a narrative world – person, nature force, state, event, action, interaction, mental life etc. These are the things that actually shape the world, and can be placed into an almost mathematical formula (adapted from the various logicians and philosophers originally using the system). I will not use this formula myself, but merely as an example,

consider the World, W, which contains certain states S, making W(S) – "a closed, atemporal, Parmenidean realm of stillness and silence, where nothing changes, nothing happens" (Doležel 1998: 32). Once you add what he calls the nature force, NF, to this, you get "a dynamic world, where changes originate in one, inanimate source" (Doležel 1998: 32). Thus W(NF, S) is the natural world *sans* people. Finally, adding people, P, creates the kind of world we are used to W(P, NF, S), where a person's mental processes create actions, artefacts and semiotic acts such as speech – changes in the world independent of the nature force. This world can further be divided into one-person worlds (where only one person exists) or multi-person worlds, where several people interact, create societies etc. (Doležel 1998: 32). Doležel finally claims that "[i]t is worlds with persons or, better, persons within worlds that generate stories" (Doležel 1998: 33) – thus agreeing with Bakhtin's assertion that human life is absolutely central to any artistic genre, and that "only a human life, or at least something directly touching it, is capable of evoking such suspense" (Bakhtin 1981: 107).

These are however only the parts that make up the world, and I personally prefer Bakhtin's approach to the mathematical formula of states, nature forces and persons. Doležel's narrative modalities remain useful even without Doležel's own formula, however. What the narrative modalities 'do' is to perform what Doležel calls a *formative operation*, which "shapes narrative worlds into orders that have the potential to produce (generate) stories" (Doležel 1998: 113). And this is what worlds do – whether they are Ryan's 'personal worlds' (which correspond to the postmodern focus on absolute subjectivity) or fictional worlds, the purpose of the world is to create stories. The modal system Doležel has proposed consists of four 'operators', alethic, deontic, axiological and epistemic, which make up the global constraints that form a possible world. Much like the chronotope, one could easily approach these narrative modalities as an alternative to the idea of genre - if only one modal system is put into "a dominant position, blocking the impact of all the others" it leads to the creation of "basic ('atomic') stories, the core of narrativity" (Doležel 1998: 115) – such as the myth and the quest. Naturally, the more common and modern variation is to have several modalities working together, creating an ever more complex framework, much as having many chronotopes interfacing creates more complex stories. I would argue that it is possible to divide post-apocalyptic stories in general into categories that 'mainly' follow one of the possible modalities. Combined with the actual make-up of their chronotope, the story can then be interpreted in a fashion that is comparative, even between stories written decades apart, by different authors

with different backgrounds for different reasons – thus creating a proper definition of a genre. I would further argue that certain considerations were more important in the past, and others are more important now – and that this in turn creates the history of the genre. Although all of these constraints are important for post-apocalyptic stories for various reasons, some are more important than others. For the sake of completeness I will, however, list them all.

Alethic constraints (Greek for 'truth') refer to "possibility, impossibility, and necessity", which are also the three quantifiers. The simplest world created through the alethic system is one which is modelled after the actual world – "a natural fictional world"; everything a person is capable of in the actual world is presumably something the people in the fictional world are capable of, and vice versa: "[a]n action like walking is possible for such a fictional person, while becoming invisible is not" (Doležel 1998: 115). Once you add the quantifier of impossibility, "worlds that violate the laws of the actual world", what is created is an impossible, supernatural world. Note that they are not *logically* impossible, merely *physically* impossible – there need not be any contradictions in a physically impossible world. The point here is also that the 'natural fictional world' is modelled on whatever beliefs or knowledge the author had at any given time, and is opposed by the purposefully supernatural world that forms a counterpoint to it. If, for instance, it became apparent human beings *can* in fact turn invisible as easily as they can walk in the actual world, then that would be the new standard for 'natural fictional worlds', and something else would need to be used to denote a turn for the impossible. Within the supernatural world we find stories of "gods, spirits, monsters, and so on" and also of natural-world persons "granted properties and action capacities that are not available to ordinary persons of that world: becoming invisible, flying on a carpet and so on", and at times "[i]nanimate objects are personified, that is, given mental life and intentionality" (Doležel 1998: 116); for instance in fables. The natural world by contrast "generates stories of the human condition" (Doležel 1998: 117) on the most varied of subjects (from culture to savagery, life to death, riches to poverty etc. etc.).

Alethic endowment is the term Doležel uses to discuss the actual potential of persons within a fictional world – what is physically possible – and how either a deprivation (hyponormal) or enhancement (hypernormal) of this alethic potential can produce stories; a hyponormal person might be for instance blind or physically disabled, whereas a hypernormal person might be a genius or the like. Within the supernatural field we might see Herculean strength or magic powers, or magical deprivation of the same, although Doležel does not discuss

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this side of things much. Science fiction stories are very often formed out of exactly these kinds of constraints, and in fact the example Doležel gives of H.G. Wells's "The Country of the Blind" (1904) is such a story. In it, a man accidentally finds himself in a world of the blind, e.g. where everyone but himself has a (by our standards) hyponormal alethic endowment. This turns him into what Doležel terms an "alethic alien". Although the man attempts to make himself king he is incapable of doing so, proving that although it would seem he is hypernormal in the country of the blind, his endowment comes to nothing and is in fact a handicap (Doležel 1998: 119-120). The dream or image of escaping the natural world alethic endowments we have has always been a prime driver of science fiction stories, which teem with themes such as immortality, psychic powers, superhuman intelligence and health. As Doležel writes "[p]erhaps the tragic nature of the human condition has its roots in the fact that despite all scientific and technological progress it is beyond a person's capacity to escape from the alethic restrictions of the natural world" (Doležel 1998: 120). Science fiction as a whole has always been very interested in this particular modality, and according to at least Margaret Atwood it forms the central dividing line between what she terms 'speculative fiction' and 'science fiction':

> What I mean by "science fiction" is those books that descend from H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which treats of an invasion by tentacle, blood-sucking Martians shot to Earth in metal canisters – things that could not possibly happen – whereas, for me, "speculative fiction" means plots that descend from Jules Verne's books about submarines and balloon travel and such – things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books.
>
> (Atwood 2011: 6)

Verne might not have been the best example to pick, as his inventions are in a sense no less fantastical than Wells's (e.g. Verne's space gun in *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865)). A better comparison might be the literary antecedent to *The War of the World*, Lieutenant Colonel George Tomkyns Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), "a fictional narrative of how Germany conquered Britain" (Petterson 2016: 222). *The Battle of Dorking* was written specifically as a warning and a "plea for more funding for the defence" (Petterson 2016: 223) at a time when the German nation saw a rise in power and the British forces, in the eyes of the Colonel, were on the decline. It presented a plausible and well-researched scenario (as the author was active military at the time of writing) that included its fair share of bloody details of the horrors of war, "a realist

novella that displayed in detail the invasion and its consequences (Petterson 2016: 222): the speculative invasion fiction to Wells's science fiction invasion.

The next modal system, *deontic modality* (Greek 'that which is obligatory') "affect the design of fictional worlds primarily as proscriptive or prescriptive norms; the norms determine which actions are prohibited, obligatory, or permitted" (Doležel 1998: 120). These three (prohibited, obligatory, permitted) make up the three quantifiers. These norms are different from the alethic 'norms' because they are based on conventions, customs or laws – societal, constructed limits, rather than physical. The examples of the different quantifiers that Doležel offers, and the different kinds of stories produced, are very indicative. The example he gives is travel: "it might be a pleasure trip, if permitted (a tourist's travel), a transgression, if prohibited (a prisoner fleeing from a camp) or a duty, if obligatory (a business man going to sign a trade deal)" (Doležel 1998: 121). Clearly, stories produced through the deontic system are indeed "the richest source of narrativity", including the classical stories of "the *fall*", "the *test*" and "the *predicament*" (Doležel 1998: 121). Post-apocalyptic novels are mainly concerned with the overthrow of stable deontological norms, usually by necessity (such as the very Maslowian basics of food and shelter) but also for more complicated reasons. For instance, in *On the Beach* the normal rules of racing become entirely overthrown in the face of impending death: drivers in the Grand Prix use it as an alternative to suicide, crashing and burning, their belongings and cars scavenged after the race for other drivers to use with no concern to ownership or money. Yet even so the fundamental idea of winning a race remains the same, even if only a few cars make it to the end.

For post-apocalyptic fiction, the most interesting modal system, as I will argue throughout the remainder of this thesis, is the one centred on *axiological constraints* (Greek for 'value', 'worth'). What this means is that "the world's entities (objects, states of affairs, events, actions, persons)" are transferred into "values and disvalues" (Doležel 1998: 123); the quantifiers are 'good', 'bad', and 'indifferent' (with 'indifferent' producing stories of nihilism). Each social group, culture or historical period may have its own "axiological codex", and axiology in general is very much subjective: "what is a value for one person might be a disvalue for another one" (Doležel 1998: 124). What this brings about is the atomic story of *the quest*, which is, simply put, "value acquisition" – acquiring a value that is considered attractive. In some cases this leads to competition, in some cases cooperation, but the root cause for the action is the same. Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was breaking his society's norms in his rebellion against Big Brother. But he did so for axiological reasons, because he

saw the system as a disvalue – becoming what Doležel terms an "axiological rebel", for whom "[w]hat is value in the codex is a disvalue in the rebel's subjective system" (Doležel 1998: 125). In the end, of course, he is beaten, and beaten thoroughly. The most telling example of this is his earnest love for Big Brother after torture – his rebellion is not annulled merely in terms of *acts* (which could have been stopped simply by incarcerating Smith) but also in terms of *value*, and this is the truly dystopian aspect of Orwell's vision.

The difference between deontological systems and axiological systems is not made very clear by Doležel, presumably because he is not a moral philosopher nor is he writing a book on ethics. What is clear though is that there seems to be a tension and a difference between the deontological codex (society's rules) and the axiological codex (a subject's own feelings on right and wrong). The reason axiological constraints are so interesting for post-apocalyptic fiction is because the deontic system is largely based either on societal laws, for which you need instances like police, courts of law and government, or on societal moral norms with respect to issues like sexual expression or appropriate behaviour in various contexts, for which you need a stable tradition. What the apocalypse does, in order to earn the right to be identified as such, is to uproot precisely these stable traditions. The typical upheaval is, as we have seen, a natural disaster, war, disease or invasion, but sometimes it can be a simple change in the alethic: in *The Day of the Triffids*, much like in José Saramago's *Blindness* (1995), nearly everyone is rendered blind; Masen, Wyndham's protagonist, says the following after having quoted Wells's 'In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king':

> The crux of the difference lies in what you mean by the word "country" – *patria* in the original,' I said. '*Caecorum in patria luscus rex imperat omnis* – a classical gentleman called Fullonius said it first: it's all anyone seems to know about him. But there's no organized *patria*, no State, here – only chaos. Wells imagined a people who had adapted themselves to blindness. I don't think that's going to happen here – I don't see how it can.'
> (*The Day of the Triffids*: 66, italics in original)

Of course changes in the alethic are not necessary, although they are surprisingly common (e.g. in Stephen King's *The Stand* the apocalypse brings supernatural power into the equation, and in Justin Cronin's *The Passage* events are determined by the psychic mind-powers the vampires command) – the most important thing is that the deontic is overturned. Doležel (1998: 121) even says that "in fictional worlds, prohibitions are often imposed only to be violated, and obligations only for the purpose of not being kept", and there are few, if any, post-apocalyptic stories that do not redefine the deontological

system in the aftermath. What remains while society as a system is inoperable is axiology – value and disvalue, the idea of good and evil, justice and injustice, the hetero-group and the auto-group, them and us, the Other and the self.

There are two broad situations where the axiological-deontological is being leveraged in post-apocalyptic stories: directly during and after an apocalypse, in which case (like in the changes in the rules of racing in *On the Beach*) the deontological system is actively being rewritten; and more long-term visions of the future where a new deontological codex has been established. One of the more telling examples of the active rewriting of values can be found in John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956) in which (as noted earlier) a mutating virus kills off all the grass in the world (including crops). A small group sets out from London, heading towards the leader's brother's potato farm in a defensible and secluded area in the countryside. On the way they pick up a man named Pirie, who slowly but inescapably leads them towards a system of values where only the strong matter and where everyone outside the group is an expendable enemy, including the protagonist's brother and owner of the farm. According to John Griffiths (1980: 70) the novel asks the simple question "whether Man can survive as a civilised being in a society recognisably descended from the one we know today". Although it might be remiss to call most post-apocalyptic stories axiological quests, in many such stories there is definitely an element of seeking values that somehow transcend societal norms. At the end of *The Death of Grass*, Griffiths (1980: 72) says, "[t]he question of whether physical survival in these circumstances must entail a lapse into barbarism is unanswered". That is a question other novels have sought to answer, reaching varying conclusions: in David Brin's *The Postman,* for example, the hypersurvivalist Holnists practice a credo of 'might is right', embracing slavery and neo-feudalism while eschewing most non-military technology, while their counterpart, which Gordon joins, is based on the idea of technological and scientific progress, equality between the sexes, and an organized democratic process. The narrative is, naturally, one of conflict between the opposing world-views.

In general, the difference between a post-apocalypse in the far future (e.g. *Riddley Walker*, *The Book of Dave*, "By the Waters of Babylon" or *The Scarlet Plague*) and a simple dystopian story is one of technological level. If the technological level is the same or more advanced compared to what we know today, it is considered dystopian: the deontological system, whatever the reasons for its appearance, is stable and has replaced whatever the reader was familiar with. For instance P.D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992) describes a future England twenty years after the whole population of the world is struck

with infertility: an autocratic dictator rules for life with his secret police, there are no courts, old people are euthanized, and dissidents weeded out and killed while the people prepare themselves for the slow extinction of the human race. The same might be said of, for instance, *Brave New World*, which was set up after a disastrous 'Five Day War' which convinced the world leaders they needed a new system to control the population. Perhaps one might say that the end of the post-apocalyptic tale is when the conflict between old and new deontological and axiological codices no longer is an issue; or, to return to the idea of Bakhtin and trauma for a moment, at the point when the world no longer faces backwards, but forwards. This definition again brings back the argument that the *real* world is still post-traumatically staring into its own past, with little concern for the future; in which case understanding post-apocalyptic fiction becomes more urgent than ever.

Doležel's final set, *epistemic constraints* (Greek for knowledge, understanding), concern "knowledge, ignorance and belief" (the three quantifiers), and much like the deontic and axiological are codified into codices such as "scientific knowledge, ideologies, religions, cultural myths" (Doležel 1998: 126). Knowledge, in both the fictional and actual world is something that largely steers a human being and his or her actions in the world. The "epistemic quest" is typically a mystery story such as detective fiction but also any other genre in which there is an "uneven distribution of knowledge among the fictional persons" (Doležel 1998: 126) or "a narrative whose modal base is the transformation of ignorance or false belief into knowledge" (Doležel 1998: 127). Doležel takes the Bildungsroman as an example of an epistemic story, as it is the "acquisition of skills and the growth of knowledge" (Doležel 1998: 127) that exemplifies the maturing process inherent in that genre. Any situation however where knowledge or the lack thereof is central to the events in the story is subject to the epistemic system – science fiction is naturally very concerned with things such as forbidden knowledge, new technological innovations, the limits of the known and unknown and so forth, and it is exactly epistemic considerations that steer the USS Enterprise on her journeys of exploration in the universe.

Within post-apocalyptic fiction, the epistemic can take different forms, for instance attempting to find out the cause of the apocalypse such as in Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) where Robert Neville turns his solitary existence into an epistemic quest for knowledge, attempting to find out what exactly it is that caused the vampire epidemic in the first place, while in *Dr. Bloodmoney* (1965) by Philip K. Dick the crazed Dr. Bluthgeld believes himself to be able to heal the world from a nuclear war (that he believes he himself

caused) by attaining a form of higher enlightenment. Normally the epistemic quests in the post-apocalypse are of a slightly less global kind: much of the beginning of *The Walking Dead* (both the TV series and the comic book) for instance consists of Rick Grimes attempting to find his wife and son while at the same time trying to understand what has happened to the world during his coma in the hospital. Another typical epistemic quest is one filtered through new mythologies, such as in Benét's "By the Waters of Babylon" where the young priest's son heads off into the 'city of the Gods' on a vision quest, coming back with new knowledge of the 'Gods' (in truth the more technologically advanced humans who destroyed themselves in a war) that hints at an eventual rise out of barbarism.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the constraints described above can only produce 'atomic' worlds where only one modal system is dominant. Most fictional worlds will be able to produce stories stemming from many different systems, or the interaction between the different systems; for instance the problem between deontic and axiological 'values' as exemplified by many post-apocalyptic novels. However, while still remaining within one system it is perfectly possible to create more complex stories through what Doležel calls "dyadic worlds", which is "a unification in one fictional world of two domains in which contrary modal conditions reign" (Doležel 1998: 128). Doležel claims that each modal system has the "potential for constructing dyadic worlds"; his example is the alethic, where a mythological world can be created in the meeting and interaction of impossible and possible (Gods and normal humans). The other systems also have such internal potentials; deontic worlds create tension between "what is prohibited in one domain is prohibited in the other", axiological worlds function in the same way but with values, while dyadic epistemic worlds arise "if the world consists of a known and an unknown domain" (Doležel 1998: 129).

By viewing story creation, and by extension worldmaking, as a series of constraints that create a possible world, what we are actually doing is moving the point of view from the finished product to the author. Whereas chronotopes largely view the world in a holistic way and draw conclusions from it, the modal approach looks at the systems underlying that whole and what kinds of constraints the author has placed on it. What the postmodern turn in literature has done, according to Doležel, is step beyond the dyadic by creating contradictions and impossibilities within one set of constraints; the "hybrid world" (Doležel 1998: 187). His example is Kafka, but one can easily find the same kinds of contradictions in stories by Auster or Vonnegut, where authorial inserts create problems in all the modal systems by making the foundations of

the world unstable: what is 'knowledge' in a world where the author steps into the story and speaks with the main protagonist, for instance? Presumably, it will create a hybrid world of some kind, which might be very bizarre indeed compared to the actual world, but which nonetheless produces stories and is comprehensible to us.

3.5. Choosing your own path – Ludonarrative experiments

> We found our quarry, outside Nizhnoye, and when Richie told him to put his hands up, he put his fists up instead and started swinging digs, lurching for Richie's head. I didn't like this bambi's manners. So I put a bullet in his kidney. Richie was sad. We didn't wave[sic] to kill him. A day later Richie would slip from the upper deck of a wrecked cargo ship and die from the fall. Me and my trigger finger – we lived on. This is when I realised what DayZ is. DayZ is an injustice engine.
>
> (Caldwell 2014)

One of the, perhaps, best ways of exemplifying possible worlds theory is by looking at something slightly different than the traditional forms of literature I have so far touched upon in this thesis. Constrained by the physicality of its form, the novel can only abstractly posit a world of infinite possibilities: something to speculate about, but not something that can be experienced or realized except, of course, in our 'real' lives outside fiction. There is however another 'mode' that is not novelistic literature which, in a way, allows us to reach out and touch these infinite possible subjective worlds, and I wish to briefly discuss that before returning to the novels of Atwood and McCarthy. Much like with Lessing, a more thorough analysis would merit a separate thesis, but I hope to at least lay the groundwork for what may be some of the future ways of expressing the post-postmodern. The reader may consider the following section an experimental aside, hopefully nonetheless illuminating certain concepts better than solely relying on novelistic examples.

The mode I wish to discuss in this section is one of the newer entries to the field of storytelling, namely the video game. The study of how video games produce narratives opens up a number of interesting new avenues of approach and study, especially within my chosen themes – post-apocalypse and science fiction. Video games are, as Paweł Frelik (2014) states, "inextricably tied to science fiction" (Frelik 2014: 226), as many of the first-ever games – for example *Spacewar!* (1962), *Space Invaders* (1978), *Asteroids* (1979) and *Missile Command* (1980) – all take on various themes from science fiction, from space

battles to alien invaders to nuclear war (popular themes within post-apocalyptic fiction as well). One of the most important titles in gaming history, Id Software's *Doom* (1993), is also a science fiction game. It and its "burgeoning community of players, developers, and fans also became a model for the entire gaming subculture based on participation not only in gameplay itself but also in extended commentary, level development, and online resources building" (Frelik 2014: 226). Unlike reading, which perhaps has a tendency towards the solitary, or cinema which, although more communal than reading, nonetheless does not involve the watcher in any part of the production aside from the actual viewing, video games require participation and therefore quite naturally generate community: a community that is capable of creating its own derivative works or modifications of the existing work, and is often encouraged to do so.

The quote with which I started this section is from an article by games journalist Brendan Caldwell, a narrative detailing his and his friends' exploits in the post-zombie apocalypse first-person shooter *DayZ*. *DayZ* (2012) encapsulates many of the traits that make video games unique: it started as a mod[3] of the popular military shooter *Arma II* (2009) by Bohemia Interactive. In *DayZ*, every player starts on the beaches of fictional Chernarus, a post-Soviet country modelled after the developers' native Czech Republic. They start with nothing but the barest necessities of survival, and the world around them is harsh, filled with hostile (computer-controlled) zombies as well as other (human) players, and in order to survive they will have to scavenge for supplies (hunger, thirst, temperature, sickness, blood loss, broken bones and more are all simulated). *DayZ* is a form of Massively Multiplayer Online game, an MMO, where the only way to play is to play with others. But unlike other MMOs, such as the massively popular *World of Warcraft*, *DayZ* is special in that whenever you die, whether from a zombie bite, a nasty fall, or at the hands of another player, you lose all your progress – i.e. whatever items you managed to scavenge from the abandoned towns, barns, cities and airports of Chernarus. This kind of death is quite rare in video games, where 'death' is usually a minor inconvenience that can be sorted by restoring the game state to a previous point, or 'respawning' and returning to the battle more or less unchanged. Marcus Carter et al. (2013), who have studied death in *DayZ*, make a distinction between 'character' and 'avatar' death in video games (and *DayZ* in particular); a

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[3] An unofficial addition or modification of a base game; in this case *Arma II* by Bohemia Interactive. The creator, or 'modder', Dean Hall, was working at Bohemia at the time, but has since moved on to work independently.

character is represented by "a set of ingame properties like skills and assets which 'belong' to that character" whereas an avatar is "merely to the player's visual manifestation within the game, through which the player sees and acts within the game world" (Carter et al 2013). Dying in *World of Warcraft* means that one's avatar has died, though their progress remains, whereas character death would be more akin to the whole character being deleted upon death. Through this distinction they seem to be arguing that 'death' in *DayZ*, so-called 'perma-death', is specifically character-death: "the death of the player's ingame character. That is, upon death the character is removed (permanently) from the game" (Carter 2013). This creates a world fraught with peril: another human might be a help, or they might murder you for your food and weapons. Caldwell's article is filled with descriptions of the various types of 'fun' he and his friends got into, kitted out in military-grade armour and weapons (all modelled to a high degree of sophistication, as the base game is first and foremost a military simulator) preying on essentially unarmed and naked 'newbies' (so-called 'bambis').

> We robbed, we punched, we shouted, we laughed. We asked them if they were hungry, and when they answered 'yes', we force-fed them rotten fruit. When we didn't know what else to do, we left them handcuffed in the middle of the road, exposed to any hungry player that cared to roam by. Every encounter would end the same. We would jog off into the sunset, telling each other how bad we felt, how guilty. But we were always laughing when we said it.
>
> (Caldwell 2014)

The fact that the game is narratively built around an apocalypse – however fanciful the zombie apocalypse may be – is no coincidence. The countryside of Chernarus is littered with abandoned cars (some of which can be repaired and repurposed), dead bodies and debris. It is the ever-present danger coupled with the scarcity of resources and the harshness of death which creates the mood in *DayZ* that allows for stories such as Caldwell's to be generated: with no plot, director, or writer, merely a set of mechanics, an expansive world, and a meticulously detailed simulation.

More traditional forms of video game narratives do exist of course, although they have for a long time found themselves lagging behind their cousins in the literary and cinematic world, accused of having flat characters, predictable plots and an overemphasis on spectacle over substance: in other words, the same kinds of accusations levied at science fiction in the pulp period (the original reader/user base presumably also overlaps to quite a degree, comprising, in the main, of young, white men). If science fiction and other genre fiction was for a

long time the black sheep of the broader literary-artistic community, video games are well on their way to becoming the replacement. But, as Frelik also points out, the conventions by which this criticism is applied to video game storytelling have been imported from film or literary studies, and they may be poorly suited to study the impact of the narrative in games: "waiting for a *Casablanca* of video games is as fallacious as expecting a *Ulysses* of hypertext" (Frelik 2014: 229). Frelik instead proposes four alternate ways of looking at the "intersection between SF as a cultural mode and video games as a medium" which are "video games as narratives of space[…]; video games as integral elements of distributed narratives spanning multiple media and forms; video games as instances of visual science fictions invested in the pictorial portrayal of futurity; and video games as performative simulations, conveying a sense of the malleability of the future" (Frelik 2014: 229). He points out that the first three are shared with other forms of media, "while the last one is specifically inherent in the gaming medium" (Frelik 2014: 229). The fourth category, then, is the most interesting to us. This modality, Frelik writes, has to do with how video games are "simulations [and] rehearsals" (Frelik 2014: 235) of things that might happen in the future, they are the stories and narratives of science fiction made real and interactable: he gives the example of altered vision in the game *Aliens vs Predator* (2001) where playing as a Predator or Alien gives access to different forms of vision; something that was *seen*, but not really *used* or *experienced* in the movie versions of these franchises. But perhaps the most important aspect is the fact that "[s]ince it is masses of players, and not the few select writers or director, that engage in configuring gameplay, the choices they make and later share online in the form of screenshots, blog posts or gameplay videos […] become indicative of larger social realities" (Frelik 2014: 235). This is what he calls "the medium's partial shift of agency from author to player" (Frelik 2014: 236); in essence, although a game is designed and its constraints pre-programmed, the player has much more freedom to interact with it than with traditional, non-interactive media. As a direct result, the experience of playing a game becomes something else than the experience of reading a novel or watching a movie: it becomes a story in itself – often a story of moulding a/our future world.

One of the most interesting ways that video game narratives interface with both real-world narratives and with literary styles is in my view exactly in the types of 're-telling' of experience that they give rise to. From breathless pre-teens explaining their latest car-chases in Rock Star Games' *Grand Theft Auto V* (overheard at a bus-stop by the author) to professional journalists writing down their impressions as in the case of Caldwell, to multi-part, ongoing

transmedial works, the re-telling of one's fictional, virtual experiences is both a wholly new, and very old, literary tradition. William Labov, in his *The Language of Life and Death* (2013), the culmination of "fifty years of sociolinguistic research" writes about "the narrative techniques used to convey the life experience of one human being to another", especially "when their own lives are in danger, when death suddenly overtakes someone close to them, when they are faced with the certainty of an oncoming death" (Labov 2013: 223). He describes an eight-point schema, and although it is primarily meant for oral narratives, he uses these same techniques to – among other literary works – analyse the story of David and Absalom in the Bible. One might say then that his findings are, at least in a Western context (which this thesis is concerned with), indicative of how narratives of death, the fear of death, and crucially, of escaping death, are dealt with. The eighth point in his schema has to do with how the narrator "may evaluate the results of a given action" in various ways – one method of being by "adding a description of an alternative possible state of affairs" (Labov 2013: 224). He goes on to comment on this a few pages later:

> The concepts of parallel universes and multiple histories have become a common theme in physics and popularizations of physics in science fiction. It is curious to find, at the end of this exploration of personal narrative, a parallel to this cosmological construct. From the outset, the role of negation in the evaluation of narratives has been seen as the evocation of parallel universes[…]As specified in 8a of the schema, narrative uses negation and other irrealis moods to evaluate what did happen by comparison with what might have, but did not, happen. The real world is evaluated in comparison to the alternate world of unrealized possibilities.
>
> (Labov 2013: 226)

An example of this may be as simple as stating something to the effect of 'if I hadn't done that, I would've died', creating in one single conditional clause an entire alternate universe, where a wholly different set of events would have played out. It is especially when speaking of death and life that these kinds of narratives become prominent, the 'principles of interest' that make "speech flow at a high level of intensity in everyday life" (Labov 2013: 4). In other words, "alternate worlds of unrealized possibilities" are created every moment of our lives, especially when they are threatened. Games, as a whole, are about meeting and overcoming challenges of various kinds, and although the risks and dangers inherent in these challenges are not directed at one's physical person, but rather at one's avatar or representative in the game world, the sense of immersion and agency gives them a similar urgency – not unlike how we can sympathize with fictional characters in films and novels. In fact, throughout this

thesis I have argued – based on Žižek – that literatures of apocalypse are imaginative rehearsals of an unimaginable event, an event that is by all means a mistake, yet must first happen before we realize it is: except that, in this case, we cannot let it happen (as we then run the very real risk of becoming extinct). Games such as *DayZ* perform a similar function, but instead of reading about somebody else's views and thoughts and actions, you play them yourself: will you be the bandit, the helper, the selfish survivor, or will you start to rebuild society – and will you succeed or fail?

Lars Schmeink (2016), in a recent article about *DayZ*, reads the game as an example of 'liquid modernity' (a term coined by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman), which in a way encapsulates the movement from deontic to axiological in the post-postmodern space.

> For Bauman, contemporary society is defined by the evanescence of any and all forms of stabilizing social institutions[…] All risk shifts from a societal to a private level, and without institutions to frame and shape our lives, issues of security, safety, and certainty become a matter of individual choice; such issues become the most prominent anxieties and fears in society. Zombies, as figures of systemic breakdown, literalize this dissolution of stability
>
> (Schmeink 2016: 68)

What Bauman's liquid modernity (at least in Schmeink's interpretation) means, is an increased focus on the individual and individual choice rather than society as whole, where one's own personal values and valuations are given precedence. This, unfortunately, extends to those in power too. Bauman calls the present stage of modernity (mind that *Liquid Modernity* was published in 2000) "*post-Panoptical*" – after Foucault's Panopticon-inspired description of modernity – and it is characterized by "the people operating the levers of power on which the fate of the less volatile partners in the relationship depends can at any moment escape beyond" (Bauman 2000: 11) – beyond responsibility and culpability. This escape is evident in the world of *DayZ*: no-where is there a sign of governmental or even military power ready to intervene on behalf of the survivors; everyone is left to fend for themselves. And the survivors themselves also reflect this: "In keeping with Bauman's concepts, institutional (authorial) ethical values are non-existent and instead the individual is left to decide what is right and what needs to be done" (Schmeink 2016: 78). This is, of course, a feature of all post-apocalyptic fiction, but the way *DayZ* simply places the player in the middle of this dog-eat-dog world giving them immediate authority to make all their own decisions about their lives and – if they have sufficient power – the lives of others, not to mention the ease by

which most players seem to embrace this state of affairs, might say something about our current state of 'liquid modernity'.

3.5.1. Storytelling engines – the metanarrative of narrative

Schmeink (2016) puts *DayZ* into the genre of "story generating games" (Schmeink 2016: 75), where a community of storytellers come together in order to tell the story of the story they experienced: a kind of metanarrative of the lived experience – not unlike how we tell stories of our experiences, as in Labov's study.

> The stories generated by the game are experienced and authored by the players—so that the burden of making sense of this world lies not with the authority of the game designers but on the shoulders of the individual players. The individual experience, which is "infused" (as Frelik terms it) with a narrative, is different for each instance of play.
>
> (Schmeink 2016: 75)

This becomes apparent through articles such as the one written by Caldwell, where the intimate, lived experience of the player is processed and then expressed creatively through the act of storytelling. Reading the comments on such an article shows how the stories told resonate immediately with the readers who have had similar, or who aspire towards similar experiences, or readers who become outraged at the actions depicted in the story, and so forth. It creates and fosters a community of storytellers – and that is the important point. As much as the game itself may be an example of liquidly modern individualization, the experience becomes shared. In this, as I argue with respect to literature at large, the creation of a single work that can be shared among many is in a sense the 'cure' for the fragmented nature of post-postmodernity. If *DayZ* takes place in a post-modern post-apocalypse, the conversation around it has already moved on.

DayZ is hardly the only 'storytelling engine' out there, and in fact since its release numerous imitators have sprung up – and they all share a few common features: encouraging player-generated narratives through non-linear, open world-building, and placing a particular emphasis on one's own character or avatar, the constant danger of death and the loss of all progress. This tradition of permanent death in a (often) procedurally[4] generated environment goes all

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[4] I.e. generated through computational algorithms that create randomized playing spaces, for example a set of rooms filled with random monsters and random loot picked from a pool of possibility provided by the programmers/designers.

the way back to *Rogue* (ca. 1980), and there has recently been an upsurge of so-called 'roguelite' or 'roguelike' games, which follow many of the same systems and conventions of the original *Rogue*. The difference between the newer, *DayZ*-inspired games (known as 'survival' games) and *Rogue* and various roguelites/-likes is that survival games rarely offer an end-game. In *Rogue*, you start as an adventurer at the top of a multi-leveled dungeon, with the task of journeying below into its randomly-generated levels in order to find the Amulet of Yendor. In *DayZ*, your only goal is to survive. There are 'roguelites' that do have an end-game aside from survival, such as Klei's *Don't Starve* (2013) or Big Robot's *Sir, You Are Being Hunted* (2013): in both, the player needs to survive in order to assemble the necessary parts to build a teleporter, which will let them escape. These games, however, are not MMOs (although they have multiplayer components), and it is specifically multiplayer games, such as Facepunch Studio's *Rust* (2013) or Daybreak Game Company's *H1Z1* (Early Access since 2015), that follow in *DayZ*'s footsteps. These multiplayer survival games have no end point, no set narrative denouement, but merely the endless task of surviving, building, rebuilding and improving one's own character (through the collection or construction of various items), often at the expense of others. It is specifically through interaction with others that these games generate stories.

I would like to argue that the stories generated by games such as *DayZ* or *Rust*, or why not their single player counterparts, are in some shape or form indications of what is to come, both in regards to narrativity and in the larger sense the post-postmodern world. However, a deeper study of the possibilities of interactive fiction is not the topic of this thesis: the short introduction above is mainly meant as a brief foray into one of the possible future avenues of research, as well as an introduction to some potential alternative literary avenues into the change in dominants that I will argue in the following chapter.

4.   The *MaddAddam*-trilogy

In the following chapter I am going to discuss Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy of novels as a potential avenue into post-postmodern thinking, before moving on to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). The trilogy of novels, written between 2003 (*Oryx and Crake*) and 2013 (*MaddAddam*), the middle part *The Year of the Flood* published in 2009, encompasses a decade's worth of thinking on the part of Atwood, a Booker-prize winning author and perhaps one of the most celebrated writers to have come out of Canada recently. Atwood has also published a non-fiction book on science fiction, or speculative fiction as she contentiously calls her brand of science fiction, called *In Other Worlds: SF And The Human Imagination* (2011), in which she discusses her relationship to the genre and its importance for literature today. Seeing as her *MaddAddam* trilogy is set in the post-apocalyptic ruins of a dystopian future vision of our world, and seeing that most of Atwood's work between *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) could perhaps best be classified as feminist fiction, Atwood at this juncture represents a kind of coming-together of many of the ideas presented throughout this thesis: postmodern, post-postmodern, science fiction, apocalypse, post-apocalypse. Atwood's own science fiction oeuvre includes the aforementioned *The Handmaid's Tale*, a work of classic dystopian fiction, but also the Booker-prize winning *The Blind Assassin* (2000) which, although classified as a work of historical fiction, in fact contains a novel-within-a-novel that is written in the style of classic, golden-age science fiction (the title of which is, obviously, *The Blind Assassin*). Lately, she has released a serialized collection of e-books, *Positron*, in four episodes, between 2012-2013, which detail life in a dystopian future American gated community. At the same time, her short story collection *Stone Mattress* (2014) is largely made out of what might be called mythological or fantastical stories, rather than science or speculative fiction. Her latest novel, *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) is another dystopia dealing explicitly with themes of incarceration and economic slavery.

In order to discuss the themes I have selected to support my thesis of a change in dominants, I first need to lay the groundwork on what kinds of novels Atwood's trilogy (*Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, *MaddAddam*) are. The story, in short, is about a near-future dystopia where climate change and unbridled capitalism have resulted in a world led by corporations rather than nation-states, where climate change has already caused untold damage, where

the biosphere is on the verge of collapse, and where science is busy coming up with new ways to splice life into sellable forms. These sellable forms include 'pigoons' – pigs bred in order to grow human transplant organs in them – wolvogs – wolf-dogs meant for protection – liobams – lion-lamb splices invented by religious fundamentalists – and Mo'Hairs, sheep that grow human hair (in various colours) for creating wigs. In the first novel, we are introduced to Jimmy and Crake, children who grow up in the affluent Compounds, protected walled estates where the rich live and work. The Compounds are contrasted with the Pleebs, where the rest of the people eke out a living, consuming whatever products the Compound scientists come up with. Crake is the alpha-man of this world, a brilliant scientist and gene-engineer, who creates a species of humans more in tune with nature (in his eyes); post-humans, essentially, albeit with the minds of naïve children. The 'Crakers' are part of Crake's plan to depopulate the Earth using a virus hidden inside a pill called BlyssPluss, marketed as an aphrodisiac and contraceptive all in one. At the start of *Oryx and Crake*, Crake's plan seems to have succeeded, with Jimmy shepherding the Crakers into their new world. In *The Year of the Flood*, we see this same world again, but from the point of view of the Pleebs. This time our two heroes are Toby and Ren: Toby is a pure 'pleebrat' child, who works a soul-crushing minimum-wage job where she is repeatedly raped by her employer, until her rescue by an eco-religious cult called the God's Gardeners. Ren comes from a Compound family, but her mother elopes with a man named Zeb, another member of the God's Gardeners. Ren then largely grows up in the Pleebs, briefly returning to the Compounds where she meets and falls in love with Jimmy, only to have her heart broken by him. The God's Gardeners are an apocalyptic cult, who name the bioengineered apocalypse the Waterless Flood: in the end, both Toby and Ren survive, as do many others, significantly the 'MaddAddam' scientists who Crake had originally employed to manufacture the virus. The third novel, *MaddAddam*, retains Toby as a narrator, but gives us insight into Zeb's past, as well as the history of his brother Adam, the founder of the God's Gardeners. Zeb moves between Compounds (being the son of an affluent preacher with the Church of PetroLeum – a parodic version of a prosperity gospel church) and the wildest, darkest parts of the Pleebs. In the post-apocalypse, things are heating up: the Crakers have moved in with the other survivors, including Jimmy, shoring up against the predations of a group of 'Painballers', escaped convicts with a thirst for blood. Ultimately, by working together with both the pigoons – who the Crakers can communicate with telepathically – and the MaddAddam scientists, they capture and kill the

Painballers. The remaining humans and Crakers seem to settle down, even inter-breeding, in an uncertain but hopeful future-oriented ending.

This summary does not do justice to the trilogy. Atwood herself, as we have already noted several times, calls them 'speculative fiction'. This is her way of grounding the science fiction in the real; she claims in the acknowledgements of the final work that "Although *MaddAddam* is a work of fiction, it does not include any technologies or biobeings that do not already exist, are not under construction, or are not possible in theory" (*MaddAddam*) – for example the glowing-green rabbits spliced with DNA from jellyfish that seem to have replaced (for some reason) regular rabbits. It is also an important reminder that Atwood values the world itself, rather than just the stories that can be told in that world. *Star Wars* for example allows for many interesting stories, but the world itself (with faster than light travel, sound in space, and a mystical Force) is not meant to be taken at face value: it is set "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" after all. Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy by contrast is set here, in our world, albeit extrapolated a bit into the future. As such, despite its at-times parodic and almost pastiche-like portrayal of modern consumerism, replete with humour, it is ultimately a very serious project. A quick overview of the reviews of *MaddAddam* seem to agree. Sarah Churchwell writing for *New Statesman*, beginning with a slight burn at Atwood's notion of speculative fiction by saying that "all fiction is speculative", nonetheless goes on to define the trilogy as "a satire about the way we live now, a warning about our future and an exploration of the question of what makes us human" (Churchwell 2013: 42). Andrew Sean Greer in *The New York Times* Sunday Book Review writes "The setting is our own century. The gated science compounds are some of the recognizable demons of our age, and the monsters that roam free, post-Armageddon, are already glints in some bioengineer's eye" (Greer 2013). Theo Tait of *The Guardian*, although in broad terms criticizing the "epic B-movie" plot of the novels, nonetheless seems to have enjoyed it as "a very exaggerated version of right-wing America, the nightmarish barbarian at the gates in much of [Atwood's] fiction" (Tait 2013).

The same view seems to apply in magazines more dedicated to the hard sciences. Michael Goldman in *Science* terms *MaddAddam* "an example of what I call firm science fiction – not quite hard, but not quite soft, either. It's grounded in the plausible science of the very near future (or of today) but is by no means didactic about that science" (Goldman 2014: 139). He goes on to point out that the themes Atwood touches upon "aren't simply fiction. We are assaulted daily with evidence of a deteriorating, unpredictable climate; an ever-growing population; diseases we can't fight; terrorism; and a maturing cybercrimes

industry" (Goldman 2014: 139). Paul McEuen, writing for *Nature*, asks whether "Atwood's imagined future [will] be our own", and points out that although some elements such as bioengineered meat will or have already happened, the story is ultimately "a warning but also, in its final accounting, a hopeful meditation on the cycle of life, death and the possibility of life anew" (McEuen 2013: 399).

This is significant as it grounds the story in the mode of science fiction, with its rationality and sense of 'realism', even though it is also coupled with 'exaggerations' and 'satire' and warnings about a potential future. It both is and is not intended to be taken seriously, like – one might argue – most works of a satirical bent. My first focus will be on Atwood's treatment of nostalgia – a chronotopic idea with a larger emphasis on *chronos* as an element in the term. After that I wish to discuss the way Atwood deals with space – the action taking place almost exclusively in various enclosures that change with time. This section is more *topos*-directed. Throughout it all, we can see how Atwood labours to construct her entire frighteningly plausible world with a view to both the historical changes in values and the potential outcome of them, while *also* offering her own alternatives, insights, and possible futures.

4.1. Nostalgia for an authentic past

Nostalgia is an interesting creature in the literary world at the moment, although it has probably always been that. Not only is nostalgia a vehicle for conservative politics, it has also for much of the post-modern period been a mode of artistic expression, hearkening back to a period seen as more authentic or 'real' in the past. Nostalgia for an authentic past is one of the hallmarks of anything 'modern', although one might argue (along with Eliade) that nostalgia came about as an immediate and necessary result of the invention of linear time. In a cyclical-time world, nostalgia always lies in the future as well as in the past, since whatever has been will come again. In a linear-time world, it is possible to be nostalgic for a lost Paradise, even if one is also hopeful for a return to that paradise at some point in the future. Post-apocalyptic literature is in many ways a literature of nostalgia: in the next section I will discuss how this is concretely expressed in the movement through space from the city to the countryside, which is concurrent with the movement through time from modernity to pre-modernity, an evolution that surprisingly often is met with support by the characters. But generally nostalgia for the past in post-apocalyptic narratives comes from the dissolution of the familiar deontic bonds

and codex, and the survivors often long for the stable world they left behind, as they feel perpetually alienated in the new world after the end. There is a reason the Greeks, among others, designated the ages in the past as 'Golden', while the current age tends towards a more base material, such as 'Iron'. Humans in general have a tendency towards valorising the past: recall Bakhtin's definition of 'historic inversion' where "[the] present and even more the past are enriched at the expense of the future", where "everything affirmative, ideal, obligatory, desired has been shifted, via the inversion, into the past (or partly into the present)" (Bakhtin 1981: 147). This, as discussed, explicitly makes the past "more authentic and persuasive" (Bakhtin 1981: 147) – but of course, in the case of post-apocalyptic fiction, it makes *our present* that. This puts post-apocalyptic fiction in the curious position of both describing a certain nostalgia for a pre-modern world of freedom from the deontological codex of the present – i.e. a return to the wild –, while *also* expressing nostalgia for the stable rule of law and society that marked that self-same world. Where this nostalgia is directed and how is often a matter of character: someone with nothing to lose in the pre-apocalyptic world is not likely to be nostalgic for it. In many cases, the battle between these two forms of conservatism constitute the driving force in the novel.

This is the reason why Atwood's use of nostalgia is so distinctive. Jimmy, in the post-apocalypse, is intensely nostalgic for his lost world of comfort: he is a fish out of water in his tree and as the supposed prophet of Crake. Yet over the course of the novel we find out that the world he is nostalgic for is a terrifying dystopia, which is quickly spiralling towards some form of apocalypse even without Crake's assistance. That world, in turn, is extremely nostalgic for a past that lies even further back: namely *our* present, at long last. Yet the reader cannot help but ask those already-dead nameless people who lament the loss of New York, real meat, security, government, voting, democracy, and human rights, why they didn't *do* anything about it. Nostalgia, Atwood shows us, is a rather powerless emotion. That is why most expressions of it are consigned to the first two novels in the series, which respectively deal with the Compounds and the Pleebs. The third, *MaddAddam*, is more concerned with the future, and is less backwards-facing (although it too spends most of its time in flashbacks and stories of the past, fleshing out the history of Zeb and Adam whose actions make possible all that happens in the first two novels) – so that, in consequence, it is the least nostalgic of the three. Of the two first, it is really through Jimmy that nostalgia for the past is felt, perhaps because Jimmy is the only character naïve enough to entertain such an emotion: most of the Pleeblanders are too busy trying to survive in an unfair world to have time to

indulge in the experience. Therefore, this chapter will largely deal with nostalgia in *Oryx and Crake*, albeit with full awareness of the other two novels as a context.

4.1.1. *Oryx and Crake* as Post-Apocalyptic and Post-Traumatic

Trauma and nostalgia come together in curious ways in post-apocalyptic fiction. I have already discussed trauma in the context of post-apocalyptic fiction in general, but would like to invoke Katherine V. Snyder (2010) who reads *Oryx and Crake* as a traumatic, and post-apocalyptic, journey of determination and retrodetermination, using trauma theory via Freud and Cathy Caruth:

> As Caruth, following Freud, describes it, a traumatic event only has its full impact upon the individual in retrospect, after a later event triggers the psychic effect of the earlier event. Thus, a trauma is always composed of at least two moments in time that stand in a mutually determinative relation to each other. The future moment activates the meaning of the past moment, but that past moment also endows the future moment with meaning; the past determines the future, but the future also retrodetermines, or gives new meaning to, the past.
>
> (Snyder 2010: 472)

This is the basic archetype of the new kind of secular apocalyptic thinking: instead of historically inverting the present calamity into a kind of future perfect tense ('the world will have ended'), the two time periods are in a constant dialogue with one another, the one changing the other as new experiences occur, old memories resurface, which may then change the experience or the memory. I will discuss examples of this in greater detail in the next section. Berger claims "[t]rauma is the psychoanalytic form of apocalypse, its temporal inversion. Trauma produces symptoms in its wake, after the event, and we reconstruct trauma by interpreting its symptoms , reading back in time" (Berger 1999: 20). The notion of Berger's ghost, as discussed in chapter 2, becomes particularly relevant when attempting to deal with post-apocalyptic trauma in *Oryx and Crake*. The most common symptom of trauma is, according to Berger, the survivor, or the ghost: "the ghost is a symptom of historical trauma, the sign of its inevitable return and compulsive repetition" (Berger 1999: 52), akin to the eponymous spectre of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). In post-apocalyptic narratives ghosts (survivors) are required for the narration to take place in the first place – comparative to Holocaust survivors or traumatized soldiers returning from the war (the 'witnesses' that I discussed in previous sections). In fact, the very *topos* of the destroyed world with its ruins and remainders is a haunting ghost of a past trauma. Leaving the city, which is

the common thing to do, is one way of escaping the immediate and worst elements of trauma – something I will discuss in the following section – but the city remains in the outskirts – and a return to the city generally means revisiting that past trauma. Jimmy effects this traumatic journey himself, which is the topic of Snyder's (2010) paper, and in doing so he dredges up the various ghosts of his past traumas, and through them, the story of *Oryx and Crake* is laid out.

4.1.2. Nostalgia masking Trauma

For most purposes the term itself would require a lot of theoretical underpinning, but my discussion of it here will be quite specific, arguing that (at least in the modern world) nostalgia is a symptom of trauma. Aaron Santesso (2006), discussing the history of nostalgia (from a seventeenth century medical diagnosis pertaining to homesickness, the origin of the word being a combination of *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (painful condition)) has some difficulties pinning down the modern condition, the broadest definition being "a desire for the past" (Santesso 2006: 16). But he goes on to specify:

> [Nostalgia] is not a desire for the past per se; nor is it ever an emotion rooted in empirical reality or concrete autobiography. Rather, it is a longing for objects that are idealized, impersonal, and unattainable. A work may look to the past; it is only truly nostalgic if that past is idealized. Thus, if nostalgia is composed of two elements— idealization and desire for the past— idealization is the only necessary one.
>
> (Santesso 2006: 16)

Today, nostalgia is not a positive term. Fredric Jameson for example criticizes postmodern nostalgia even when used by the supposed left, seeing it as an element of pastiche, a part of the crisis in historicity, which in short is manifested in the inability of postmodern novels to "organize [their] past and future into coherent experience" (Jameson 1991: 25) and thus organize any kind of resistance to late capitalism. Canavan (2012) reads *Oryx and Crake* as a kind of reply to Jameson's statement that it is 'easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' (paraphrased, from *The Seeds of Time*): that the "entire *world* would end first – and even that might not be enough" (Canavan 2012: 138).

Post-apocalyptic nostalgia is perhaps closer to the original medical definition, nostalgia as a kind of psychological longing for a lost homeland, but also a sickness that may in fact lead to death (Santesso points out that nostalgia was considered an actual, potentially fatal disease). An example of such post-modern, post-apocalyptic, potentially lethal nostalgia can be found in *In the*

Country of Last Things (1987). Anna Blume, as we know, travels to the city from an unafflicted space – which she nostalgically peers back at through descriptions of her childhood (the person she is writing the letter-novel to is clearly someone she knew 'back home') – but she constantly has to fight this impulse in herself, noting how indulging in it is destroying people around her. For example, there are fake rental agencies advertising "fraudulent apartments" that do not exist, "yet there are many people willing to sink their last pennies into these empty promises", arriving at the office to "look at photographs of buildings on tree-lined streets, of comfortable rooms, of apartments furnished with carpets and soft leather chairs" (*In the Country of Last Things*: 8-9). Anna calls it the "language of ghosts" (in a rather Bergerian sense): "In general, people hold to the belief that however bad things were yesterday, they were better than things are today. What they were like two days ago was even better than yesterday. The farther you go back, the more beautiful and desirable the world becomes" (*In the Country of Last Things*: 10). One of the great masters of the language of ghosts is Boris, one of Anna's benefactors and friends. Boris sells ancient heirlooms, trinkets and other found things to the 'Resurrection agents' (resellers and recyclers of goods), always spinning a marvellous tale of Russian countesses or exotic locales around them: "Boris steered the Resurrection men away from the objects themselves, coaxing them into a realm where the thing for sale was no longer the teacup but the Countess Oblomov herself. It didn't matter whether these stories were true or not" (*In the Country of Last Things*: 150). Even in the post-apocalypse, commerce continues, whether in living things (Anna once almost falls prey to cannibalistic flesh-merchants), necessities (she believed she was on her way to buy shoes), or luxuries (Boris's teacups). The language of ghosts is a way to mask the apocalyptic, traumatic world of the city: for a while it is possible to indulge in it, but eventually it will lead to your death: "The ghost people always die in their sleep" (*In the Country of Last Things*: 11). That is not to say Anna and her friends are immune to it: even at the very end as they are making their escape from the city, their plans are no more than romantic hopes of setting up a touring magic show, although Anna is obviously not convinced. Still, "Considering what we have to look forward to, it is pleasant to dream of these absurdities" (*In the Country of Last Things*: 187): the perhaps-absurd hope that whatever lies beyond the 'wall' of the subjective will be a utopia of some kind.

There are works where nostalgia has the opposite function as well. Rather than being expressions of absurdity or a failure to take the present-day reality seriously, nostalgia for the past becomes a source of strength. For example in *The Postman* the protagonist specifically uses nostalgia as a way to build hope in

post-apocalyptic Oregon; nostalgia is how the character both sustains his belief in a future by hoping for a return to a past he remembers, and how he spreads this nostalgia by impersonating a postal worker, a representative of the now-extinct United States government. Although Gordon's nostalgia is, strictly speaking, directed at his own pre-apocalypse - a science fiction utopia in which humanity had just discovered Artificial Intelligence and was about to be ushered into a new Renaissance - it serves the same purpose: as scar tissue for Gordon, sustaining him in his quest for a better existence in the post-apocalypse. In fact, at the very end, when he is near death, strung up by a Holnist enemy, he is rallied and saved by this nostalgic, ghostly remembrance: "Only there, in the blackness, he encountered the one ghost that remained. The one he had used the most shamelessly, and which had used him. It was a nation. A world […]" (*The Postman*: 350), and he realizes that, although his dreams may seem like fantasies or fairy tales, they were what kept him alive: "*Without them, I would have curled up and died*" (*The Postman*: 351, italics in original). The ghost-dream then turns into a "bright mote hovering in a murky sea" which he takes into his hands, upon which a "spectral light seemed to stream away from him in all directions, passing through the broken walls of the ruined building as if *they* were the dream stuff, and the brilliant rays the true reality" (*The Postman*: 351). It may be noted that, up until this moment, the entire novel has (aside from science fictional tropes like laser satellites, AI, and genetically modified supersoldiers) been strictly 'realistic', which makes this more of a vision – perhaps a revelatory, apocalyptic instance, but still a vision. And, of course, to Brin, this is exactly it – the ruins and the post-apocalypse that is described in the novel is just a kind of dream, as he cheekily makes clear in another, earlier thought of Gordon's: "Every so often – even as he approached middle age – he still imagined he was going to wake up in his student dormitory room, back in Minnesota, and all the dirt and death and madness would turn out to be a nightmare, an alternate world that had never been" (*The Postman*: 276). *The Postman*, as opposed to *In the Country of Last Things*, sees a kind of redemptive power in the ghosts and angels of nostalgic trauma. Thanks to Gordon's memories of a better time in the past, he is able to fight back the forces of evil and, by the end of the novel, actually manages to begin the reconstitution of the lost United States.

Gordon and Anna both have utopias to look back to, at least compared to their own present post-apocalyptic scenario. For Gordon, the utopia is a source of power; for Anna a dangerous lure that should be avoided in favour of day-to-day survival. And both are problematic in their own way, one eschewing hope for postmodern cynicism and the other veering dangerously close to what

Berger would call an 'angel' rather than a 'ghost'. But, in many ways unique to the genre, *Oryx and Crake* does *not* offer this comparative utopia in the past. The world that Jimmy looks back at is clearly a dystopia, a world rapidly descending into universal death. As Crake says, shortly prior to setting his plans into motion:

> [It is] sink or swim. I've seen the latest confidential Corps demographic reports. As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone's saying. They're afraid to release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we're running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply for everyone.
>
> (Oryx and Crake: 347)

A second-order nostalgic reading (i.e. looking back towards a time *before* the present day) of this situation might be that the dystopia is simply an analogue for our corrupt world, that its destruction is inevitable and desired, and that the apocalypse allows the survivors (perhaps God's Gardeners) to rebuild it from the ground up. Danette DiMarco (2005) at least partially seems to be of this opinion, seeing in the ending the potential for the human survivors to take "deliberative and participatory action in the creation of a yet-to-be imagined inviolate world" (DiMarco 2005: 170), safe from the influence of Hannah Arendt's *homo faber* who is, DiMarco claims, the root of the problem. The problem is of course that this presupposes that enough humans survived to be able to create a new society – for better or worse. The more likely outcome would be that the Crakers inherit the world, which rather invalidates this point, as according to DiMarco the Crakers are the result of *homo faber* and cannot therefore be considered a solution. Stephen Dunning (2005) sees the apocalypse as an essentially 'therapeutic' project, aiming at cleansing the world: "Crake's drastic therapy seeks to remedy the ills of a world in deep distress on almost all levels of description or organization" (Dunning 2005: 89). The world that needs to be cleansed is, naturally, the modern world. The Crakers, to him, offer hope, as they are a throwback to an earlier, pre-modern time, with their sacred narratives and magical thinking. Thus, Dunning is a second-order nostalgic reader: he sees the apocalypse as an attempted therapy against the trauma caused by modernity, and a successful one too: the Crakers *have* rediscovered sacred narratives, and in doing so may give us an example to abide by. These kinds of second-order nostalgic readings are common in narratives where the post-apocalyptic survivors do not consider the past to be a Golden age or utopia of any kind, and where the 'return' to a pastoral, pre-modern, romantic existence is presented as desirable and preferable – for example

Jefferies' *After London* (1885). Reading *Oryx and Crake* as this kind of neo-luddite narrative is, however, incomplete at best.

4.1.3. 'Nostalgia' in *Oryx and Crake*

The word 'nostalgia' or 'nostalgic' itself occurs frequently through the narrative of *Oryx and Crake*, often in significant contexts. Although there is a wide array of nostalgic content in the novel (exhibited by multiple different characters) I have chosen to focus on the actual word itself since words, both before and after the apocalypse in the world of *Oryx and Crake*, are exceptionally important to the narrator Jimmy, and they are often as endangered as the species (such as Oryxes and Crakes) which used to inhabit it. Neither the word 'nostalgia' nor 'nostalgic' appear at all in *The Year of the Flood*, and although there are a few mentions in *MaddAddam*, the word itself is less important in these novels since the narrator is no longer Jimmy. To Jimmy, as mentioned, words have a particular power. He often finds himself remembering, and then forgetting, words in the post-apocalypse, like *Mesozoic*, "He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can't reach the word. He can't attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space" (*Oryx and Crake*: 43). The word 'nostalgia', when evoked, is thus something valuable and specific. One could also look at words like 'memory' or 'remember', but they are far too numerous to be studied in detail, and are furthermore often used simply to mark the passage from present-tense narration to past-tense narration. By looking at this (potentially endangered) word, as narrated by Jimmy, we can gain access to insights into how Atwood uses Jimmy's fragmented and traumatized memory, in Snyder's words, to 'determine and retrodetermine' the world. Consider this first description of the Craker children, as witnessed by Snowman-Jimmy:

> On the white beach, ground-up coral and broken bones, a group of the children are walking. They must have been swimming, they're still wet and glistening. They should be more careful: who knows what may infest the lagoon? But they're unwary; unlike Snowman, who won't dip a toe in there even at night, when the sun can't get at him. Revision: especially at night. He watches them with envy, or is it nostalgia? It can't be that: he never swam in the sea as a child, never ran around on a beach without any clothes on.
>
> (Oryx and Crake: 6)

The image of the innocent children, although post-human, raises more questions than answers in this early stage of the novel, but it also sets the entire scene: bones and corals signifying the apocalypse, while the lagoon, the sun and the night – nature, in short – being perceived as dangerous hearkens to

Snowman's sheltered past, which is further confirmed by his statement that he never "ran around on a beach without any clothes on" as a child. The feeling of nostalgia is first conflated with envy and then immediately denied as impossible since it does not refer to his own recognizable past, but that denial rings hollow. He sees in the children the childhood he never had, and in fact never could have: the lagoon would have been too dangerous, as would the weather and the sun. One of his first childhood memories is of watching a bonfire "of cows and sheep and pigs" (*Oryx and Crake*: 18) burning after having been infected with some hostile bioform through a deliberate act of terrorism (or perhaps corporate warfare, or perhaps activism billed terrorism – it is impossible to know). Afterwards he has to cleanse his rubber boots by walking through a pool of disinfectant. Here the image of a child by the water is present again, but in a much more sinister way: "They'd said the disinfectant was poisonous and he shouldn't splash" (*Oryx and Crake*: 17).

Another by now distinctly ominous piece of childhood nostalgia comes from his teenage years, from when Jimmy and Crake used to sit in Crake's room playing games, smoking pot and watching pornography and talking:

> One afternoon in – what? March, it must have been, because it was already hot as hell outside – the two of them were watching porn in Crake's room. Already it felt like old time's sake, already it felt like nostalgia – something they were too grown-up for, like middle-aged guys cruising the pleebland teeny clubs.
>
> (Oryx and Crake: 102)

The notion that March is 'hot as hell' reinforces the difference between Jimmy's world and ours – global warming having made the unregulated world outside the climate-controlled Compounds sweltering – and although the act of two teenagers watching porn clandestinely is recognizable enough, the *kind* of porn they watch ("They checked into Tart of the Day, which featured elaborate confectionary in the usual orifices, then went to Superswallowers; then to a Russian site that employed ex-acrobats, ballerinas, and contortionists […] Then they went to Hott Totts, a global sex-trotting site" (*Oryx and* Crake: 102)) is a greater cause for alarm (Hott Totts being a site for third-world child pornography). This time, nostalgia is coupled with cynicism or disillusionment, as if by this time they should already have replaced child pornography with something considerably more depraved – in *MaddAddam* we are given some hints as to what that may be in the character of the Reverend, Zeb's and Adam One's father (or step-father, as it may be), whose interests online included "whips, penetration with bottles, and nipple burning" as well as "historical re-enactment beheading" (*MaddAddam*: 118). It is a nostalgia for a time when they,

Jimmy and Crake, still thought of porn as something that gave rise to some emotion other than boredom. A nostalgia for an age of greater innocence, perhaps, but also a nod at the poverty of the culture of the dystopia where even the most 'extreme' experiences are seen as boring at best, and older forms of culture as entirely irrelevant or unappealing: "the TV sitcom, the rock video – their audience was ancient and their appeal mostly nostalgic" (*Oryx and Crake*: 219). Nostalgia hides a scar here, rather poorly: by attempting to re-define the objects of nostalgia as something not fit for the modern world, something that should be confined to the same levels as "studying Latin, or book-binding: pleasant to contemplate in its way, but no longer central to anything" (*Oryx and Crake*: 219), it merely accentuates it. Nostalgia, in Santesso's definition, is the longing for something "unattainable" (Santesso 2006: 16) and thus it becomes all the more acute because we fear what would happen if these things (culture of any kind, common human decency in the face of sexual exploitation) become objects of mere nostalgic remembrance.

This scene is significant for another reason as well, as it is here that Jimmy comes face to face with Oryx, the third-world former sex worker who eventually ends up in Paradice handling the Crakers, where she becomes the lover of both Crake and Jimmy. In the post-apocalypse, she survives as the mother goddess Oryx. They capture an image of her on Hott Totts while she (or someone like her) was still just a child, servicing a white man while on her knees: "she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer – right into Jimmy's eyes, into the secret person inside him. *I see you*, that look said. *I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want*" (*Oryx and Crake*: 104). This is a moment of ethical awakening in Jimmy, through the act of witnessing: "Before, it had always been entertainment, or else far beyond his control, but now he felt culpable" (*Oryx and Crake*: 104). Oryx is the quintessential ghost of the dystopia, representing post-colonial injustice, sexual slavery, and economic exploitation. Her story is a sordid one of being sold by her family into slavery, used by rich, often western men, and finally brought over to North America where, eventually, she ends up in Crake's bed. Her motivations are mysterious as are her allegiances, but that first encounter is what stays with Jimmy: the eyes seeing him for what he really is. In the post-apocalypse after her death, she becomes an ever-present ghost, one of many voices that taunt Snowman in his loneliness. Her voice joins that of his mother's and even Crake's. These ghostly voices are the only company Snowman has, aside from the Crakers, and as the novel progresses he has more and more of an actual dialogue with them. Half-way through the novel for example when Jimmy decides he needs to find a weapon to help him survive (chasing away wolvogs and hunting pigoons), and

the one place he knows where to find one is in Paradice, he has the following dialogue with an unidentified voice in his head who is, however, presumably Oryx:

> *But you don't want to go back there, do you?* a soft voice whispers.
> "Not particularly."
> *Because?*
> "Because nothing."
> *Go on, say it.*
> "I forget."
> *No, you don't. You've forgotten nothing.*
>
> <div align="right">(Oryx and Crake: 179, italics in original)</div>

The traumatic journey back into the city/back to the scene of the traumatic crimes is also time-travel, of course, as more and more is revealed to the reader about what caused the unexplained apocalypse, the Crakers, and the strange ghost-voices he converses with. Paradice is the site of the murder of Oryx and the assisted suicide of Crake, as well as the place he witnessed the end of the world while safely locked in, while his best friend and true love lay dead in the airlock outside. It is here that he invents the voice of Oryx, and by extension the other ghosts who haunt him, at a moment when he considers suicide. "He could imagine Crake's amused contempt, and the disappointment of Oryx: *But Jimmy! Why do you give up? You have a job to do! You promised, remember?*" (*Oryx and Crake*: 402). The ghosts, naturally, stem from Jimmy's overstimulated imagination – uncalled, unwanted – but what they do is keep up a constant dialogue between his present and his past, forcing the recollections that half or more of the narrative consists of. He has, indeed, been allowed to forget nothing.

At the very end of the novel, Jimmy has returned from Paradice Dome and has just discovered the footprints of the other survivors. He has not yet decided what to do, but goes through with his daily routines anyway: "He pees on the grasshoppers, watches with nostalgia as they whir away. Already this routine of his is entering the past, like a lover seen from a train window, waving goodbye, pulled inexorably back, in space, in time, so quickly" (*Oryx and Crake:* 430). Here the nostalgia is entirely in-text: it does not refer, first-order, back at the dystopia, nor second-order at a pre-modern time or even pre-dystopian time, but at the text itself (in this case the very beginning of the novel). At the time when we are first introduced to his routine, Jimmy is at his worst: he is half-starved, crazed from having lived alone with the Crakers for several months, wracked with guilt over the destruction of the world and his part and non-part of it. "Jimmy, who'd had clues, who ought to have seen but didn't"

(*Oryx and Crake*: 324). Nostalgia is also by this point appropriately coupled with fear of change: "He's not ready for this. He's not well. He's frightened" (*Oryx and Crake*: 430), but also the realization that he *can* effect a change of some kind, that he has power to direct the future (at least in his own mind), something he could not do before – the peeing-on-grasshoppers routine happens thrice; once in the very beginning, once before he heads off back to Paradice dome on his post-traumatic journey, and finally here. The goal, and the prize, from that journey is the item he can now use to effect the change: a weapon (a spraygun, perhaps some kind of laser weapon), that he can use to kill, befriend, or chase away the others. Whatever he decides, it will lead to a future – a future that Atwood broaches in *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*. Although hardly cured from his traumatic experiences, he is electing to act, to create some kind of future for himself and the Crakers, using the tools he has collected during the journey – and in the process, defeating his useless clinging to 'nostalgia'.

4.1.4. Working through the symptoms

Oryx and Crake shows that it is possible to work through traumatic symptoms, on both a larger, societal level, and on a personal and interpersonal level, even if this working-through is not an angelic cure. Berger ends his book claiming we need "to recognize and create narratives that work through these symptoms and return to the apocalyptic moments that traumatize and reveal" This, he claims, may allow for "new – more healthy and more truthful – histories and futures" (Berger 1999: 219). Many readers of *Oryx and Crake* seem to see the novel as exactly this: Snyder points out that "post-apocalyptic fictions such as *Oryx and Crake* enable us to witness the unwitnessable and to survive the unsurvivable" and that such fictions "allow us imaginatively to rehearse the end, a rehearsal that itself stands as both traumatic symptom and potential cure, as acting out and working through, as repetition and repetition-with-a-difference" (Snyder 2012: 486). Canavan claims the power of *Oryx and Crake* lies "in this reopening of possibility: the assertion of the radical break, the strident insistence that things might yet be otherwise" (Canavan 2012: 156). I contend that Atwood in *Oryx and Crake* partially redefines 'nostalgia', taking it away from the ineffectual 'angelic' (Berger) or 'anti-historicist' (Jameson) modes that postmodernism has saddled it with, and instead allows for a more truthful dialogue between world and reader, ghost and survivor. Nostalgia is no balm for Jimmy, nor should it be for us: the past is not some ideal place we want to return to, and even if we wanted to, nostalgia in itself is an ineffectual tool. In

the case of *Oryx and Crake*, the nostalgia Jimmy has for his past is for something that, for us, is yet-to-come, but the deeper wounds it attempts, and fails, to hide are very contemporary indeed. It is not by mistake Jimmy says, early on in the novel when he contemplates writing a journal *à la* Robinson Crusoe (and decides against it), that "[a]ny reader he can possibly imagine is in the past" (*Oryx and Crake*: 46). In reading *Oryx and Crake* we end up meeting Jimmy's eyes (not unlike how he met Oryx's), and although there is probably less of a mystical transfer there, Jimmy being Jimmy, a connection is made. Nostalgia in *Oryx and Crake* is thus *future oriented*: it does not idealize an actual past, as much post-apocalyptic fiction does, nor some earlier, pre-urban utopia. It describes the imperfect time-space that lies in our present, and in our future. As Atwood puts it, rather poetically, in an essay on *Brave New World* included in her non-fiction essay collection *In Other Worlds*: "Alone among the animals, we suffer from the future perfect tense" (Atwood 2011: 193). We alone can imagine a future that is already in the past, and we alone can already be suffering from something that has not yet happened, and we alone can avoid the trap of nostalgia, and perhaps do something about it.

4.2. The Wilderness Enclosure in *The MaddAddam* trilogy

Although Atwood clearly believes that there is merit to warning us about our present direction, and also warning us not to rely on nostalgia, she does not shy away from describing the outcome of our failure to act – which is the plotline of the trilogy, naturally. Yet the plot is not a simple warning either, a finger-wagging Revelation of 'if you do not cut carbon emissions, the world will be taken over by transgenic creatures and humans will become extinct' – it is in itself an attempt to answer some of the ethical questions that it itself raises. The way she goes about this is by very purposefully creating what might be termed an arena of sorts – a place where various world views and alternative future visions can interact and react with one another, and perhaps in the process offer some new axiological codex that is worth following. This arena, which I have called the 'wilderness enclosure', is a recurring *topos* throughout the novels, although it becomes especially pronounced towards the third in the series.

   Oryx and Crake begins in the wilderness, looking back at / out over a ruined city. Our protagonist, Jimmy, wakes up in a tree, surrounded by the sounds, smells and experiences of nature: insect bites, the shrieks of birds, the sound of

water lapping. It quickly becomes clear that this is not Jimmy's 'natural' state, nor is it the natural state of Jimmy's world: nature is juxtaposed, immediately, with a *lack:* something is no longer there:

> The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against [the rising sun], rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic.
>
> <div align="right">(Oryx and Crake: 3)</div>

In this way, Atwood immediately places her narrative at the border of the (formerly) civilized: wild birds have taken over the ruins of the city, and our protagonist has uncomfortably reverted to a less-than civilized status. This beginning is not dissimilar to the usual *topos* of post-apocalyptic fiction, which sees those who survive the apocalypse (whether it is a meteor strike, zombie outbreak or a plague) leaving the cities and setting up new colonies outside it. This movement from the urban to the countryside is a central part of the post-apocalyptic narrative, from Shelley and Jefferies to modern-day expressions of it – so common in fact that it requires some further study. In the wilderness, outside the city, the story seems to go, there is a hope for a new beginning, a new utopia. Whether that means returning to civilization eventually (as London's *The Scarlet Plague* has it) or celebrating the death of the urban (as Jefferies's *After London* does), the city must be abandoned when the world ends. In *Oryx and Crake*, it at first appears that this has happened: Jimmy has led the Crakers to the beach, away from the crumbling and deadly city, where they can live in their intended state of nature, but as the story continues the reader realizes they have not actually left the city at all. The trees and grass (which the Crakers require, being herbivores) belong to a park, not 'true' wilderness, and it was here that Jimmy purposefully chose to lead them after the end of the world: they "could live in the park near the arboretum, coloured green on the map and marked with a tree symbol" (*Oryx and Crake*: 408). To Jimmy, it seems, the true wilderness outside the city is yet too alien a prospect.

This conscious decision not to leave the city – not wholly – is one of the aspects that sets Atwood's post-apocalyptic vision off from the norm. The spatial movement out of the city mirrors the temporal movement back in time: as signs of civilization are left behind, signs of 'barbarism' begin to emerge. So too, of course, with the tree-dwelling Jimmy (and later the other survivors), but the proximity to the city seems inversely proportional to the speed at which 'barbarism' occurs – not unlike the real world then, where one expects the rural to be very different in nature to the urban. In the *MaddAddam*-trilogy, as

in many other post-apocalyptic narratives, the post-apocalyptic chronotope is an extension of the pre-apocalyptic one – the pre-apocalypse often being the more important time-space of the two. The wilderness enclosure that the Crakers and the other MaddAddamite and God's Gardener survivors find themselves in is no accident: it is a continuation of the many other enclosed/walled-in gardens of the pre-apocalypse, except they have now all opened up into one single, common enclosure where the final conflict takes place. In the pre-apocalypse, the most prominent enclosures were the Pleebs and the Compounds: the place where the poor and the rich live, respectively.

To the inhabitants of the Compounds, the Pleebs are a wilderness, a place you cannot go without a bodyguard or special knowledge. As is typical of wildernesses, they are also considered places where one can find authentic experiences. In *MaddAddam*, the Corps visitors to an upscale strip club *Scales and Tails* are described by Zeb:

> Zeb knew their kind from the Floating World: out for thrills during their night on the town, eager for something they mistook for experience. They led sheltered lives inside their Corp Compounds and the other guarded spaces where they hung out, such as courthouses, statehouses, and religious institutions, and they were gullible about anything outside their walls.
>
> (MaddAddam: 296)

The Compounds are here connected not only to places where one lives – the typical gated community that already exists – but also to other places of legal, economic and religious power. Each institution is a walled fortress that protects against an all-encompassing wilderness, but as the above passage shows, they tend towards the stale and buttoned down, hyper-controlled. Jimmy, born and raised in one, is especially aware of this. His description of the Pleeblands versus the Compounds is telling:

> There wasn't much else to do after school in the HelthWyzer Compound, or in any of the Compounds, not for kids their age, not in any sort of group way. It wasn't like the pleeblands. There, it was rumoured, the kids ran in packs, in hordes. They'd wait until some parent was away, then get right down to business – they'd swarm the place, waste themselves with loud music and toking and boozing, fuck everything including the family cat, trash the furniture, shoot up, overdose. Glamorous, thought Jimmy. But in the Compounds the lid was screwed down tight. Night patrols, curfews for growing minds, sniffer dogs after hard drugs. Once, they'd loosened up, let in a real band – The Pleebland Dirtballs, it had been – but there'd been a quasi-riot, so no repeats.
>
> (Oryx and Crake: 83-84)

The Compounds, then, are well-tended walled gardens, where the inhabitants are treated much the same as the plants: they are safe and well cared for, but only as long as they stay within their flower beds and grow in whatever uniform way they were expected to grow. In fact, the Compounds are often compared to gardens, albeit not very natural ones. The prestigious Watson-Crick Institute (a Compound in its own right) is described as "beautifully laid out" where the "students in Botanical Transgenics (Ornamental Division) had created a whole array of drought-and-flood resistant tropical blends, with flowers or leaves in lurid shades of chrome yellow and brilliant flame red and phosphorescent blue and neon purple" (*Oryx and Crake*: 234). The notion of genetically engineering beauty (and utility) above and beyond mere horticulture is an important subtext; in the post-apocalypse, all of these carefully kept animals and plants begin to spread across the world, growing wild – mirroring the way the humans living in these various enclosures were let out by the end of the former deontic bonds.

The Pleebs are far from the wilderness that the Compound-people imagine, however, as we find out in *The Year of the Flood*. On the one hand, they are divided into individual communities, with charming names like Apple Corners ("the official name of our pleeb, though everyone called it the Sinkhole because people vanished into it without a trace" (*The Year of the Flood*: 93)) and Willow Acres ("the locals called it the Sewage Lagoon because a lot of shit ended up in it" (*The Year of the Flood*: 39)). On the other hand they are divided into poorer and richer ("Fernside, Golfgreens, and the richest of all, SolarSpace" (*The Year of the Flood*: 89)). As Jimmy's father says in *Oryx and Crake*: "some had better neighbourhoods in them […] almost like the Compounds, with high walls around the houses, but those didn't get on TV much" (*Oryx and Crake*: 31). Within these Pleebs – some more affluent, some less so – we find even smaller units. Although we do not get an insight into the lives of people who might live in these 'old style' gated communities where the more affluent Pleebs reside, those who live in the poorer parts still create their own castles to protect their own. Toby and Ren are both from their own kind of enclosed space, having lived much of their lives with the eco-cult, God's Gardeners. The cult's original home base, the Edencliff Rooftop Gardens, is in itself the quintessential expression of the *topos* of the enclosed or walled garden:

> The Garden itself wasn't at all what Toby had expected from hearsay. It wasn't a baked mudflat strewn with rotting vegetable waste – quite the reverse. She gazed around it in wonder: it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she'd never seen before. There were vivid butterflies; from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different.
>
> (*The Year of the Flood*: 56)

The beautiful protected garden obviously has its downsides as well, the cult having strict rules for everything from clothing to hair-length to what you can eat, what technology you can use, how often you can bathe etc. This is an expression of Atwood's ustopian message – a portmanteau of 'utopian' and 'dystopian' — which we will return to later. As it were, the message of the entirety of *The Year of the Flood* seems to be that the Pleebs are far from the lawless chaos that the Compounds believe it is, but rather comprise their own set of enclosed spaces all bumping against one another – and against the Compound walls.

The space in which most of the action in the post-apocalypse takes place, Heritage Park, is as a place as complex as any other, and as steeped in various enclosures. The Arboretum is where the Crakers live, and is certainly the most open of all. Nearby is the site of the AnooYoo Spa-in-the-Park, a small compound with lax security intended for women looking to fight off the effects of age through various treatments, which Toby uses as her shelter during the apocalypse. As Ren describes it:

> They had roses that glowed in the dark, and big pink butterflies in the daytime and beautiful kudzu moths at night, and a swimming pool, although staff couldn't use it, and fountains, and their own organic vegetable garden. The air was better there than it was in the middle of the city so you didn't have to wear nose cones so much.
>
> (*The Year of the Flood*: 395)

Another site is the Tree of Life parkette, an open-air marketplace where the God's Gardeners would sell the organic produce they created on their rooftop garden. In the post-apocalypse, the parkette is where the surviving MaddAddamites (a splinter group of scientists and activists led by Zeb) made their home, however ramshackle it seemed:

> They have a cookhouse, and some violet portabiolets over in one corner, and some solar they're fixing up. There's no shortage of parts for just about everything back in the pleebs, though you have to look out for falling buildings. Their vegetable garden is in behind: they don't have a lot of stuff planted yet. "We get pig attacks," he says.
>
> (*The Year of the Flood*: 516)

130

These little shelters have their own gardens and enclosures of course, in order to defend against the escaped genetically engineered animals that also roam the park – Pigoons, Liobams and Wolvogs – and for similar reasons Jimmy spends his nights in his tree. Even the Crakers, designed to survive in this world, create their own enclosure – albeit by the rather unconventional method of peeing a border around their territory that makes it smell like dangerous predators live there. It is, of course, only unconventional insofar as *humans* are considered, seeing as "Scent-marking was a wide-ranging mammalian leitmotif" (*Oryx and Crake*: 182) according to Crake. In that sense, the Crakers' own way of enclosure is perhaps the most 'natural', based on scent and territory rather than physical walls, although that of course makes their enclosure useless against their worst predator, other humans – hence Crake's plan that no other humans would survive.

The enclosed garden-*topos* is also expressed rather explicitly in the case of the Crakers versus the Painballers. The original 'Dome', Paradice, that the Crakers lived in until Jimmy freed them, is an arboreal prison, where they were grown and taught until they could finally be let out into the world. Jimmy describes their enclosure as follows:

> There was a large central space filled with trees and plants, above them a blue sky. (Not really a blue sky, only the curved ceiling of the bubble-dome, with a clever projection device that simulated dawn, sunlight, evening, night. There was a fake moon that went through its phases, he discovered later. There was fake rain.)

> (Oryx and Crake: 355)

The Painballers, who are the main threat in the post-apocalypse (once it has been established the Crakers can speak to the Pigoons and therefore conduct diplomacy), come from a similar background. Painball is "a facility for condemned criminals, both political ones and the other kind: they had a choice of being spray-gunned to death or doing time in the Painball Arena, which wasn't an arena at all, but more like an enclosed forest" (*The Year of the Flood*: 129). The Painball arena is a team deathmatch, where two teams – Gold and Red – are forced to compete and kill one another as a spectator sport – another expression of the culture-death of Atwood's dystopia. Those who win do so through extreme cruelty: "Some teams would hang their kill on a tree, some would mutilate the body. Cut off the head, tear out the heart and kidneys. That was to intimidate the other team. Eat part of it, if food was running low or just to show how mean you were" (*The Year of the Flood*: 130). The parallel between the Crakers and the Painball arena should not be ignored: both are the end result of the capitalist machine (humans made to custom

specifications / incarceration as entertainment), both create a space of artificial freedom – the enclosed forest – with the express purpose of *educating* those incarcerated there. The Crakers are taught by Oryx: "Botany and zoology […] In other words, what not to eat and what could bite. And what not to hurt" (*Oryx and Crake*: 363). In the park, Jimmy continues the education Oryx started: sifting through all the junk of the world before, from dangerous to harmless, from holy to profane. This theme of education within the enclosed garden is of course reflected everywhere: The Gardeners educate their cultists, and the Compounds – often – are themselves educational institutes, such as the Martha Graham Academy that Jimmy went to, or the Watson-Crick Institute that Crake studied at.

The things the Painballers learn however seem to lie on the opposite side of the spectrum to the Crakers: from herbivore to carnivore, in essence. They learn how to hunt, intimidate and kill, and in their repeated stints through the arena end up destroying their "empathy circuits" (*MaddAddam*: 144) so to speak; the broken empathy circuits being a shorthand for psychopathy:

> How to recognize them? The facial scars. The blank expressions: some of their human mirror neurons had gone missing, along with big chunks of the empathy module: show a normal person a child in pain and they'd wince, whereas these guys would smirk. According to Jeb you had to get quick at reading the signs because if you were dealing with a psycho you needed to know it.
>
> (MaddAddam: 297)

It is telling how the language compartmentalizes the 'humanity' of the Painballers much as Crake does to the Crakers: empathy modules or circuits conjuring the idea of a broken human machine of some kind. The Crakers are in that sense no different, parts of them having been removed by Crake – except Crake removed the 'bad' parts, which handily translates to all the parts that remain in Painballers. Painballers and Crakers, it becomes apparent, make up a kind of Janus or Manichean duality: lobotomized good versus lobotomized evil.

All of these enclosures make the final apocalypse rather baffling in its completeness: considering the Compounds are used to isolating themselves from all manner of infectious disease, and considering everyone from local gangs and doomsday cults to spa visitors and university students habitually spend all of their time locked away from the rest of the world, one would imagine there would be a lot more survivors than there are. The Crakers and the Painballers survive in their enclosures, as do the MaddAddamite scientists and Toby, who uses her God's Gardener skills. Throughout *The Year of the*

Flood we get to read 'off-screen' sermons by Adam One about his and his group's survival: had they stayed put for longer, or had more luck, they might well have survived in greater numbers as well (in the end, Adam One dies at the hands of the Painballers, suggesting he did make it past the initial viral infection phase). Atwood has rightfully been criticized for how convenient it is that almost everyone knows everyone else among the survivors: not one but *two* of Jimmy's former girlfriends (Ren and Amanda), for example, are among the survivors. Aside from the convenience of retaining the same narrators and not having to create new characters, however, I would say the main reason for it is because the park – where they all end up – is a continuation of the *topos* that dominates throughout the novel. The park becomes the playground for the Crakers, the MaddAddamite survivors, the God's Gardeners, and the Painballers, and in a very real sense, their struggles in the post-apocalypse (not resolved fully until *MaddAddam*) is reflective of the entire novel. It is not surprising that *Oryx and Crake*'s chronotope, in its various forms, remains stable. In the post-apocalypse, the striated world of borders and enclosures, walls and limits, is usually blown wide open: but this is not so in Atwood's works. The question is why. Why doesn't Jimmy lead his charges away from the city? Why do the MaddAddamites and God's Gardeners stay in the Cobb house? And why do the Painballers remain behind, instead of finding easier targets to attack than the armed survivors who ultimately kill them? The answer to this, I would argue, is embedded in the wider significance of Atwood's *topos*.

4.2.1. Carceral Archipelagos and Walled Gardens

Edward Soja (1997) has proposed a number of possible options for where the urban metropolis will turn to in the future. The six themes he discusses are flex city, cosmopolis, exopolis, metropolarities, carceral archipelagos and simcities (Soja 1997: 22-23). They are all fascinating ideas of the possible direction of urban development, and, despite the chapter in which he discusses these things being two decades old, their direction is still not decided. In *Oryx and Crake*, however, the future of the city has already been determined, and we find it to closely resemble one of Soja's possible themes: the carceral archipelago. Soja uses Mike Davis's description of Los Angeles from *The City of Quartz* (1990) as an exemplary description of a carceral archipelago:

> Davis depicts Los Angeles as a fortified city with bulging prisons, sadistic street environments, housing projects that have become strategic hamlets, gated and armed-guarded communities where signs say 'trespassers will be shot', and where the city is surveilled and patrolled by a high-tech space police. What his work suggests is that the globalized post-Fordist industrial metropolis, with its extraordinary cultural heterogeneity, growing social polarities and explosive potential, is being held together largely by 'carceral' technologies of violence and social control, fostered by capital and the state.
>
> (Soja 1997: 27)

'Carceral archipelago' is a term Foucault uses in his *Discipline and Punish* (1975) to describe our increasingly 'carceral' modern world, the end point of the history of punishment from torture to modern imprisonment and 'rehabilitation': "We have seen that, in penal justice, the prison transformed the punitive procedure into a penitentiary technique; the carceral archipelago transported this technique from the penal institution to the entire social body" (Foucault 1995: 298). Essentially, Foucault posits, all of society functions as a part of the prison-industrial complex, as judges increasingly became not the judges of moral or immoral action, but "judges of normality", a situation wherein the "carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power" (Foucault 1995: 304). This normalization is what is at work when we look at our modern prisons and other penal institutions as somehow 'rectifying' rather than 'punishing'. Foucault counts everything from almshouses to orphanages as a part of this machinery – and in that process determining what is proper or right: "Their task was to produce bodies that were both docile and capable […] Training was accompanied by permanent observation: a body of knowledge was being constantly built up from the everyday behavior of the inmates" (Foucault 1995: 294). Observation and surveillance is, of course, one of the top issues of the post-Snowden modern world.

Looking at each possible 'carceral island' or 'walled garden' in the *MaddAddam* series, we find this kind of training, normalization and judging taking place: each Compound for example in its own right attempts to create a work force that is suited to the desired ends – e.g. working for the corporate body in order to generate profits. The walled garden of the God's Gardeners work in a similar way: most of *The Year of the Flood* is a description of growing up under their tutelage, learning survival techniques, listening to sermons on morality, and preparing for the world to come. In both cases their current existence is contingent on a sort of walled garden (a Compound or the Edencliff Rooftop Garden) they have created for themselves to protect their

way of life from the Pleebs: they survive and thrive, but only in the protected environment of their own making. There is of course a huge power imbalance between the two groups, but they are in many ways similar. The Painballers and the Crakers embody a different aspect of the 'carceral', but they are still clearly products of it. The Painball arena is, on one hand, a natural evolution of Atwood's capitalist dystopia: like the televised executions, it gives convicts a financial value by selling their suffering (authorized and normalized through the carceral network) to willing viewers, initially only the upper echelons who "liked to watch duels to the death involving skill, cunning, ruthlessness, and cannibalism: it was Corps life in graphic terms" (*MaddAddam*: 296). As a consequence, it also 'trains' them to be as vicious and inhumane as possible: "Those who survived it did so through guile, the ability to wrongfoot their opponents, and superior murderousness: the eating of gouged-out eyes was a favourite party trick. In a word, you had to be prepared to knife and fillet your best friend" (*MaddAddam*: 297). As Zeb says about the 'third time' Painballers that are stalking them: "there's nothing left of their empathy circuits" (*MaddAddam*: 144). The Painballers fit into a long line of cannibalistic, violent 'raider' or 'bandit' archetype that one finds in most if not all post-apocalyptic fictions. They are the amoral other, enemies and opponents, who are incapable of creation and only capable of destruction, who live off the spoils of civilized society – these types are found in every kind of post-apocalyptic narrative from *The Road* to *The Postman*. They are not a solution of any kind, but a consequence: like the destroyed biosphere, they represent the end result of Corps-styled humanity, of what kind of people are created through the carceral archipelago of the future.

The Crakers, by contrast, are brought up in a literal walled garden: they have no knowledge of the world outside, and when they are finally introduced to it their reactions are naïve and trusting. As discussed previously, the Crakers are not a real solution to anything either, rather they are a ustopian example of what would be necessary to create human beings who are truly without all the negative traits of humanity: no murder, no rape, no racism, no violence. Yet as the story goes on, and the Crakers are educated further and further about the world – *MaddAddam* primarily figures Toby telling them stories of the past – they continue to be sheltered, like children. Each main chapter in *MaddAddam* begins with a 'story': 'The Story of the Egg, and of Oryx and Crake, and how they made People and Animals; and of the Chaos; and of Snowman-the-Jimmy; and of the Smelly Bone and the coming of the Two Bad Men' is the name of the first such 'story', which is told to us through a first-person oral narrative where the answers and reactions of the audience are not recorded, but the reactions

of the narrator is. This back-and-forth is shown through paragraph breaks (represented further down by a slash in brackets: [/]):

> And then the two bad men came. They were left over from the chaos.
> I don't know why Crake didn't clear them away. Maybe they were hiding under a bush, so he didn't see them. But they'd caught Amanda, and they were doing cruel and hurtful things to her.
> We don't need to talk about those things right now.
>
> (*MaddAddam*: 4)

They are instructed through these stories – what is bad, good, the history of the world, their place in it – but they are also consciously protected, like children, from the 'worst' of it. Towards the end, the stories are no longer told by the humans, but written down from the oral narrative by the newly-literate Crakers themselves. For example in 'The Story of the Trial' we are told the final fate of the captured Painballers, namely their execution. "In the morning there was a Trial. You all saw it. It was at the table. Many words were said. The Pig Ones were also at the Trial. [/] Perhaps we will understand it later, this Trial. [/] And after the Trial, [everyone] went down to the seashore. […] But we did not go, we Children of Crake, because Toby said it would be hurtful to us" (*MaddAddam*: 370).The final story, 'The Story of Toby', is the last inkling we get of the future of the post-apocalypse, and is told by Blackbeard (a Craker child) – yet it seems they have no better understanding of the world then than they did at the very beginning. Zeb and some of the other men leave to investigate a fire coming closer, which suggests that even more people had survived than initially thought: "So Zeb told us there might be others – more people from before the chaos, from before Crake cleared the chaos away. But would they be good people, or would they be bad and cruel men that would hurt us? There was no way to tell." Zeb and some others go to investigate, but once again leave the Crakers behind: "Zeb said it might be too harsh what would happen. And we were not sure what *harsh* meant. And Zeb said he hoped we would never have to find out" (*MaddAddam*: 388-389, italics in original).

The reason why the Crakers need to be sheltered can either be because their naivety is a fragile thing, something likely to shatter at the first sign of true violence perpetrated against them – or then because Crake's genetic coding has worked too well, making them actually incapable of understanding 'harsh' concepts (like murder, rape, enslavement): making them the perfect representative of H.G. Wells's *Eloi*. Much as the Painballers cannot be rehabilitated and turned into productive members of society, the Crakers are locked in their own limited understanding of the world. But I would like to

think it is the first option, rather than the second, that informs the survivors' decision not to speak of these things to the Crakers. This is in a sense a very interesting question that Atwood brings to bear: if we are cursed to be locked into various carceral islands, how responsible are we for the things we teach ourselves (or others?).

4.2.2. Margaret Atwood's Ustopian Visions

Ustopia is a neologism coined by Atwood, which offers up an alternative third space between dystopia and utopia – and it is a space that is, to use Doležel's term, specifically concerned with the axiological, or value judgements. Atwood describes the term as she uses it in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011), claiming that both her *MaddAddam* series and her previous SF novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) are 'ustopian'. The word ustopia is a combination of utopia and dystopia: "because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other" (Atwood 2011: 66). In a sense Atwood is actually attempting to salvage utopia through this term, seeing as literary utopias have essentially become extinct in the (post-)modern world, while dystopias have become and are becoming ever more popular. By using the term ustopia rather than merely dystopia, she also recognizes in dystopias the latent utopian potential: "a yin and yang pattern; within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia, if only in the form of the world as it existed before the bad guys took over" (Atwood 2011: 85). If dystopias and utopias can be considered fairly straightforward - in a utopia the author is attempting to describe what they consider a perfect society, whereas a dystopia is the description of how that society inevitably fails – a ustopia is a postmodern answer to that, claiming nothing can ever be fully utopian or fully dystopian. Ketterer pointed out that the "source of utopian reality is two removes from where we are; dystopia is one" (Ketterer 1974: 93) – the source of utopia being some form of heavenly realm as Northrop Frye might describe it, whereas the source of dystopia is simply our own, everyday life. Ustopia, as an idea, allows for some minor access to a world (in the multiple worlds-theory sense) beyond 'our everyday world' and 'our everyday world, just worse' – but that access is dependent on an observant and critical reader.

The majority of scholars have focused on the more obvious dystopian and utopian aspects of *Oryx and Crake*: namely the dystopian world that Jimmy grows up in contrasted with the utopian potential of world after, inhabited by the peaceful Crakers. Danette DiMarco's (2005) analysis is a prototypical one. She uses Hannah Arendt's notion of the *homo faber*, the tool-using man, to

criticize and frame Atwood's dystopia. The tool-using man, according to Arendt, uses science to create technologies that are ostensibly meant to improve or ease life, but that under capitalism in a market economy are only 'successful' "to the degree that those technologies can be marketed and sold to a populace on the premise that they can fulfill emotional desires. Whether such products are really 'good' and 'needed' to live a decent life are certainly questionable" (DiMarco 2005: 176). To her, the apocalypse in *Oryx and Crake* is basically a good thing: there is hope for the future in Snowman and the humans he discovers at the very end of the novel, who now have the potential to take "deliberative and participatory action in the creation of a yet-to-be imagined inviolate world" (DiMarco 2005: 170). Although the later novels show that the particular survivors Jimmy found at the end of *Oryx and Crake* (the Painballers, together with their captive Amanda) were far from good candidates for the creation of a new non-capitalist world order, the point remains that, according to DiMarco, the solution does not lie in the Crakers, but in humans. Karen F. Stein (2010) compares Crake to Frankenstein, the scientist, whose overreliance on reason became his undoing. "Like *Frankenstein*, *Oryx and Crake* critiques the dangers of binary thinking, the split between reason and emotion" (Stein 2010: 148), going on to state that "Atwood's novel, like Shelley's, is meant as a warning. We may be on the path to extinction, doomed to self-destruction through the abuse of scientific technologies" (Stein 2010: 153). Stein is representative of an approach that takes the apocalypse out of the future and moves it back to the present – it becomes, as she says, a warning, rather than an attempt at looking ahead. Her view also, like DiMarco's, places the blame squarely on the overly rational and scientific.

Stephen Dunning (2005) is perhaps more positively inclined towards science, especially the Crakers, but he also looks ahead. The Crakers, engineered by Crake to be naturally in tune with their environment, with UV-resistant skin and capable of eating both grass and their own faeces if need be, were also originally intended to be without religion, creed, racism, sexism, or technology. However, throughout the story they start to develop a kind of spirituality, fuelled by Jimmy's perhaps slightly misguided attempts at explaining the horrors of the deteriorating apocalyptic world around them in a way that does not impinge on their rather charming naivety. Falling back on pre-modern language, Jimmy speaks of the 'chaos' (the pre-apocalypse) that Crake (the creator-God) chased away so that they and all of the children of Oryx (a mother-goddess figure) may live in peace. Dunning sees this naturally-incurring spirituality as an expression of the unexcisable or unquenchable human desire for sacred or magical narratives, which modernity, according to him, has more or less

successfully managed to suppress in favour of what he calls first-order desires of "immediate gratification" (Dunning 2005: 87). His conclusion is that "whatever solutions we may hope for must come at least partially by way of recovery, recovery of some form of great narrative that reestablishes culture firmly in the *cultus* from which science has torn it" (Dunning 2005: 98). The utopian potential of the new sacred language of the Crakers is something that others, such as Shannon Hengen (2010) also discusses, often from a direct religious point of view: "[p]rophets are needed now to find the language to convince us to redeem our moral selves and to repay our ethical debts" (Hengen 2010: 140). Dunning and Hengen then see the Crakers as representatives of a solution, although perhaps not literally. Rather what they represent – a belief in the sacred, spirituality, ethics and so forth – is what we should strive for.

It is fairly straightforward to attribute utopian potential to something like the Crakers, who are, in Crake's own words, "perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create tools or weapons, or for that matter, clothing. They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money" (*Oryx and Crake*: 359). The problem is of course that they are engineered. Atwood, for one, sees this as a ustopian issue: in *Oryx and Crake* she recognizes both the utopian potential of the "genetically modified, peaceful, and sexually harmonious New Humans set to replace [humanity]" (Atwood 2011: 93) and the inherent problem of an engineered species that only has this utopian potential because "[t]hey can't choose otherwise", asking the question of what the "little dystopia concealed within such utopian visions of the perfected human body [is]" (Atwood 2011: 95). The question of free will is something that, among others, Mark Bosco (2010) and Hannes Bergthaller (2010) have addressed. For example, by turning the Crakers' mating instincts to a seasonal pattern and thus eradicating all 'courtship behaviour', what Crake attempted to eradicate are "the very features that define our humanity, the attributes that create culture and religion and, consequently, a meaningful history" (Bosco 2010: 165). In a 'ustopian' turn, Bosco claims that their nascent spirituality is a sign that "the Crakers are not satisfied being what their creator had imagined. They want to become something more" (Bosco 2010: 166) – the utopia present in the dystopia of no free will.

Hannes Bergthaller (2010) addresses this same problem citing the controversial philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who famously claimed the need to tame or domesticate the 'human animal', mainly through "anthropotechnologies", "technologies of self-domestication that deal with

human beings as evolved, biological creatures so as to make them governable" (Bergthaller 2010: 729 – culture, religion, society etc. Bergthaller points out that the traditional view of the humanities, of humans and all fellow species being "bound together into a single 'household'" (Bergthaller 2010: 731) and are thus mutually dependant on one another is not only a romanticized or even pastoral view of humanity's relationship to nature, but outright dangerous: "Crake has literalized the pastoral fantasy of humanism—he has employed the tools of genetical engineering in order to breed the wildness out of man, creating a species of human beings that will be congenitally unable to soil the planetary *oikos*. The Crakers have been thoroughly and permanently housebroken" (Bergthaller 2010: 735). Rather than breeding free will out of humans, Bergthaller believes there is some hope in more traditional anthropotechnologies, such as what is found in the beliefs of the God's Gardeners, the cult Atwood introduces in *The Year of the Flood* which combines ecological awareness with Christianity. Here Bergthaller presumably agrees with Dunning (2005) and Hengen (2010) in saying that we need to re-introduce a sacred narrative of some kind that can function as a focal point for our own domestication: as opposed to traditional romantic narratives which give nature itself a "normative content", "[i]n the Gardeners' version of natural theology, nature acquires normativity only by virtue of its createdness at the hand of God—that is, through the place it occupies within the symbolic order that is created and upheld by the Gardeners' religious practices" (Bergthaller 2010: 740-741). In other words, Bergthaller would presumably consider an ultimate Gardener victory the best outcome of the post-apocalyptic battle taking place. If one steps back and considers these arguments anew, though, they remain somewhat unconvincing: if one is a non-believer, must one then adopt belief (in God/a god/a sacred narrative) by force? Both 'old' (e.g. Bertrand Russell) and 'new' (Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens) atheists would surely be up in arms at such a suggestion. Atwood herself is fully aware of what she calls the "lumpiness of human beings" (Atwood 2011: 84), the inability for all people at all times to "fit into [a] grand scheme" (*Ibid.*) and the problem of what to do with such lumpy people in supposed utopias (exiling or exterminating them, generally), so it seems unlikely that this is necessarily something that she would support: although her description of the Gardeners is by and large very positive.

Crakers, of course, do not have the problem of lumpiness, making them essentially the perfect post-modern person: incapable of sexism or racism (their skin colour varies across the entire spectrum by design), entirely in tune with their surroundings, vegetarian and pacifist and, significantly, eager to adopt

whatever spiritual beliefs people around them impose on them without any coercion or interference by rationality. The fact that this 'docility' was a selling point for many who were planning on purchasing the finalized products ("several world leaders had expressed interest in that" (*Oryx and Crake*: 358)) is, of course, yet another ustopian wrinkle. Like the initially utopian-seeming society of Eloi from Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), or the stunted lower castes of Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931), it only takes a bit of examination to discover the dystopian Morlocks hiding beneath the utopian exterior. Gerry Canavan (2012), who incidentally reads the novel as post-apocalyptic rather than dystopian, summarizes my thoughts on the matter better than I could:

> The Crakers are manifestly not an actual plan to save the world—Crake's plan employs unethical methods and impossible genomics towards a plainly ridiculous purpose. Rather, the Crakers allegorize the radical transformation of both society and subjectivity that will be necessary in order to save the planet - showing us how very difficult the project will be, and giving us a sideways, funhouse-mirror, only-kidding glimpse at the kinds of revolutionary changes that will be required to make the future better than the present.
>
> (Canavan 2012: 152)

Canavan goes on to point out that what is actually at stake is an attempt to find a solution to the problem of capitalism, seeing the novels as allegorizing "both the difficulty and the *necessity* of finding some sort of alternative" (Canavan 2012: 154) – and doing this through apocalypse, exemplifying Jameson's famous statement that "[it] seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (Jameson 1994: xii). Still, one wonders if the Crakers *or* the God's Gardeners are really to be considered solutions: if they are, they are intrinsically ustopian ones.

4.3. Neither Dystopian nor Utopian

I have skimmed over the more straightforward examples the axiological in *MaddAddam* on purpose, since that reading is apparent to all who have opened the novels in question. If post-modernist writing is ontological – world-building – in nature, then Atwood's world-building is deeply axiological. Every line that creates back-story of some kind is steeped in value-building, from Zeb's and Adam's abusive, hypocritically religious PetroBaptist father, to the callousness through which Toby's parents were killed by sickness-creating megacorps and then ruined by debt, to the staid and culturally dead upbringing of Crake and

Jimmy whose parents were deeply involved in the aforementioned evil. This kind of world-building aligns Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy very closely to the so-called cyberpunk genre, a genre of science fiction made especially famous by William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Ridley Scott's (dir.) *Blade Runner* (1982). Jameson (2005), looking at the various stages of science fiction, places cyberpunk as the latest and newest addition to the story: "a general period break which is also consistent, not only with the neo-conservative revolution and globalization, but also with the rise of commercial fantasy as a generic competitor and ultimate victor in the field of mass culture" (Jameson 2005: 93) – and indeed when reading histories of science fiction, even more recent ones, cyberpunk (together with ideas like slipstream) is often what comes 'last', what is considered the very 'latest'. Atwood is perhaps closer to 'biopunk', as she is less concerned with the 'cyber' part of it (such as the Matrix/Internet and cybernetic enhancements of the body) and more with the 'bio' part (genetic engineering, species extinction, post-humanism), but the deeply value-based, anti-capitalist element ('punk') to her work remains. Instead of looking at this more obvious element, I have endeavoured to show how the structure of the work itself on a chronotopic level has been built up around the challenging and discussing of values and disvalues.

If there is one aspect of postmodernism that has survived and is thriving today, and which might be termed the properly post-postmodern, I would argue it is exactly this conflict of world-views that has been ongoing for the last couple of decades. The aesthetic experimentation remains, but the important issues, these that actually have a noticeable effect on society and culture at large, are questions pertaining to things like gender and sexual identity, race and ethnicity, and to varying degrees religious belief versus disbelief, as well – as Marxist scholars like Jameson are quick to point out – as the ongoing political struggle between left and right, capitalism and the alternative (whatever it may be). What these issues describe is, of course, fundamentally a battle of values – which in itself is nothing new. But there may be something new that the postmodern discourse has brought to this battle of the *weltanschaaung*, namely the notion of multiple, fractured worlds, all living within touching distance of one another, rubbing up against one another, occasionally fighting, often ignoring everyone else. These are the various carceral archipelagos that Soja and Foucault speak of, the places that create their own normativity and values in isolation. This is the *topos* of the post-modern world. The *chronos* is, as Atwood once again captures it, one of abiding nostalgia for an invented world that seemed both safer and easier to comprehend (and perhaps more

homogenous), but which is also by design harmless. Nostalgia cannot change anything, not even within one's own invented world.

Even when attempting to reach outside the self-created walled garden, however, postmodernism has a number of 'utopian' problems. I have previously discussed Slavoj Žižek's reading of Hegel's dialectics in relation to specifically science fiction and post-apocalyptic fiction, but it bears repeating. In *Living in the End Times* (2011), Žižek criticizes the traditional dialectical approach to history, which goes something like "the standard notion is that one can only arrive at the final truth at the end of a series of errors, so that these errors are not simply discarded, but are 'sublated' in the final truth, preserved therein as moments within it" (Žižek 2011: 28) – the series of errors being the series of theses and antitheses that eventually lead towards the final Hegelian moment that Fukuyama so famously claimed had occurred in Western society. The example he uses is the Terror that followed the French Revolution (and many others): by placing the Terror in the past as an 'error' sublated into the final (Marxist/Hegelian) truth, it paradoxically creates a narrative where the Terror is considered superfluous: where it might have been possible to reach "the modern rational state without having to pass through the 'superfluous' detour of the Terror" (Žižek 2011: 28). This, Žižek says, is utopian, especially the "contemporary liberal idea of global justice, whose aim is not only to characterize all past injustices as collective crimes" but also "make recompense for its founding crimes, thereby retroactively cleansing itself of its guilt and regaining its innocence" (Žižek 2011: 35). In other words, the idea that the society we have today which has reached a moment where it considers the circumstances of its founding to be criminal could somehow have been created without committing the said crimes in the first place. This line of thinking of course includes the "ecological utopia of humanity in its entirety repaying its debts to Nature for all its past exploitation" (Žižek 2011: 35) – the idea that one can buy a cup of 'ecological' Starbucks coffee and somehow nullify the negative impact of the purchase in the process. Instead of this utopian view of the 'superfluous' past 'errors', Žižek continues, one should look at the past as something that is in constant, retroactive change, contingent on the present – "in which effect precedes cause, i.e., retroactively creates it" (Žižek 2011: 21). This rather strange view of things nonetheless largely seems to correspond to how we do view the world: when I fall in love, it is because my past actions up to that moment made it possible: it was a sort of fate, or destiny. It is strange that we would not look at history in the same manner.

I would argue that by moving the normally-utopian pre-apocalypse into an unreachable, nostalgic distance in her novels, Atwood is in a way addressing this

apparent contradiction. Atwood does not engage in the utopia of white-washing the past and its ecological disasters. Instead, as Žižek also points out, she accepts the fact that "already in nature itself, there is no circle of total recycling, there is un-usable waste" (Žižek 2011: 35) and instead gives us a rather depressing ustopian view of the future: it is not that there is no hope, it is simply that there is no hope for *us* – to reference the title of Canavan's (2012) article. The impossible Crakers give us a template as to how we are supposed to change in order to minimize the useless waste we produce, but they, being 'new', are also unburdened by our long list of past mistakes: they are a solution, but only in the same sense that the voluntary human extinction movement is a solution. That is why it is so easy to idealize their newfound spirituality and apparent rejection of Crake's engineered atheism. But we are not Crakers. On the other hand, Atwood also points out that we are hardly Painballers either (yet?), the result of the Corps' brutal system of penitentiary training.

In his *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse* (2012), written together with philosopher Boris Gunjević, Žižek discusses how one should react to the apocalyptic not by embracing it as something inevitable, but rather by preparing for it and attempting to prevent it at all costs, yet always being aware and accepting of the fact that it will never stop being a threat: "the apocalyptic time is precisely the time of this indefinite postponement, the time of freeze in between the two deaths: in some sense, we are already dead, since the catastrophe is already here, casting its shadow from the future" (Žižek and Gunjević 2012: 70). Here he is referencing, in a fashion reminiscent of the postmodernists, the bombing of Hiroshima: once that particular Pandora's Box opened, it has only been a matter of time. Atwood's box contains genetic engineering, but in a sense it is the same as the atomic bomb: technology that is, in short, 'too powerful' for us: the capacity, through genetic modification, to create the kind of virus that kills off nearly the entire world in the MaddAddam trilogy is not too different from the capacity to build and launch nuclear bombs. Once it exists, the risk is always there – and all we can do is constantly attempt to postpone it (what Žižek calls 'enlightened catastrophism'). Atwood, I remind you, pointed out that all of the technologies she described were either existent or considered possible at the time of writing: that is to say, she is not warning us about *not* opening Pandora's Box – she is telling us it is already open.

The Postmoderns, as we have discussed, froze here – between the two deaths. But Atwood does not. Ustopia is the answer to relativism; agreeing that, yes, things are never neither dystopian nor utopian, but they are *never neither dystopian nor utopian*. Post-postmodernity might well be the logical end-

point of the ontological quest for 'worlds' as McHale posits it: an endless number of worlds may exist, and may be found and understood, but which is the world we want to live in? In Atwood's world, in order to live in any kind of safety whatsoever, you have to isolate yourself into tiny compounds or rooftop gardens, a natural evolution of our current fractured time-space. But unlike the traditional isolated chronotopes one might be exposed to – in a novel, or in the real world – Atwood branches out, over the entire world, giving us views from the Compounds, the Pleebs, the scientists and the believers, the violent and the pacifists, and in the end she breaks the entire world apart, puts everyone together, and forces a confrontation of values. The rational-spiritual view of the God's Gardeners, the refreshing naivety of the Crakers, Jimmy's reawakened sense of ethical purpose – even Crake's misguided attempt at salvaging what could be salvaged – all of these offer potential futures, potential reactions to our current catastrophic world.

5.   Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Road* (2006) is in many ways the perfect way to round off this work. In it, the various strands of theory and analysis I have discussed throughout the rest of the thesis come together. Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy is filled with colour and light and multiple characters whose lives intersect in various ways. It presents a vast smorgasbord of axiological alternatives and future possibilities, its apocalypse unleashing new life-forms and ways of life unto a planet that now has the chance to recover from the apocalyptic road of the dystopia. *The Road*, by contrast, is the absolute opposite of this. It is a bleak post-apocalyptic tale which embodies the chronotope of the road after the end of all roads, and its critical reception has been marked by a singular, almost desperate struggle to wring some form of meaning out of its seemingly-nihilistic yet inescapably human narrative. The plot is protean in its form: a man and his son, a boy no older than ten, are trekking across the desolate grey landscape of America after some unknown cataclysm has rendered the whole world ashen grey and burnt. They are headed south, hoping for warmer climes, "each the other's world entire" (*The Road*: 4). On the way they subsist on canned goods and lucky finds of food and clean water, avoid the cannibals that roam the roads while attempting to stave off starvation, death by exposure, and sickness. Their journey seems to have no end however, as even reaching the sea to the south, they find nothing but yet another desolate and lifeless non-place. At the end of the novel, the father dies after a long sickness of some unspecified respiratory disease that has been present since the first pages, leaving the son alone to fend for himself. The father, who early on insisted that "If you died I would want to die too" (*The Road*: 9) does not end up taking his son with him in death, and likewise the son does not commit suicide to follow him. Instead, the book ends on an almost absurdly positive note, where the son is almost immediately picked up by a family of 'good guys'. But the end of *The Road* is by no means the end of the road: all the fears and anxieties of the journey so far continue even after the father's death, and we are left ignorant of the ultimate fate of both the boy and his world. It is not a very long novel, but it has definitely sparked discussion, and a lively scholarly and societal debate has sprung up about it in the decade since it was published.

What is particularly fascinating regarding the reception of the novel is the demarcation of the reactions into two distinct camps that I have chosen to call

'redemptive' and 'non-redemptive'. Shelly L. Rambo (2008) is one of the early 'non-redemptive' readers of *The Road*, and she describes the notion of redemption as such:

> The term "redemption" is rooted in the concept of repairing or restoring what is damaged. Something or someone is freed from a situation of harm and changed for the better. Although redemption is described differently across religious traditions, it revolves around a series of images that speak of the process by which humanity and the natural world are taken from a situation of disrepair and restored to an original, if not perfected, state. The concept of redemption entails: 1) an original innocence or goodness; 2) a subsequent fall, struggle, or separation; and 3) a rescue, recovery, or transformation.
>
> (Rambo 2008: 102)

Redemption, or non-redemption, appears as one of the central motifs of post-apocalyptic fiction in general, although it can often be obscured by the wealth of other issues dealt with by the genre. Although it is a religious concept, redemption can be expressed just as well in secular sense: that is after all what Žižek means when he speaks of "the ecological utopia of humanity in its entirety repaying its debts to Nature for all its past exploitation" (Žižek 2011: 35), as discussed in the previous chapter. The difference between a religious and secular redemptive narrative is perhaps centred on the third and final part Rambo lists, the "rescue, recovery, or transformation" (Rambo 2008: 102) – in a religious context, rescue comes in the form of the grace of God, of salvation. In a secular context, rescue is only possible through the hard work of people – for example by (utopically) attempting to repay our debts to Nature.

Apocalyptic fiction, as discussed in my earlier theoretical chapters, has always faced a kind of dilemma: time (i.e. history) ends with the religious apocalypse, and so does all narrative aside from the perpetual utopia of the chosen and the perpetual hell of the enemies of the chosen. If time does not end, then it simply restarts its cycle, which is (as Eliade points out) just another form of timelessness. As a result, religious apocalypses do not offer much space for conversation, critique or even warning: the world will simply come to an end one day (soon), and all the wicked will be judged. Secular fiction allows for a time after the apocalypse, for a continuation of history, but this begs the question: if the apocalypse was not *the* end, then what was it? Berger and Heffernan argue that the Second World War was the apocalypse that triggered our current post-apocalyptic, post-modern condition: in their view, there has been no continuation since then, no progress, merely the perpetual rehashing of old things. But if one does not accept the postmodern view, then 'an

apocalypse' becomes just that – an indeterminate, singular event among the many through which human kind has suffered. As a result the effectiveness of apocalypse as a motif is, arguably, diminished in the secular sense compared to its religious roots as an absolute end, turning it into a kind of stumbling block or temporary setback on the road forward. That is not to say that these kinds of narratives recounting 'apocalypse without an end' are not powerful and useful: in their extreme simplification of a complex world, they allow for some very effective rhetoric around a number of questions otherwise too complex to discuss properly. The *MaddAddam* trilogy is perhaps the culmination of this form of post-apocalyptic narrative, where the apocalypse allows us to better understand the direction our current society seems to be headed by compressing it into a few core concepts, in the process illuminating the fragmented carceral archipelago of our present day and near future. These classical science fiction narratives inspire vigorous debate which marshals the kind of retroactive re-evaluation of the past that Žižek talks about; except, of course, that science fiction allows us to 'pro'-actively (in the antonymic sense vis-a-vis 'retroactively') evaluate our present.

The Road is an atypical post-apocalyptic narrative in that the end is, apparently, really 'the end'. Whatever the apocalypse was, it seems to have left the natural world wholly decimated. What food exists is stored in cans or jars or preserved under the ground in a dried form. Animals, such as crows, cows and (particularly) trout are alluded to – but always in the past sense, as a phenomenon now extinct. At one point, when searching for food in an old barn, where the smell of cows still lingered, the man "stood there thinking about cows and he realized they were extinct. Was that true? Here could be a cow somewhere being fed and cared for. Could there? Fed what? Saved for what?" (*The Road*: 127). Both of these questions – fed what, and saved for what – find their answer in the narrative itself: there is nothing to feed a cow, and no reason to save it. Other novels, including the *MaddAddam*-trilogy, feature extinction (the MaddAddamites all chose their codenames from among extinct species, and used the Extinctathon game as their channel of communication), but Atwood both replaces extinct species with new species and leaves plenty of other animals alive. In *The Road* the problem is simply that there is nothing to feed to cows, no nature at all. And there is nothing specific to blame either – in one of the other few 'final end' post-apocalyptic novels, Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), there are also intimations of the eventual death of nature, although at a much later stage: the people-less vistas we are treated to during the submarine's voyage of discovery to the northern hemisphere features untouched houses and verdant nature. *On the Beach* also has a clear antagonist:

nuclear weapons. The *Road* steps away from this by offering no obvious reason for the apocalypse, which brings it closer to post-modern post-apocalypses such as the works by Lessing or Auster. As in Lessing, there is an 'it' in *The Road* that is killing the world and everyone in it, but unlike Lessing there is no magical wall or passage to another dimension altogether, merely the grey, bleak and desolate continuation of time without a future.

Despite, or perhaps *because* of this abiding bleakness, critics have worked hard to imbue the narrative with some kind of meaningful, redemptive framework, from Lydia Cooper's (2011) characterization of *The Road* as a grail narrative to Russell M. Hillier's (2015) analysis of intertextuality in *The Road* as a vindication of textual remembrance. Often, the redemptive readings focus on the overt Christian elements of *The Road*, such as Matthew L. Potts's (2014) straightforward theological reading of it or the aforementioned grail narrative. But reading *The Road* as either redemptive or non-redemptive (meaningful or not meaningful, religious or secular…) is, as some critics have pointed out, not the best approach: it is not a novel that easily accepts a dualistic interpretation. Eric Pudney (2015) points out that "*The Road* actively and forcefully pushes these multiple, mutually exclusive interpretations upon the reader" (308-309), never allowing for simple interpretations. To go back to McHale's language of 'resolving' ontological tension, *The Road* refuses to resolve the apocalypse into either the mystical and religious, or the purely secular, pragmatic and 'earthly'. It is an example of both, and in that sense as well transcends the typical categories of the genre which, as I have discussed previously, generally resolves into either the purely secular or then the supernatural. This puts it closer to the postmodern post-apocalypses (that resist resolution), but they generally resolve into the generally 'impossible' – whereas *The Road* is frighteningly real.

If *MaddAddam*, or rather the aftermath, is one of the possible worlds beyond the wall in *Memoirs of a Survivor*, or outside the city in Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*, and a hopeful one at that, then *The Road* is what happens if the escape from the 'it' is in fact impossible. As such, it is not an escape, but rather, I argue, an arena for the true 'post'-apocalyptic dealing-with-the-apocalypse that was postmodernism, a sober look from afar at the state of the world today. It is a world that requires everything we can marshal in order to make sense, from ancient literature to theological doctrine to simple and abiding love between people. In this chapter, I will perform a reading of the novel in dialogue with previous scholarship, while also making reference to and boiling down the various strands of thoughts that have been presented throughout this thesis. Central to this is my contention of the change in dominants, the turn towards the axiological. But while Atwood's work is, in a sense,

straightforward, McCarthy's *The Road* is far from that. The axiological in its post-postmodern conception, I argue, contains multitudes, yet in a fashion that is non-exclusionary without becoming relative (a complicated achievement to be sure). As Graulund (2010) states: "Depending on what one comes looking for, *The Road* can convincingly sustain readings that suggest we invest our hopes either in nature, in humanity or in God" (Graulund 2010: 76) but that "[w]herever one decides to put one's stake, there can hardly be any doubt, though, that *The Road* expresses a passionate hope that *hope itself matters* (Graulund 2010: 76; emphasis in original). Put in a different way: if postmodernism was the apocalypse, and whatever comes after (post-postmodernism) is the 'post-apocalypse', then *The Road* is the first step towards rebuilding some kind of structure, whether that is of hope or no-hope (or no-hope-for-us, as Atwood has it) remains to be seen.

5.1. Seeking Redemption in *The Road*

The notion of redemption in the secular world is, I argue, closely connected to space. In the religious sense the space of redemption is either out of this world entirely (i.e. heaven), or existing in some inner mental world divorced from the 'real' – a moral, rather than an actual, space, where one might be saved, or rendered without sin, or in some other sense redeemed, despite the outer circumstances remaining the same. In the secular sense, however, it seems to me that it is the world 'without' that needs to be redeemed. Flannery O'Connor is one Southern writer who shares many of McCarthy's predilections towards violent, sudden ends interspaced with serious questions of grace, redemption and faith. Her oft-quoted short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1953), is the tale of a road trip gone wrong: a grandmother, her son, and his family are embarking on an interstate journey, when the grandmother insists they veer off the road to go see a sight from her childhood. Throughout, she is shown to be shallow, racist and opinionated, a wholly unlikeable character, who even smuggled her cat along with her in the car. The cat escapes and causes a road accident, upon which they encounter the Misfit – an escaped convict – and his crew. The grandmother, in yet another fatal blunder, recognizes the criminal and says so, upon which the Misfit has little choice but to get rid of all the witnesses. The grandmother – after having inadvertently caused the deaths of her entire family through her selfishness – experiences a "moment of beatitude" (Boudreaux 2011: 151) moments before being gunned down. This redemption for the grandmother is very Christian:

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provided the realization comes prior to death, anyone can be redeemed and their souls can live on in the space hereafter. What is more, the reader's reaction to the apparently unfair and senseless assignment of grace – perhaps feeling "bewildered or even outraged" at the way "the grandmother's salvation [comes] through the brutal murder of her family, of her grandchildren" (Boudreaux 2011: 151) – functions as an indictment of the readers, as feeling this way aligns them with the Misfit, who claimed the reason for his immoral behaviour was that he did not have physical proof of the truth of Jesus – an extreme form of the common Christian argument that without the judgement and law of God the world would descend into chaos. Accepting the grace of the grandmother's last moment rather than dwelling on the evil in the world is, in an extremely simplified sense, the essence of Christian redemption.

In the secular view of post-apocalypse, leaving the world to the various Misfits who now seem to inhabit it cannot easily be accepted in the same manner. Whereas the Christian outlook posits an ultimate judgement beyond-this-world, a secular world-view does not. Even if you yourself 'die well' so to speak, the world as a whole remains doomed – to emphasize the point: *the world*, the physical non-heavenly or hellish space we call Earth. Even *The Stand*, where the existence and influence of God and the Devil in history is revealed, and where the 'Stand' being taken is primarily a metaphysical one between the powers of good and evil, empathy and rationality, the battlefield is unequivocally the Earth (or, as is more than often the case, the United States). The epilogue makes clear that King's message was more closely aligned with social and ecological issues than religious questions of grace, although there is still the redemption of the natural world[5]. Examples of this kind of earthly redemption in post-apocalyptic narratives abound – the conflict between world-views becomes not a battle taking place on an ethical level, but over purely physical space. In *Oryx and Crake*, Crake's redemptive (or, as Dunning (2005) calls it, 'therapeutic') move is 'clearing away the Chaos' in order to give his creations the room they need to thrive: he did not attempt, for example, to introduce Crakers into the existing world and let their example create a change in the existing paradigms – presumably because, in the *MaddAddam* world (as in ours?), it would have been impossible; the Crakers and all they represent would

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[5] *"All any of us can buy is time,* Stu thought. *Peter's lifetime, his children's lifetimes, maybe the lifetimes of my great-grandchildren. Until the year 2100 maybe, surely no longer than that. Maybe not that long. Time enough for poor old Mother Earth to recycle herself a little. A season of rest."* (*The Stand*: 1433, italics original)

merely have been exploited for commercial gain. Again and again, the post-apocalyptic template shows us that some change is possible, some redemption, but it requires near-universal death – clearing away the debris of the old world to make room for something new. The essence of the post-apocalypse then is a kind of archetypical battle of world-views (as discussed by Wagar (1982)), where one might easily kill the last atheist or the last Christian (depending on which the author considers the bigger bugbear) and bring about change. Mass death itself is not the judgement – and this is one of the major differences between the secular and the religious, at least the dispensationalist-style religious readings of apocalypse – it is not a Rapture that selects you based on your virtue: for example Chaffeur in London's *The Scarlet Plague* is an early example of a 'Misfit' who was spared death. The 'judgement' comes when the various survivors come head to head, carrying their pre-apocalyptic baggage and preparing to lay their stake to the newly depopulated land. They claim the *land*. It is the *land itself* that needs to be redeemed – at least in the American apocalyptic tradition.

Douglas Robinson in his *American Apocalypses* (1985) traces this back to the early settlers of America, who came to the New World looking for inviolate land where they might escape the perceived decadence of Catholic Europe: "as the term *New World* suggests […] the ideology that American writers at their most mythic invariably engage is *apocalyptic*: it is an ideology very much concerned with the end of old eras and the beginning of new eras, with the transition in space and time from an Old to a New World, from the Age of Europe (decadence, decay, death) to the Age of America (rebirth, return to primeval innocence)" (Robinson 1985: 2). The early settlers of America arrived at the frontier explicitly because they needed *space* to build their heteoropias – heterotopia here in the sense Foucault (1984) uses it as a space of perfection in an imperfect world, a kind of realized Utopia. After expanding west, they eventually reached the coast: what followed was the systematic genocide of the native population followed by rapid modernization. Although wilderness still exists today, the space needed to construct a viable heterotopia is ever-smaller. Consider M. Night Shyamalan's thriller *The Village* (2004), which at first seems to be a period piece about a small nineteenth century Pennsylvania village besieged by creatures in the woods and entirely isolated from the rest of the world. When one of the children, who have only ever known life in the village, is stabbed and lies dying, the Elders of the village allow one of the other young (who is conveniently blind) to leave in order to find medicine. In a typical Shyamalan twist, it is revealed that it is in fact the modern day, and that the village and its woods are in fact situated in a wildlife preserve. The 'Elders' are

merely disenchanted modern men and women who built the village in an attempt to escape their past traumas, including the rich billionaire who owns the preserve and arranged no-fly zones around it to make sure no hint of the modern world could pierce the veil. Although the premise is thought-provoking in its own way, it is also almost entirely unbelievable when considered logically – and in the case of the children kept unaware and tormented by monsters (in reality the Elders ensuring the children do not wander too far), tantamount to child abuse. The movie simultaneously indulges in and subverts the fantasy of finding a land of primeval innocence somewhere – indulges by letting the viewer briefly imagine it, and subverts it by showing us it is impossible. In the industrialized, post-Baudrillardian America, the only hope of finding space that is inviolate is through apocalypse. Atwood's *MaddAddam*-trilogy toys with the idea of the return to innocence, of washing away the chaos, but does so through the patently absurd Crakers, showing us the absolute distance between ourselves and the twisted image we have of said 'primeval innocence'. There is, quite simply, no more space.

This is perhaps why much post-apocalyptic fiction is so automatically redemptive, as it allows us a second shot at filling up the world as we wish – the survivors are, in that sense, like the Pilgrims going to America. But, perhaps like the said pilgrims, they fail to account for the fact that even a post-apocalyptic world is filled with ruins, of both people and the places they lived, and the traumas of the Old World are not necessarily so easy to leave behind. *The Road* adds another dimension to this: what if the Pilgrims arriving in the New World found not a verdant, 'empty' wilderness ready to be turned into a heteropic expression of the famous 'shining city upon a hill',[6] but rather a blasted waste, unable to sustain life? The post-apocalyptic travel narrative only allows travel in one temporal direction – forward – and said Pilgrims, however much they might wish to return home to safer lands, find themselves marooned in a space (and time) devoid of any chance of redemption – leaving only death. Redemption requires space, because space makes life possible.

Although Robinson does not point it out, the apocalypse of the pilgrims is also revelatory in nature: they witnessed not what was there, but what they wanted. Instead of seeing the already-inhabited land, they sighted a pristine land (or a land that could be redeemed from the heathens, presumably). *The Road*,

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[6] A reference to Matthew 5:14 from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: ""You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."; popular among American politicians and religious leaders from the start of the colonization of the Americas.

from the very beginning, dispels the failed revelation of the paradise on Earth – the vision it gives us is not just bleak and desolate, it is also failing, "the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world" (*The Road*: 1). The first image we have of this world is, tellingly, oneiric: the man dreams that he and the boy had wandered into a cave, "[l]ike pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast" (*The Road*: 1), where they come across a frightening beast: "a creature […] with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders. […] Crouching there pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it. Its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell" (*The Road*: 2). Although it is not made explicit, the creature seems human somehow – or rather, some form of subterranean descendant of 'human', a blind, translucent dweller of darkness, like one finds living inside caves or at the bottom of the ocean. Stark (2013), who has analysed vision and the act of seeing in *The Road*, points out the duality of this imagery, the "notion of compromised sight" which "simultaneously evokes the capacity to see" (Stark 2013: 78) – the beast, although blind, is also translucent "enabling them to see into its interior spaces to its bowls, heart, and brain" (Stark 2013: 78).

Sight continues to be an important motif in *The Road*, but so is the apparently inevitable 'glaucoma'. The cave works as a metaphor for the book itself – a dystopian vision of an inhospitable place only lit up by the wan light of the lantern that the two carry with them, the inhabitants of which in the main have become blind and predatory, yet remain painfully translucent when brought into the light. The 'light' they carry, in turn, is another construct of *The Road*, repeatedly referred to as 'carrying the fire', which I will return to in a moment. Like most passages in *The Road*, this cave-dream sustains multiple readings. One reading is of survival: the man, although they come across no other life anywhere, speculates that there may yet be lonely survivors out in the far oceans: "Or life in the deep. Great squid propelling themselves over the floor of the sea in the cold darkness. Shuttling past like trains, eyes the size of saucers" (*The Road*: 234). Eyes, and seeing, and survival, are all repeated here again – in this case as with the cave the survival of something alien to us, that lives deep down in the ocean. In this reading, the blind creature is the ultimate human survivor, the end-point of the race, not unlike the Morlocks of *The Time Machine*. Regressed, subterranean, but surviving for long enough to evolve into something different. Is that a form of redemption? *The Road* at least offers it as an alternative.

In the beginning of the novel, the reader is unlikely to make this connection - the dream features on the very first pages, after all, before any other spatial

or temporal orientation has taken place. That orientation occurs soon enough: as mentioned, the plot of the novel sees the boy and the man travelling down the road, southwards, away from the encroaching winter. Corby (2014) like many others, has remarked upon the fact that *The Road* is in fact quite spaceless, which, in the context of redemption, is significant. He identifies only three chronotopes: "These are the road itself, the sea, and chanced-upon, variously manifested domestic space" (Corby 2014: 22). The road is here the post-apocalyptic road, rather than Bakhtin's road, winding through familiar territory rendered radically uncanny by the apocalypse. Early on there are references to other roads, other experiences: "No more balefires on the distant ridges. He thought the bloodcults must have all consumed one another. No one traveled this road. No roadagents, no marauders" (*The Road*: 15). As Corby (2014) points out, "Even the remaining, intermittently inscribed signs of early attempts at survival and organization mounted in response to the catastrophe seem oddly, impotently, irrelevant" (Corby 2014: 22). The sea, their goal to the south at this early stage, still offers some potential for redemption – "a vast blank canvas upon which they can project the precarious, weakly entertained hopes that will give them just enough motivation to continue" (Corby 2014: 22), although more so for the boy, who tentatively asks whether the sea might be blue. The man answers "I dont know. It used to be" (*The Road*: 194), although he had no hope for it: "He said that everything depended on reaching the coast, yet waking in the night he knew that all of this was empty and no substance to it" (*The Road*: 29). But although one might see some kind of quest-like journey of redemption in their journey south, an approach which resembles Lydia Cooper's (2011) reading of the entire novel as a grail narrative (invested in matters of seeking, travel, water, faith, and asking the correct questions), the sea, when they reach it, offers nothing different from the rest of the world: "the gray beach with the slow combers rolling dull and leaden and the distant sound of it. Like the desolation of some alien sea breaking on the shores of a world unheard of" (*The Road*: 230): a place so strange that it seems to lie on some other planet. The three chronotopes of *The Road* break up into just two – the home, and the road.

The home, or the domestic sphere, offers another 'space' of redemption: if the natural world in itself cannot provide respite, is it nonetheless possible to create your own? There are a number of times and places during the harrowing journey that the pair find a place to sit down and rest, eat, and spend time together, without necessarily feeling like they were "two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover" (*The Road*: 138), spaces that perhaps fulfil Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) definition of 'place' as safe and familiar rather than the

wide open danger of the road. Corby's (2014) discussion of 'domestic space' mainly involves the kind of environment where, in the dark of the night, the man and the boy are able to go beyond the basic necessities of 'the road' (survival, travel, looting supplies and food, avoiding 'bad guys') and create "an *oikos*, the environment proper to such stories, the environment that shelters, protects and preserves the past as it sustains life in the present" (Corby 2014: 26). The tales Corby refers to are the "[o]ld stories of courage and justice as he remembered them" (*The Road*: 42) that the man tells the boy, stories that presumably are the heart of the notion of 'the fire', which is without a doubt the most redemptive idea in the novel (and in the entire McCarthyan oeuvre to date). The fire, which the man repeatedly claims they are carrying, and which comes up time and again after and during times of crisis, appears as a kind of cobbled-together ethical system, a way to differentiate 'bad guys' from 'good guys': they do not eat people because they are carrying the fire, for example. Corby (2014: 29) explicitly identifies the fire with the fire of the hearth, the fire of the domestic, cultural space. Cooper (2011) likewise sees it as a manifestation of the idea of transplanted hearth-fires, as carried by migrating tribes, which "illuminates the theme of inheritance in the novel" (Cooper 2011: 227). Many others (e.g. De Bruyn 2010, Hillier 2015) have pointed out this theme – and generally in the context of the domestic, the home. Of course the fire, like all other things in *The Road*, is far from a straightforward concept. Pudney (2015: 295) for example points out the irony that carrying the fire "represents goodness in a world which has been destroyed by fire", referring to the ever-present signs of fire in the world around them. The origin of the fire as hearth-fire is likely enough: at the very end of *No Country for Old Men* (2005), the novel McCarthy published before *The Road*, sheriff Bell – incapable of defending the people he set out to defend from the evils brought on by money, drugs and a circle of violence – decides to retire, realizing the world is no place for a man of old virtues such as his own. He recounts a dream he had then, of his late father riding past him in the dark, carrying a fire to prepare a camp up ahead:

> I was on horseback goin through the mountains of a night. Goin through this pass in the mountains. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and he [Bell's father] rode past me and kept on goin. Never said nothing. He just rode on past and he had this blanket wrapped around him and he had his head down and when he rode past I seen he was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the horn from the light inside of it. About the color of the moon. And in the dream I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up.
>
> (*No Country for Old Men*: 309)

In this setting the fire-carrying is inversed: the dead are carrying the fire ahead of the living, rather than the fire being inherited from father to son, but the basic notion remains: the fire, carried, is a way of transplanting a safe, domestic space, a space where stories can be told and transmitted through the generations, and a necessary component of what is ethical and good in the world.

But as Rambo (2008) concludes, however redemptive one might find the ending – where the boy finds a 'home' of sorts with a new family after his father dies – or select parts of the story – such as when they sit down by the fire and share their food with Ely, an old man and the only named character in the novel, or when they stumble across the abandoned shelter with its stores of food – the question of "is there redemption or not?" (Rambo 2008: 114) ends up being far too simplistic. Rambo (2008) herself proposes that *The Road*'s narrative is primarily one of traumatic rupture which halts the typical progression of the American redemptive narrative:

> [R]eading the descent as a rupture calls into question the linear progression from one event to the other. The temporality in trauma reveals that death is not behind and life forward; instead, the traumatic event means that something of that past event returns in the present. The past is not simply behind; fragments of the past remain and persist in the present. Second, reading the descent as a rupture resists a binary reading of death and life, in which life stands in opposition to death, and vice-versa. A traumatic reading exposes the ways in which oppositional understandings of death and life do not account for the experience of living on, in which death and life are present in a more mixed and complex relationship.
>
> (Rambo 2008: 112)

Rambo's interpretation of trauma theory and the idea of past events returning in the present is similar to Žižek's notion of the past retroactively changing in the present; rather it is an active player in the present, shaping but also being shaped by us. The motif of inheritance seems more apt here: the fire represents

inheritance as much as it represents any form of redemption. Trauma can be inherited, but – as *The Road* makes clear – so can things such as ethical thinking, faith, and hope. The second question – the question of 'living on', rather than surviving and being redeemed, is another matter altogether. In the radically de-spatialized world of *The Road*, there seems to be little recourse but to either die or 'live on'.

Rambo (2008) does not really answer the question of what it means to 'live on' in her own article, ending on the note: "As readers, we are handed over the perilous question: 'What does it mean to witness to what remains?' The question is not who will save the world but, instead, who will witness its shattering?" (Rambo 2008: 115). Cathy Caruth, who Rambo used as a source for many of her ideas of bearing witness rather than surviving, wrote a response that, in some way, clarifies this. I shall quote part of it here:

> The challenge of "bearing witness" is rather an attempt to create a sense of history in the context that appears to mark the end, precisely, of historical understanding. The ethics of witness—both that of the survivor and that of the academic critics—is a new ethics, retaining, it could be argued, the imperative inherited from biblical commands, but transferring this imperative to an experience and language that precisely exceeds the confines, or extends after the end, of biblically sanctioned interpretation. The "responsibility" of reading as ethical readers—rather than as neutral historians or critics—is paradoxically a way of communicating this remainder of biblical and theological force that testimonial Holocaust texts carry with them precisely at the moment that they signal the end of such theological modes of interpretation. These texts, and our reception of them, would bear witness to a new kind of history that is itself a kind of remainder of history.
> (Caruth 2008: 124)

What Caruth means by 'theological force' in many ways reiterates the same points that many critics have picked up in McCarthy's text – the various references to divinity, the intertextual biblical allusions, the difficulty of 'resolving' the text into a secular or a religious mode. She claims that "the language of theology survives, but as a remainder and a perplexity—a tool of struggle and survival, like the tools used by the man and the boy in *The Road*" (Caruth 2008: 128). As to the sense of history 'after the end' she is, in the vein of Heffernan and Berger, referring specifically to (Jewish) history after the Holocaust; suggesting like they do that our present history is indeed a 'remainder' of that past, i.e. a traumatic symptom. But she does add one more interesting point, namely the idea of responsibility and ethical reading, which is something that (arguably) the post-modern mode of criticism has lacked – perhaps intentionally. This 'turn towards the ethical' is still marred by

postmodern relativism however, as 'ethical' implies 'unethical', and the question arises of who gets to decide that. That is why 'axiological' is perhaps more accurate as a descriptor of what's going on: it is the question of what we *value*, rather than what is (on some kind of non-reachable objective level) ethical or unethical. *The Road*, as I see it, exemplifies this turn through its chosen genre in a way that really untangles the underlying issues of 'what comes after the end'.

5.2. Living On in The *Road*: Time with an end

As established, the road of *The Road* is largely a space that is dangerous, vast and undifferentiated – and it offers very little room for redemptive narratives. Inherent in the spatial side of the road is the temporal, the other side of the chronotope. Time is, naturally, running out – from the father's realization that their time in the north is running short, to the constant feeling of being hounded or chased which forces them to leave every 'good place' they find – a waterfall where they find a small colony of morels, the subterranean bunker, and the encampment on the beach. This feeling of time running out is what motivates their constant movement down the road and through space, and forms the backbone of the narrative: scavenging new sources of food, moving away from the cold or from dangers, avoiding staying at one place for too long. As the father says about the waterfall when the boy asks why they cannot stay: "It's getting colder every day. And the waterfall is an attraction. It was for us and it will be for others and we dont know who they will be and we cant hear them coming. It's not safe" (*The Road*: 42-43). It is important to note that it is not that they are running out of *space* – there is a seemingly endless amount of room remaining – it is time: more specifically, *time alive*. At the very beginning of the novel, the father realizes his own time is about to run out prematurely (as ironic as that may be in a world of near-universal death) – he is afflicted by some unknown respiratory disease that causes him to cough up blood, perhaps caused by the ash in the air.

There are a few other post-apocalyptic novels that deal with the same notion of limited time, the most well-known of which being Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957). Claire Curtis (2010) in her book-length analysis of post-apocalyptic fiction and the social contract starts off by analysing *The Road* and *On the Beach* as the *exceptions* to the typical narrative of the post-apocalypse, which is typically a story of how to rebuild civil society after being given a clean slate. *On the Beach*, she argues, shows an a-typical post-apocalypse in that civil society in fact continues to function; with beaches, bars, policemen and hotels

still in business, and the government keeping civil order (even handing out suicide pills that can be picked up at the local pharmacy before the radiation arrives). *The Road*, by contrast, shows a world where civil society is entirely impossible to construct as there is no 'nature' that can be returned to in order to create the 'state of nature' necessary for restarting society. She points out that Hobbes and Locke and the other political philosophers she quotes presupposed some kind of natural bounty from which civilization could be built: "A social contract cannot emerge in a functioning society; and a social contract cannot emerge from a dead world" (Curtis 2010: 35). She asks the same question I, Rambo, and others have asked, namely: "what it means to go on living when life has become physically pointless" (Curtis 2010: 26). Curtis's answer is curt enough: "These two novels do not depict states of nature, they do not outline how we survive the end, and instead they detail how to endure the end and how to die with grace" (Curtis 2010: 37). In *On the Beach*, death should come with as little fuss as possible, with a minimum of crying – a stoic acceptance. *The Road* in turn shows that any amount of fighting, any amount of cannibalism and 'anything goes' attempts at survival still amount to the same thing in the end: death, or, more specifically, the fear of death, which she calls "the underlying premise of postapocalyptic [sic] fiction" (Curtis 2010: 16). All we can do in that scenario is to face it – which is what 'carrying the fire' means, in Curtis's opinion.

Although I agree with Curtis in that *The Road* and *On the Beach* are both distinct from many, perhaps most, exemplars of the genre, She makes the mistake of attributing the apocalypse in *The Road* to nuclear weapons, as in *On the Beach* (Curtis 2010: 31). There is no particular indication that the mass-death of *The Road* was, in fact caused by a nuclear weapons, although it is possible that they contributed to the event. The only reference to the actual cause of the apocalypse is a short description: "The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions" (*The Road*: 54), which may well indicate the dropping of nuclear bombs (or why not the impact of a meteor?). But there may have been any number of other reasons, from ecological to social, surrounding the event – much as in *The Postman*, where the apocalypse was not a singular apocalypse but rather a "shotgun blast of one midscale catastrophe after another" (*The Postman*: 37). The fact that we do not know allows us to speculate, but it also disallows definite statements: at the moment, ecological collapse is the most pertinent fear we have, but in the past it would have been nuclear war, and the future may yet bring new fears that can fill the empty referent of the apocalypse in *The Road*. *On the Beach*, by contrast, is clearly speaking against nuclear proliferation – a very real, very historical fear,

which in the time since the novel was published has led to various nuclear non-proliferation treaties that have drastically cut down on the amount of nuclear weapons available in the world. Although one *can* read *The Road* as a warning against nuclear war, as for example Tim Blackmore (2009) does, it is only *one* interpretation – and a clearly didactic one.

What remains is the 'underlying premise' of post-apocalyptic fiction, namely the fear of extinction or the fear of death, and how to face it. The creation of a civil society, as Curtis (2010) rightly points out, is often the way "[survivors] could somehow solve the problem of fear produced after an apocalyptic event. Fear informs the movement from the state of nature like setting of the postapocalypse to civil society" (Curtis 2010: 16), yet in *The Road* we find very few traces of civil society – new or old. There are some scattered examples: mainly in the roving bands of cannibals and roadagents that the two try to avoid, but also in scattered allusions to a "commune" or "refugees" (*The Road*: 82). There is even an inkling of a rule of law when, towards the end of the novel, they meet a thief who steals their cart. The thief is described as "an outcast from one of the communes and the fingers of his right hand had been cut away. He tried to hide it behind him. A sort of fleshy spatula" (*The Road*: 273). This suggests that the man is familiar with the communes and their laws, and that it is possible – in a return to earlier forms of punishment – to be punished for theft by having your hands cut off. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, points out that the reason for corporal punishment being so common in pre-modern times was because "the body [was] in most cases the only property accessible" (Foucault 1984: 25) – it is only with the mercantile economy that other forms of punishment, such as forced labour or fines, were implemented. The man, after having recovered their possessions, forces the thief to strip naked, something that will almost certainly kill him: "I'm going to leave you the way you left us" (*The Road*: 276) he says, Hammurabi-like. They do not need the clothes, the punishment is not a 'fine' in other words, and in fact they later attempt to return them after the boy begs his father to show some mercy. The punishing act is perpetrated against the thief's body, as the thief has nothing else to offer (aside from his life), but as the boy's insistence shows, even such pre-modern laws no longer mean anything: "He was just hungry, Papa. He's going to die" (*The Road*: 277). In a sense, *The Road* is 'post-postapocalyptic', much like the *MaddAddam*-trilogy: in both, some originary disaster led to the formation of a new society different from ours (in *MaddAddam* et al., the dystopia is that society), and in both cases, that new society turned out to be insufficient. By the time of the narrative in *The Road*, the effects of "such late history" (*The Road*: 95) still apparent in the space around them and the messages the man

sees in them are fading, like the rest of the world. What remains is the interminable walk towards death, shown the most clearly in the man's ever-worsening condition.

The temporal aspect of *The Road* then seems centred around the inevitable march towards death, and the manner by which one faces that death. There is one other Pulitzer-prize winning writer who has written extensively about the fear of death: Ernst Becker, in his 1973 book *The Denial of Death*. Becker's thoughts, although by now several decades old, continue to resonate, and seem especially pertinent when applied to *The Road*. In summary, Becker proposes that the central causation behind everything human – culture, psychology, value systems, the creation of civil society – comes from our unique understanding of ourselves as mortal, an understanding that appears at some point during our childhood and remains with us for the rest of our lives (at least as far as modern man is concerned in a post-Darwin world). He further argues that the method the human animal has found to battle the existential dread that stems from this realization is by aspiring to heroism, a heroism that can transcend death and bestow some form of immortality to each individual: "Society itself is a codified hero system, which means that society everywhere is a living myth of the significance of human life, a defiant creation of meaning" (Becker 1973: 7). We do not know anything much about the other now-barren societies of *The Road*, but in the 'society of two' that is the man and the boy the creation of 'the fire' definitely seems to be a kind of 'defiant creation of meaning'. There are many places in the novel where this 'defiant creation of meaning' takes place, with an emphasis on 'defiant': meaning in the face of meaninglessness. At one point the man, faced with a forest fire in the distance, feels something stir: "[t]he color of it moved something in him long forgotten. Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember" (*The Road*: 31). Out of the fire of the old world the man creates ritual and remembrance. When washing the blood and gore of a man he killed in defence of his son from his son's hair, he states "All of this like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" (*The Road*: 77-78). The man's wife, and the boy's mother, before taking her own life points this out as well: "A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love" (*The Road*: 59). Out of the worst circumstances, some ritual form appears. The curious thing here is that this is all 'new' in a sense – although the man speaks to God from time to time, it seems clear that he is aware that the creation of the fire is not merely repeating Christian dogma. At the very end, after the boy has been rescued by the man and his family, the woman "would

talk to him sometimes about God", but although the boy "tried to talk to God" the "best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget" (*The Road*: 306). Although religious in nature, it feels perhaps more like – as Caruth says – the theological language here is used as a tool rather than anything else. A tool to 'live on' in the post-apocalypse.

Although Becker speaks of heroism, what that boils down to is rather a variety of ways of shielding yourself from the certainty of death: these methods are what he calls character armour, the "vital lie" (Becker 1973: 55) of one's lifestyle that protects against the vagaries of chaotic reality: "these defenses allow him to feel a basic sense of self-worth, of meaningfulness, of power. They allow him to feel that he controls his life and his death, and the really does live and act as a willful and free individual, that he has a unique and self-fashioned identity, that he is somebody" (Becker 1973: 55). Heroism is a way of asserting such control – perhaps like the man asserts control over the one thing he *can* control, namely the manner of his and his son's own death. Becker discusses Kierkegaard's thoughts on the inauthenticity of people whose only means of heroic self-expression follow the specific modes of conduct as demarcated by their culture, what Becker calls "the 'automatic culture man'", "man as confined by culture, a slave to it, who imagines that he has an identity if he pays his insurance premium, that he has control of his life if he guns his sports car or works his electric toothbrush" (Becker 1973: 74). The dilemma is of course that if one leaves these safe, already-extant alternatives, the resulting feeling is one of existential loss, of feeling lost. And it is in that existential loss that one might build something more – out of the "ideas of the shipwrecked" as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset puts it[7]. Post-apocalyptic fiction is entirely built around this idea, of taking away the possibility of being an 'automatic culture man', the possibility of building one's sense of heroic control through already-existing society and culture, and instead forcing each individual to face their own values and disvalues. But what then? Kierkegaard's solution, famously, is faith, which comes at the end of a chain of breakages: "Man breaks through the bonds of merely cultural heroism; he destroys the character lie that had him perform as a hero in the everyday social scheme of things; and by doing so he opens himself up to infinity, to the possibility of cosmic heroism, to the very service of God" (Becker 1973: 91). By allying one's own inner self to that of the final Creator, one can attain "cosmic significance by affirming [one's] connection with the invisible mystery at the heart of creation" (Becker 1973:

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[7] From *The Revolt of the Masses* (1923), translated from Spanish, and quoted in Becker (1973: 89)

91). This is, again, a rehashing of the same argument that has been heard many times throughout this thesis – from Eliade to D.H. Lawrence to Franz Borkenau, the answer to the existential dread engendered by the removal of society seems to be faith.

Becker is not quite done there though – he continues by analysing Freud (by way of Otto Rank), who was famously a-theistic as far as theological explanations are concerned. Although I will not go into too much detail regarding psychoanalysis – Becker discusses everything from the way anality is an expression of man's creatureliness to a child's fear of being eaten like other animals are – the end result of a wholly rational psychoanalysis is, according to Becker, the realization that some form of character armour is necessary: "The real world is simply too terrible to admit; it tells man that he is a small, trembling animal who will decay and die" (Becker 1973: 133). The human-animal, the callousness of the universe, is expressed in an oft-quoted passage in *The Road*:

> He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like groundfoxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it.
>
> (*The Road*: 138)

When looked at this way, the end of the world in *The Road* is no different from the kind of 'apocalypse' experienced by any human being who has realized that their own personal immortality project (be it an artistic endeavour, religious adherence or a cultural project of some kind) does not change the fundamental facts of the world – the vacuum of the uncaring universe, the mortal, animal nature of man, and the realization that both time and space and self are all fleeting and must, in time, be returned to its lender. According to Becker, the end result of either a philosophical or scientific (psychoanalytical) foray into this existentialist conundrum must be that "at the very furthest reaches of scientific description, psychology has to give way to 'theology' – that is, to a world-view that absorbs the individual's conflicts and guilt and offers him the possibility for some kind of heroic apotheosis" (Becker 1973: 196). The ultimate problem is that "man simply cannot justify his own heroism; he cannot fit himself into his own cosmic plan and make it believable" (Becker 1973: 196). In *The Road*, the man clearly holds on to some form of theological belief, perhaps self-created like his wife suggests, and although he wavers in it from time to time – as in the quote above – at his own death he holds on to it: he really sees 'the fire' in his

son, feels that he has given him some form of inheritance. The culmination of his own immortality project, if you will.

The question is, what do these two things – the waning space for redemption, and the exposed fear of annihilation – have to do with post-postmodernism? As I will argue below, they form the basis of an axiological system that is yet a world 'in its becoming' to quote *The Road*'s enigmatic end.

5.3. "A creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end" – A return to the human

Robinson (1985) suggests that there is an alternative solution to the "fictional ordering of reality into end-oriented narratives" (Robinson 1985: 231) – i.e. the problem of teleology that Kermode and others have identified as one of the central issues of post-modernism and which typically culminates in the 'heroic apotheosis' that Becker speaks of. He suggests that "[the] ultimate achievement as a world-redeeming hero is not apotheosis or deification, the elevation of a human being to the singular status of a god, but 'apoanthroposis' or humanization, the recognition of a shared humanity" (Robinson 1985: 231). The question of what constitutes a 'shared humanity' is at the heart of post- and post-postmodern polity today, and the central concern of for instance Atwood's *MaddAddam*-series, where the world is split into a series of echo-chambers by pure necessity. In *The Road*, the community we follow is the community of two – the man and the boy – and any other communities that they meet on the way (until the very end) are either hostile or isolationist. But that is not to say that they were always just the two of them: previously there had been at least three, the man, the boy, and the boy's mother. But even in birth, the connection seems to be the strongest between the man and the boy: McCarthy gives us this description of the boy's birth on the eve of the apocalypse only after a flashback detailing the night the wife walks out alone into the dark to kill herself:

> Always so deliberate, hardly surprised by the most outlandish events. A creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end. They sat at the window and ate in their robes by candlelight a midnight supper and watched distant cities burn. A few nights later she gave birth in their bed by the light of a drycell lamp. Gloves meant for dishwashing. […] Her cries meant nothing to him. Beyond the window just the gathering cold, the fires on the horizon.
>
> (*The Road*: 61)

Although 'a creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end' presumably refers to the whole human race, it might simply refer to the wife alone as well – and indeed it seems in a sense that she has the better of it, has figured out the truth of their world better than him. Is Curtis (2010) correct, that *The Road* is a novel about meeting death in the right way? It is without a doubt one of the motifs, and at a glance it can be difficult to ascertain any other 'motive' for its creation. It is a novel about inheritance, where the only thing being inherited is a world without space for redemption.

The necessity or non-necessity of survival is certainly one question we are faced with today: there seems to be nothing inherently wrong in discussing whether or not humankind has a right to exist on the planet (especially considering the almost unprecedented harm we seem to be inflicting on the biosphere), and neither is there anything wrong with discussing how one might meet calamity: with acceptance, with suicide, through the 'defiant creation of meaning', or any other reaction stemming from one's own personal view of reality. The scene of the wife's suicide in *The Road* is in a way perfectly rational, when faced with the world they live in. Taking control over one's own death seems to be the final, and only, power anyone has: "She would do it with a flake of obsidian. He'd taught her himself" (*The Road*: 60). Various interpretations of their discussion have been presented, but most of them go down the now-familiar lines of redemption versus non-redemption. The woman points out that "It's the right thing to do. […] Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont face it" (*The Road*: 58). Throughout the novel, situations arise where the father may be forced to kill his son: in fact, the gun is more thought of as a means to a swift end than as a means to defend themselves – the one time the gun is fired, at a roadagent holding the boy hostage, the risky shot might as well have hit the boy. But that was the point: the bandit perhaps did not know that the bullets in the gun were intended for the man and the boy anyway, and the fact that the man's aim was true and the bullet hit the bandit and not the boy was actually immaterial. Killing the boy would have been preferable to leaving him with the bandits. As they are running away – their escape still not certain – the man thinks of the gun: "A single round left in the revolver. You will not face the truth. You will not" (*The Road*: 71). This repetition of the mother's words, of 'truth', of the refusal to face it, continues throughout. Later, after having almost been caught in the house of a group of serial cannibals, the two hide in the bushes outside. He tells the boy: "If they find you you are going to have to do it. Do you understand? […] You know how to do it. You put it in your mouth and point up. Do it quick and

hard. Do you understand? Stop crying" (*The Road*: 119). His intention had been to run and lead them away, but he decides against it because the boy clearly did not 'understand'. As he lies there, his mind churns with the question of 'doing it': "Can you do it? When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesnt fire? It has to fire. What if it doesnt fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing?" (*The Road*: 120)

Another of the few conversations the man has about death and suicide is with the character Ely – the only named character in the novel – which solidifies many of these specific ideas. When asked "How long have you been on the road?" Ely replies "I was always on the road", adding "I knew this was coming. […] This or something like it. I always believed in it." The man asks him if he tried "to get ready for it", to which Ely replied: "No. What would you do? […] People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didnt believe in that. Tomorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there. […] Even if you knew what to do you wouldnt know what to do. You wouldnt know if you wanted to do it or not" (*The Road*: 179). The reason, it may be noted, why the man and the boy could stop and help Ely was because they were flush with loot from an untouched underground shelter they had stumbled upon earlier (one of the few 'domestic' chronotopes of the novel) – before that they had nearly starved to death. They were alive, and sharing their windfall with Ely, because someone had 'tried to get ready for it'. Yet the fact the shelter was never in use before speaks of how pointless the preparation by the unknown original owners of the shelters had been (for them). Likewise, the man and the boy giving Ely a few cans of food to eat probably extended his life with a few days, perhaps a week, but as the boy says after they leave him behind: "He's going to die" (*The Road*: 186). What Ely intimates through his comment on whether one would even want to prepare or not ultimately comes back to the question of 'so what' – of what it means to survive or not to survive – survive *for what reason*. As Ely puts it: "When we're all gone at last then there'll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He'll be out in the road there with nothing to do and nobody to do it to. He'll say: Where did everybody go? And that's how it will be. What's wrong with that?" (*The Road*: 184). Tellingly, that is the last sentence in the paragraph: we never know if the man answered anything, or if the boy did. Like many other such paragraph-ending questions or question-statements, McCarthy seems to redirect the query at us, at the reader. What *is* wrong with the idea that mankind goes extinct?

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McCarthy, I would argue, answers this question by leaving the boy alive. As the man lies dying at the end of the novel, he entrusts the gun to the boy and tells him: "I cant hold my son dead in my arms. I thought I could but I cant" (*The Road*: 298). There is no talk any more of the boy killing himself, only that he should "Keep going south. Do everything the way we did it" (*The Road*: 297). Although the boy begs him to "take me with you" (*The Road*: 298) the man refuses. "You're going to be lucky. I know you are" (*The Road*: 299). And as it turns out, the boy is lucky: right after his father's death he encounters another good guy, who neither takes his pistol nor rapes, kills and eats him. The 'truth' is though that the first person the boy met on the road might as well have been a 'bad guy'; that this was not the case was indeed just luck (or, if one prefers, some form of divine intervention): and even though the boy is safe for the moment, for the reader that merely means a continuing and continual anxiety about the boy's fate. McCarthy refuses to end the story by death, but rather forces it to continue in the reader's imagination.

My interpretation of this ending differs slightly from some who have seen it, in various guises, as either a reaffirmation of the ability for the human spirit to soldier on or as a pointless gesture that only prolongs the inevitable. What this ending suggests is naturally survival – and how survival is necessary for chronotopes to endure. After all, without the 'image of Man', the chronotope is sorely lacking. As such, it is a comment on what is necessary to tell a story: the story can *end* with everyone dead, as in a Greek tragedy, but it cannot *continue*. And McCarthy clearly wants the story to continue – the fire to be carried on. What 'the fire' is, then, in this context, is something fundamental, a thing we can all agree on – the point or points where all the various circles that encompass our multiple, subjective understandings of the world meet. *The Road* is a novel that could only be written in its particular genre – the post-apocalypse – explicitly because of this. After reading *The Road*, all readers are likely to at least agree on a few basic – or, rather, fundamental – things, while still being able to discuss *ad infinitum* everything else. Is the child God, *a* (new) god, or nothing? Is the apocalypse man-made or the cause of some *force majeure*, and what does this mean? Is there hope after the father's death? Is this a tale of redemption, or a tale of despair? *The Road* has the space – vast, empty, ash-filled as it is – to encompass all of these questions, and all the answers to them. In expressing opinions about matters such as faith, redemption, inheritance, love, and the ethics of suicide, readers express their own ontological status, their own situatedness in time and space – their own chronotopes. The fundamentals of *The Road* however hearken back to one of the most universal aspects of humanity – survival (of humanity). Considering

survival irrelevant is, like so many other things, also represented in the novel of course, in the form of the mother and Ely, who both seem to see no real problem with the extinction of themselves and consequently the human race. But neither is really a proponent of 'voluntary human extinction': the woman rationalizes that death on one's own terms is preferable to inevitable death and torture on somebody else's. Ely, despite saying "[t]hings will be better when everybody's gone" (*The Road*: 183), nonetheless accepts the food from the man despite the obvious danger of trusting others on the road. As to the question of who things will be better for when we are all dead, he simply says "Everybody" (*The Road*: 183). Yet he does not as such wish he were dead, but rather "I might wish I had died. When you're alive you've always got that ahead of you" (*The Road*: 179). This is largely the same truth the man's wife speaks of: life can be unbearable to live, but that does not mean one wishes the extinction of all life, or does not accept an improvement in one's own conditions: "I wouldnt have even come this far but I was hungry" (*The Road*: 182), as Ely says. *The Road* is not saying continued survival is the choice of everyone, but it is saying that without survival there can be nothing more: *chronos* and *topos* surely exist independently of the human, but there is always the third part of the chronotope: the image of Man.

The fundamental idea of human survival spawns a few other fundamentals, some of which we have already covered here. One such is remembrance, or remembering: again, this is a fundamental thing – one must remember in order to be able to construct a timeline or order the chaos of sensory inputs. The theme of remembrance, aside from its place in the construct of 'the fire' itself is, also reiterated in the actual final passage of *The Road*. It is separate from the end of the man and the boy's story, and seems to look back at some more ancient time: "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains […] On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again" (*The Road*: 307). Many critics have talked about this final passage, and the last word of the novel, *mystery*: "In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery" (*The Road*: 307). It is, surely, a rather poetic passage, and like the novel as a whole, it 'sustains many readings'. Stefan Skrimshire (2011) writes that "[f]or many people, the implication of McCarthy's conclusion will be to hold out for a revival of humanity or human community at all costs" (Skrimshire 2011: 13) – the aforementioned redemptive reading. Skrimshire however feels that this is not the entire mystery of the ending: "ultimately, in *The Road*, the desire for closure, or an end, is not met; all that is met is a deepening of its mystery: like

the living, recited and continuing memory of a past that will never return, and yet refuses to disappear" (Skrimshire 2011: 13). Here he makes reference to trauma theory as well as what he calls Derrida's 'apocalyptic' thinking, which is quite similar to Žižek's: "Derrida expresses a notion of the future as being not a future-present but as something perpetually out of reach. It produces, like death, the effect of interminable non-occurrence" (Skrimshire 2011: 9) – in this he agrees with Rambo's assertion of the novel as calling into question the notion of linear progress towards an end. *The Road*'s final passage definitely embodies strange temporal notions – 'once' hearkening back to a past where 'things older than man' exist, yet on their backs 'maps of the world in its becoming': a sort of temporal map, rather than a spatial one, mapping out the future (our present day? Our past? Our future?). In other words, the ending scene celebrates the "persistence and memory of that which refuses to be forgotten" (Skrimshire 2011: 12). Here the anthropocentric joins the ecocentric: "Redemption might therefore mean nothing more than the persistence of beings who can remember" (Skrimshire 2011: 12) – i.e. humans.

The persistence of memory does seem to be a fundamental prerequisite to survival: a person with no memory is not a person at all. The man tells the child to remember him before he dies, to remember and to speak to him. Throughout the novel the man, in turn, forgets, both on purpose and in spite of himself. At one point, after having lost their meagre supplies and nearly their lives to some roadagents, the man is taken by desperation, sitting silently by the fire: "He tried to think of something to say but he could not. He'd had this feeling before, beyond the numbness and dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true" (*The Road*: 93). This is in essence what *The Road* embodies – that raw core of parsible entities – the things that come after (colors, bird names, food names, and even belief itself) are not a part of this raw core because they have become "shorn of its referents and so of its reality" (*The Road*: 93). Later, he remembers in his dreams his wife "crossing the lawn" wearing "a thin rose gown that clung to her breasts" (*The Road*: 139) – rich dreams like those of "the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard" or "walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky was aching blue" (*The Road*: 17). That world that he remembered still was like "the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory" (*The Road*: 17). Yet there is a danger also in remembering, since human memory is intrinsically flawed, like a game of telephone: "He thought each memory recalled must do some violence

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to its origins. […] So be sparing. What you alter in the remembering has yet a reality, known or not" (*The Road*: 139). This suggests the man is being careful on purpose with his memories, with remembering, as he is afraid he will 'do violence' to his memories by recalling them – and indeed, throughout the novel, despite being privy to much of the man's inner life, we know almost nothing about him: what he used to do, what his wife used to do, what party he voted for, if he had any opinions on global warming or gay marriage. These things are, in a word, irrelevant, "[o]ld and troubling issues resolved into nothingness and night" (*The Road*: 28) with the apocalypse. Recall here Marie-Laure Ryan's (2001) concept of accessibility, and of the clusters of different worlds belonging to individual people that overlap wherever there is consensus "as to what exists and what does not" (Ryan 2001: 101-102). *The Road*, I would argue, places itself squarely in the centre of all of these overlapping circles, expressing something common to all.

Obviously, these two fundamental issues – remembering, and surviving – are subject to the entropic force that is otherwise consuming the world, and this is the central tension in the novel: whether or not the man and the child will survive, while wanting to know more about what caused the apocalypse, how the man and the boy had survived, and perhaps how it could be prevented: all the while hounded by the lack of time. Remember: when a prophet awakens and retells his prophecy, it is exactly as a retelling: so too with fiction. Fiction is a memory, a story told in the past tense (usually – although a change of tense does not change the 'done-ness' of it – fiction exists in a fixed form) [8]. Either way, these two fundamentals drive the story but – and this is the large *but* – as critics and readers have shown when reading *The Road*, they are clearly not enough. Despite McCarthy masterfully avoiding any clear cut resolutions in the main questions of ontology and epistemology (is there a God, is there no God, is the apocalypse caused by man, is it not), this very lack creates a void that has to be filled – nature abhors a vacuum. The only way to discuss this void, it seems, is by using value-based language: every critic, sooner or later, arrives at the point where they feel the need to point out the redemptive or non-redemptive nature of the narrative (or, in the case of Rambo and Skrimshire, point out the need for this). I wrote earlier of how the postmodern narrative ended at the point where Lessing's, Auster's or Ballard's characters wander out of the city into the unknown, leaving the question of what comes after

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[8] This is not necessarily true for *all* types of fiction however, as we saw in the example on more interactive fiction.

unresolved, and how the post-postmodern narrative has to contend with this space and time after the apocalypse. *The Road* functions as a kind of baseline opening move, a starting point from whence further discussion can flourish, but it also functions as a way to structure the discussion. The human, survival, and what it means to survive and to be human – what is required to do these things – is the kind of basic point we need to return to today, after the extravagance of postmodernism.

5.4. "How does the never to be differ from what never was" – *The Road* and Science Fiction

As I have intimated several times throughout this thesis, the alternative to postmodern readings that I myself have been a proponent of has been the science fictional one. So far, we have looked at *The Road* without any particular regard for its science fictional content – few of the critics quoted so far are, to my knowledge, primarily concerned with that particular genre. In fact, as established, this is McCarthy's first foray beyond what might be termed the realistic or – at a push – the gothic, which means that McCarthy scholars in general have been obliged to peer into a genre quite different from what they are used to. There are however some who have looked at *The Road* specifically as science fiction, including Christopher Pizzino (2010) and Bill Hardwig (2013). What I want to emphasize here is that there is nothing inherently wrong with reading *The Road* as for example a grail narrative, horror or a gothic western akin to his earlier *Blood Meridian*, or simply a fantasy: but the fact remains that McCarthy's novel is set in a place and time outside history, yet within the genre conventions of science fiction. As such, *The Road* also succeeds at finally bridging the gap between genre and 'literary' fiction that postmodern authors initiated – bringing together the two 'parallel literary tracks' that McHale spoke of.

Curtis (2010) claimed earlier that *The Road* did not fit into the canon of post-apocalyptic fiction, perhaps because it does not fit very neatly into the canon of science fiction either. One reason for this might be because science fiction, as opposed to for example horror fiction, has a tendency towards describing much larger structures on a societal level: instead of confining a moral question to a single family or individual for example, science fiction seeks to encompass all of the world or all of humanity and our "status in the universe" in it (Aldiss 1986: 30). Pizzino in a roundabout way points out that the more mainstream reading of the novel assumes it is a "character-based

examination of moral conflict" (Pizzino 2010: 359) which largely bypasses the typically science fictional/post-apocalyptic need to see society as a whole enter into some kind of future. Pizzino however points out that boy, unlike the man, does harbour hopes of some kind of utopian future where a community of people may live and flourish: "The boy's hopes, meanwhile, are for new experiences and encounters, and they connect the text to sf that anticipates the advent of difference, specifically the arrival of new forms of social being" (Pizzino 2010: 360). Pizzino argues that the father essentially leads the two of them away from any other form of larger community during the novel – whether this is wholly rational or not is irrelevant. The main example Pizzino has of this is an encounter the boy thinks that he has with another little boy in one of the burnt-out cities fairly early in the novel. The scene stands out particularly because it is one of the few times the narration ever jumps from the father (until the end, that is):

> The boy was sitting on the steps when he saw something move at the rear of the house across the road. A face was looking at him. A boy, about his age, wrapped in an outsized wool coat with the sleeves turned back. He stood up. He ran across the road and up the drive. No one there. He looked toward the house and then he ran to the bottom of the yard through the dead weeds to a still black creek. Come back, he called. I wont hurt you. He was standing there crying when his father came sprinting across the road and seized him by the arm.
>
> (*The Road*: 88)

The father is naturally furious: the boy was supposed to stay put while the father went looking for supplies, as he has so many times before during the story. "I told you to stay put. Didnt I tell you? Now we've got to go" (*The Road*: 89) he says. Despite evidence that there is some community here that does *not* eat their children, the man refuses to even entertain the idea of trying to make contact with them. At the same time, the alternative, which the boy also broaches: "What if that little boy doesnt have anybody to take care of him?" is dismissed by the father: "There are people there. They were just hiding" (*The Road*: 89). Yet, moments after saying this, he studies "the tracks of the truck through the wet ash, faint and washed out, but there" (*The Road*: 90). This, of course, being *the* truck belonging to the group of roadagents who nearly captured and ate them a few days prior, the prime examples of the kinds of 'bad guys' the father was trying to protect the boy from in this situation much like any other. The tracks remind us that there is no guarantee that there are indeed people left alive, that whoever had kept that hypothetical boy alive until

then might well have been swept up by the same roadagents who nearly took them days prior.

Pizzino sees the man's refusal to engage with others they might meet on the road and the boy's increasing skepticism of this course of action is at the heart of the "science fictional qualities of *The Road*" (Pizzino 2010: 362). And, of course, at the very end of the novel it is revealed that not only is the boy still worrying about that boy they saw, he soon believes himself to have *become* that boy, left without a father or help. The very final conversation they have, even after their talk about carrying the fire, is about that little boy:

> Do you think he's all right that little boy?
> Oh yes. I think he's all right.
> Do you think he was lost?
> No. I dont think he was lost.
> I'm scared that he was lost.
> I think he's all right.
> But who will find him if he's lost? Who will find the little boy?
> Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again.
>
> (*The Road*: 300)

The text reads like the mind of the reader at this point, knowing the danger of the world and the coming death of the father will leave the boy at risk of becoming lost. The man's unprecedented future-oriented language – 'will find' – suggests some Flannery O'Connor-like moment of final beatitude or then, alternatively, the man finally abandoning his cold pragmatism and giving in to hopeless hope in order to allow himself to die. A third, less generous reading might be that the man is trying to justify his own choice of not killing his son (which is what the mother would have done) by trusting against all hope and truth that 'goodness' will find him. Of course, the boy *is* found by goodness - perhaps in the same way the other boy, in the city, might have been found by the goodness of the man and his son. When looked at this way, the story of *The Road* can indeed be summarized, as Pizzino (2010: 363-364) does, as the story of a man who refuses contact with others at all costs, including another boy, until he dies, upon which another man "makes the opposite choice and approaches the man's son with a sincere offer of care and community, revealing that the man had, from the first, been mistaken not to risk contact with others" (Pizzino 2010: 364). In Pizzino's definition, modern science fiction has stepped away from extrapolation and analogy and is more concerned with "radical difference and the challenges of encountering or fostering it" (Pizzino 2010: 368). I have previously discussed how science fiction, according to among others Darko Suvin, is specifically fiction around a *novum*, and that *novum* can go

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from simply being an extrapolated technological advancement to something more akin to what McCarthy, according to Pizzino, is attempting in *The Road* – a *novum* which precisely exists within the science fiction convention which in itself already disrupts the canon of traditional 'literary' tradition. "The novel enacts the emergence of the utopian through what initially appears to be a conservative exercise in bomb-shelter ethics. What should strike us as wondrous about McCarthy's story of father and son is not the capacity of individuals to be good in a bad world, or to choose good myths over bad ones, but the possibility that utopian energies can arise from limited forms of good" (Pizzino 2010: 371).

The close reading of this one particular transformative moment – the father perhaps realizing that he was wrong not to trust what the boy sees as "a commitment to broader ethical horizons and hope, however fraught, that the future will bring new forms of care and community" (Pizzino 2010: 371) does not invalidate Rambo's idea however – rather it shows that a 'science fiction' reading may well belong to the redemptive type of reading. But that is not a criticism: it shows once again that the novel is capable of supporting both kinds of readings, but it also underlines the generational, transformative, future-looking gap between the point of view we are given (the man) and the point of view we only get to glimpse (the boy). It is akin to the shift at the end of *MaddAddam*, where we are given some small insights into the future society of the Crakers, even as the members of the old society (Zeb, Toby) disappear. The inheritance of 'carrying the fire' itself has been transformed, from whatever stories the man used as a basis for it to the version the boy constructed out of it. When looking at the instances where 'the fire' is brought up, we find that it too can be construed as a kind of 'fundamental' like the other two fundamentals I have discussed previously. A kind of fundamental ethics on the most basic level: do not eat one another. From that, one can derive much already, as the boy does: share what you have so that others do not have to resort to cannibalism, for example. As such, 'carrying the fire' is really a science fictional idea, borne out of a utopian impulse of some sort.

Science fiction readings also add one more fundamental element to the (three) established ones, what Bill Hardwig (2013) calls 'things'. Hardwig (2013) points out that McCarthy's move from naturalism to science fiction is a complete reversal from his previous preoccupation with removing the "entanglement of modern objects" (Hardwig 2013: 39). Utilizing Bill Brown's 'thing theory', he argues that in *The Road* "things become resonant with an at times nostalgic meaning for what is gone and at other times a poignant meaning of the expectation of a future that such things evoke" (Hardwig 2013: 39). He,

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like many other critics, compares *The Road* to the similarly violent *Blood Meridian,* which he reads as a naturalistic novel where "the 'things' of civilized life, the cultural and social trappings of comfortable civilization, obscure the more essential elements of life from us" (Hardwig 2013: 42) – something that is reversed entirely in *The Road* which expresses "a profound tenderness for the artificial, for the human-made objects" (Hardwig 2013: 44). There are a few particularly poignant scenes referring explicitly to *objects* in *The Road*. At one point, fairly early on, the man and the boy wander into a looted supermarket. In there, they find "two softdrink machines that had been tilted over into the floor and opened with a prybar" (*The Road*: 22). The man roots around inside the machine despite how unlikely it was that anything remained, noting that the looters had left the useless coins on the ground. Against all probability, his hand "closed over a cold metal cylinder" and he "withdrew his hand slowly and sat looking at a Coca Cola" (*The Road*: 22). Given names are exceedingly rare in *The Road*, making this explicit reference to an object and trademark a marker of the uniqueness of the situation. The father, true to form, gives the drink to his son and reverently asks him to drink it. The boy shares it, but the father insists. "You drink it, he said. Let's just sit here." The boy replies: "It's because I wont ever get to drink another one, isnt it?" (*The Road*: 23). Donnely (2010) offers a non-science fictional reading of this same situation, reading the can of Coke as some kind of analogous critique of modernity as offered by McCarthy: "The novel describes the demise of humanity in the same terms as those articulated in the Coke incident: a detrimentally excessive consumption finds both its apotheosis and its apocalypse in cannibalism, the utter and abject dissolution of recognizable society" (Donnelly 2010: 72) – as if the kind of consumerism that 'created' Coke (or that the Coca Cola company created) is analogous to the cannibalism of the post-apocalyptic world, and that furthermore "[t]he possible extinction of the product is registered as concomitant with the gross excesses of that society, and the realization of a world where the iconic product is no longer immediately recognized is indicative of the novel's critique of excessive consumption" (Donnelly 2010: 73). Donnely's critique, however, rings hollow, and his reading is also flawed (he claims Coca Cola is the only named brand in the novel, which is not true – Rock City is another of the very rare given names in the text, and a brand): it feels rather like this kind of preoccupation with 'consumerism' is one of the "old and troubling issues" (*The Road*: 28) that simply faded away after the end, irrelevant. The can of Coke, and the advertisement for Rock City (an attraction in the state of Georgia), rather seem to be, as Hardwig (2013: 46) puts it, "a lament for the destroyed past, but more specifically for the confidence in continuity and stability that the past held,

the time when one drank a Coke or passed a Rock City- painted barn without giving it a thought". Perhaps the best example of the power of 'things' is the man's childhood home that they come across at one point: "My cot was against this wall." He tells his son, although there is nothing there now. "He pushed open the closet door half expecting to find his childhood things" (*The Road*: 26-27). The emptiness of the house, its lack of things, is haunted by remnants: "He felt with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago" (*The Road*: 25). The boy finds the house and "the shapes claiming [the father] that [the boy] could not see" (*The Road*: 26) frightening and understandably wants to leave. There were no things left in the house, only memories, and this disconnect between the disappearing things of the old world and the new is what makes the man feel like "an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed" (*The Road*: 163) – at least in the eyes of the boy. This realization comes when they spend time in the underground bunker, filled with 'things' the boy could hardly understand but which reminded the man of the lost world, and with them came the realization that "He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well" (*The Road*: 163). Remembrance is closely knitted to 'things', and these things are all in the process of withering away.

In the beginning of the novel, a rather odd almost extra-textual 'query' is presented to the reader: "Query: How does the never to be differ from what never was?" (*The Road*: 32). Hardwig (2013) calls it "the question that haunts this book [...] the question that gives poignant meaning to a can of Coke, to the boy's toy truck, to the canned ham and creamed corn in the bunker, and even the saturation marketing of Rock City" (Hardwig 2013: 48). In the context of the novel, the first part of the question 'the never to be' seems to refer to the future of the world itself, which the man and the boy have been robbed of. The 'what never was' is more opaque: the section comes right after a dream in which he is caring for his sick wife: "The dream bore the look of sacrifice but he thought differently. He did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell" (*The Road*: 32). It suggests he dreams of alternate worlds, alternate realities, in which he succeeded in caring for his wife in a way that would not end up with her death, alone in the dark. The question of how these two things differ – things that will never be and things that never were – is indeed a haunting one, but it is also at the heart of any science fictional reading of *The Road*. Recall that *Nineteen-Eighty Four* is by now helplessly set in the past, as are any number of other science fiction novels. In *Oryx and Crake*, one of Jimmy's jobs at his university is digitizing the library unto

CD-ROMs: probably a likely thing to imagine in 2003, when the novel was written, but already hilariously outdated by 2013 when *MaddAddam* was published (which has no more mentions of CD-ROMs). But it is of course not the details of the act itself that was the focus of that particular scene, it was the transformation of physical objects (books) and their informational content into something non-physical that would require a whole apparatus of civilization to even use: computers, power to run the computers, monitors to display the information and so on – versus simply opening a book. Of course, in *The Road*, the man does stumble upon books, but much like the rotten books in Wells's *The Time Machine*, they offer no transcendental revelations. He tells of an unspecified time in the post-apocalypse when he came across the "charred ruins of a library where blackened books lay in pools of water". It appears the library had been burned and vandalized on purpose. "Some rage at the lies arranged in their thousands row on row". He picks up a book but soon puts it down again: "He'd not have thought the value of the smallest thing predicated on a world to come. It surprised him. That the space which these things occupied was itself an expectation" (*The Road*: 199). Hardwig (2013) calls this the "treachery of expectation" (Hardwig 2013: 48) of the novel, the failure of the future to be as one expected or hoped it to be: the ruins of *The Road* are all indicative of this broken continuum, a betrayal of sorts.

This treachery of expectation is something that one can keenly feel in the modern world, an apocalypse notwithstanding: are we not supposed to have a cure for cancer, a Mars colony, and an end to world hunger by now? Coming to terms with these things perhaps never 'becoming' is, I think, one of the challenges facing the post-postmodern world. Mars, one of the few named places in the novel, is brought up several times during the novel. At one point the boy asks "Do you know where we are Papa?" (*The Road*: 166), to which the man answers: "Sort of". The conversation turns to an idiom, "as the crow flies", which turns to the question of birds, who "can go wherever they want" because they "dont have to follow roads" – a brief glimpse of utopia. The boy, perhaps gripped by the idea of not having to follow the road, asks: "Could they fly to Mars or someplace?" Naturally, they can't, and "[a]nyway they wouldnt know where Mars was" (*The Road*: 167). "Do we know where Mars is?" the boy asks, and again the man answers "Sort of", as if their spatial coordinates on Earth are as uncertain as the location of Mars in the sky. The boy wonders if they could go there. "Well. If you had a really good spaceship and you had people to help you I suppose you could go there." The follow-up question is telling: "Would there be food and stuff when you got there?" The answer is "No. There's nothing there." They return to this conversation slightly later:

> There could be people alive someplace else.
> Whereplace else?
> I dont know. Anywhere.
> You mean besides on earth?
> Yes.
> I dont think so. They couldnt live anyplace else.
> Not even if they could get there?
> No.

<div align="right">(The Road: 260-261)</div>

Ketterer (1974), as discussed earlier, claims that science fiction literature passes through "four relatively distinct phases" (Ketterer 1974: 123): from dystopian fiction, to apocalyptic fiction, to post-apocalyptic fiction, all of which "concern the planet Earth". The fourth phase by contrast "may be isolated in so far as the center of interest shifts to the cosmic voyage and worlds beyond Earth" (Ketterer 1974: 123). It is only this fourth phase that allows an exploration of the utopian motif, according to Ketterer, although equally often one will find the cycle of "decadence, destruction and regeneration" continue in the "increasingly widening setting" of the universe, but it is only in these fourth-stage narratives where the potential to discuss "the new Heaven and the new Earth" (Ketterer 1974: 124) is found. In *The Road*, this eventual 'utopian excursus' (to misappropriate Westphal's term) is quite evidently impossible, a point which is reinforced time and again whenever the narration is, briefly, moved from the immediately visible and local to the coldness and vastness of space: "By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp" (*The Road*: 32). In reference to long-lost migratory birds: "Their half muted crankings miles above where they circled the earth as senselessly as insects trooping the rim of a bowl" (*The Road*: 55). We even return to the imagery of the pilgrim in an image of the people in their millions dying early in the catastrophe: "Out on the roads the pilgrims sank down and fell over and died and the bleak and shrouded earth went trundling past the sun and returned again as trackless and as unremarked as the path of any nameless sisterworld in the ancient dark beyond" (*The Road*: 193). The recurring image here of the earth (and other planets) circling the sun like "blind dogs" (*The Road*: 138) serves to undermine the normally comic (as opposed to tragic) idea of cycles, where at the end there is potential for regeneration, the story starting anew – in the cosmic perspective of *The Road* even this perennial symbol of renewal has been rendered impotent. Instead, what we will be left with is merely a rock circling the sun – not unlike the airless, lifeless 'sisterworld' of Mars. That said, although it is not stated directly, it seems obvious that the man has told at least some kind of science fiction-utopian

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stories to the child (as he knows what Mars and spaceships are), and if there is one genre preoccupied with both creating and dealing with the treachery of expectation, it has to be science fiction.

There is one other point where this dream of things-that-never-will-be-and-things-that-never-were comes up. It is, once again, in conjunction with dreaming and dreams: the boy has just had a nightmare of some kind, and does not want to share it with the man – much as he does not want to share stories any more, perhaps realizing the increasing gulf between the stories, reality, and expectation. The man tells him. "When your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up. Do you understand? And you cant give up. I wont let you" (*The Road*: 202). But, as shown time and time through the novel and this analysis, the man's outlook on the world, its stories, and the value of dreams should perhaps be treated with some suspicion – the man wishes to remain entirely in the present, but as Žižek (and Derrida, and many others) have pointed out, there probably is no such thing as a present. Science fiction stories are by their very definition of 'some world that never was or of some world that never will be' – they are not extrapolations or predictions, although those elements do enter into it. As to the difference between the two – the query in the beginning – I do not think that this one novel necessarily answers it, but my tentative answer would be that there is no difference between them: whether the imagined, dreamed world is in the past or in the future, they both describe a common human experience where past, present and future are all intertwined and influence one another. The apocalypse in *The Road* may have taken place in the year 2006 – at the time of writing a decade ago – or it might yet take place in the future, say in the year 2026, almost a decade from now. 2026, incidentally, is the year depicted in Ray Bradbury's famous short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950), about a futuristic house that continues to keep the time, clean, cook and regulate itself, despite the fact that its inhabitants and the human race as a whole have been obliterated by nuclear warfare – a real 'thing' left behind, built perhaps not to outlast humanity, but at the very least built to last, and in the case of Bradbury remaining even after the end, a single wall left repeating the date over and over again.

5.5. Polysemic Creation of Meaning in *The Road*

Douglas Robinson (1985) argues an essentially 'postmodern' view of American literature, where fiction is used both to create and destroy the world in an

infinite recursive pattern: "Fictions are at once the primary vehicles and the primary targets of destruction: one fiction is needed to destroy another, and yet a third to destroy that. Fictions harden into realities, or versions of reality that deaden our vision to what is really out there, and so must be undermined and dismantled" (Robinson 1985: 198-199). Setting aside the idea of an objective 'really out there' existing, *The Road* seems to be doing very little dismantling. It is heavily intertextual, relying on a literary background that has made at least one critic declare that "McCarthy's narrative vindicates the worth of textual remembrance" (Hillier 2015: 687). It also exists beside the established literary canon, it is not 'Literature' with a capital L in the traditional sense. Though science fiction is and surely will be more accepted as time goes on, no little thanks to writers like Atwood or McCarthy, it is still genre fiction. And within its own established genre, it also does little damage: rather it builds upon and improves the already extant post-apocalyptic tradition. If there is any part of *The Road* that might be construed as destructive, it is its deconstruction of the lines of demarcation between 'literature' and 'science fiction'. Gunjević, in *God in Pain* (2012), mentions a letter Dante wrote about his *The Divine Comedy*, where he claims that his work is "polysemic, in other words that the meaning in the *Comedy* is literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic. […]" – in other words, it extends in all possible dimensions, into the past, future, down to the moral and human, and up into the heavens. He goes on: "Allegory is extended metaphor and it must meet certain conditions dictated by the theological tradition if it is not to be arbitrary. Literal and allegorical meaning are in a relationship of tension in the *Comedy*. They do not merge, but neither are they separate. This is what makes the Dante of *The Divine Comedy* both an apostle and a prophet" (Žižek and Gunjević 2012: 17). Gunjević is a theologian, and uses these terms in the theological sense, but it seems to me that one could well apply the term polysemic to the meanings in *The Road* as well, and the description of Dante to McCarthy. In our current post-apocalyptic/post-postmodern reality, there can be no alternative to polysemy, and that, as discussed above, a properly polysemic text can in fact lead to that elusive common ground.

The essence of world-building and chronotopes is their relationship to what we consider our own world. The postmoderns have shown that the problem is not so much to mutually determine the content of a constructed, made-up world – such as that of a novel – but rather to comprehend the content of our *own* world. The postmodern literary experiment, consequently, was one of transporting that multiplicity and uncertainty to the normally ordered fictional realm. By making novels and narratives as confusing as the postmodern world

itself, they attempted to create a more truthful chronotopic representation of reality. Hence McHale's movement from epistemic to ontological: if what postmodernity is about is a multiplicity of personal worlds, then the question that literature must ask is how such worlds are constructed, what they are made of, how they can be described. Writing, today, on a level separate from fiction, is replete with this – social media allows everyone and anyone a platform to express their own personal world and their own personal experiences. Increasingly, this constant expression of the self seems to have reached a kind of self-validating stasis, where it is not so much the issues themselves that are important, but the freedom to express it. As long as we can make posts on social media about it that reach people and garner 'likes', each person's own personal hero-quest can be fulfilled. The Internet, in all its connectivity, seems to be the perfect example of the postmodern multiple-worlds ethos.

There is nothing inherently wrong with multiple worlds, however, although one would hope that the values that underpin them could be more shared than wholly different: in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the apocalypse allows the survivors (of vastly different backgrounds) to come together while also excising those who simply had no place in the new (or old) order, namely the Painballers. In *The Road*, there seems to be little hope for integrating worlds – and indeed, as I have already noted in the beginning of this chapter, the man and the boy were "each the other's world entire" (*The Road*: 4). Yet, as I have also argued, this notion of 'a community of two' should perhaps be criticized; as necessary as it is for survival, it also prevented the two from joining with others. If it weren't for the boy's trust, the fire would have died with the father. The axiological quest of *The Road* is of course much less obvious than in *MaddAddam* or most other works in the genre, and although the novel must be read as a thing apart from its predecessors, it is a continuation rather than a break. A break for McCarthy, no doubt, but not a break for the genre as a whole. Post-apocalyptic fiction often treads the same ground as theological works, which is of course unsurprising considering its origins, but as *science fiction* it is unavoidably also the fiction of the modern, secular world. However as *The Road* shows us, the 'forms' of theology cannot, and perhaps should not, easily be removed from how we approach the world in its becoming and unbecoming. The idea of God seems to be what we encounter when we reach the end of our world, but in fiction at least that God is effectively the author. In McCarthy's case, the author-God stays away from sweeping statements of axiological decrees, instead first crushing the reader's hopes with a tale of such despair that most readers seem to experience it as a physical sensation (according, at least, to

Caracciolo (2013)), and then forcing a re-evaluation of the text over and over again until some semblance of meaning emerges from it. Therein lies the polysemic strength of *The Road*: its ability to force readers to enter into a place (albeit fictional) they would never wish to encounter in reality, and then to oblige them to create some 'forms' from their experiences. Against all expectation, *The Road* becomes an exercise in hope and the creation of meaning, giving individual readers a common platform from which to launch their meaning-creation project. No matter the end point of that project – whether a reaffirmation of the power of an Almighty God, the importance of human community and love, or the necessity for the recreation of an ethical framework that is independent of past cultural trappings, the most important thing is the common starting point. The fact that this starting point needs to be a devastated post-cataclysmic wasteland where life itself will soon become extinct may be saying a thing or two about the current state of the world – as the man thinks at the very end, hearkening back to the dream in the beginning: "In that cold corridor they had reached the point of no return which was measured from the first solely by the light they carried with them" (*The Road*: 300). A point of no return is a place where the options remaining are stark: but whatever options they are, it is, ultimately, the *start* not the *end*.

6.   Conclusion

In the beginning of this thesis I quoted Frank Kermode in his differentiation between myths and fictions. He pointed out that fictions are fluid, and that they "are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change" (Kermode 2000: 39). Part of the reason I felt the need to write this thesis was because it felt as if the 'needs of sense-making' were indeed going through some kind of change. Historically, it seems, 'apocalypse' is a motif or mode that appears with some regularity whenever there is a change, and at least based on the amount of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic media we have been subjected to over the last few decades the 'sense of an ending' seems to be something that is ongoing. When things are changing, or are threatening to change, people turn to the apocalypse, either in an attempt to turn back time, or in an attempt to hasten the change, to make it occur within their lifetimes.

Science fiction is one of the few ways someone can travel imaginatively into a future one either wishes, or does not wish, to see. That we would gravitate towards future-oriented fiction in times of uncertainty is, again, not surprising – a human brain is, after all, as Palmer (2004) points out "an anticipation machine" (Palmer 2004: 90) and any method we can devise to help us anticipate what is coming will be useful. Post-apocalyptic fiction however is different to 'typical' science fiction that extrapolates into the future. Although, yes, post-apocalyptic fiction extrapolates a future, it is a future we (in the main) do not wish for. That is why so much effort is spent looking backward: I discussed this through what Bakhtin calls historical inversion, where the present day becomes of utmost importance, a historical artefact whose foibles are laid bare in a way usually reserved for satire and comedy. The curious connection between comedy and post-apocalyptic fiction is, however, the basis for a wholly different thesis, for although apocalypse can be pretty funny – as in Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), many of Beckett's works (notably *Endgame*) or why not Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) – there is always something serious underlying it all. It is, after all, supposing the near-extinction of humanity.

Extinction, along four different axes, forms what is perhaps the main underlying structure of the genre: on one hand, personal extinction, the fear of death, the original apocalypse. On the other hand, global extinction, where the entirety of the human race is at risk. Concurrent with these fears are fears not of physical annihilation, but of moral, cultural or ethical death: again, on both

the individual level, and on the level of whole cultures, nations or peoples. Dystopian fiction, which can either be seen as the father of post-apocalyptic fictions, or their twin sibling, is a prime example of the fear of mass cultural death – dystopias are usually the realized end-state of an apocalypse, as many of them (as discussed in the beginning chapters) are the result of some material apocalypse in their own past. Individual cultural death is generally explored in more personal texts, where we follow a single person or a small group (such as in *The Death of Grass*) and how they deal with the new state of the world, but individual cultural death is also the purview of non-apocalyptic fiction; for example the various 'last of the race' stories that Stafford (1994) deals with in her book. What sets post-apocalyptic fiction apart is the use of all four of these axes: individual and collective physical and cultural death. The focal point differs between works, but they all to some degree deal with the whole wheel.

Yet, like in Pandora's Box, shadowing these four axes of fear are axes of hope, regeneration and realized utopia. This perhaps hearkens back to the religious origin of apocalypse, in which there was definitely death and fire and brimstone, but also a heaven for the righteous. If one considers the current world as corrupt as it can be, then an apocalypse begins to look like the only way to escape the said world. Whatever comes after then must, or at least has the potential to be radically better or at least radically transformed. The axes of hope, as far as I can tell, only go two ways: into the future and into the past. Those that are concerned with the past either look back at the moment of pre-apocalypse, or then into a past even further removed, for their utopia. A novel like Stephen King's *The Stand* hopes for a less-technological future, where things like atomic bombs and attack helicopters can happily become extinct. So too do *Alas, Babylon* and *Earth Abides*, which see something romantic in the admitted hardship, but also increased happiness, in a society no longer so dependent on technology. Post-apocalyptic fiction that genuinely projects a utopian project into the future is much rarer: Atwood's *MaddAddam*-series and Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*-series, discussed in greater detail by Curtis (2010), are perhaps prime examples, while something like Dick's *Dr. Bloodmoney* at least *allows* for a future, however strange and filled with sentient machines and mutated giant rodents it may be. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the cycle of destruction on Earth continues, but a ship with monks who escape into space brings with them the hope that they might create something new and different.

Hope and fear mix in post-apocalyptic fiction, I've further argued, because catastrophe or apocalypse is a way by which one can describe and deal with something that is either currently occurring or is still too close to be able to look at through a historical lens: it becomes, as Regier (2010) argues, transformed by

the discourse of the sublime, which in domesticating and normalizing the event makes it something that can be discussed. But before that can happen, there is a period of time when one is left with, as Heffernan puts it, "teasing through" (Heffernan 2008: 22) the narratives of rupture in order to perhaps eventually make some new sense out of what at first appears senseless. As discussed in the chapter on postmodernism, the senseless catastrophe of our age was and perhaps remains the Second World War, which still sends ripples through time: politically, through the effects of post-colonialism and now, perhaps, neo-colonialism; aesthetically in the works of contemporary art within every genre that still manages to impress and confuse; culturally through the rise of feminism, queer studies, and racially motivated activism, and other movements that celebrate or express diversity and social justice. Although they can naturally be traced further back than this period in time, there seems to be a timeline at least insofar as scholarly works are concerned which finds their strongest and most influential work happening in the post-war era. As far as literature is concerned the postmodern literary experiment is surely still on-going, but again – as I have argued throughout this thesis – it seems to me that the moment of 'teasing through' might be coming to an end, with something else instead replacing it. That something else is perhaps not going to be what I have discussed here: a more axiologically aware literature, a literature that curates and connects disparate possible worlds by providing us with an egalitarian and shared forum for discussion, predicated on the awfully blunt but increasingly urgent fact that without a new post-postmodern consensus, we may not be around for long enough to finish any of the fights the post-moderns started.

In this conclusion, I would like to finalize my arguments regarding the role of specifically post-apocalyptic fiction as a sort of trailblazer into the new post-postmodern time-space. But seeing as we are currently living that chronotope, any closing arguments I make will rightfully seem rather incomplete without some discussion of what other areas might be worthy of study. So I will also be bringing up some new areas of study that may well point the way into the future from here with regards to science fiction, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, and post-postmodern fiction.

6.1. Post-postmodernism, Iconospheres, and Technology

I have attempted to use Bakhtin's chronotope to discuss this new post-postmodern reality, but it may well be that the chronotope is better suited to

purely literary analysis, than to the more holistic analysis of literature-as-an-artefact, or literature-as-a-thing, something that exists in many different forms and that comes to us through many different media, sometimes entirely independent of its actual content. One recent alternative for a more modernized chronotope is the notion of the *imageme*, as used by the field of cultural imagology, championed by Anthony Johnson. I have already touched upon 'traditional' imagology in my earlier section on Bakhtin and personhood as a discipline which is largely concerned with the study of national stereotypes and the images associated with them. *Cultural* imagology by contrast aims beyond national stereotypes, instead attempting to embrace the past-as-an-artefact-in-the-present in a more comprehensive way, building on the older understanding of what imagology was (and is). Johnson in a 2006 essay outlines cultural imagology in the following terms:

> Cultural imagology comprises three main dimensions which are tightly interconnected. The first is *social imagology*, which encompasses the fields of inter-, intra-, and trans-personal relationships. This is the area in which the findings of gender studies and national imagology may be garnered, through the exploration of stereotypes (and their dissolution), hegemonic mechanisms, weighted cultural translations, and *auto-* or *hetereo*-images, the image *cache*, or the interplay of different visual, verbal and acoustic positionalities[…] Although, characteristically, social imagology may concentrate on present practices, there is no reason why its lines of inquiry should not also extend into the spatial dimension (*geographical imagology*).[…] Finally, the social and geographical axes of the subject are, of course, constantly in play with the temporal dimension (*historical imagology*).
>
> (Johnson 2006: 15-16; italics in original)

In addition to these three fields of imagology that correspond quite neatly to Bakhtin's *chronos* (historical), *topos* (geographical) and personhood (social), Johnson, developing the ideas of Polish art historian Jan Białostocki, also proposes the term *iconosphere*, a curious, ever-moveable concept he defines as "the totality of the physical world that is available at a particular moment or period in history" (Johnson 2006: 16) – including but not limited to things such as "paintings, sculptures, writings, and even encrypted or digitised objects such as CDs or DVDs" (Johnson 2006: 16). The iconosphere and the chronotope are, thus, closely related, but one might call the iconosphere the 'material chronotope' as opposed to the 'literary-artistic chronotope' that Bakhtin uses (and Bakhtin did allow for chronotopes other than just the literary-artistic one!). The need for a material chronotope, or a theory of iconospheres, is probably more urgent now in our current post-postmodern science fiction reality than ever before, as the material reality of technology and 'things' (even

entirely immaterial things, such as the Internet) are causing changes that are far too fast for either governments or traditional academia to keep up with.

Post-apocalyptic fiction is the fiction of sorting through iconospheres. *Oryx and Crake* begins on the beach, with Jimmy-the-Snowman being presented various objects that the Craker children bring to him, objects that he sometimes attempts to explain truthfully (when they are dangerous) and sometimes fancifully (when he has run out of patience). The children are beach-combers, going through the literal detritus of the material world left behind by not one, but two apocalypses: out to sea stand the skyscrapers, abandoned by humans due to the rising sea level but now inhabited by all manners of birds; remnants from the first climatological apocalypse. But the children also find pieces of the pre-apocalyptic, dystopian world: "A plastic BlyssPluss container, empty; a ChickieNobs Bucket O'Nubbins, ditto" (*Oryx and Crake*: 7). These are remainders from an entirely fictional iconosphere, created by Atwood over the course of three novels, and by the end of the third book the significance of both BlyssPluss and ChickieNobs is as apparent to the reader as if the containers had read 'Viagra' or 'KFC' (I am not aware of any genetically grown lab-meat producers yet, but when they inevitably come, replace 'KFC' with the name of that company). In *The Road*, the man and the boy beachcomb as well, although the boy of course does not know what beachcombing is. The man explains: "It's people who walk along the beach looking for things of value that might have washed up." The boy asks "What kind of things?" and the man answers "Any kind of things. Anything that you might be able to use" (*The Road*: 235). And they do find things, just like they have throughout the novel, things that belong to an iconosphere that the boy simply cannot comprehend – not unlike the Craker children in *Oryx and Crake*, or the descendants of Granser in *The Scarlet Plague*, or Ish's grandchildren in *Earth Abides*, the Eloi in *The Time Machine* and so on: material things, even more than anything else, is the focal point of modern, post-modern and post-postmodern culture, and the absolute focal point for post-apocalyptic fiction. But even without an apocalypse, we too are perpetual beach-combers, looking for things we might be able to use in the remnants of the past, washed up on the shores of today. That is what most of Johnson's work in cultural imagology is concerned with: how for example renaissance drama and poetry is perceived today, what we would find if we pick up a play by Ben Jonson as remains of the past: "the iconosphere of a period consists of the traces that have survived, in whatever form, from individuals of that passing world" (Johnson 2005: 53). In other words, the iconosphere of the present contains the sum total of all iconospheres of the past, everything that

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has survived the multitudinous apocalypses that Walter Benjamin's famous Angel of History sees as he is propelled irresistibly into the future:

> This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.
>
> (Benjamin 1968: 257-268)

Notions of 'present' and 'future' are, of course, a bit of a philosophical conundrum, especially as it would seem that the speed at which our brain processes things means that whatever we perceive is already set in the past (by a few microseconds), but the truth of the matter is that all we have at hand is the debris of the past at our feet – not the constructs of the future. Post-apocalyptic fiction is an attempt at cheating, as is all science fiction – constructing an imaginary world where the angel of history has already brought us so far into the future that we can look back at what is our present in hindsight, and look at things currently too close to us as artefacts of our past. Because, as postmodernism has taught us, even the material remnants of the past are far from objective, and two people experiencing the 'resurfacing' (Johnson's term) of some particular iconosphere will no doubt experience it in very different ways. So too with literature that peers back from the proposed future: some will see the past as decadent and catastrophic, others will see it as a promised utopia, never to be seen again. The mode of apocalypse itself, as I have discussed in this thesis, stems from a very old 'iconosphere', with influences that go as far back as man has been able to perceive cause and effect. As such its 'image cache' (another Johnsonian term) is absolutely full to its breaking point, with more added to it every year. There is no real way a single thesis could pick through its complex and long history, it can scarcely even hope to address a small portion of 'the iconosphere of Apocalypse'. Rather, one needs to choose what one wishes to look at based on what one considers valuable and worthwhile: as any beach comber must. In the post-postmodern world we are faced with an information overload in so many different senses of the word that the only way to deal with it is to pick and choose what appeals to one's own axiological codex. This is the crux of my argument of the change in dominants: if postmodernism created an endless multiplicity of worlds, the

people living in the post-postmodern era is left with the task of choosing which of these worlds is the most comfortable to exist in.

One could make the protracted argument (this thesis is an abbreviated example) that, historically, whenever a 'new world' (in the sense of a new ideology, belief-system, philosophy etc.) has been introduced into a homeostatic system, there has been some kind of apocalyptic reaction: either on the side of the new or the old system: some of the first post-apocalyptic fictions were reactions to technology and industrialization. My discussion of culture cycles in the first chapter touched on this in particular but, as Borkenau pointed out, it may well be that the next coming culture cycle will not be marked by a downturn followed by a new flowering, as seems to have been the pattern in the past. Climate change, nuclear weapons, or (as Crake warns in *Oryx and Crake*) the literal exhaustion of the resources needed to build an advanced civilization might point towards a scenario where, if apocalypse should occur (as it has many times before), there would be no return. This has been one of the messages of post-apocalyptic fiction since at least the invention of the nuclear bomb: a warning that soon the only 'things' our descendants will be finding will be the smashed remains of our comfortable middle-class lifestyle. These, no doubt, they will largely throw away in favour of whatever will help them survive the best: be it atavistic murder and cannibalism, a return to tribal ignorance, or something else. This is surely one reason why post-apocalyptic fiction seems to enjoy, and continues to enjoy, a period of popularity presently: it is, in all simplicity, a 'necessary' literature, a literature that reflects the desires and fears of the day. Another reason for its popularity, however, ties it more closely to the idea of the multiplicity of worlds and the difficulty of sifting through the iconosphere, namely the radical simplification that post-apocalyptic fiction (or, arguably, any fiction) allows for.

To put it simply: in a novel the reader will encounter a (by necessity) simplified version of a world (often our world), which will contain whatever is needed to convey the author's intentions. This simplified version is readable and understandable and can be discussed by a varied group of people, each coming from their own background: a novel, or any work of art, is a platform and an arena that allows for opinions to converge. It is very difficult to discuss the 'real' world, but much easier to discuss a fictional one: and this is the great strength of art. The notion that literature is a boon to communication is of course not a new one; Sell (2000) for example considers 'classical' literature in particular to be something that draws readers together, calling it "a concentration of semiotic, affective and ethical potential that is globally accessible" (Sell 2000: 276). Sell, much like Johnson, is involved in the 'sifting

through' of iconospheric remnants from the past, and proposes a kind of mediating criticism, wherein the critic's role becomes one of a mediator between the reader and the text, especially if the text has its origin in a much older iconosphere. Sell writes:

> When readers break the seal of time or, come to that, the seal of a sociocultural difference obtaining in the present, it is thanks to this personal effort of empathetic understanding, this willingness to share in their imagination the relationship proposed between the implied writer and reader personae. In Eliot's meaning of the word, they assent. Without a preparedness to give the other selves and their worlds a try, what takes place would not really be communication at all but something much more small-minded, which a mediating critic may have to warn against.
>
> (Sell 2000: 175)

Literature cannot, and should not, *force* anyone to read or attempt to understand itself; it always requires a willingness, 'assent' as Sell puts it, from the reader. The next step after reading is, of course, to communicate *about* what has been read communally: one might argue that through sites like GoodReads,[9] where readers can sign up to create book lists, write reviews and recommendations, and participate in a community around their favourite novels, the act of solitary reading is no longer something that is taken for granted – not that it ever was; reading has surely always been at least partially a communal activity. Science fiction has matured into a fully-formed literary genre, perhaps the best equipped literary genre to tackle the issues with which our 'science fictional' society of today is dealing with. Additionally, it has a very low barrier of entry: many a young person has been introduced to the world of reading not through Jane Austen or Salman Rushdie, but through the works of Suzanne Collins (*The Hunger Games*) or Douglas Adams (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). Post-apocalyptic science fiction narrows the field down further: aside from its leanings towards didactic warning, post-apocalyptic fiction focuses on ends and remainders, on revelation and remembrance, and on the danger of both forgetting the past and of letting it rule us. Above all, post-apocalyptic visions give the readers a sense of hope: hope that a terrible future can be averted, or hope that even a terrible future is not the end.

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[9] www.goodreads.com

6.2. The Ever-Moving Apocalypse: A Non-Conclusion

Concluding a thesis on apocalypse and post-apocalypse can quickly become an exercise in the absurd. After having argued for and against various literary notions of endings, creating one's own end becomes a difficult proposition. I have, however, tried to point the way and the route towards what might come next, towards possible new avenues of inquiry – because even after the end (of the world, of a thesis) life goes on. Žižek, at the end of his *Living in the End Times*, quotes Gramsci, in reference to the new epoch that began with the end of the First World War: "The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters" (Žižek 2010: 479). Stalin and Hitler were, Žižek argues, the monsters of the New, and as Heffernan and Berger and others have argued, their shadow still haunts us. But, as Žižek continues, "what about the monsters we are engendering now, propelled by techno-gnostic dreams of a biogenetically controlled society? All the consequences should be drawn from this paradox: perhaps there is no direct passage to the New, at least not in the way we imagined it, and monsters necessarily emerge in any attempt to force that passage" (Žižek 2010: 479). Indeed, there is an abiding cloud of apocalypticism today, from financial crises to energy crises to environmental crises, all monsters of the new New. As I have argued, to understand and contend with these monsters, one must read science fiction, both old and new, and accept the post-apocalyptic tales that they furnish us with. And perhaps, in doing so, some new more 'truthful' story can be discerned, some hopeful future path through the garden that does not lead to the realization of the scenario of *The Road*.

The apocalypse is ever-moving, however, an elusive point of no return that Žižek speaks of, that must constantly be kept at bay yet which can never be fully banished (if nothing else as a result of the laws of thermodynamics). The postmoderns were of the opinion that the apocalypse had either already happened, or would never happen; this, perhaps, gave them some measure of comfort in an increasingly chaotic and incomprehensible world, where everything that was once solid melts and becomes liquid. But, to follow that metaphor, perhaps the solids have not really melted – maybe they are just hidden just under the water's surface like proverbial icebergs, a constant and unseen danger. Our monsters, coming to haunt us, but harder to see than ever before. Or perhaps that is just the way things always appear: the disaster of the moment seeming grander, more immediate and more unique than any that have preceded it.

Most who study something presumably hope that their work will be relevant for all eternity – not so I. Imagine that one day in the future, a reader of *The Road* might understand what is happening in much the same way we today can understand the social mores that governed the Bennet sisters' desire for marriage: the notion that the fall of society would turn us into desperate cannibals and murderous child-killers a curious echo from a less civilized age. Perhaps this future reader would be inspired to themselves imagine some awful disaster befalling their society. What if that future *The Road* would not become of a story of the descent of man into cruelty and atavism, but instead it would be a story of hope, community and altruism. The moment it is no longer possible to imagine a post-apocalypse, is the moment this thesis will finally, thankfully, have become irrelevant. Until then, however, I fear the study of our bleak future will only become more urgent.

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8.   Svensk sammanfattning

Denna avhandling är en litteraturhistorisk analys av post-apokalyptisk litteratur, från de tidigaste verken till de post-postmoderna. Jag har med hjälp av Bakhtins teori om kronotoper och Lubomír Doležels axiologi-koncept utarbetat en analysmodell som jag använt för att analysera Cormac McCarthys Pulitzer-prisbelönade roman *Vägen* (2006) och Margaret Atwoods *MaddAddam*-trilogi (2003-2013). Denna analysmodell har jag samtidigt använt som grund för en teori om post-postmodernitet.

Post-apokalyptisk litteratur är science fiction om det som händer efter världens slut. Ordet apokalyps kommer från grekiskan och betyder ungefär "avtäckande" eller "uppenbarelse". I religiös bemärkelse innebär apokalypsen en eskatologisk framtidsvision av den yttersta domen, vilket på många sätt påverkat den sekulära apokalypsen. Både religiösa och sekulära apokalyptiska narrativ är reaktioner på olika reella katastrofer i det samtida samhället, och vittnar om en omvälvande förändring av något slag.

Den första post-apokalyptiska romanen är troligtvis Mary Shelleys *Den sista människan* (1827). Richard Jefferies *After London* (1885) och Jack Londons *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) är andra tidiga exempel, men det var i och med att science fiction-genren blev populär och atombomben uppfanns som post-apokalyptiska berättelser blev allmännare. T.ex. romaner som Nevil Shutes *On the Beach* (1957), Pat Franks *Alas, Babylon* (1959) och Walter M. Millers *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) behandlar rädslan för kärnvapenkrig. Men även efter det kalla krigets slut fortsatte man skriva post-apokalyptiska romaner, och särskilt efter ca 2005 har de blivit allt vanligare, vilket tyder på att vi nått en ny brytningspunkt.

Behovet av en post-postmodern litteraturteori är uppenbar när man studerar hur begreppet apokalyps behandlas inom den postmoderna diskursen. Enligt till exempel James Berger (1999) och Theresa Heffernan (2008) lever vi i en permanent post-apokalyps, där allting är en traumatisk återspegling av det förflutna, utan hopp om förändring eller framtid. Enligt Baudrillard är apokalypsen i sig själv omöjlig: i ett hyperrealt samhälle kan man inte "avtäcka" den underliggande sanningen eftersom den inte existerar: apokalypsen blir ett simulacrum. En annan synvinkel kommer från Francis Fukuyama, som i *Historiens slut och den sista människan* (1992) påstod att kampen mellan olika samhällssystem tagit slut i och med Sovjetunionens fall, och att alla så småningom kommer att anamma den marknadsekonomiska liberala demokratin.

Men idag verkar det som om det är just denna senkapitalistiska världssyn som håller på att leda världen mot undergång.

Enligt Brian McHale (1987) dominerades modernismen av konceptet epistemologi d.v.s. vad sanning är, hur sanning förändras, medan postmodernismen dominerades av ontologi, d.v.s. hur olika världar skapas och skiljer sig från varandra. Jag argumenterar för att post-postmodernismen domineras av vad Doležel kallar axiologi: en persons värderingar och värden.

Både Atwoods and McCarthys verk handlar om hur viktigt det är att vi hittar en gemensam värdegrund innan det är för sent. Värden är viktigare än sanningar i den post-postmoderna världen, vilket innebär att det är särskilt angeläget för kulturpåverkare att ta sitt ansvar och försöka skapa gemensamma världar som inte slutar i en apokalyps. För trots postmodernismens försök att minimera apokalypsen som begrepp, existerar den fortfarande, och för att kunna handskas med framtidens utmaningar behöver vi nya verktyg, både teoretiska och praktiska.