A World-Maker's Will: The Post-Apocalypse and Human Power in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

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ABSTRACT: A World-Maker's Will: The Post-Apocalypse and Human Power in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

This thesis discusses human empowerment in Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, *The Road*. While much of present-day scholarship on *The Road* views the novel as nihilistically highlighting the hopelessness of existence after a cataclysmic event, this thesis provides a counter-reading that argues for the existence and sustainability of human empowerment in the post-apocalyptic space imagined in the novel. I focus on the non-physical and non-relational power that can be found within the self, and particularly within the human mind, arguing that the father and son protagonists find routes to power only by means of a detachment from the reality of the ruined world that they face and a turning inward to their individual ideals, philosophies and imaginations.

This thesis situates *The Road* in the context of the concept of the apocalypse, and its popular contemporary form, the post-apocalypse genre. It then draws on the philosophy of Plato, Descartes, Hobbes, Hume, and Kant, among others, to demonstrate how the protagonists develop their own philosophy as a means of creating and maintaining their empowerment in the fact of societal and environmental collapse. This thesis relies on intensive close-readings of the novel and engages directly with the extensive scholarship on *The Road* that is already published. The result is an optimistic reading of *The Road* as an exemplar for empowerment in the post-apocalypse, that is charted through a reliance on the self, and the mind. Ultimately, it provides an optimistic reading of *The Road* as an exemplar of empowerment through a reliance upon the self and the mind.

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It has been a long and arduous road, and while I promised myself that I would avoid any *Road*-related puns, I just cannot bring myself to forsake them completely.

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Sincerely,

-Alexander Jackson

Post-Apocalyptic Power: First Steps

In her monograph entitled *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*, Claire P. Curtis suggests that "Postapocalyptic fiction exists at a crossroads...between science fiction, horror and Utopia[n] and dystopia[n] concepts" (7). Further, she believes that Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* falls within the dystopian scheme chiefly because it offers "no opportunity for starting over" (7). Though I find these two assessments fair, I do not engage with her conceptions of both the post-apocalyptic genre and *The Road* in the same manner. It certainly is true that post-apocalyptic fiction is "at a crossroads" but I believe that it is concerned with much more than utopia or dystopia. *The Road* leads to a crossroad that runs through the post-apocalyptic genre as a whole, because of the inherent tension between creation and destruction, and order and chaos within the apocalyptic concept itself, and the way in which *The Road* attempts to reconfigure expressions of power. That is, the question of what *kind* of power may exist when societal structures are annihilated is central to this novel. In short, I believe like Curtis, that there is a necessary tension within the post-apocalyptic genre, but that this tension is centered on the issue of power, so that the central questions are: who has it? how is it held? and how is it made? Furthermore, in *The Road* specifically, the human being *itself* can and *does* exist as the most powerful creature and force on the face of a ruined planet. The empowered human in *The Road*, however, is not one defined by empire or army, nor politics or divine authority. *The Road*'s human owns no land or home, and is beset on all sides by the decayed conditions of his[1] environment in which survival is an everyday struggle. *The Road's* human also has very few

[1] Using the male pronoun here is, unfortunately, by design. Cormac McCarthy's novel situates the male presence as its most prominent focus, and as I will note throughout, often ignores, marginalizes or obliterates the female presence as a result. There are very few uses of the female pronoun throughout the entire text, so utilizing the male pronoun here helps set the fame in which this thesis works.

allies, and many enemies, and is altogether the picture of a thing disenfranchised from its prior comforts and asked to live in a nearly unrecognizable world in which the sun itself is in "cold transit" and the ocean is an "alien sea" (McCarthy 178; 215). And yet, the human in *The Road* is powerful.

Like the last being that walks a desolate earth, *The Road* must often re-define, create and alter our species' usual approach to empowerment, and to the world itself. Pulled between forces of immense order in the form of divine expectation, and immense chaos in the form of post-cataclysmic ruin, *The Road* tells the story of the potential for human emancipation from both forces, and moves them into a zone in which human power is realizable and self-contained. The human in *The Road,* as represented by the Man and the Boy, is a being empowered by his creative abilities, imaginations, capacities for speech and willingness to develop brand new philosophies and illusory communities and commit them to memory. While there is absolutely no doubt that *The Road* is a dystopian novel, and a particularly grim one at that, the idea that it offers "no opportunity for starting over" is frankly a simplification of an area of major tension in the novel. While the surface descriptors and aesthetics of the novel's world suggest that there is no way to return to the world that was[2] or no way to build a new world over the "eternal ash" (McCarthy 80) of the current one, the novel's two main characters, the Man and the Boy, frequently engage with the world that was, just as they live in the world that *is* and in so doing they grab hold of the power of world-making, design, and meaning-creation. Indeed, in this high-tension world, the task of believing in, upholding, and defending the guiding principles and grand narratives (of their choosing) in the world falls to *them.* In such a position, the Man and the

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[2] No birds, no cities, no vegetation, no animals, and the slow decay of all trees suggest that, somehow, the earth is dying and has reached a point at which there can be no recovery or nursing back to health. The fact that even the "blood cults" that we can assume emerged in the wake of the apocalyptic event have faded and died off suggests just how close to a kind of 'ending' precipice the existence of humans on this earth may be.

Boy strive to create a world that is *finally their own* (for better or worse). Moreover, *The Road* is nearly shorn of all grand narratives from humanity's past. And, while battling against meaninglessness in the same breath as trying to find meaning when the old world has ceased to exist, humans can find a fascinating degree of power within themselves. Indeed, though it is in tension with the memories of the past and the possibilities of an expected future, as well as the "narratives" of their past world, and the ruin of the current one, it is the ability of the Man and the Boy to exist and persist within that tensioned space which allows The Man and The Boy to hold power. It allows them to act as vessels, which suggests that the genre of the post-apocalyptic need not be so strictly didactic, or prophetic in its demand for a servitude to a divine plan, as suggested by scholars such as Carl James Grindley and by works like the *Left Behind* series. [3] Similarly, imagining the post-apocalyptic as a sanctuary for the power of humanity suggests that, just as it may not be forever hamstrung by divine root, it is also not solely a genre that needs to be marked by its "theoretical association with the Postmodern" (explored by critics such as Berger, Rosen and Dellamora, which we will discuss shortly) and the fading of meaning and narrative through such means (Curtis 12). *The Road* narrates a constant struggle with the ideas of preservation, creation, destruction and return, and amidst all of those issues (which are symptoms of belonging to the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres and 'trees of thought') the humans find themselves pressed as they are between the need for hope and agency in a ruined world that offers little but fealty to divinity on its origin-end and the threat of meaning-obliteration at the other postmodern, world-of-ruin end. Yet, despite this maelstrom, I believe that *The Road* showcases the post-apocalyptic space as conducive to establishing a new kind of human power in

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[3] Grindly's scholastic focus when assessing *The Road* is on the novel's relationship to divine scriptures like *the Book of Revelation.* Additionally, the *Left Behind* series of novels is well known for its Christian viewpoint on cataclysmic events, placing them firmly in the context of religious faith, divine plans, and Christian eschatology.

a fascinatingly dislocated fashion. That is, it is driven not by seizing or conquering the world in which they live, but in growing less and less physically attached to it, and more attached to one's own mind, and its capacity for stories, imagination and philosophical negotiation.

While the fact that the world is dying may seem to limit the kind of power and world-ownership that can be achieved, it is precisely because the world is dying that a type of individualized, non-physical, and severed sense of power can be located. That the world is dying physically seems to matter less to the protagonists than to the others, who have become cannibals in the wake of a dying world, as if they are simply conforming to a natural law of survival written by the world's continual demise. While so many others have abandoned their previous methods of living and acting, electing to become cannibals because of a *survival* response to the dying world, part of my argument regarding the special nature of a non-relational sense of power for the Man and the Boy is exactly *because* the two protagonists do not undergo a metamorphosis as severe as turning to cannibalism in the wake of a cataclysm. Indeed, the Man and the Boy do not situate their viewpoints as responses to the empirical truth of a dying world (like survivalist cannibals), but instead, forge ahead, utilizing methods of creation, personal philosophies and inward ideas about morality and human worth that are often *removed* from the hopeless doom suggested by a dying world. For the duration of the Man and the Boy's journey, their focus is more on conceptions of the self and moral philosophies as opposed to being about the world at all. In part, this inward turn and prioritization of the self, one's mental community, and philosophical expectations essentially places them in a stronger position of power than the many humans who have resorted to cannibalism, because it is the cannibals who are capitulating to the expectations of a dying world, while the Man and Boy continue to focus on each other and their own beliefs. In this sense, the cannibal is a purely reactionary individual who shifts and

edits its values according to what the world prescribes. Meanwhile, the Man and the Boy turn inward, avoiding the 'natural law' of survival in this dying world, to instead prioritize each other and their own world views, beyond the reality they face.

Just as *The Road* is not about dominating any physical realm, though religion is a major point of emphasis throughout the novel (just as it resides at the root of the apocalyptic idea), this is not a novel intent on broadcasting the need to cling to divine providence for humanity's best hope. Similarly, though identity, personality, naming and purpose are all put in tension, *The Road* avoids advocating the slow and steady demolition of meaning which might be imagined as common place in a world of ruin or in postmodern thought. Instead, *The Road* allows for a redefinition of identity and philosophical purpose that is born and sustained in illusory ways, and which corresponds to one's specific beliefs as they grow and change. Similarly, even though the notion that humanity becomes a more elemental (and darker) version of itself when it is reduced to mere dregs, and such survivors are often discussed in the genre[4], we will see that though *The Road* has its share of such human-decay, the emphasis rests on also having the power to move forward from these spaces, as well as the sheer capability of the human to overcome, redefine, and create an enclave of power in a manner that is intimate, individualized and psychologically driven. In this way, it is possible to understand *The Road* as a novel which professes the power of one's own mind; as an of expression of a reconfigured Cartesian *cogito* that does not state "I

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[4] Claire P. Curtis outlines the basic 'script' of the post-apocalyptic novel in which the 'other' is an essential aspect. She writes: "Inherent in all of these accounts is the necessary other: the groups of people who do not react so well to the cataclysm. These people, who seem to band up far more quickly than our survivors, are bent on continued destruction (despite the irrationality of this). So roving bands of cannibals terrorizing the countryside emerges as a threat from which our pair of survivors must find escape...Thus the typical-postapocalyptic novel uses the threat to the safety of the small collection of survivors to cement their ties and to push those survivors into a more self-consciously organized system.. Thus, such postapocalyptic accounts climax in the defeat of the cannibals and end on the note of hope as the small community learns of the existence of other like minded communities across the country and from which the country will rise again. This is the traditional script" (8-9).

think, therefore I am" but instead: 'I think, therefore I am *empowered'* (Descartes, Part IV, Par. 1).

The Apocalypse and its Alternate Forms

The concepts of apocalypse and post-apocalypse are symbiotic even if they are, in some ways, at odds. In order to understand and get to grips with the '*post*' portion of the apocalyptic and what it means to exist in that space, we must begin with the apocalyptic concept proper, and its own vast network of diverse undercurrents. Only once we understand the importance of the end times, and the Structural nature of the apocalyptic tradition, can we then begin to piece together the shards of what comes after, and look at *The Road*'s own understanding of that vision.

The apocalyptic lies indisputably within religious realms, existing as a major event in both Christian and Jewish scripture (Boyarin 42-58). However, the origins and current iterations of the concept certainly extend beyond these major faiths. At its core, the history of the apocalyptic idea is comprised of "two meanings" that share a certain symbiosis (Cohn 28). Historically, the apocalypse can simply refer to the "end of the world" (Alexander 43), though it may refer also to the "'unveiling' or revelation of "secret knowledge about the destiny of...our world" (Cohn 28). The first core meaning has no innate religious quality, and is instead a 'moment' of destruction and cataclysm alone, while the second conception, which sees the apocalypse as a great revelation, or 'unveiling' of an ultimate 'destiny' that is in touch with the plan of a higher power, sits much closer to the original meaning of the apocalypse, and comes far closer to the apocalyptic concept's religious tradition. Of the two, it is the religious conception of the apocalypse with which this thesis is concerned, because it is that conception which began as a display of divine intent and power in its own right. Moreover, that vision of apocalyptic meaning once promised a potent power

structure which (as we will see) can and will topple.

Continuing with the religious conception, Jonathan Boyarin confirms that the term *apokalypsis* can be "Gloss[ed] as a "revelation' that will specifically 'disclose a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" (Collins qtd Boyarin in Dellamora 42). This "supernatural world" that offers a hope of salvation is, as Rosen adds, the "unequivocal...promise" of "God['s]...plan" in which "mankind" is subjected to "God's ultimate judgement" to receive punishment or reward (Rosen XII).Whatever the major or minor differences in the various religious understandings of the end times, it is important to note that they all involve "destruction of the way things are" before all is "cleansed" and things are "made anew" as a "sort of cosmic recycling" (Daniels 3). Indeed, understood from this millennialist, eschatological, and religious angle, while the apocalypse certainly involves (even necessitates) the process of destruction, it is, at its core, a highly systemic process that has as its main goal the establishment of a very particular "ultimate order" (Rosen XII). From its religious roots, the apocalypse is a planned mechanism specifically designed to instill, promise, and possibly even create an undeniable form of order in the universe. It provides the feeling that God has a plan and that his plan will be enacted. More than this, for the faithful, it operates as a kind of promise that, eventually, everything in the universe will make sense and the right outcome will come to pass. The key point: God is the force of power, and it is a power so great and fundamental that it creates a structural scheme that is highly ordered, detailed, and seemingly unassailable.

Now, while it is clear at this point that the apocalyptic concept has an innate and important tension between order and systemization at its core, as well as annihilation as part of its cycling process, the apocalyptic concept has certainly not remained static. The idea that the apocalyptic

notion has undergone a shift is a conception that is handled well by Elizabeth Rosen, Richard Dellamora and Frank Kermode, all of whom cite a fascinating secular shift in the apocalyptic idea that is most potently located in literature. For Rosen, this shift in the understanding of the apocalyptic idea seems to come about with the thinking-world's shift into postmodernism, in which there is "an overriding sense of a chaotic, indifferent, and possibly meaningless universe" (Rosen XIV-XV). It is an idea that is at odds with the God-ordered power of the traditional apocalyptic notion, but Rosen believes it is perhaps a "response to a culture that is caught up in a crisis that challenges the very undergirdings of its makeup" via postmodernism (XV). To Kermode, the fact that the apocalyptic sensation could shift to meet our changing societal outlook is not surprising, as he corroborates the ability of the apocalyptic to be "changed by our special pressures, and [to be] subdued by our skepticism" (Kermode 29). Still, this shift should concern us, at least initially, as the field of literature has attempted to enact this seemingly impossible pairing of an apocalyptic idea that is necessarily a grand-narrative, with the societal push to postmodernism that rejects the very idea of grand narratives (Rosen XX). This linkage occurs in apocalyptic literature, creating a modified apocalyptic tale that Rosen calls "neo-apocalyptic"(XV). According to Rosen, it is a shift in the apocalyptic tale that is notably "grimmer" via its "focus on cataclysm" and the failure to "offer [or] anticipate a New Jerusalem" or any kind of salvation promise (XV). Instead, this "neo-apocalyptic" literature functions as a "lamentation over the degeneracy of the world" (XIV) as well as being a cautionary tale about "gloom and judgement...punishment...[and]...imaginative but definitive End scenarios" (XV). This neo-apocalyptic tale assumes, essentially, that all mankind is beyond renovation and that our degeneracy is more or less complete. At this moment, we might well be concerned that the apocalyptic concept is not the power-driven, systemic-obsessed idea that I have described it to be, especially if it describes the human as hopeless and the goals as meaningless. In this modern shift

from a "sense-making" apocalypse to a "neo-apocalypse" that centralizes humanity's degeneration, it would seem that postmodernism has paradoxically written its usual "challenges [to] traditional sense making structures [and] grand meta narratives" onto the ultimate grand narrative of all: God's plan (Rosen XX-XXI). In short, according to Rosen it would seem that the eternally traditional apocalyptic concept has become, for the moment, postmodern – perhaps it might be said that it becomes less about power and consolidation of systems and more about a creeping sense of meaninglessness. If that were so, it would likely jeopardize the conception that the *post* -apocalyptic novel provides a form of power at all (which is the central contention of this thesis). However, while it cannot be denied that the apocalyptic concept has shifted in the modern lexicon from a religious narrative of privilege, power and elitism to one of catastrophe that is more reflective of "the fears and disillusionment about the present" and a modern "overriding sense of a chaotic, indifferent, and possibly meaningless universe," it is still possible to argue that *even if* the apocalyptic idea has fallen under a modern-day sway, it is *still* (and always) concerned with power and systemics (Rosen XIV-XV).While there may have been a severe shift in the conception of the apocalypse (that necessarily leads to a conception of the *post*-apocalypse), the apocalyptic idea's recent turn is not only concerned with meaninglessness, but it can also be associated with the conception of power and organization in a socio-political manner as well, which is worth considering briefly.

According to Mary Manjikian in *Apocalypse and Post-Politics,* the apocalyptic idea has a separate branch beyond the religious or the postmodern. For citizens of westernized, developed nations, the apocalypse looms as a potentially devastating moment that is both immediately plausible, and could destabilize or obliterate the current geo-political power-holders entirely. Manjikian believes that "Americans," for example, "have developed a fascination with apocalyptic scenarios" and that while there is not, as yet, a "critical consensus regarding the propensities of

individuals to theorize about the end times, the[ir] motivations...[or] the [ultimate] meaning of such an activity and... its utility," there *is* "a consensus that apocalyptic theorizing is both on the increase and [is] an activity which now appeals to mainstream Americans--- rather than being exclusively the province of ...religious fundamentalists or survivalists" (6). More importantly, Manjikian notes that literature of dystopia and apocalypse in particular is most prevalent in "dominant" nations which appear on the international stage as world leaders because such a literature (even if not religiously driven) is generated from a dominant hegemonic nation in a power position, and belongs most often in today's modern world to a "highly ideological society with a strong, dominant narrative" (6-7). This relationship between the apocalyptic concept and the idea of power and dominance is possible, Manjikian notes, because only those in power can conceive of what *loss* of power may truly be like--what the collapse of America, for example, might yield (6-7). One must have it, to imagine losing it, essentially. Manjikian notes also that " imagining the demise of one's empire serves both psychological and political ends and is a useful way for moving beyond the situatedness of one's own experience and coming to a broader understanding of the hegemon's significance (or lack thereof)" (7). If that is so, then the apocalyptic idea, even without its religious-trappings, and even if it partly engages in postmodern doubt, simply seems as though it *must* traffic in the realms of order, control and power. The relationship between the concepts of apocalypse and order are that fundamental, even in our current age. Thus, while we cannot simply cast aside the potentially post-modern shift that has altered the apocalypse and defined the *post*-apocalypse, it *should* be possible to analyze those narratives not just in terms of the presence of their decay or their ruin, but also in terms of the potential existence of power within those spaces.

Manjikian also suggests that "Apocalyptic fiction can serve [to form] a new stance for evaluating and interrogating contemporary political themes like progress, the spread of democracy,

and what it means to be a 'civilization'" (29), allowing readers and writers to "ask political questions" about "organizations and structures" (29), or to "reformulate and re-envision our stances... [that] we [may] have taken for granted" (29). And if we take this as a fact, we must note that it only deepens the apocalyptic concept's relationship to power, order and 'the system', while also suggesting that to conceive of an 'end' lends those who conceive of it a kind of power to assess his or her present that he or she may not otherwise own. Though the potential for critical thought about society that is one possibility that is at work in the shift towards the post-apocalypse, clearly it need not be the only one, and we can extrapolate Manjikian's understanding of the apocalyptic novel to note that the apocalyptic work *must* always be in some kind of dialogue with what was, even if what *was* is no longer *there* (as in the post-apocalypse). This necessarily allows the apocalyptic novel to engage in a conversation of power, even if it also flirts with postmodern-like meaninglessness.

According to Rosen, the ""raison d'etre of the *traditional* apocalyptic narrative" is the creation of a highly elite, paradisiacal "New Jerusalem"-- the reconfiguration of a society *meant* to house the most worthy and powerful entities possible (XIII, XIV, emphasis added). In *that* mould, the true goal of the apocalypse is simply to allow God to intensify an enclave of power and truncate the number of detractors to it. It is a move of consolidation, and in every way, represents a kind of 'biblical power play' in which God's plan produces only *the* most potent bastion of believers possible. In that vein, while the apocalyptic idea is certainly a " sense-making" narrative "of ancient lineage" that provides an "ordered universe with a cogent history" it is necessarily also a power-grabbing narrative in which the faithful are promised a place in a glorious state run by God himself: a New Jerusalem that is planned to rise as "God intervenes to restore order to a disordered world and [to] restore the faithful" (Rosen XIII; XIV-XV). More than an organizing principle, then, or a way to fantasize about the demise of the world as we know it, both the secular and religious

conceptions of the apocalyptic idea necessarily operate on the premise of power. However, just as Curtis noted that "Postapocalyptic fiction exists at a crossroads" it is also true that *The Road* frequently struggles with the very same tensions that the apocalyptic concept does: issues of meaning, power, purpose and definition. As I will argue, however, *The Road* will provide a fascinating example of the accrual of power *not* at the national level, or in the modern day consciousness, but at the level of one "Man" who must navigate both his own past, and his purpose, and one "Boy" whose perception of the world will be shaped *only* by what he and his father do, and what he believes is 'right'. After all, as we will see, the world of *The Road* is one with no other informants for such things. And while the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic concepts are always in negotiation with a kind of power-expression, the power that potentially exists in *The Road* may well be a power entirely of the protagonists' choosing and nothing less, or more. This capacity to make one's own sense of power is only possible because the post-apocalyptic shift creates a 'power-void' that characters like the Man and the Boy are capable of utilizing.

The notion that the post-apocalypse can fight against meaninglessness *and* New Jerusalem's order in order to create a space of power that is clearly *apart* from expectations of ruin or from other movements is a central concept I will employ in my analysis of many aspects of *The Road*, including its reliance on religion, didacticism and moral codes. The novel is in dialogue with these concepts, and certainly contemplates the meaning and meaninglessness of them, but it *does not* necessarily enact the neo-apocalyptic shift that Rosen writes of, whereby the modern apocalyptic reader apparently must be frozen by "the[ir] fears and disillusionment about the present" and a modern "overriding sense of a chaotic, indifferent, and possibly meaningless universe" which hails from the postmodern. Instead, as Manjikian and the apocalyptic lineage itself helps profess, the apocalyptic

idea, even in the modern sense, simply cannot be divested from the issue of the structure, system, order, narrative, or power, even if the relationship to power and the nature of its accrual within that apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic frame changes. The concept of 'gaining power' by being able to conceive a loss of it (in the sense that conceiving the end of a system and how it comes to an end allows us to criticize and reform that system) may seem an awkward concept, but it is one that becomes much more potent in the realms of the *post*-apocalypse, where the issue goes beyond conceiving a loss, to experiencing it, and where the concept of reforming a system is pushed into creating and defining a new one, or abandoning it entirely. *The Road* showcases the aspect of post-apocalyptic power that understands the apocalyptic relationship to the idea of a system, but imagines the post-apocalypse as an opportunity not just to reconfigure order or 'seize' an old version of power for one's own-- but, rather, to take a notion like Manjikian's thoughts of "reform[ation] [and] revision" and expand it to a to a concept of *reinvention*, *redefinition* and finding power in oneself.

To this point, I have noted that the apocalyptic concept undergoes a great shift in which the scripts of its meaning have changed. In that change, there is born a conception of power that is possible only in a world in which the overriding structures of a society are stripped bare, and the promise of apocalyptic or biblical salvation is also gone. This is because the post-apocalyptic landscape contains a void of power, structure, or control that could be filled by a number of potential suitors.

The expression of this void in the genre exists because of its relationship to the apocalyptic narrative and how it differs from and abandons that narrative. The historical function of the apocalyptic narrative has always been that of an organizer-- a "sense-making" "paradigm" that promises order to an "overwhelming, seemingly disordered universe" (Rosen XI, XIII). With the classic apocalyptic tale the promise is the provision of "meaning" and structure where none

may seem to be. As we know, the apocalyptic concept is one of "unveiling" or uncovering" (Rosen XII), and in that, the very nature of the apocalyptic narrative is to contextualize the universe into a believable plan, and to suggest that there *is something* at the proverbial heart of an existence. However, according to Rosen, Dellamora and others, the apocalyptic concept has spawned a change. In the shifting of the apocalyptic narrative, the concept of a sense-making structure slips away to instead offer the *destruction* of that promise of order. As Rosen describes it, it is "a bleak shift in emphasis from the belief in an ordered universe with a cogent history to one in which the overriding sense is of a chaotic, indifferent, and possibly meaningless universe"(XIV). Essentially then, we see a shift between a world set to a pre-determined plan to a world that is slowly succumbing to a fact of absence.

Fascinatingly, this shift goes beyond religious roots and finds a working expression in the post-apocalyptic novel, wherein the very shift between structure and absence-of-structure that seems to occur at the theoretical level of the apocalypse occurs in the literary works of the post-apocalyptic genre and, specifically, in *The Road.* In the post-apocalyptic novel, the Fall is a fact, and often *the only fact* that remains about the world, as memories of the past world fade over time. The overt fading from what was to the ruin of what is, is the very foundation upon which the genre rests, and the post-apocalyptic novel itself is the exploration of the world that is necessarily in the throes of absence, navigating from what once had meaning and actuality, and promise, to something that may no longer house any of those attributes, or any attributes at all. The claim that the world that once was represented as a seat of power is now vacant is not an idle one, however. In *The Road,* the era of cities and hierarchies, social expectations and infrastructure is over, and in its ending, the physical world is left vacant, and, as we will see, it is inhospitable for the production of any real sense of power at all. Instead, power will be based on

humanity's mental faculties where conceptions of reality, creativity, imagination and identity are all able to be entirely reworked.

Situating Scholarship on *The Road*

There are a number of overarching concepts that are central to *The Road*'s development as a post-apocalyptic novel that battles with and ultimately resists the pull of meaninglessness, as well as worn-out old-world hierarchies and ruin. The issues that are central to reimaging *The Road* as a post-apocalyptic novel that asserts an emancipated if beleaguered human authority are these: The clash of knowledge; the integrality of dreams in the novel; the importance of relationships; the potential life and death of religion, duty, and morality; and the survival (or not) of history, humanity's legacy and the ability to create and define meaning. Working with these concepts, I believe the novel wrestles with and ultimately abandons ruination, meaninglessness and potentially the postmodern, as well as the weathered structures and grand narratives of the old world. Further, there are many scenes in the novel in which the depiction of the world itself and the images that are placed within it can be highlighted as sites of tension between structure and ruin in the genre, and they too will be important to understanding *The Road* as a post-apocalyptic novel that eschews both grand narrative and ultimate annihilation in favour of invented, new or personal structural concepts that allow for an individualist human power chiefly through the act of creation– both abstract and actual.

Rune Graulund argues that the novel rests upon the precarious structure of "the landscape of the desert" (57). He suggests that the concept of 'the desert' has always been integral to all of McCarthy's works, but that this structural quality holds "unprecedented importance" in *The Road*. Graulund's claim carries some import for this thesis as well, as it will assist our reading of *The Road* as a novel with a foundation that is precarious and in-tension, much like the

apocalyptic concept to which it is necessarily related. Graulund notes that the desert concept is “a source of sustenance and rejuvenation" at times and an "environment in which both individual and society break under the strain of [the desert's] unrelenting indifference and meaninglessness" at others (57). One should note the similarity of the desert concept to the apocalyptic concept and its innate tension between concepts of chaos and order, and destruction and renewal. When we note that these concepts share a mirrored tension, and we further note that, according to Graulund, the 'desert' concept is an essential foundation in *The Road*, the understanding must be that *The Road* is immediately and essentially built on a foundation of tension between the survival and rebirth of order and structure, versus decay, destruction and meaninglessness. In making that statement regarding *The Road*, we can extrapolate about the nature of its ingrained tensions further, given that it resides within the post-apocalyptic genre, which itself is necessarily and immediately engaged in the apocalyptic grand narrative, and the fading of that narrative and its promise of universal meaning and the plan of a higher power. In being *post*-apocalyptic, *The Road* ought to be past all of that. For as we noted previously, the *post-apocalyptic* is shorn of so many of the aspects that lend meaning and structure to the apocalyptic, like a guarantee of God's plan (and even his existence), an elite society of saved-believers, and a new world devoid of sinners, among others. Because each of these aspects lends the promise of real meaning to the world and the universe at large, and even gives a purpose to the apocalyptic musing itself, the loss of so many of these aspects in transition to the post-apocalyptic could be said to place the possibility of meaning and meaning-creation within the post-apocalyptic genre in real jeopardy. And further, to be more particular, if we take Graulund's point that the foundation of *The Road* is a foundation of 'desert' of "deserta" or "absence," which is itself so steeped in "unrelenting indifference and meaningless" (57-58), then surely the central issue within a post-apocalyptic,

deserta novel like *The Road* must be the issue of meaninglessness. Indeed, with the odds so stacked against it, it is conceivable that meaning may not stand a chance of survival in a book like *The Road*. In it, the land itself is a "barren, silent, [and] godless" "waste" that offers "nothing to see" in its "cold" and ever-graying days and its nights "dark beyond darkness" (McCarthy 3-4, 8). As a result, there is said to be "no hope for starting over" (Curtis 7) and, yet, for all of this deserta, all of this absence, and all this potentially snuffed out meaning, *The Road* very much tries to 'start over'-- or at least, inasmuch as the Man and the Boy exist in a world of ruin and fight to make their own world out of it. It may not be a new world, or a planned one, and on occasion they may struggle with meaning too. But throughout it, the Man and the Boy fight to *make* their own meanings, carve their own agencies and craft their own authorities, in however small or abstract a fashion (as I will show shortly).As such, while Graulund states that the desert concept at the core of *The Road* can be a place where "both individual and society break under the strain of [the desert's] unrelenting indifference and meaninglessness," it is my belief that the Man and the Boy overcome great struggle in order *not* to individually "break" but to instead *gain* power (Graulund 57). Instead, *The Road* creates a space in which the inner authority of its protagonists overcomes the pall of meaningless, postmodernism, and the ancient megalithic systems of the past world. In that previous world of grand schemes, governments and general 'narratives', the individual human and his internal thought has little sway. In this post-apocalypse, however, power comes in the severing of relational ties to previous methods of power, and instead, can be found within the self, internally. That is, *The Road* exemplifies the ability of the post-apocalyptic genre to postulate spaces where humans are given a surprising space of non-relational power and authority that springs forth from the mind, and one's ability to refuse to capitulate to the harshness of the present-world's reality. Further, try as they might (and they do),

neither the 'postmodern' strain of unrelenting indifference and meaninglessness, nor the strain of pained-memories of old world hierarchies and expectations of previous structures can obliterate this kind of individualistic, heedless, and internal form of power. While the post-apocalyptic deals in a near-obliteration, it is in that obliteration that humanity finds itself straight in-between past-structure and future-meaninglessness, only to emerge in a space of its own, and ultimately deny the siren song of the past as well as the cold whispers of the obliterated, meaningless future.

The Road struggles through a post-apocalyptic landscape that at once focuses on the sheer act of simple survival as much as it represents a battle between order, grand narrative and structure in a world in which systems, organizations and meanings have become grey and faded via postmodernism and the casting off of grand narratives and believable control systems that the concept promises. Indeed, the shift in the overarching concept of the apocalypse *alone* (from one promising renewal to one offering none) suggests that grand designs of structure, salvation, order and implied meaning are being sacrificed at a new-world altar in which the apocalyptic event is no longer a great plan, or plot, but simply an "end-time without revelation...[that doubles as an] ultimate evacuation of meaning" (Collins 42). In this loss of meaning, the changed apocalypse gives way to mere " remainder[s]," "symptom[s]" and a sense of "disorienting" absence (Berger 7). And yet, despite the potential decline of meaningful structures, symbols, and beliefs that may occur in new imaginings of apocalyptic scenarios, *The Road* manages to reject an apocalyptic shift into meaninglessness, while also avoiding a return to the organizing principles of power that are (or were) contained in a modern society.

The Road chooses neither to travel a path backwards to a prior era of structure, nor to embrace the death of meaning in a world so clearly starved of it, and instead presents a reorganized and redefined sense of power that is individual and potent. In rejecting prior

methods of power distribution, while also ignoring the phantom of meaninglessness that seems to hover over a broken world, McCarthy's novel shows not simply that humanity is capable of surviving when the world is ruined, but that humanity is capable of the ultimate power within itself. Working within the spaces of creation, philosophical notions, and the mind's ability to manipulate conceptions of reality, the Man and the Boy are able to define and redefine the self *and* the world around them. In McCarthy's post-apocalypse humans master meaning creation, and may tender their own rejection of the fated world that apocalyptic theory promised, *and* the ruined world that they now exist in, authoring their own world in the process. Humans such as the Man and the Boy then become recognizable 'islands' of power, even 'world-makers' of their own by choosing to alter, re-define, appropriate, doubt and move beyond (in most cases) the spectres of the past, horrors of the present, and fears of the future. Though *The Road* is certainly tempted by and even sometimes succumbs to meaninglessness and the fading conceptualizations of a past order and a past narrative, it illustrates that the trappings of a *kind* of order, structure, and grand narrative have the ability to persist through redefinition even in "a world" Claire P. Curtis calls "utterly dead" (19). However, these narratives and structures are not the same pillars that western society clung to in the past, but are rather, the re-defined and self-defined trappings of a new empowered individualistic human, and nothing else.

The Road uses its world not simply to express death, hopelessness, or human struggle. Curtis argues that "*The Road* proves the impossibility of... a movement back to civil society by describing a postapocalyptic world" composed only of "husks of humanity" that is entirely devoid "of all point [and] mutual advantage for banding together" (Curtis 18-20). However, this thesis views *The Road* as a statement that is similar to Matthew Mullins' description of the novel as "transcendental-humanist" (76). It is a transcendental-humanist work at least inasmuch as *The*

Road offers a vision of humans that move beyond the chains of their previous society as well as the ruins of the present world. While embracing their own abilities for creation and redefinition, The Man and the Boy can transcend their grim realities to achieve a power within the self. With creation as a focus, the spirit and mind that were heretofore unrealized (and perhaps unexpected in such ruination) become central. In this manner, humans in the post-apocalypse become more than just desperate people clinging to the past, and, certainly, far more than simple "husks of humanity that wander searching for cans of food" (Curtis 19).To chart this road to human power and authority that transcends the corporeality of the ruin of the past and looming ghost of the future I will turn first (and briefly) to an interpretation of *The Road* and 'human dependency'.

Making a World in the Ruins

Interpretations of *The Road's* overall message, its core nature, and what it aspires to accomplish are vast and varied. According to Carl James Grindley, *The Road* can be understood as partly a repackaging of "The Book of Revelations," because the "landscape" of the novel "aligns with the effects of the Seven Seals" of Revelation and McCarthy's language is "rich in religious, primarily Christian terminology" (Grindley 11-12). In fact, *The Road* includes thirty-three mentions of God, and five of Christ and a plethora of other "Judeo-Christian lexical items" including "Christendom," "godspoke," and even "chalice" (Grindley 11-12). Meanwhile, English columnist, writer, and political activist George Monbiot called *The Road* "the most important *environmental* book ever written," noting that the novel "considers what would happen if the world lost its biosphere, and the only living creatures were humans, hunting for food among the dead wood and soot" (Monbiot, emphasis added). Reading the text through an environmental lens, Monbiot argues that *The Road's* central contention is that "our dependence on biological production remains absolute" and that from this dependency, the novel suggests that "civilisation

is just a russeting on the skin of the biosphere, never immune from being rubbed against the sleeve of environmental change" (Monbiot). For both Monbiot and Grindley, then, the novel works as a potential reminder about humanity's place in the world, and while both may seem to offer a didactic promise, neither Monbiot's nor Grindley's interpretations seem to hold much concern for the agency of the reader or the characters, and instead appear to centralize the pure spectacle of the disaster. Indeed, both of them necessarily postulate that the human is dependent on a structural force (either God's plan or the biosphere) and neither see *The Road* with any concern for its ability to provide the human creature with a potential emancipation from a dependency on either structure. For Monbiot, the book exists to "haunt" the reader about our world's potential fate (and the importance of protecting the biosphere), though it provides "no graphs, no tables, no facts, figures, warnings, predictions or even arguments" to effectively 'teach' the reader about how to avoid such catastrophe (Monbiot). Similarly, Grindley's understanding that *The Road* operates as a re-imagining of Revelation is necessarily devoid of advice and instead postulates a vision of a universal moment that will come to pass, and in which an apocalyptic moment can and will happen. In short, then, both of these interpretations render humans powerless, and they postulate that we are doomed if a system fails (biosphere) or that even a world of ruin was always part of a master plan in which we had no final say. I do not see the novel as one which exists simply to remind us of the importance of these dependencies or of our systemic obligations (religious, environmental or otherwise). Instead, I will postulate that in *The Road*, even with the physical death of the world, and the death of a belief in a higher power, The Man and Boy find their own world, and stoke its flame high and bright. They do so in such a way, I will show, that they manage to maintain a kind of life in a world that was supposed to be dead, and that this life is *in them* and not in any dependency.

The Man and the Boy represent the only real hope of redefining and even mastering a post-apocalyptic world that might otherwise be described as "utterly dead" and lacking any life beyond "husks of humanity" (Curtis 19). With them, there *is* hope for starting over in the novel, at least as it is expressed in the battle to not just uphold the far-gone values of a previous, nearly non-existent past-world, but to create and defend new values and meanings. First, the values of the Man and the Boy uphold that to be "Good" one must simply not "treat other people as food" (4). Though simple, this guiding principal highlights one attempt to define a world that now lacks its own definitions and rule-sets in the post-apocalypse. In this expectation, the Man and Boy agree that any engagement with cannibalism would render them unable to claim the positive moral label of being and remaining "the good guys" (McCarthy 77). Now, if we follow Erik J. Wielenberg's suggestion that the Man and the Boy's outlook is a similar philosophical move as the one Kant made for our world (in his suggestion that rational beings should be duty-bound to respect each other's "intrinsic worth"), then we move to place the Man and the Boy as philosophic thinkers with a clear ability to define their world.

In his time, Kant was a fundamental figure of modern philosophy who sought to not only establish a moral code but to redefine how we understand our world. He argued for the perpetual powers of reason and duty, and agreed with other thinkers that natural laws are established by human perspective (that nothing in the world could be processed outside of the human mind or its phenomenology [Hatfield, *Prolegomena to Any future Metaphysics ix-x*]), just as he also sought to assert that one could establish a moral imperative that could not be disputed. Further, Kant sought to ask "whether such a thing as Metaphysics is possible at all" and in this manner, he attempted to alter the very ways we validate and perceive the world (Hatfield, *xxvi*). For as strong as Kant's thoughts were in helping to define his Enlightenment world then, the thoughts of

the Man and the Boy may be equally as powerful (or perhaps even more so) in defining theirs. That is, as Wielenberg notes, Kant's imperative establishes an "important distinction between persons and things" such that persons and "rational beings" have "an intrinsic worth that must always be valued and respected" (Wielenberg, 4; Kant *Grounding* 36; *Virtue* 97), and, indeed, according to Wielenberg, Kant's categorical imperative finds a unique form of expression in *The Road* that helps define the characters, and their world. The Man and the Boy view the notion that good people would never eat other people to be an undeniable expectation, similar to Kant's categorical imperative in terms of its importance.

Wielenberg rightly notes that there are more principles and imperatives that must be met in the new world in order that a person be recognized as one of the 'good guys', however, and in this we learn more about the power of our characters. Wielenberg himself selects a total of six imperatives to being a rational being in *The Road* and claiming one's place in what he calls the "Code of the Good Guys. "For Wielenberg, the six imperatives to the "Code of the Good Guys" are:

1. Don't eat people
2. Don't steal.
3. Don't Lie
4. Keep your promises
5. Help others
6. Never Give Up.

(4)

In a way, then, *The Road*'s Man and Boy share a likeness to Kant, for like Kant, they create and shape what they view as a universally valid law that is to be upheld by all rational thinkers

regardless of ulterior issues.[5] For the Man and the Boy, it is categorically (or undeniably) true that any rational-thinking 'good person' would never eat another human being, or steal, or lie, or give up prematurely. In their world, through their eyes, they have defined this notion as a moral necessity and any breach of it would annihilate one's claim to being morally rational in the structure of their world such as they make it. In this manner, the Man and the Boy are philosophers, and not unlike Kant, they seek to apply to their world an inalterable moral truth, just as they seek to alter the world in which they live. Just as it is "characteristic of the great modern philosophers to attempt, each in his own way, to rebuild philosophy from the ground up" The Man and the Boy engage in a building up of their own world through the perseverance of worldviews (*ix*).

While Kant wondered about the human ability to know God, for example, given his views on the "capacity of the human intellect" and "limits to human understanding" (ix-x) the Man and the Boy face perhaps this same problem, only written into their actual world: The world that the two inhabit is a world that is "barren, silent, [and] godless" (McCarthy 4). It is a reality in which "there are no godspoke men"[6] (32), and as such, it would seem that the survival of at least one aspect of metaphysics -- the aspect of God's and humanity's ties to them-- would be impossible indeed (McCarthy 4, 32). The survival of metaphysics through the question of the divine and its potential to be carried on, re-written, or obliterated in the post-apocalypse is but one challenge that the world of *The Road* poses to our 'would-be philosophers', and though this is

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[5] Kant refers to the concept of a universal human law throughout his work on ethics, including in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* where he states, somewhat famously, that humans are "ends in themselves" to which Morale laws and expectations and rights are universal" (77-79).

6 The term "godspoke" appears coined for the purpose of the novel, and which, I imagine, refers to religious people or people of faith, either following the word of a god, or leading people to the word of the god. I would think then, that the phrase "there are no godspoke men" would simply suggest that there are no people who interface, on any level, with god. There is no faith, and the notion of a religion as a kind of institution is an impossibility in *The Road*.

certainly a central issue for the post-apocalyptic genre, given the relationship to the overtly religious nature of the apocalypse, as was discussed earlier, the book issues several other challenges to the potential survival and possibility of metaphysics. In all such challenges within *The Road* the only characters we can rely on are the Man and the Boy. And with the Man and the Boy as primary thinkers, the viability of metaphysics (specifically in the realm of existence, being, reality and identity) undergoes assaults when the Man's identity can be obscured and his reality destabilized. In fact, dreams and memories are also major sites for potential destabilization, as well. And although destabilization of both reality and the divine is challenge enough for *The Road*'s two philosophical world-makers, like Kant himself, their system of morality also undergoes a 'contemporary' challenge that cannot be overlooked.

The Man's Moral Imperatives

Immanuel Kant's notion of a system of morality defined by an undeniable and duty-driven categorical imperative had a notable detractor in the form of David Hume. While the two were not contemporaries, Hume famously argued that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (*Treatise* 415). To Hume, reason is not the motivating factor in any action, and it cannot be used to determine 'proper morality'. Instead, reason, and the calculated imperatives and reasoned-systems of a thinker like Kant can provide only an "auxiliary" role in understanding human actions as they interface with morality (Hume and Kant's Morality)[7]. For Hume the passions might be understood as "what we today would call emotions, feelings, and desires" that include "aversion, hope, fear, grief, and joy" in addition to "pride, humility (shame), love and hatred," and simply

[7] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-hume-morality/ ("Reason and Motivations", par. 1)

pleasure (Hume's Moral Philosophy)[8]. I take the time to express Hume's focus on desire as the chief determinant of human action as it contrasts Kant's sense of reason and human duty to morality, because an intriguing contrast is established by the world and inhabitants of *The Road*, and, at times, it chafes against the attempts of the Man and the Boy as they attempt to define the 'proper morality' of their world. The Kantian building of a universal morality for *The Road*'s desolated world that is enacted by the novel's protagonist-duo has its own detractors in the form of roving 'others' who offer an aggressive and alternative world-view that nearly parallels the difference of opinion between Hume and Kant as to the nature of the world and its morality. Understanding this parallel is essential to placing the Man and the Boy as world-makers with a power for world definition and human mental prowess that can eventually transcend even in its barren landscape.

In *The Road,* if we allow the six imperatives of the "Code of the Good Guys" (Wielenberg 4) to stand up as a kind of well-reasoned sense of morality not too dissimilar to Kant's imperative and universal morality, then we can also move forward and suggest that the Man and the Boy, by virtue of some simil arity to Kant and his goal of "rebuilding...from the ground up" (Hatfield ix), indeed occupy a space of world redefinition. Like Kant and other philosophers who seek to attempt some fundamental rebuilding of their world's philosophy, perhaps we can suggest that the first stroke in understanding the potential power of the Man and the Boy is that they occupy just that same space, except that their philosophy is the only philosophy available. As arbiters of a new kind of moral philosophy that they themselves generate, The Man and the Boy are exceedingly powerful, even vital, in the (re)formation of this world. However, though the world is without other protagonists, and thus, 'philosophers' in a

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[8] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume-moral/ ("The Passions and the Will", par. 1)

direct sense, it is not without those whose actions directly dispute the new moral imperatives that the Man and The Boy offer. Indeed, if we continue the analogy between reason and desire as clashing forces in the attempt to define the morality of *The Road*'s world, then the Humean opposition to the moral imperatives of the Man and the Boy comes, first and most basically, in the form of the cannibals and other ne'er-do-wells like "the bloodcults", "road agents" and "marauders" who feverishly "[consume] one another" either via cannibalism or attempts to conquer each other (McCarthy 16). In fact, there are at least three encounters with these types of people, and each places them in direct opposition to the Man and the Boy because these others operate on what Hume might have called "Passions".

Two separate passages in the novel offer a look at those who would seek to detract from the world-building philosophy of the novel's protagonists. An encounter with a row of decapitated heads placed as territorial markers as well as a roving band of "marchers" "on the road" help situate the protagonists' philosophical focus (90-92). First, the Man and the Boy come across a grizzly scene of decapitated heads and "shapes of dried blood and coils of viscera" that seems to mark the place of a previous battle between roving bands of marauders (90). What is intriguing in this passage is the narrator's description of the Man's familiarity with these events, which emphasizes the notion that the brutal scene and any like it belong to some ancient and perhaps outmoded practice. We are told that the Man has "seen it all before" and this familiarity is best emphasized in the reliance on the word "old" as a descriptor of the scene, where the Man enumerates the types of tattoos and symbolism used by the folk involved in the conflict, calling them "Old scars with old motifs" (90). The staleness of the slaughter is furthered in the description that "everything" in the scene is covered "gray in ash" (90). The layers of dust further enhance the notion that the scene hails from some previous time and, as a result, the Man has no

use for it. This conception is solidified a tad further when we note that the Man "walks along the wall" of heads in an emotionless "last review" before later admitting that the "tableau of the slain and the devoured" represents a "late history" with a message (91). The message is one of "warning" that this is not the reasonable domain of the "good guys" but that of marauders, cannibals and those driven by passions of power, greed, and pleasure. The secondary message, though, warning or no, is that the domain of cannibals and pleasure seekers, even in this world, is not just an ancient and outmoded one, but one that is actually *so present* as to be fatalistic. If it seems contradictory to suggest that these cannibals are both a glance back into "history" whose symbology, 'language' and actions are simply "old", while they are at the same time so present as to be fatally indifferent to the future, it is intentional. This is because in either case, where the Man and the Boy represent something that is capable of moving forward from the ruin to design, create, or imagine something new, these others are defined in manners both intensely present and beholden to the past to suggest that the alternative to forward progression is a kind of stasis that is altogether damning. That stasis is partly contained within their relationship to the past in the descriptions provided by McCarthy, but more importantly, it can be abstractly witnessed in the role they play as immediate creatures of the apocalyptic present and symbolic tropes of the genre.

A day after the Man's encounter with the bloodied grounds of a cannibal battleground that itself represents a "late history", the Boy is forced to keep low and out of sight as the Man observes a passing cadre of "marchers" moving "four abreast" clad in "clothing of every description" and in "scarves" that were "as close to red [in colour] as [each] could find" (91). Much like the battlegrounds before, these cannibal marchers are again placed into an outmoded and ancient imagery-- clearly not belonging to the imagined-world that the Man and the Boy try

to uphold with their Kantian-like code of moral imperatives. Like the passage of the decapitated scene that minimized the grizzly images and their perpetrators by tethering them to some ancient unenlightened past, the second view of the marchers we are given confirms them as existing in a kind of historical or outmoded stasis. The narrator refers to the "raggedy horde" as being formed in a "phalanx" or as similar to "wind-up toys" (91). Furthermore, the keeping of "catamites" is yet another historic reference to the ancient Roman, Etruscan, and Greek tradition of maintaining a pederastic relationship with a young boy (a catamite), who is indentured to serve his master's pleasures. In this descriptor, the horde of marchers is not only lodged firmly in an outmoded past, but also seems quite clearly interested not in the reasoned care for universal human worth or duty, like the Kantian duo of the Man and the Boy, but instead, in the achievement of fulfilling their own desires, regardless of the moral issues. This outmoded and self-interested morality is defined a moment further when the narrator writes that the horde also kept a dozen women, "some of them pregnant" (92). However, though McCarthy makes a clear effort to link these travelling cannibals to something from humanity's dark ages, effectively suggesting their inability to function as progressive thinkers in the vein of the Man and the Boy, the notion that the protagonists are progressive and therefore empowered while the cannibals are not relies more on the conception that the cannibals are intensely associated with the present, and that they are defined by it in such a way that they have absolutely no ability to move beyond it.

The first hints of the roving cannibals' stasis as being linked to their focus on the present comes somewhat innocuously in McCarthy's description of the band. While we already noted the numerous ways that McCarthy tethers the wanderers to a brutal human past, he also occasionally problematizes the notion that the cannibals are simply reminiscent of a dredged-up barbarity of humanity's past when they are described as an "army in tennis shoes" or when their weapons are

said to be "hammered out of trucksprings". While these moments are fleeting, they serve to remind the reader where it is that these scenes are located. They are not in Ancient Rome, its dark ages, or any such historical location. They are here, in McCarthy's "barren" post-apocalyptic present in which (for some) "there is no past...there is no later" and the "day [is] providential [only] to itself" (54). And being precisely in that present, survivor's frame of mind, it would seem that the cannibals all but *accept* the rules of the new world, as suggested by their move into cannibalism . To become a cannibal in a post-apocalyptic space is to become, we might rightly imagine, entirely subsumed by the 'way things are, and are going to continue to be' such that matters of survival are no longer matters of morality. To be willing to reject the worth of a human life and render it down into food is a rejection of the principles of past society and human valuation specifically on the basis of the demands of the present. In a present so scarcely stocked with 'cans of food' to begin with, those who believe that adaption and survival is all that matters will pursue such a grotesquely practical path, putting the reality of the present above the morality of the past, or the promise of the future.

This forsaking of the future is perhaps in no way better expressed than in piecing together our duo's various encounters with the cannibals in which humans are clearly being tallied as a finite resource, which obliterates the future in a piecemeal fashion in lockstep with the cannibals' consumption. There are two scenes in which we may witness this directly. The first is in the protagonists' discovery of a residence presided over by cannibals that houses naked humans in a cellar (109-111). After entering into the cellar, the Man holds out the flame of a lighter and in the darkness finds that "huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands" while "on the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous" (110).

The grotesque discovery speaks to exactly how finite the future becomes to those who elect to prioritize the present reality as the only truth worth considering. For the cannibals whose concern is obviously that of survival, the future and its length is a purely temporal prospect to be measured in the rationing and management of their stock. In the case of the cellar-bound humans cited above, while it is clear that the cannibals are managing their resources and thus prolonging their future with the careful removal of a human's legs for food, while still preserving his life for future use, it is also clear that their future is certainly nothing to build on. It goes only as far as the stock will go-- it goes until no human in that cellar has legs, nor arms, nor breath to draw. Perhaps the cannibals' future will continue only until the various diseases of the flesh set in and the human meat is inconsumable-- a process which is already suggested in the "hideous" stink of the cellar. Perhaps then, the cannibal's future is no 'future' at all, but rather a slow dismemberment and decay of that future, which is prolonged only by a brief extension of the present, toward the next meal. In this, there is no will toward any philosophy, nor creativity, or world-making in any more grand fashion, and we might say there is thereby no power in it at all, for there is no potential to master that existence beyond the rationing of a food supply. In a similar fashion, too, is the brief scene in which the Man and the Boy, late into their travels, discover "a charred human infant, headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (198). This brief but brutal image operates as perhaps the most grotesque and direct example of the complete and total disenfranchising of any notion of 'a future' on the part of the cannibals. If a human child, with all its potential, can be sacrificed for the needs of less than a day's worth of sustenance, then it is impossible to view the cannibalistic 'bad guy' other as anything but entirely 'present' and a slave to the post-apocalyptic reality. It also forces readers to put from their minds any arguments that the "pregnant" (92) women we mentioned earlier are proof of a continuing

and communal future. Those pregnancies may be little else but food-in-waiting. Such a capitulation to the demands of reality can be considered nihilistic, static and ultimately powerless, for having forsaken all of what once mattered and all of the potential of the future in favour of the most basic of survivalist outlook, could be little else but fatally static. Indeed, this kind of life was one of the Wife's arguments for the superiority of suicide, as she balked at the conception of being a mere "survivor". In the Man's recollection, she states "Survivors... What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors, we're the walking dead in a horror film" (55). In fact, so locked are these cannibals in such a space that we might even call on the classic image of Thomas Hobbes' conception of nature to define them further, in that we might say that they are in the most basic 'state' of human existence which Hobbes thought possible to occupy--that life which is "nasty, brutish and short" (*Leviathan* 78*)*. Regardless, the notion that the post-apocalyptic human who forsakes the future for sheer amoral survival is indeed little more than a zombie is as apt a conception as any. At the very least, noting that the cannibal-others enact such a capitulated and aimless existence establishes the sheer ideological and philosophical distance between the Man and the Boy (as world-building and potentially powerful 'good guys') and the cannibal roamers, who are instinctually driven 'bad-guys' who weakly capitulate to a post-apocalyptic present. The differences are succinctly offered in a conversation between the Man and the Boy days after their encounters with the cannibals from the above passages, when the Boy seeks reassurance that the two of them "wouldnt ever eat anybody...even if they were starving" confirming again that this is because the two are the "good guys" who are "carrying the fire" (129). Even for the child, the act of sheer survivability not only situates the two groups as diametrically opposed in the real-world, but as opponents in the realm of ideology and philosophy that lies beyond the harsh reality in which they live.

Returning, then, to the issue of philosophy and the way in which the protagonists and cannibals represent an opposition that can be linked to Kant versus Hume in our own world, we see that for the Man and the Boy, through their likeminded defense of universal concepts of human law and worth, and their creation of a new kind of categorical imperative in which the central maxim of moral goodness is to not eat another human, the comparison to Kant is useful. Meanwhile, for the roving bands and their reliance on immediate sustenance, their comparison to a Humean concept of desire is possible, but incomplete. While the roving bands might stand as the duo's unquestioned philosophical and physical opponent in the novel, Hume was not always a detractor of Kant's theories, nor was he as callous in his thought as the novel's cannibals. In fact, though Hume actively spoke against the "monkish virtues" of moral rationalists like Kant, he also decried philosophers like Hobbes who believed that people act according to their own desire, and do not innately care for or possess benevolence. Instead, Hume believed purely in causality, experience and observation.[9] As a result, Hume had very little faith in monolithic structures of morality and decision-making that arise from "systems and hypotheses" based on "moral rationalism" (Hume's Moral Philosophy, par.1). In that sense, we might well suggest that Hume contended against the kind of categorical philosophy that the Man and the Boy undertake, as it is not precisely based on observed reality so much as intellectual reasoning. It follows that at a minimum, while the comparison is loose, Hume would find some modicum of common ground with the cannibal others, insofar as their morality is also based solely upon the reality that they experience, and is caused by that reality. In this way, in addition to some of Hume's thoughts on desires, the cannibals occupy a reality-first morality which might allow them to stand in analogous opposition to the Kantian reasoned-morality of the Man and the Boy. However, we

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[9] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/#Mor

might also note that it would be more accurate to analyze the cannibals as Hobbesian in their morality, as they contain little ability for benevolence, rationalism, and morality beyond their own day to day needs.

Surely, if the cannibals subscribe to any school of philosophical thought at all, it would be to that Hobbesian kind which Hume called "selfish schools" who believe in humanity as being in a constant "condition called war" wherein "ever man is enemy to every man" in view of "competition," "gain," "saftey," and "glory" (Hobbes 76-78). In fact, McCarthy seems to pull directly from Hobbes himself to cast the mould of his cannibals, as Hobbes claims that humans will always be willing to kill one another to "furnish" their survival "in such condition" where "there is no place for industry" and the "fruit" of the earth is "uncertain" (78). Hobbes further calls to that cannibal brutishness in suggesting that the "Nature" of the world that humanity inhabits should "thus dissociate and render men apt to invade and destroy one another" as long as there looms a "fear of death" (79). This is the state that the world of *The Road* appears to be in, and, with humanity reduced to what Hobbes viewed as the reality of "the savage people in many places of America", it is believed also that "nothing [that] can be unjust" in such a state and as such, reasoned notions of "right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place" (78-79). In as succinct a manner as possible then: this is the nature of the cannibal rovers in *The Road*. If they might be imagined to have a philosophy, it is the philosophy of self-interest and sustainment that admits no space for reason, morals or justice in the same way that those concepts appeal to future-thinkers like the Man and the Boy.

Whether Hume could see the merit of a selfish move into cannibal-morality under the circumstances of a post-apocalypse or not, the implication in all of this is the juxtaposition between the Man and the Boy as principled (almost-Kantian) moralists who are also content to

continually forge ahead on the road, towards their ocean-goal, while these others are so painstakingly described as selfish, desire-first survivalists whose actions are not concerned with an overall philosophy beyond pure survivability. Moreover, like the philosophies of Hume and Hobbes, the cannibal others are tied exclusively to, and even birthed out of, an obsession with reality and the demands of the world as it stands. In this obsession, the cannibal others can see no future, and are thereby static, locked in a selfish and weakened state of perpetual survival, which perhaps admits a kind of perverse empiricism in which, like Hume, the reality is all that matters, while the post-apocalyptic reality is, in turn, precisely why they have become selfish and heedless to any notion of future or progress.

Rejecting Reality, Inventing the Self

While the inclusion of a band of morally bankrupt cannibalistic humans is an exceedingly common trope in the post-apocalyptic genre (Curtis 8-9), the juxtaposition between the protagonists and the cannibals on philosophical grounds, capacities for progression, and actual physical contest, leads to a sense that despite the inclusion of the typically immoral 'other', what is at stake in *The Road* is much more than simply another retelling of "the traditional script" (Curtis 8). Instead, without a physical 'community' to hold on to or find solace in, the duo must find solace in each other and in conceptions of the moralities which they themselves invent. To the Man and the Boy, respect for human worth is expressed in the commitment not to consume another human being "even if we're starving" and the ultimate expression of good intention is summarized in a mere motto: "carrying the fire". What is yet more fascinating, however, is that the Man and the Boy are not simply effigies of Kantian imperatives applied to a post-apocalyptic world, because even Kant could see the worth in empiricism and the tallying up of reality as it is, "freely admit[ting]", as he did, that some of the words of his opponent, the staunch empiricist

David Hume, managed to "interrupt [his] dogmatic slumber" to awaken him to "completely different direction[s]" (Kant, *Prolegomena* 10). For as much as he resembles Kant as a world-builder and rational moralist, the Man will *not* be woken from his proverbial moral slumbers and made to capitulate to the brutality of the reality he faces. There are those around him who *have* chosen to witness reality for what it really is, and, in so doing, elect to take their own lives (like his Wife) or abandon all precepts of human worth (as the cannibals do), and while this abandonment of the worth of human life is a choice of the Wife, for the cannibals it is clearly a weakness in the form of a capitulation to the harsh reality they face. While the cannibals are merely in thrall to the survivalist expectations of a dying world, neither the Man nor the Boy see fit to allow their post-apocalyptic reality to control them.

Certainly, there are a moments when both the Man and the Boy seem to be beleaguered enough by the nature of their reality to consider capitulation by wishing for death, but each of those cases are brief and ultimately cast aside in favour of their invented philosophies, beliefs, and continued mental strength all of which are removed from the reality that they face. The Boy is featured in two such instances of potential capitulation. In the first, the Boy and the Man converse about his mother. The Boy begins:

> I wish I was with my mom
>
> [...] you mean you wish you were dead?
>
> Yes.
>
> You musnt say that
>
> But I do
>
> Dont say it, its a bad thing to say
>
> I cant help it.

I know. But you have to.

How do I do it?

I don't know. (55)

While recognizing the reality that the Boy's mother is dead, the Man will not allow the Boy to wish for the same fate, no matter how grave the scenario. To capitulate and actively eliminate oneself from the world is a "bad thing", a weakness, and one that must be avoided. However, unlike the "bad guy" cannibals who cope with brutality by being brutal, the Man has no real answer to how that is to be done as a 'good guy', stating only the importance in refusing to give in. There are other scenes where such difficulties surface for the Man and Boy alike, but in each case a transcendence over the difficulties they really face is demanded-- though the nature of exactly how to enact that transcendence is almost always undefined and underlined by a frequent "I don't know"[10]. This lack of ability to define, in real terms, the process by which one must navigate the calamitous reality they face calls into question the precarious worth of anchoring to reality in the first place. And, in fact, another exchange between the Man and the Boy reveals just how precarious the duo's power becomes if they are asked to consider reality. This particular scene involves the Boy running away from his father to chase another Boy he believes he sees. This dangerous flight infuriates the Man, who does not believe the child exists at all. The Boy's chase of this vision, whether real or not, prompts the Man to firmly tell the Boy "There's no one to see. Do you want to die? Is that what you want?" to which the Boy responds, breaking into tears, "I don't care...I don't care" (85). In this particular instance, the reality of the situation essentially breaks the Boy, and the Man quickly realizes, once again, that rousing his

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[10] There are 29 instances in which the Man or the Boy respond with a lack of knowledge that is most often presented as an "I don't know" on topics that range from how the duo are to survive, to how they should identify themselves, facts about the reality they face, and how to handle their thoughts. Some examples on pages: 49, 53, 55-56, 64-65, 82, 92, 127 and even as late as the Man's death at 268-269.

child to a cold truth about the unlikelihood of his hopes is not the way to preserve him, even if the Boy's dislocation from reality made him chase blindly. As a brief attempt to fix the moment, the Man "stopped. He stopped and squatted and held him. I'm sorry, he said. Dont say that. You musnt say that" (85). Again, the Boy is asked not to engage with the same conclusions about the world that his mother did, and to remain empowered in whatever way he can. To illustrate this, very soon after having said "There's no one to see" the Man states "There are people there" after all (85). This reversal of his initial views suggests the proper route to power and survival in the post-apocalypse is *not* the honest truth, but faith in a story to tell oneself. That fact is made much clearer in a later conversation in which the Boy and the Man reveal how much they depend not on reality, but a story of their own making. The Boy begins:

> There are other good guys. You said so.
>
> Yes.
>
> So where are they?
>
> They're hiding
>
> Who are they hiding from?
>
> From each other.
>
> Are there lots of them?
>
> We don't know.
>
> But some.
>
> Some. Yes.
>
> Is that true?
>
> Yes. That's true.
>
> But it might not be true.

I think it's true

Okay.

You don't believe me

I believe you.

Okay.

I always believe you.

I dont think so.

Yes I do. I have to.

(184-185)

Yet later, as the Man lies dying he reminds the Boy to keep faith in the goals they set without knowing their plausibility, imploring his son to "find the good guys" and "carry the fire", and though the Boy doubts the veracity of these concepts, the Man defends them outright, no longer speaking of reality as he knows it, but the reality of their story (278). When the Boy asks if the fire is real at all, collectively speaking of everything that they believe in, the father says "Yes it is". While the Boy does not "know where it is", suggesting it cannot be found in reality at all, the Man reminds him that "It's inside you" (278-279). In each of these three moments then, it becomes clear just how important it is to anchor *not* to reality, but to transcend it, and believe in something beyond what one sees-- to scribe a story about the world that is far beyond reality. In yet another move, the Man, on his death bed, asks the Boy to tell him a story "you have...inside of you" and that such stories do not have to correspond to "real life", because "real life is pretty bad" (268). When the Boy doubts the worth of such a story, the Man contends that such stories that are "like dreams or just things you think about" that "dont have to be true" but that they would be "a pretty good story" anyway (269). In each of these exchanges what is vital to grasp is

that their hold on reality, practicality and knowledge within their post-apocalyptic present is of very distant importance to their empowerment and future survivability. For the Man and the Boy, defining their world and attempting to gain mastery over it is all about projecting the beliefs of the self like a blanket over reality. So while they are similar to Kant as people who are interested in redefining the methods by which others think, live and value their world, unlike Kant, Hume, or Hobbes, they very often realize that power, in many forms, comes in the dislocation from empirical reality, and not in the binding to it. Rather than wake, like Kant, from the "dogmatic slumber" of their various ideologies to see the worth in empirical reality, these two philosophers see the continuance of 'dreaming' or a controlled and intensely personal *dislocation* from reality as the seat of power in the post-apocalypse. Whether that is done in actual dreams, like "the rich dreams [the Man] was loathe to wake from" or in the strength of one's "pretty good story" that does not " have to be true" the methods to gain power are not empirical at all, but invented, disassociated and remoulded to become the reality, dream, and truth that is desired. However, while disassociation from what is real is of key import to understanding how the Man and the Boy achieve power in the post-apocalypse, it is an idea not without its detraction, and must contend with those who see the dream, memory and other moves away from reality as expressions of traumatic injury and a nihilism that, quite apart from the rendering of the novel in this thesis, is believed to admit no potential for forward movement and power.

Beyond Trauma and Credicide

Much of *The Road* is rife with the presentation of dreams. At times, the dreams in *The Road* provide foresight or foreshadowing and, at times, they provide memories of the past. As in the sudden recollection of a conversation with the Man's Wife, the novel is occasionally ambiguous as to whether the moment is a dream or a waking memory (55). In either case, a

dream of past events or a memory of them will be referred to, going forward, as part of 'history', and the issue of history -- especially a personal history-- is a contentious and potent area in establishing human power in the post-apocalypse. As Francisco Collado-Rodriguez notes, McCarthy places "reiterative importance in memories" and the recollection of the past (46). For Collado-Rodriguez, these memories offer the chance for *The Road's* people to tell stories, and in doing so, they offer a potential escape from the world at hand, and the harshness of reality (45-46). However, according to Collado-Rodriguez, while the concept of storytelling is expected to promise the power to "soothe traumatic pain," the use of memory and storytelling as a method of coping in the post-apocalyptic space of *The Road* is truly "antithetic" and powerless (45-46). This is an important contention to discuss within this thesis, as I seek to express how the human is able to secure power in the post-apocalyptic realm, and, thus, how *The Road*`s use of memory forges a battleground and eventual victory towards a reshaping of reality and their own power. In a sense, then, Collado-Rodriguez's reading of the novel and my own must clash, as I do not believe the past or its trauma is the central issue when there is great power to be had in conceptions of the self and the future.

Collado-Rodriguez describes the operation of the human mind in coming to storytelling:

> ...Once the fragmented memories of...traumatic events are brought to consciousness, the victim can work through them and eventually structure the memories in a coherent narrative form. [In this function] Storytelling [is to be] understood as the conscious attempt to remember what happened and give meaning to it, [and] it [should] soothe the pain of the victim as teller. Additionally, [storytelling] is...a manner to propriate the sympathetic capacity of the listener or reader as a secondary witness. (49)

Further, Collado-Rodriguez cites trauma studies to suggest that, typically, "A victim still immersed in the process of working through her trauma cannot articulate in a fully coherent way an experience she can remember only gradually...[with] [fragments] distortion [and] ghostly manifestations [being] common in [traumatic] literature" (49). Following this reading of trauma-storytelling, Collado-Rodriguez believes that "*The Road* describes life in terms so negative and catastrophic that its characters' symptomatic anxiety becomes a structural and collective condition" and that "nobody in the book" is capable of removing themselves from that condition (49-50).

While Collado-Rodriguez agrees that the characters in *The Road* create stories that "eventually may become legends" and "generate myths," he doubts the capacity of storytelling to soothe trauma, and essentially suggests that the characters are powerless to escape or rise above their post-apocalyptic circumstances. Certainly, it is easy to imagine that the force of a cataclysmic event could be powerful enough to essentially annihilate one's ability to progress from trauma. Indeed, I would argue that Collado-Rodriguez's assertion of the potency of trauma in the post-apocalypse is valid inasmuch as it describes the cannibals, who seem to be very much locked in the day to day process of survival, and nothing more. I have mentioned already that these cannibals are examples of a capitulation to the new natural 'law' of a dying world, and exist now as survivors who, as the Wife says "are little more than the walking dead" (McCarthy 55). In the Wife's implication that post-apocalyptic survivors are little more than mindless entities suffering from a kind of post-cataclysmic 'zombification', we may be able to witness the kind of 'inescapable' trauma that Collado-Rodriguez believes is fully present in the novel. In my view, however, while the cannibals are certainly subsumed by an inescapable capitulation to survive over all other faculties, the very nature of the Man and the Boy as creative individuals who seek

to uphold concepts like "the fire" and "the good guys" suggest that they have the ability to progress beyond endless suffering. While the Man may struggle to communicate direct experiences of the past (as he does when asked about his friends) he does see fit to tell new stories and defend ideals for living for both himself and his son, specifically maintaining positive ideals of storytelling for the Boy in his late-novel conception of the self as always having a "pretty good" to tell "inside of you" even if they are not always positive or true (McCarthy 268-269). Moreover, the character of the Wife proves to be a harsh judge for the Man, and the recollection of her in dreams and thoughts occasionally seems traumatic for the Man. Yet, still, as we will examine in more detail later, the Man actively elects to discard the picture of his wife alongside all other physical documentation of his past identity before continuing on the Road (51). While the man admits he would like to find a way to keep his Wife in the lives of him and his son, his decision to cast her picture aside and also reiterate the worth of the Boy's personal experiences and his capacity for storytelling offer two clear moments that highlight his ability to defend the power of storytelling to survive beyond trauma. Even if he has difficulties in these decisions, Collado-Rodriguez's view on the 'inescapable' quality of trauma seems reductive, especially in a novel which features a continual journey on a road, which eventually leads both to new hope, new communities and a continued sense of self-worth and the survivability of ideals for the Boy, even as the Man perishes. Still, Collado-Rodriguez' views are not without support, and his notion that *The Road*'s "mythmaking" is "useless" in "a context in which there may be no future left for anybody" (65) suggests a larger issue that is potentially present in the post-apocalyptic space: the issue of credicide and the death of faith.

Collado-Rodriguez' reading of *The Road* echoes Warren W. Wagar's discussion of apocalyptic concepts in *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (1985). In his

introduction, Wagar asks the reader to consider the term "credicide" which he describes as "a killing much more tremendous than deicide," being that "credicide is nothing less than the destruction of the will and power to believe" -- the murder of faith and faithfulness in (potentially) *all* of its forms (XI). Both Collado-Rodriguez and Wagar argue that faith is dead, and that no manner of useful myth stands a chance of saving post-apocalyptic individuals, or even casting them as productive world-makers. Wagar suggests that in a space where faith itself dies (as in an apocalypse), the only resulting structures would fail. Wagar asks "In any case, who could believe anything in a credicidal civilization? How could a rational new religion emerge in such a poisoned mental climate? If new religions did materialize would they not rather [engage] in crazy throwbacks to primitivism, panic-stricken responses for unsophisticated minds to the onrush of catastrophe? " (XII). The claim that any structure would be "primitive" and anything but soothing, useful, powerful or progressive is echoed by Collado-Rodriguez, who says that the Man and the Boy are "unable" to progress within their "traumatized minds" while the relic-nature of their quest toward the sea is "reduced to its basic aim" (62) and the fragmented human is "trapped" in its trauma and consistently related to its former "violence" (62, 67-68). This post-apocalyptic state of being trapped within humanity's past violence comes about, according to Collado-Rodriguez, because the power of storytelling, mythmaking, and legend is allegedly obliterated in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road*. In fact, according to Collado-Rodriguez, the novel expresses precisely the same credicide that Wagar fears more generally, for Collado-Rodriguez believes "religious myths have no room [nor space for human empowerment] in [this] situation (66)" and the Man and the Boy have no choice but to harbour a "suspicion of mythmaking" while "incessantly suffering from the symptoms of [the] traumatic condition" within which the Boy and the Man appear to regress. Eventually, this would seem to suggest that

"storytelling" and myth "seem to be invalid" and neither the Man nor the Boy can progress mentally beyond his traumatized condition (Collado-Rodriguez 65). In fact, Collado-Rodriguez notes that the Boy declares that "he cannot believe..." the stories of his father because those stories are 'not true' (McCarthy 286). It would appear that faith is indeed lost, and a credicide has seemingly occurred. And when we note also that Collado-Rodriguez reads the scene with old-man Ely as a "prophecy of total extinction;" in which "religious myths have no room [to exist]," and neither does God, while structural myths are simply "lies" from a dying, desperate man that offer no hope (Collado-Rodriguez 66), the relevance of Wagar's credicide is given made clearer. In essence, then, it appears that Collado-Rodriguez's reading describes the credicide that Wagar believed was inevitable in such a "poisoned mental climate" as a traumatic- post-apocalypse (Wagar XII); and the existence of credicide in Collado-Rodriguez's reading of the *The Road* is supported by Wagar's claim that credicide is typified by "a crazy throwback to primitivism [...] a panic-stricken response for unsophisticated minds" (XII). After all, Collado-Rodriguez argues *just that* in suggesting that the post-apocalyptic human mind is *not only trapped*, but rooted to its violent past in view of the falsities of storytelling (Collado-Rodriguez 66-68).

It would seem that any positive conception of the Man and the Boy's role of world-making would be impossible, but that is not so. The fairly extensive numeration of interpretations as to how it is that the Man and the Boy are rendered powerless and inert by their post-apocalyptic world are noteworthy, and certainly, well-argued. But, they disregard other modes and means of empowerment within the novel, and are incorrect for it. What is and will continue to become clear is that *The Road's* central characters exist as a beacon of human power and capability, and that they do so in a manner that directly contradicts and combats the conceptions offered by Collado-Rodriguez and others. I do not believe that credicide truly comes

to pass, just as I do not believe that storytelling and mythology are negative forces in the novel. Rather, they are sites of power because they are divorced from the traumatic realities to which others have capitulated. Clearly, Collado-Rodriguez relies on a notion that privileges reality as the most potent force in defining the self and the human (in)ability to create and maintain an enclave of power. What he overlooks, however, is the novel's depiction of the resilience of the mind to withstand so-called traumas and hold tight to self-driven internal elements. The potency of the Man and the Boy's internal ideas and mental inventions as the *only* means by which they can weather the various hardships and degradations of the post-apocalypse is present, in fact, in perhaps the most potentially 'traumatic' moment of the novel: the Man's death. As the Man lies dying upon the beach shore, he hurriedly seeks to remind the Boy of the tools he will need to rely on in order to survive this world. Most potent among those tools (besides "keeping the gun") is "doing everything the way we did it," "finding the good guys," and the "need" to "carry the fire" (278). Far from their stories being "useless" and instilling "false hopes about their capacities" (Collado-Rodriguez 51) it is their entirely invented (and internally hosted) world-view that *is* their capacity, and the only thing worth upholding. In fact, the sheer power hidden within the human is further alluded to in an abstract moment that carries the image of the Boy as a light-carrier who remains ardent amidst traumas, by the sheer fact of his internal beliefs. The scene reads:

> He woke in the darkness, coughing softly. He lay listening. The boy sat by the fire wrapped in a blanket watching him. Drip of water. Fading light. Old dreams encroached upon the waking world. The dripping was in the cave. The light was a candle which the boy bore in ringstick of beaten copper. The wax spattered on the stones. Tracks of unknown creatures in the mortified loess. In that cold corridor

> they reached the point of no return which was measured from the first solely by the light they carried with them. (280)

In this, there is no question that the Boy is beset by traumas (represented by unknown creatures lurking in the dust, in part). But despite the reality of that ultimate 'trauma ' that the Boy will face in the loss of his father, it is precisely the protection and proliferation of their created imperatives that will save him and make him strong. In a world which offers "no return" to a better reality, the Boy must bear the weathered candle of the ideas he and his father made, and he must "spatter" the "wax" of those notions around the cave by going beyond realities in search of his power, and sharing his 'unreal' creations with others. In a kind of inversion of the famous Platonic allegory of the Cave[11], the Boy must embrace those so-called 'useless' stories and notions that he and his father invented and forsake empirical realities in order to be empowered. He must "carry the fire" and "find the good guys" because those ideas represent the sole way to process and 'measure' the world in a manner that lasts. Instead of relying upon an emergence from an illusion-laden cave to witness a pre-existing and external light of knowledge waiting for one's arrival as Plato's cave dwellers do, the post-apocalypse demands a far different pursuit that is internal, personal, freely creatable, without regard for external reality. The result is not knowledge, purely, like "the elevation of the soul to the contemplation of the highest ideal of being"[12] that Plato's cave dweller is said to receive once casting off all that is unreal. Instead, it is an elevation of the self as a pure creator and storyteller who is not at the mercy of fact and reality, and it is a power that I believe the post-apocalypse uniquely allows. It is the "light they carried with them" (28), rather than the pre-existent light granted by the world of "mathematical

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[11] In which one exits the dark cave of illusions and falsity to find the pure empowerment of true, empirical knowledge found upon simply reaching the upper-world and synthesizing the view. The famous allegory describing an ascent into a realm of external knowledge can be found in Plato's Republic, Book VII. (pg. 312-340)

[12] "Introduction and Analysis", *Plato's Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett. Ed. Sue Asscher and David Widger.

sciences," and it is a more empowering and available force in the post-apocalypse than any conception of knowledge which exists-already, simply waiting to inform the dweller what a fool he has been. The mind, then, is not too "traumatized" to operate as Collado-Rodriguez notes, nor is it secondary to reality, but rather, it is a major source of power-- a major source of 'light'. And though the Boy asks in a panic about whether 'the fire' is "real" at all, the only thing that matters, the Man says, is that the Boy knows it is *inside* him and carried as real by him. This is the potency of the mind and the internal human self in the post-apocalypse. The mind is a place of power and creativity more potent than reality, and whether its notions are 'false' or not matters little.

The Potency of Speech and Storytelling

Thomas H. Schaub rightly highlights the importance of storytelling and philosophy in our world, stating that "the quest for life's meaning, we may safely say, has always been a central aspect of human life and culture" (153).While he then notes that "Cormac McCarthy's...*The Road* stages [a] problem of belief from the inside" he quickly declares that the problem is solvable within the novel itself by suggesting that *The Road* is "unique in locating the basis for meaning in the father's love for his son," and even in suggesting that this meaning "transcends the father's efforts to affirm and protect his son's life" (153). But how does the novel do this? If it was not already clear that an aspect of unique power belongs to the Man and the Boy on the basis of their moral codes and philosophies, then an equally important power comes to the duo through a belief in themselves, and a commitment to engaging with the world on their own terms, not the terms that reality dictates to them. Moreover, the above quotation regarding the Boy's own light inside a cave is important due to the way in which that scene plays with the foundational philosophical tale of the pursuit of knowledge. Rather than re-enacting a Platonic story about the

nature of the world and its pre-eminent "forms", the description of the light as being within the Boy's power suggests that, once again, the terms of their reality will not dictate the stories in which they believe. Just as the duo refuses to engage in the expected banditry and cannibalism of the post-apocalyptic degradation, choosing instead to author their own story featuring 'good guys', 'bad guys' and moral imperatives; they also refuse to believe in a story of ultimate truth that is already in place. In the story that they tell and believe, the world and its truths are revealed only insofar as the Man and the Boy elect to scribe them. They hold the ability to shed the light on a world of stories of their own making, and they need not rely on leaving the cave behind and begging for the light of the sun. The connection between *The Road* and the Platonic idea of knowledge is but one of the examples of the potency of the post-apocalyptic for telling *new* stories, authored by the self, and this ability for story-telling to double as a definitive act of world-making that is essential to understanding human power within the novel. In order to successfully exonerate the power of storytelling as an empowering agent in the post-apocalypse, however, we must first understand how language operates in the post-apocalypse, and in *The Road,* as a precarious yet vital vessel to reimagining reality and the self.

For James Berger, one of the central battlegrounds in coming to understand apocalyptic schisms can be found in gaining an awareness of, and even mastery over, the ability to actively speak one's experience in an apocalyptic reality. However, not all truths must be revealed, and not all things must be said. Indeed, Berger notes that, in thinking about the Holocaust one must "think about issues of historical transmission -- of events, aftermaths, symptoms, representations that in various ways conveyed, transformed, and suppressed historical events; how certain events, it seemed, could not be said, and *others must not be said"* (Berger XIV, emphasis added). While we must be careful to acknowledge that the Holocaust is a far different issue than *The*

Road's post-apocalypse, it is also important to note that though James Berger speaks of the impenetrability of a cataclysmic language, acknowledging the difficulty in expecting a language to emerge for speaking something so terrible, there is yet hope to imagine the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* as more empowered by the speaking *and* the failure to speak. Despite his acknowledgements of the traumatic difficulty of speaking in the post-apocalypse, Berger also believes that the post-apocalypse "demands a 'saying the unsayable'" so that an account of an otherwise "unimaginable aftermath" may be "provided" (XX). While Berger's focus rests strongly on the concept that the *modern world* is one of post-catastrophe, suggesting that "these aftermaths, however unimaginable, have actually happened" he also admits that "languages for them exist" and must continue to if we are to "characterize our postmodern/post-apocalyptic" present while "coming to terms" with our past (XX).

Clearly, Berger's focus is vastly different from this thesis, but the import is relevant. That is, while there is a tremendous difficulty in speaking of a catastrophe -- a "historical trauma"-- there *is* hope and power and transformation potential nestled within words, and fabricated histories, and storytelling. For our purposes, Berger's notion of "saying the unsayable" and choosing what will and will not be said and its impact on characterizing the "post-apocalyptic" is useful. First, returning to the conversation between the Man and the Boy in which the Man tells the Boy that his personal story is "pretty good" (269) and worth telling, it is possible to reveal part of the novel's empowerment through the implied ability to redefine and essentially re-speak one's reality as desired. With no one else around to speak of their experience, and few around who care to speak at all, the act of speaking places the entire defining of a ruined reality within the speaker's control. Within that same scene, near to the Man's death, that potential lies in the Boy alone. As we highlighted earlier, it does not matter whether the speech is factual or if it is

false-- in either case, the very act of producing language is of crucial importance in itself. In fact, the sheer necessity of speaking as a means to repair or validate a community, while also retaining a sense of power and importance for its members is expressed when, on his proverbial deathbed, the Man states:

> You have to talk to me...
>
> I'm talking.
>
> Are you sure?
>
> I'm talking now.
>
> Do you want to tell me a story?
>
> No.
>
> Why not? [...]
>
> Those stories are not true.
>
> They don't have to be true. They're stories.
>
> Yes. But in the stories we're always helping people and we dont help people.
>
> Why don't you tell me a story.
>
> I dont want to [...] I don't have any stories to tell
>
> You could tell me a story about yourself
>
> You already know all the stories about me. You were there.
>
> You have stories inside that I dont know about
>
> You mean like dreams?
>
> Like dreams. Or just things you think about.
>
> Yeah but stories are supposed to be happy
>
> You always tell happy stories

You dont have any happy ones?

They're more like real life.

But my stories are not.

Your stories are not. No.

...Real life is pretty bad?

What do you think?

Well I think we're still here. A lot of bad things have happened but we're still here

Yeah.

You dont think that's so great.

It's okay. (267-269)

In this exchange, I am struck by the insistence on the presence of and need for stories, and the struggle in navigating what is true and what is not, and what one wishes to say, and what one does not. Here, the Boy seems again run-down by the truth about the reality they have faced, and appears to have little desire to speak, especially of a falsity. However, the Man returns again with that earlier-quoted insistence: "I think it's pretty good. It's a pretty good story. It counts for something." But the Boy rebuffs the Man's desire to see him craft a story, saying "I dont want to talk about anything" and then adds that he "[does not] have good dreams anyway..." (269). The Boy follows that feeling with a sudden qualifier that proves precisely the duo's ability to *invent* lasting mottos and cast them into a reality, even if they are not 'real'. The Boy states that the Man always said bad dreams were "okay because good dreams are not a good sign" to which the Man predictably states "Maybe. I dont know" (269). In that moment, for all his concern about what is true and what is not, the Boy unknowingly remains subscribed to the very language the Man employs. Of course, the Man is right: he cannot possibly know whether good dreams herald bad

events, and, so, the idea that good dreams are a bad sign is a falsity. But amidst all his concern for falsity, the Boy does not see the relation between good dreams and poor realities as false at all, but rather an expectation and rule of this post-apocalyptic world.

Similar to those rules, at the moment of the Man's passing, he demands that the Boy follow the invented worldview they held to all along, proclaiming that he must "do everything the way we did it" and that the Boy must "carry the fire" (278). In his perpetual concern for the concept of carrying the fire, the Boy asks if carrying the fire is "real" and is frightened by his inability to locate it in the real world (279). Again, the Man places the power within the Boy, claiming that the fire has always resided within himself, but then follows on with the primacy and legacy of speech, telling his son that if "I'm not here you can still talk to me. You can talk to me and I'll talk to you. You'll see" (279). In his concern for reality the Boy asks whether he will hear the Man at all in such a conversation, and, as if reminding the Boy that the real world is not (nor ever is) primary, the Man states "Yes. You will. [But] [y]ou have to make it like talk that you imagine. And you'll hear me. You have to practice. Just dont give up okay?" (279). In spaces like this, we learn that power in *The Road* comes, in part, in the same battleground that Berger suggests, and Collado-Rodriguez seems to reject. Power here (as the ability to craft a legacy, forge on, and contend against reality) relies solely on the ability to both speak and not speak, to speak *to* and speak *about*; to speak half truths, whole truths or fake truths, and believe in the worth of doing so, regardless. Here, simply to acknowledge the self, the experience and the right to define it in story, or in an imagined conversation, is where the power is. And at the end of the novel, the resonating note then, is that, when the Boy comes across a new group, he asks if *they* carry the fire, and if they eat people or not--speaking the same language of the world that he and his father built. As one of the last moments in the novel, the narrator notes that while a woman in

the group "would talk to [the Boy] sometimes about God" and though the Boy "tried to talk to God...the best thing was to talk to [the Man] and he didnt forget" (286). In the end, then, despite the Boy's concern, whether a tale, invention or story is real matters less than the keeping to it. And in the end, what was said and not said becomes the truth that lives on and moulds things to come. That is the role that language plays in reshaping the post-apocalypse and in empowering those with the determination to speak through the catastrophe and remain faithful in the tales that they do tell. In this manner, if we take Berger's attempt to find the hope in the cataclysmic by finding the language of it, we can make the intellectual move that storytelling cannot be bankrupt in *The Road*, because the speakers define the perceived facts of their very lives through the story. Language and storytelling is instead empowering in a way that it could not likely have been in a previous society. That is because in the post-apocalypse of *The Road,* those who choose to speak have the capacity to affect reality, whether they do so to express a lack of knowledge, their own outlook, or their experiences, dreams, fears or identities.

Human Composition: History, Myth and Creativity

The Road's characters use myth, concepts of creation and a personal displacement of self not only from harsh reality, but also from chronology and identity, in order to tell their own stories of the world in a manner that makes them tremendously powerful-- and even 'godlike'. As the Man and the Boy plunge more deeply into their dreams, self-absorbed mythologies and self-authored creations, though what they become is a fascinating question. Though they wrestle with dreams, memories and the capacity for creation, as simultaneously both dangerous and helpful forces, they continue to define a world by themselves that is centered on them. In both creation and dreams, the Man and the Boy do not necessarily rely on history, time, or truth, and eventually aid each other in emancipation from prior identities, narratives, and past spectres.

The Road does not only demonstrate the power of stories, but also the human power to re-write, re-create and master new stories, and by extension, a new world. First, let's consider a passage in which the Boy asks the Man to speak of his previous friends. The Boy begins his query:

> Did you have any friends?
>
> Yes. I did.
>
> Lots of them?
>
> Yes.
>
> Do you remember them?
>
> Yes. I remember them.
>
> What happened to them?
>
> They died.
>
> All of them?
>
> Yes. All of them.
>
> Do you miss them?
>
> Yes. I do.
>
> Where are we going?
>
> We're going south.
>
> Okay.
>
> (59-60)

Ostensibly, this conversation might first imply that the Man is suffering from a form of trauma, given his difficulty in divulging detailed information on the death of his friends. Trauma or not, the novel's narrator expresses the difficulty in trying to recollect a memory or a story from the

past after a cataclysm. The narrator notes that "sometimes the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. [The Man] thought hard how to answer. There is no past. What would you like?" (54). Here, the Man's difficulty in speaking suggests an inability to forge ahead, or capture his own stories and expression as methods of power. However, while there do exist "languages" that will allow us to speak about the truths of a cataclysm, this particular passage also indicates a powerful freedom. While the conversation appears to depict a man who is powerless to conceive of the world that was, and the deaths he has witnessed when the Boy asks about his friends, it also indicates a subtle but important shift about the priorities of the day, and a subtle yet violent breaking of their yoking to the past. At the end of the conversation about his friends, the Man and the Boy show that they need not linger within the past. After twelve lines of dialogue unsuccessfully seeking the past, the Boy turns his mind to the future. He asks: "Where we are going? / We're going south. / Okay" (59-60). In that moment, he reminds us that while the past may hold questions, it is also irrelevant. What *is* relevant is the duo's quest southward, the future of their willpower, and the manner in which they create themselves in their world.

Moreover, there is an important moment in which it is possible to learn for certain exactly where the Man's focus lies. In a scene of great importance, which we will turn to shortly, the Man states the ultimate truth about the post-apocalyptic world, and allows us a brief understanding of where real power comes from in a post-apocalyptic space. The narrator notes that in this broken world "there is no past" and "there is no later" and that "the day [is] providential to itself" as long as he believes it to be so (54). The acknowledgement that now is the only time that matters in the post-apocalyptic space suggests, in part, the liberty of the Man and the Boy, for they need not be slaves to what was or will be, nor need they be weakened by

the traumas of the past. While there is absolutely no question that the Man and the Boy struggle with issues of the past and of memories, and that these come to the fore in resounding battles with dreams at the very core of the post-apocalyptic world, only the immediate sense of self matters. Only the immediate moments. However, in this immediacy it is important to note that the notion that "there is no past" and "no later" is not to suggest that suddenly the Man has become a slave to his reality like the cannibals but, rather, that whatever he *believes* and invents about the *now* is what matters. The Man's claim to the annihilation of temporal futures and pasts suggests more an annihilation of their primacy over him, when we look back to what he says after his son's query: "for him was not even a memory. He [The Man] thought hard how to answer. There is no past. What would you like?" (53-54). This passage makes clear just how monumental a shift it is to be able to entirely disengage oneself from the *history* of a world, and to exist purely in a place in which a speaker can *provide whatever answer* he or she wishes about what came before, and that the truth of the world is a matter *only* of what one would *like*. After all, we are told that the past world is "not even a memory" any longer and that the two of them have nothing to worry about but the day as it is now. That is freedom. That is the end of one's conception of self as an organism with a relationship to a world that has come before but, more importantly, it is a window into the Man`s ability to create whatever truths he wishes, and impart them upon the Boy, and even himself, as the only truth that is possible to recollect. The Man`s power in this moment is a power of arbitration and truth creation that supersedes both temporal and memorial ties. In this manner, in much the same way that they created a moral understanding of the world that suited them, the survivors of a post-apocalyptic world can ostensibly utilize concepts of chronology however they see fit.

In fact, Charles Taylor calls to a similar conception of the unique freedom and power of creation in post-apocalyptic space in an indirect discussion of modernity. He writes:

> No doubt sweeping away the old orders immensely widen[s] the scope...Once society no longer has a sacred structure, once social arrangements and modes of action are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, they are in a sense up for grabs. They can be redesigned with their consequences for the happiness and well-being of individuals as [the] goal...
>
> (Taylor 5)

While individual happiness is not at the root of *The Road*'s abandoning of the sacred structures of identity, religion and temporality, an individual's ability to recreate and redesign those systems at will most certainly is. And because of the special fluidity of truth and temporality in McCarthy's apocalypse they can create *new* pasts or understandings of it, as if writers of their own world.

The creative power of the human being in a world of ruin is first expressed in a scene involving playing cards (53). The Man and the Boy play cards, and though it would seem fairly innocuous at first glance, especially when we are told that the cards are "worn and spindled" and lack essential elements like "the two of clubs" (much like the inadequate world they now inhabit), the moment carries great significance in understanding the link between creativity and power When the Man sits down to play card games with the Boy, we witness the potential for human power in miniature as it struggles to be born against the ghosts of the past and the spectres of a potential future. In the scene, the Man attempts to first revive "old childhood games" like "Old Maid" and "Whist" from the world before. Here, he initially relies on memory and knowledge to create a positive experience for his child. However, when we learn that despite

his best effort to remember the rules "he was sure he had them mostly wrong", it is not long before the narrator notes that the past world and its trappings are now so far gone that as a whole they are no longer "even a memory to [The Man]" and that memories of the past world as a whole have now become useless (McCarthy 53-54). After this moment, shorn of the bindings of the past world, the Man is able to illustrate a minor space of human power when he chooses instead to "ma[ke] up new games" with "made up names" like "Abnormal Fescue or Catbarf" (53-54). And while this moment of creativity and empowered creation may seem to end once the man decides to "[stop] making things up" (54), this does little to actually obliterate humanity's space of authority in the post-apocalypse. For while we are beholden to certain rules, expectations, and games in the past-world, the real power comes in the expression that these games (and *any* structure like them) are essentially "up for grabs" (Taylor 5), with as few pre-definitions and temporal anchors as the emancipated Man.

Now, the two never play cards again, and while it may appear that power is lost when their creative game is obliterated, the opposite is true. Though the Man and the Boy successfully emancipate themselves from the past in their card game scene, creating new games for their new world (just like they created their own moral imperatives), perhaps their greatest power comes in the ability to destroy or abandon those games and creations at will. In the post-apocalyptic space, then, much like the mythic Judeo-Christian God of creation, famed destruction, and immense power, humanity has gained the ability to directly and wilfully extinguish both the structures of the past, the fears of the future, and even the pull of its own creations, at will. Here, history and memory show their ability to sway the human, before showcasing their essential weakness next to the power of a forward-thinking human in the post-apocalyptic space. In this brief moment the Man has control over the game, and all its structures, both new and old, and while he initially

attempts to summon a carbon copy of the past, he soon realizes that history, no matter how traumatic and powerful, cannot overpower him in a world whose story he alone can write and explain. . Indeed, besides the Boy, the Man is nearly a lone creator, for we are rarely[13] given the chance to see the world through the experience of a mind other than his own.

Immediately following the earlier-quoted scene involving the Boy's questions about the past, we learn more about the Boy's power as it relates to his own view of the world, as well as the Man's moral difficulties with his power of world-definition. On occasion, the Man expressed a dislike for his creation of games and the view of the world he provides The Boy (which is based on half-truths and false fact) because "[t]hose things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad" (54). However, it is also clear that "the child had his own fantasies", and that whether the Man builds a vision and history of the world that is composed of truths or of falsities, the perception of the world that the Boy holds, and the hope he holds for his vision of the world to be made real, will remain. McCarthy's narrator notes as much in stating that the child maintained his own fantasies including "How things would be in the south, [hoping for] other children." Indeed, we are then told that while "he [The Man] tried to keep a reign on [these fantasies]...his heart was not in it. Whose would be?"(53-54). Presumably, in his attempt to define the post-apocalyptic world and being aware of his ability to define it *alone*, as a kind of image crafter, the Man wrestles with the nature of exactly what kind of world he wants to provide his son. For the Man, as we have noted, what really matters is neither the past nor the future, but a continued presentation of an outlook and philosophy to which he and his son can cling as a method of contention against the bleak yet steady truths of the post-apocalyptic present. And while the man frequently *does* doubt whether truth is to be held above falsity even

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[13] But once, with Ely, the old 'prophet' (172-173).

if the truth is ugly, in the moment of the card game, which plays a role deciding which sort of world he will allow the Boy to perceive, the central question is one of power-- one of storytelling-- one of 'truth' and the power to create a stand-in for it, even out of a falsity. Thus, as a being with the capacity to tell *any* story and watch it flourish between them, the Man wrestles with the immediate oppressions of the present versus the hope of an envisioned future. In this, the Man is continually challenged in his shared role as empowered creator, but he consistently has the ability to choose-- to control the 'life' or 'death' of his created worlds.

Important to understanding the tension at work in the process of coming to grips with the Man and the Boy as creators both in-power and in-tension, is taking this internal debate about what should and should not be known, told, and believed about the world, and expanding it into a debate that is housed within the Man's and the Boy's powerful roles as world-makers or creators. As the two principal characters in a novel nearly devoid of characters, the minds of the Man and the Boy seem absolutely essential to the makeup of the world itself, for otherwise, the reader has only the narrator to rely upon. Within the story itself, the Boy is the Man's most pressing concern, and that which keeps him going. In fact, the Boy is the only hope for the future of the world to be carried on, in just the way they wish it to be. This is how the important concept of "carrying the fire" exists in the novel-- as the created metaphor that implies that the Boy and the Man are the *only* ones who can ensure that the world they want to make continues to exist as a marker of their own importance, and their own power.[14]As "carriers of fire", the stakes are high, but so is the potential power.

However, the duo's existence is certainly not without peril and there are several points

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[14] The term "Carrying the fire" occurs in various contexts as the manifestation of the Man and Boy's importance in the world. The statement appears frequently throughout, including 128-129; 139-142; 216; and in the concluding pages (278-279).

throughout the novel when the Man appears to overtly doubt the real strength of his position as a world-maker, because he fears the weakness that is at the heart of his creations, when those creations are based on falsities. One of the initial moments of potential disempowerment for the Man comes in the initial recollection of his conversation regarding survival with his Wife. At the most basic level, the Wife questions the Man's claim that they are survivors at all, suggesting that they are little more than "The walking dead" (55). The Man, spurned and grovelling for fear of losing his wife, is also portrayed as the less confident of the two, with the Wife appearing quite calm with her perception of the world and of the Man. While the Man "begs" the Wife not to capitulate to the call of death, claiming that he "cant do it alone", the Wife opens up her arguments with the assertion that "[She is] speaking the truth" and that the Man's claims of loyalty to her, or his attempt to debate are both "meaningless" (56). She furthers her stance in claiming that the Man can call her whatever names he likes, while simultaneously "doubt[ing]" whether the Man will "be good at" living and taking care of his son in the first place (57). However, perhaps the Wife's most relevant attack on the Man's perception of the reality they face (and his ability to be a pillar of power in it) comes in the suggestion that "[t]he one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself" and that, in order to stand any chance he would "be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost." That he ought to "Breathe" some illusion" into being and coax it along with words of love [and] [o]ffer each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body" (57). These statements define the Man's potentially lingering weakness perhaps more than any in the entire novel, for they suggest that the Man's strength and commitments to his son are based on false confidence. Her suggestion is that the Man requires illusion to propel him, and that, in order to show any kind of strength, he must create an effigy to love that gives him no other option than to instinctually protect. Indeed, there are *very* few times

where we see the Man so scathingly defined, with his faults laid bare, but I believe it is *this moment* and this recollection that instills in the Man some lingering fear over his own strength, if indeed all he has built is a world of illusions. Of course, the Man rarely shows that fear, but the issue of truth and the believability of the stories, and the 'world' that the Man has built does become a notable issue for the Boy as well, because of a perception of continued falsity. In light of the Wife's critiques and their deft summary of the Man's intense uncertainty, it is surely fair to wonder just how powerful a man he is, after all.

Struggling with the Sacrifice: The Man as Abraham

However damning the Wife's characterizations of her husband's strength are, though, Heather Duerre Humann offers an interesting reading of the relationship between the Man and the Boy in the novel, such that, whether the Man lacks the ability to decisively assert his power, and overcome his doubt, he is given power all the same, through the very same self-doubt that the Wife criticizes. According to Humann, *The Road* portrays a father and son who struggle, "stranded in a spiritually and physically inhospitable environment" (63) and she notes that "it is precisely because of these novels[15] ... bleak and forbidding settings" that these literary works provide unique backdrops in which to consider agency and selfhood" (63-64). Humann suggests that there is yet further space to discover human agency in these worlds, when we consider "Hume's notion of 'hypothetical liberty" (65). According to Humann, Hume's notion of hypothetical liberty suggests that a people cannot make a choice unless they are "truly free" from all restriction (63-64). She states, further, that a lack of such a freedom, or ability to truly choose, also absolves one of the moral responsibilities that their "supposed choices" demand (63-

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[15] Humann discusses both McCarthy's *The Road* and Styron's *Sophie's Choice* as two novels with "plots and dilemmas" that are both "bleak and forbidding."

64). For Humann, though the father is not literally a "prisoner[...] in chains," his family's situation is not only tantamount to, but arguably worse than, those most prisoners face (69). To make her point further, Humann cites several portions of the novel, drawing particular attention to the debate on suicide that is offered as a memory (McCarthy 55-59) noting that "in the middle of horrific circumstances, the couple must decide the most difficult of moral dilemmas" as they "debated the pros and cons of self-destruction with the earnestness of philosophers chained to a madhouse wall"(Humann 69-70; McCarthy 58). In short, due to the circumstances of the post-apocalyptic space, Humann essentially suggests that one cannot possibly be judged weak or powerful, decisive or indecisive (as the Wife judges the Man in that discussion), as there is no "hypothetical liberty" and, thus, no fair capacity for any choice to be expected, asked, or answered. Claiming that we might exonerate the Man of the Wife's doubt about his power because he is stripped of the "hypothetical liberty" that is required to make a real and self-defining choice is not the only boon Humann's reading provides the Man in our assessment of his power. Humann, in fact, believes that the Man "amazingly...manages to retain a degree of agency while" negotiating *The Road*'s troubled landscape (Humann 70). By 'choosing' *not* to do a thing, and "to delay and defer the most difficult of his dilemmas" while still holding on to the possibility that a thing *must* be done, the Man, Humann states, holds a certain agency (70-71). That is, to Humann, one of the chief decisions that befalls the Man is whether he and his son should join the Wife in death, or live in the world as it is. Though the Man knows he must take his son's life if the world becomes too harsh or too dangerous (or they risk becoming captured, raped, and killed, as the Wife highlights in a recollection [54]), he remains unsure whether he would be able to carry out such an act, and only partially commits to it. In fact, the Man's lingering doubt about his ability to carry out the killing of his son is a central thread in the Wife's

scathing criticism of him, as she doubts whether he has the power to do the deed. Of course, the query also weighs heavily on the Man himself, calling his empowerment into question in turn. He struggles with it often, and does recognize the possible choice he faces, "[going] as far as [to]...instruct his son on how [to] kill himself..." (70). Though, as Humann notes, "...it remains unclear to us (and to the father himself) if, when faced with the crucial moment of decision, he would choose to pull the trigger or not" (70). Humann, in citing the moment when the Man directly asks himself whether he *could* do it, notes that "Ironically, the father's ability to *not choose*...is what allows him to maintain some semblance of agency and autonomy" (70). It is in the aspect of delay and non-commitment within which power is contained. To think that a tactic of delay is a source of power in a world which Humann rightly calls the "epitome of bleak" seems preposterous, but that very indecision, according to Humann's theory, is what allows the reader to not only exonerate part of the Wife's criticisms of the Man's power, but also, find him a further space for authority and individuality.

Given that the need to protect his child (even by providing the child's death) is described as if it is ordained by something fundamental to the Man's existence,[16] the "doubt" about his ability to proceed with the killing of his son in order to protect him, is what empowers the Man, Though the Man may resemble "his biblical predecessor Abraham", who was "test[ed]" by God, and bidden to sacrifice his Son Isaac by God's Angels (*KJV Genesis 22)*, the Man is much more autonomous, and thereby much more empowered than the infamous would-be sacrificer. Indeed, as Humann herself notes, the Man "does not come across as a [one] who marches blindly on" in his duties to the expectation of a test, or a judgement upon him (71). Although the Man *does*

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[16] Two instances mark the 'ordaining of the Man's guardianship of the boy: "He knew only that the child was his warrant... the word of God" (5) and a more elaborate address by the Man, regarding the sacredness and immutability of his role "This is my child, he said. I wash a dead man's brains out of his hair. That is my job... All of this like some ancient anoiting. So be it. Evoke the forms...

frequently interface with the rhetoric of Judeo-Christianity, while recognizing the base "forms" of his role in the world like Abraham, Humann's notion of agency and empowerment via hesitation helps to break some of the association with the willing biblical-pawn that is Abraham. This hesitation, then, is actually more proof of his power. After all, if the Man is indeed indecisive and requiring the goading of a "passable ghost" to force him to action (as the Wife suggests) he is not without a sense of agency in that hesitation, for Abraham required not the goading of his own passable ghost to help him draw the blade (in the form of "angel") but the *intervention* of that angel to stay his hand which had already so obediently "stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son" in God's name, in no delay at all (Genesis 22:10-11). When juxtaposing a blind follower such as Abraham against a self-doubting, indecisive father such as the Man, it is that self-doubt and precisely that hesitancy which can empower our protagonist, much to the dismay of the Wife, his chief judge and skeptic. While Humann's work on hesitancy does allow us to gain a greater appreciation of the Man's power to freely doubt himself as he is to act and create, the Man is still frequently haunted by illusions from his past. Even if the Man is a free agent, this is a trait that hampers his emancipation and which requires assessment.

Power in Narrative Structure

The novel privileges the Man and the Boy as power-holders because *The Road* focuses on the journey of just two humans in a post-cataclysmic arena. It also traverses the Man's consciousness as *the* central conduit through which the narration operates. This acute focus on the Man and the Boy necessarily elevates the duo to a place of power. However, this focus also suggests a limitation. With such a focus, the novel essentially ensures that its protagonists must be seen as powerful, and it does so in a genre which necessarily places the seat of power as

vacant, and some form of it yet to be claimed. In this combined space of a post-apocalyptic novel with extremely limited focus on two characters, the novel authorizes the power of the Man and the Boy in its very structure. McCarthy's world is a world that may only be seen through the eyes of the Man and the Boy themselves, and there are several different ramifications of that limitation.

While such structural focus on the duo does not guarantee a place of power for them, one result of that limited perspective is that McCarthy's work innately asks us to place the Man and the Boy as the primary world builders and forces of creation and power-- for there *is* no other society, no government, or groups which provide that potential. This is a world of ruin, and in it, there is a void in which the powers-that-were are missing. This void is further expanded when McCarthy offers no exposition about what happened to the former powers in society, nor does he offer any detailed explication about other visionaries, goal-oriented groups, or forces of organization that may exist. Though there are certainly contending or threatening forces afoot, and a few dangerous encounters to be had, there is no central villain or antagonist, nor a clearly developed rival. As such, each specific threat is fleeting, as is every other potential power-holder. Indeed, because the perspective of the novel is placed intimately (and solely) on the Man and the Boy, the reader is denied access to alternative perspectives that might be held by other characters (other potential power-holders), whether they are external valuations on the physical world, or internal musings on concepts of law, survival, order or morality. In short, with the exception of a passing elderly man by the name of Ely, whose stay spans thirteen pages, and those characters who are hinted at in dreams, there are frankly no other minds working through the validity of creation, or the telling of stories, just as there are no other characters who speak about rules and morality (so far as the reader can witness). In this space, with the Man and the Boy given

primacy to work through these issues, they can be imagined as powerful for their status as the world's most accessible arbiters. Further, given that the post-apocalyptic genre must house a 'power-void' within it, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a certain level of default empowerment applies to the only two characters given *real* primacy, within the confines of the novel, to fill that void. Indeed, by the very structure and focus of the novel, and the fact that it is set within the post-apocalyptic genre, the Man and the Boy are imagined to at least have a potential to fill the void of power that is necessarily presented by the post-apocalyptic genre. They become powerful themselves, for they are the only forces of mental fortitude that *appear* to remain accessible to the reader, in a world bereft of such people. Where others capitulate to the natural push for survival above any other philosophy, and others elect to undertake a kind of triumphant suicide, there is no other *major* source from which definitive statements and analyses of the world flows in the novel, beyond the Man and the Boy. This is the authorization of a kind of power for the Man and the Boy that is set within the novel's basic structure, and for the reader, there is no other touchstone through which to understand the world, nor organize it (as the narrator only appeals to and works within the thoughts of the Man, too). In this way the claim for a unique human power within the post-apocalyptic space of *The Road* only increases.

In Medias Res and the Creature

Though the notion that a post-apocalyptic novel contains a 'power-void' at all might be best exemplified in the concept that it necessarily involves the destruction of 'what was' and leaves only ruins in its wake; *The Road* offers yet further space for us to conceive of the presence of 'a void' (which the Man and the Boy are able to fill) given the novel's structural reliance on the technique of *in medias res*. As a narrative technique, *in medias res* involves beginning a story in the middle, rather than the start, and often the story opens with a dramatic scene of action, rather

than a deliberate set-up. Moreover, *in medias* res often incorporates flashbacks and other non-linear means of storytelling, as does *The Road*, which has its main thread frequently broken up by the Man's dream-sequences and flashbacks. *In medias res* is a potent aspect of the novel both at the level of its initial scene and in the fact that it occurs in the high-stakes, destabilized platform that is offered in the post-apocalyptic genre.

While *The Road* never prioritizes exposition, its opening scene (and entire page, in truth) deserves a deeper look. *The Road* opens with the Man snapping awake in "the woods in the dark and the cold of the night" and immediately, the Man reaches out to "touch the child beside him", essentially groping in the blackness in "[n]ights dark beyond darkness"(3). This focus on the difficulty of visualization continues when the narrator describes the days too, as fading into a "gray" shade, like "some cold glaucoma dimming away the world" (3), and in "look[ing] to the east" for a light but finding "none" (3). This implied and 'creeping' blindness is the very first image we receive in the novel, and, as such, the first image we receive is nearly no image at all. It is more the fading promise of an image, already in the act of decline in which the image, the scene and perhaps the world itself are already eclipsed into darkness. Instead of a focus on a scene of battle or victory, the 'action' here is simply placed on a battle already lost, and paradoxically, in the middle of an aftermath-- the middle of 'after an end'. The action of this first scene is found in the slow creep of decay and the emptiness and dematerialization that has come and will come once the rotting has run its course. And yet, the nature of 'in medias res' demands that we also look to the very first action that is taken in the novel. And, perhaps, it is not so bleak.

That first action is of the Man propelling his arm into the dark night to "reach out and touch the child" after waking from sleep, as if to find something of value amidst the void (3).

And find something he does, for we are told that after presumably making contact with the Boy's sleeping form, the Man's "hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath" (3). Precious. Something precious, breathing and alive to latch on to in the darkness. Something of worth, of hope, besides. In this, we can conclude that the child provides the sole thing of worth in this particular dreamed darkness, and outside the dream at that, as we soon eventually learn that child is the sole entity of worth in the "world entire" for the Man as well as being of essential importance to the Man's very function: "He only knew that the child was his warrant"(6).

Even after this sense of reverence and the need to protect the Boy, when the initial page of the novel's narrative shifts and we are taken back to the Man's dream, the child "[leads] him by the hand while "their" own inner "light play[s] over the wet flowstone walls" and the two of them are "like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost in the inward parts of some granitic beast" (3). It is they, the Man and the Boy together, with the Boy leading the way, who stand as the only sources of light, in front of a "black and ancient lake" from which emerges a "creature" with a "dripping mouth" that "stares into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders" (3-4). It is a creature stricken with its own blindness, "lost in the dark" and caught in its own decay. That decay is referenced in the prioritization of the creature's mortality: Its "alabaster bones...its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell" (4). Though the heart beats and the creature lives, the Man and the Boy witness its mortality, firstly, in the very structure that makes it up. And the creature's deficiency and its ultimate doom is suggested, as this image of decay then swings "its head low over the water as if to take the scent of what it could not see" before giving out "a low moan" and loping "soundlessly into the dark" (4). The creature retreats as if wounded by its sightless and wasting fate (4). All the while, we are to imagine that the Man and the Boy have stood there, hand in hand and light radiating from

them, with their eyes perfectly fit to see all of the beast's inner workings through its "translucent skin". They have sight, light, and life, as well as each other, while the creature itself sees nothing, smells nothing, finds nothing and seems to exist, just barely, as a kind of "dull"-brained drone.

Who, then, is the creature? Who or what takes up the real-world mantle of this effigy of decay, so blind and hopeless in its mortality? Is it the Man, or the Boy, or both of them together? Is it society, the world, our species? Perhaps it is nothing so grand. Just before the dream, we saw the Man wake into just such a darkness with just such a blindness, faced with similar decay. The Man may not be so different from the creature, as the Man emerges from his proverbial "lake" of sleep and sees nothing, just like the blind beast in its own "black" and "ancient" waters (4). Just the same, the Man is often hopeless, and ever-conscious of his own mortality with every spurt of blood he coughs and each dream he has that may signal his end. Eventually he does die, soundlessly in the night, at the beach and in front of the ocean, after having hobbled the last days of their journey with an arrow-shot to the leg (280-282).[19] So doomed is the Man's health throughout the novel that the Man's mortality and demise is no less visible and translucent than the creature whose organs show themselves.

It might also be argued that the Man is sometimes as blind, as hopeless and as instinctual[20] as the beast. If these are indeed other possible connections to be made in the book's

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[19] There are many scenes in which the Man showcases his fading health by coughing, and frequently, he coughs only when alone, perhaps attempting to hide the fact of his impending death or his own weakness. At any rate examples of the Man coughing exist on pages 54, 94, 112 and 113, while he takes the arrow on 263 and finally perishes on 280-282.

[20] The claim for The Man as 'occasionally instinctual' might be made in several scenes, including the Man's constant desire/need to protect the child above all things, his belief that life (even the worst kind of life) bests the 'peace of death' (85) and his hunting down of the 'thief' who steals their shopping cart (256-259) (inasmuch as one might be said to be 'instinctual' if privileging sheer survival over morality). However, the notion that the man is instinctual might be best supported on 267, when the Boy claims that "we don't help people" and instead simply seek to survive. These moments pose problems for my conception of the Man as empowered by and beholden to his own worldview, because when he acts 'instinctually' he tends to briefly abandon some of the principles he is believed to subscribe to. In those moments, I consider the Man to admit a degree of weakness, and not power, because to be

beginning, and we note that the Man is not *always* hopeful, able, or even empowered, then I believe it is useful to look to the Boy's power too. For the Man and the Boy certainly have their own spaces for power and weakness alike, and often those moments of weakness or doubt in one of the protagonists allow us to witness a moment of strength or power for the other. Further, I believe we may also note that the Man and the Boy have an exceptional degree of power together, more so than they do when dealing with issues on their own. In the space of the dream, we know that the Boy leads the Man by the hand, and the two of them give off light where no light is, while making full use of sight to visualize a monster that itself cannot see. Despite the possible links that might be established between the Man and the lake creature, then, it cannot be that the Man and the Boy *together* are equated to the beast, for they are the eyes in the void-- the light too. They may have "Dimming eyes" for "fading light", but they have eyes and light nonetheless when they are together, even if the Man and the Boy may have their weaknesses when they stand alone and apart. In this, the novel's first scene, *The Road* immediately offers the basic concept of a void, as well as the immediate potential of the two protagonists as entities of power made to forge on within their world as it is, and contend against it. And, the Boy's 'power' is primary, as he leads the Man by the proverbial hand, and acts as the central light source.

A Close[d] Community

Earlier, I showcased the playing cards scene as a moment in which the Man becomes aware of the potency of, and problems with his ability for creation. The post-apocalyptic space undoubtedly provides a unique potential for creation, given that the rules of the world that had

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powerful in the post-apocalypse is to be creative, and committed to one's way of defining the world. Now, these moments of instinctual weakness are useful though, because they provide quiet spaces in which the Boy asserts and positions himself as, frequently, the more committed of the two to aspects of their worldview (such as expectations that Good Guys should help others). The Man's descent into instinctual outlooks, even if only momentary, acts as a flash of weakness. And as we will see, among these momentary weaknesses, whether instinctually driven or otherwise shown, are part of what will allow the Boy to capture a position of power all his own.

once been are gone, and so are its leaders, thinkers and policy makers. However, there are aspects of being a creative force which prove problematic, and having the Boy as the vessel for the future, while also being able to control what he learns and knows of the world proves difficult and troublesome for the Man. That is, the issue of creativity and being a creator in *The Road* is often tenuous, and it is tenuous because there is so much at stake, and so much room for failure. Society was once driven by the hands of multiple creators, from law-makers and politicians who decided on aspects of organized society to the pages of literary, biblical, and philosophical texts that situate the world and its happenings for would-be readers, thinkers and children alike. While the Man does not believe himself to be capable of building a society in the wake of these ruins, Paul D. Knox's assessment of the nature of acknowledgements, imagination and speech as essential materials in the construction of a post-apocalyptic 'community' is useful for understanding the notion that power in the post-apocalypse is not anchored to the physical, but maintained in the mind (Knox 97). Paul D. Knox asks "what sort of ideology [can] survive an apocalypse and why" (97). Indeed, Knox argues that while most thinkers on *The Road* regard it as a kind of "metaphysic with no first principles, no foundational truth" (like our Kantian assessment), instead, ideologies in *The Road* are not simply stated and set, but, rather, "constructed and maintained as a series of values that are received and accepted" and continually negotiated (96). Knox's notion that the construct of "good guys" and "bad guy(s)" is the product of the Man and the Boy's equal engagement in a "didactic metaphysic" which is itself an "ideology" is an interesting start (97).Yet more interesting, however, is the notion that the duo's worldview is in a constant negotiation that requires "the frequent but inconsistent use of the word *okay* by the man and the boy to reaffirm their ideology, to approve an event or plan for the future and to indicate their well-being..." (97). In that manner, it appears that the "the repeated *okays* "

that pass between the Man and the Boy might be said also to act as a kind of language of 'citizenship' or proof of belonging, in which their "imagin[ary]...community" is continually legitimized, and they legitimized within that invented community.

Moreover, the miniature communal ideology shared between the Man and the Boy in their methods of speaking establishes the stability of the "shared vision of the world" that the Man and the Boy hold. The suggestion that the sense-making construct which the Man and the Boy invent needs only an occasional series of continued affirmations between its occupants to remain stable and operational offers proof for the power of the duo. That the Man and the Boy are able to establish an effective and useful 'community' in the simple deployment of imagination speaks strongly about the worth of speech, their capacity for effective and empowered creation, and the potency of the dedicated human mind in its ability to gain comfort and belonging and position in an entity that is completely dislodged from the physical, real world. Knox does note, however, that the systemic need to repeat the affirmative *okay* "reveals an underlying anxiety about the decisions the man and the boy make" and perhaps the overall feasibility of their "shared vision" (96-97). What we learn from the novel itself, however, is that whatever doubts the Man and the Boy have about the ability to act on their visions (and they do), and however vehemently the Boy suggests that they fail their own vision because they "do not help people," the Boy does not ever abandon the worldview or imagined community that he and his father created at any point in the novel. Even when the Man dies, for all the doubt the Boy heaped upon it, the worldview they invented and sustained between each other remains central enough to the Boy, that upon meeting a new group of survivors, he holds staunchly to that same affirmative when attempting to assess whether they belong to his mental community. Responding with "Okay", "Okay then" and "Okay" again, two more times, when he is assured that this new man

does not want his pistol and is not a cannibal, the Boy legitimizes his creation by speaking in the language that binds it together (282-285). Even more importantly, the Boy holds to the world view he and his father valued when he asks the new man if he and his group are “Carrying the fire” (283). In this, the Boy shows both his true resolve in maintaining his mental community, and the power his own creation has in shaping his interactions, because the Boy's only concern when deciding if these people are to be trusted is in assessing whether they meet the requirements of belonging to it. The importance of this conceived "community" is implied in the fact that, even without his father, the Boy knows he must sustain his belonging to it, by making sure that whomever he admits to his community will pass the same expectations, and follow the same imperatives that are represented by the phrase "carrying the fire". The maxims that his father invented remain, and quite beyond fizzling out and perishing, they are the tools by which a creation can be sustained and grown, or banished and sent away at will. Indeed, as Knox succinctly notes, regardless of ambiguity, doubt, or fear of falsity, the true power of carving out this mental community is the realization that “surviving the wasteland requires more than finding food and shelter...[it] requires re-creating... communities", whether they are only assembled in the mind or not (97). Survival and thriving, then, requires "finding a way to make sense of the world and [main]taining hope [in] that community" (99).

Knox's assessment leads to the understanding that the preservation of imagined communities and the processes by which they are invented, ratified, and grown relies *solely* on humans and their capacity for creation. Moreover, an additional import is that while inside that post-apocalyptic space, humans and their created community are also not subject to the whims of temporality nor are they limited by the constraints of the physical realm that might affect other more traditional examples of associations. In this manner, the Man and the Boy are empowered

by a construct of their own design, which has no other master and few perceivable detractors. It is a construct which can exist perpetually in their minds as long as they remain committed to it, and one that has the ability to gain new meanings, followers and capacities over time. Of course, the contention that such an imagined community offers very little practical power outside one's own phenomenology and likeminded membership would be a fair one, but in a world on the brink of death and populated with shambling cannibals, even the survivability of belief, ideology and mental community appears resounding. Regardless, the Boy managed to find at least one new member for his imagined community in the form of the new man. Simply by 'speaking the language' of the community by insisting on receiving a direct answer as to whether the beach traveler 'carries the fire' or not (which the new man eventually says that he does) (283), the Boy managed to proliferate his ideology, and increase his chances of survival simply by holding to the expectations of the 'good guy' construct he helped create. And in a world with so few overt allies, the power to project one's own ideologies into finding more allies and more routes to continued survival may just be the most empowered thing a lone post-apocalyptic survivor could do. Establishing the fact that a created ideology which exists in the mind is more than merely a passing thought, but, instead, a real and effective force capable of defining the Boy's world, the terms of his interaction with it, and the nature (and sum) of his compatriots is important to understanding exactly how potent is the act of creation in the novel. With such an understanding of the potency of creation and imagination for not only helping to define the world around the protagonists but, also, constructing and stabilizing the world's meaning and the possibility for survival within it, I would argue that the common scholarly contention that "nihilism...pervades the novel" (Skirmshire 1) is a difficult belief to defend.

Authoring Identities and the Act of Naming

I will move now to a further discussion of a notion of *re-creation* of self and one's own conceptions of identity through the act of naming. Just as speech and imagination can set the terms of one's own psychological community, the act of speaking and the willful abandonment of prior concepts of identification can work to create new visions of others, and of the self. For much of this study, I have sought to highlight moments in which the Man and the Boy handle issues of definition and creation. Whether it is definition of the self or definition of the world around them, much of the issue of power revolves around the question of creativity and the act of creation: How it is that the Man and the Boy create themselves and the world around them? And how are identification and naming tools through which the self and others may be defined. In *The Road* creating oneself and defining others is often done through naming, and a willful and intentional abandonment of what one could be identified as before the apocalypse. In fact, one of the initial observations the reader will make when dealing with *The Road* is the absence of any names or means of identification beyond the most basic descriptor of a given person. Very clearly, the Man and the Boy are reduced to what is (nearly) their most basic descriptors (the only more general might be 'human', or 'creature') in 'the Man' and 'the Boy' as well as the occasional calling out of 'Papa' and 'son'. Likewise, the commitment to basic identifiers and pronouns is extended to the Man's spouse who is only called 'the Wife', and to others who are often classified as "good guys" and "bad guys", and as "Men", "them," "roadrat", "cannibal" (and so on). The novel only lends birth names to two characters. The decision by McCarthy to reduce nearly every human to his or her most basic identifier might be a way to heighten the post-apocalyptic sensation by suggesting that the world is so derelict that the people themselves are just as badly disenfranchised; however, I believe the issue of identity and its willful

abandonment has a more complex use than that. Instead of increasing the immersion and believability of the novel, *The Road's* use of naming and base identification speaks to the power of the human towards creation and speech as tools to reposition reality to one's own liking .

When queried by the "roadrat" about 'what he is' (specifically in asking: "Are you a doctor") the Man responds with "I'm not anything" (64). However, the roadrat does not seem to hear him, and continues with the suggestion that if the Man *were* a doctor , aiding the "truck people" who've "got a man hurt" would be "Worth [his] while" (64). What is interesting here, then, is that all the Man needs to do to *become* a doctor in this world is to make it so by speaking it. The roadrat, in seeming pre-disposed to the hope of finding a doctor (whether for medical or nefarious ends), allows the potential for the simple power of speech and naming to make great leaps in recreating the Man, and determining his fate. We must imagine that if the Man decided to reply with an affirmative that he was, in fact, a doctor, the entire nature by which he is perceived would be changed, as would his future paths. In that instance, to *be* a doctor and gain all the potential imbedded in that position, the Man need only speak it as a fact, despite its falsity. He needs no degree, certificate, or proof of knowledge, but only the willingness to affirm it. Ultimately, despite such a freedom, the Man retorts a rejection to the "roadrat", asking "Do I look like an imbecile to you", electing to forgo the potential future of that role, believing it would lead to harm (64). Then, in a moment that suggests the cannibal himself operates in that same precarious space of naming and unstable identities the roadrat states, "I dont know what you look like" (65). That uncertainty of identification also occurs in a scene in which the protagonists come across a lightening stricken man, whereupon the Boy asks "who is it?" and the Man can only offer "I dont know. Who is anybody?" (49). Identities in *The Road* are essentially products of the will of each human to affirm or deny them. In the post-apocalyptic space, a person is only

what they *claim* to be and are believed to be, without the need for other identifiers and bureaucratic proofs demanded by a modern society. Thus, in *The Road*, the world and its inhabitants are constantly in flux, and the most powerful tools for definition are upended in comparison to pre-apocalyptic societies. Here, facts and empirical realities must be considered as weak evidence in determining the identity of any remaining human. Instead, like the development of Knox's notion of communities, truth (such as it is) is only to be decided by what each person is willing to consider and claim, and what others are willing to legitimize or deny in their minds, or, in the negotiation present in speech. This system of identification is extremely malleable, and intimate.

The issue of naming takes a number of turns throughout the *The Road*, first as the marker by which we sever ourselves from previous systems of definition (similar to the Man's avoidance of the past and even the Wife's death). It is clear that in the post-apocalypse, one must actively speak and think through each person or entity in order to legitimize or commit it as a new 'fact'. As such, one has the power to create facts by perception and negotiation alone, with no regard for empirical proof. Falsity and fact become little but matters of negotiation between such disenfranchised 'free-agents'. In fact, a key passage on the world's vulnerability to definition through the transaction of naming occurs when the narrator encapsulates the state of the world by discussing the state of names:

> [The Man] tried to think of something to say but he could not. He'd had this feeling before, beyond the numbness and the dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would

> have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (88-89)

This passage suggests that the very sustainability of one's environment, knowledge and known history can be tied to the losing or gaining of names, and, further, that in this transaction, facts and truths are undeniably at stake. It would seem that if we can no longer reference ourselves *to* something or *as* something through identifying processes like naming, then the existence of that thing can no longer be legitimized. And while this is not to say that the thing is *actually* removed from existence in this lack of named-legitimization, with the complete annihilation of organized society and its ease of transport, it is entirely conceivable that a given thing can no longer be witnessed, and as such, its existence will never again be ratified in reality. With an inability to confirm the existence of a thing in reality, to those characters within *The Road* (with whose minds we must interact), a thing's existence then becomes linked exclusively to naming. And as the above passage suggests, that naming is itself at risk as time goes on. When a thing disappears from view, and the name of a thing is gone, the thing itself "wink[s] out forever" (89).

In addition to its concern for the fragility of existence as it corresponds to perception and the future of naming, the above passage suggests that a lack of identifiers also offers a "shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities" (88). While that "shrinking down" may result in a move to "oblivion" or nihilism, it rather suggests an ability for a kind of reconfiguration of the elemental primacy of a thing (88). That is, the move away from advanced identifiers represents a cutting away of all that is unnecessary, and in so doing, *not* losing the truth of a thing, but rather, creating a new fact about it. While this passage certainly seems to be in tension with competing ideas of obliteration and arriving at a kind of elemental truth, the actual practice of identifiers in

The Road is that no one is anything but what they claim to be, and when we cannot confirm what they *are* by empirical knowledge (as we rarely can in *The Road*), then a thing simply becomes what they are *said* to be. Indeed, like the roadrat and the Man as a 'doctor' (64-65), or the new man and his allegiance to the 'carrying the fire' imperative (283), everyone is 'no one' and nothing is true until it is spoken. This severing of the self from identifiers shows how the *The Road's* humans become the authorizers of their own identity.

Fact, Falsity and Further Negotiation

After the Man and the Boy consult their maps in determining their progress towards the ocean, the Man mentions the term "as the crow flies" and how they are not moving at the same rate as a crow would (183). We learn how little the Boy (who was born at the conception of the apocalyptic schism itself) knows about crows in the following conversation, which the Boy initiates with a query:

> Because crows dont have to follow roads?
>
> Yes.
>
> They can go wherever they want.
>
> Do you think there might be crows somewhere?
>
> I don't know.
>
> But what do you think?
>
> I think it's unlikely.
>
> Could they fly to Mars or someplace?
>
> No. They couldnt.
>
> Because it's too far?

Yes.

Even if they wanted to?

Even if they wanted to.

(156-157)

The Man and the Boy then continue the discussion on the question of whether a crow could survive a flight to Mars. The Man is not certain about the precise location of Mars or the ability to successfully get there, however, he is certain that "There's nothing there" when the Boy asks if there would be "food and stuff" on Mars (158). In response, the boy simply replies "Oh", and leaves the subject of Mars for good, taking the Man's perception of the reality of Mars as fact. Later, we are then told that "They sat for a long time" and that "[a]fter awhile the boy said: There's not any crows. Are there?/ No/ Just in books./ Yes, just in books. I didnt think so" (158). While this scene seems innocuous it speaks precisely to the argument that the world no longer depends on empirical fact. Instead, a 'fact' is determined only by what two people think about a thing, and agree to believe in. Because so much knowledge cannot be proven empirically, it seems as though it is electively proven, instead, by human conversation. For example, while the Man admits he knows little about Mars, he is still certain in his belief that there is nothing to be had upon it-- a remark that the child is willing to take as a fact, and in that negotiation, it becomes one. In the same manner, the Man and the Boy debate and ratify the abilities and sheer existence of crows, and together in their speech, they add another fact to their individually negotiated worldview: the extinction of crows in the real world is taken as a pure fact, and any sign of their having lived is consigned only to the realm of literature. The bizarre truth about this world, then, is that while the Man and the Boy could not possibly verify that all crows in the world have died, all that matters is the spoken belief that they are gone, and the willingness to

believe that statement.

It seems that, like the negotiation and legitimization of a name, the post-apocalyptic human's primary method of truth creation is no longer based on empirical observation. Instead, to confirm the nature of the world, humans need only to believe a thing, and have their belief confirmed by others. Now, while the loss of naming and the fading of identification and the primacy of empirical facts *can* be nihilistic and damning, it can be empowering and freeing. If the human mind is thus the arbiter of life, death, truth, and fiction, then humans express their immense power as world makers in their capacity for debate, belief, imagination and psychological corroboration. In spite of the opportunity for complete desolation as a result of the end of the identifier, in this state the human actually becomes more powerful because the post-apocalypse props the individual up with the ability to substitute whatever identifiers, statements and claims as fact or fiction with only minor negotiation at most.

While the Man's spouse is often called-to only with the pronouns of "she" and "her", she is also frequently called a "wife", and implicated (and occasionally directly noted) as a "mom" (51, 54-55). With the fact that her 'name' is frequently reduced to her domestic role, it would be natural for a reader to assume a variety of goals, focuses, and expectations. However, for the character, the post-apocalypse actually allows her to renegotiate and re-brand herself through the act of speech and sheer will alone. While she may be speaking metaphorically, the Wife willingly subjects herself to all manner of renaming, inviting the Man to "think of her" and presumably speak of her however he may "like" (56-57). While the Wife may seem to berate herself in selecting the aforementioned moniker of "faithless slut" or implying that she be called a whore, she is also adamant that such names mean little to her, just as she "do[es not] care" for identifiers of mother, wife, and ostensibly "survivor", which have all become "meaningless" to

the kind of identity she feels is truly at her core in the circumstance (55-56). It may seem that a tale of self-destruction is hardly a tale of power, but once again, the post-apocalyptic space allows humans to reach a "raw core of parsible entities" through which they may dig, shift, alter and define themselves and the things around them, until they find whatever truth they desire. It may or may not coincide with expectation. For the Wife, the obliteration of identifiers and the capacity of the post-apocalyptic space to reframe and renege on her 'expected duties' allows her a sense of self-definition and identity formation that is purely unbound-- given up to whatever or whomever would take up the call.

In the redefinition of identity and naming that becomes possible in McCarthy's apocalypse, the Man clearly expresses his focus on living. "We are survivors," he claims, and though his wife balks at the label (and has that right, in this space of freedom), it is the Man's claim to being a "survivor" that becomes a guiding identifier for the Man and his son. That vocal claim births a label for the duo that is much more potent than any other form of proof-of-identity from the past world (such as the licences or credit cards that the Man possesses, and eventually abandons) (55). While the setting allows the Man to be fluid with his identifiers and effectively claim to be "no one" when trouble brews (64-65), he is sure of his identity as a survivor, just as he is sure of his identity as the Boy's father, in saying to himself "this is my child...That is my job" (74). The Man continues, lodging his own identity safely in the mind of his son and the identity of others, in saying "You wanted to know what bad guys looked like. Now you know... My job is to take care of you... I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand?" (77). Afterward the boy asks, in his *own* mode of naming and identity distribution:

> Are we still the good guys?
>
> Yes. We're still the god guys

> And we always will be.
>
> Yes. We always will be.
>
> Okay.
>
> (77)

In the above example, the Man both establishes his identity and re-asserts his 'name' in the new world, while hoping that his son will follow suit. The Man chose his identity as father, good guy, survivor and protector; and while he cannot speak for all people, or force his wife to be a survivor too, the Man utilizes the post-apocalyptic setting in order to create his "raw core" and remake his image in the post-apocalyptic 'tabula rasa' as he sees fit (88).

Like the Man, another character by the name of Ely similarly uses the stripped-away spaces of the post-apocalypse to define himself as he sees fit. With the exception of the frequent references to "God" itself, Ely is the only entity in the novel that has a 'proper name'. However, even Ely's name is soon revealed to a pseudonym:

> Is your name really Ely?
>
> No
>
> You dont want to say your name.
>
> I dont want to say it.
>
> Why?
>
> (171)

In response, 'Ely' reveals the potency behind a name and an identity in the post-apocalyptic world, saying that he elects not to share his real name because:

> I couldnt trust you with it. To do something with it. I dont want anybody talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there. I mean, you could talk *about* me

> maybe. But nobody could say that it was me. I could be anybody. I think in times like these the less said the better. If something had happened and we were survivors and we met on the road then we'd have something to talk about. But we're not. So we don't. (171-172)

In his defensive attitude regarding naming and knowledge, Ely adds clarity to the notion that in a post-apocalyptic world, everything within one's control is to be cherished and safeguarded, including the control one has over his or her own self-image. In fact, his statement expresses the importance of non-physical concepts. Ely essentially notes that in a world where money is useless and bartering is hardly seen, it is one's name, identity and outward perception that must be handled, horded and protected as the most valuable currency left. "I couldnt trust you. To do something with it," he notes, and refuses to relinquish the power he holds over his own identity by speaking too much, and revealing his true name.

Finally, when the Man tries to ensure that 'Ely' is no threat, and asks "You're not a shill for a pack of roadagents?" Ely responds with the familiar retort of "I'm not anything" (172). Ely may conceive of himself as nothing in order to keep himself in the shadow, but the importance that he places upon the nature of a name and on the importance of a name in the making of an identity is clear. A name is a marker of a person, and to be able to remove, reshuffle, or redistribute one's own name or identity is an ability that is exceptionally potent. In that sense, then, what is interesting about Ely is that he chooses to frame his identity by what he essentially is not. That is, the term "Eli" has a notable degree of biblical significance in that the Bible cites an "Eli" who was the "high priest of Shiloh [and] the second-to-last Israelite judge" who existed "before the rule of kings" and whose "Shiloh tradition will become old and lost" ("Eli", *Jewish Encyclopedia).* Meanwhile, the novel's own 'Ely' carries an odd relationship to the divine,

suggesting that "there is no God" and soon after that "there is no God and we are his prophets" (170). It is strange for an irreligious man to select the name of a religious judge and biblical figure, but the power of the post-apocalypse is that it allows the human the ability to not only strip away names and find truths about ourselves, but also to engage in a 'state of play' with identifiers and names, and choose those which may or may not suit us depending on the purpose. Ely utilizes his identity-crafting to select a name to which he has seemingly little relation. However, if his only goal is to wander the road as a 'prophet' of a God that does not exist, one must wonder whether this is 'Ely's' own expression of his identity and focus, in that he has seemingly utilized the mutability of names and identifiers in the post-apocalyptic world to craft an effigy and mockery of the religious faith and script, as well as those who are still clinging to an absent God (170).

Forging On: Power in Progression

This ability to re-define and re-name the self in whatever manner one sees fit is, quite clearly, a tremendous focus of the novel that occurs as a central example of humanity's power in the post-apocalypse. Indeed, the notion that identity construction in *The Road* is a nearly free-form endeavour is quite the empowering one, and it is one that the Man also attempts to use in order to propel himself and the Boy into a continued sense of progression and forward movement that is essential to survive in the post-apocalyptic world. In fact, part of the novel's focus on the concept of forward movement can be understood by first reading the figure of the Wife. It is possible to unearth exactly how the (admittedly troubling) figure of the Wife plays into the question of power and forward movement as it affects our central characters. Further, the figure of the Wife acts as at least one way for us to understand how rebuking past structures, focuses and other tethers can allow for a greater and more 'individual sense' of authority. There are

moments in the novel when the Man makes it clear that his engagement with a past tether is no longer to be, in an effort to press forward in his aim of survival.

Early on in the novel, the Man situates himself at odds with the tethers of his past in a way that suggests that forward movement and progression is of greater importance to him than his memories. In one early passage, the Man casts his face upward after a coughing fit, seemingly speaking to his dead wife, or to God. Kneeling in the ashes, the Man "raises his face to the paling day" and asks "Are you there? Will I see you at last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul...?" (11). Now, while the Wife and God are completely different concepts , given what we know of the Man's history and present, it is possible to at least categorize the two forces as entities in which the Man once had faith. As such, in either case we can set the specifics aside and note that the Man begins to remove himself from that which previously held power over him. Indeed, whatever the target of that initial scene, the Man's aggression towards his past signals his desire to abandon it and move forward as someone else, with some other goal.

The Man spends several separate scenes in dreams of recollection regarding his Wife, and he regards her with disdain, and perhaps sheer fear over her loss.[21] While the preceding scene lays a foundation for understanding the Man as a human who is burdened by his past and actively seeking to move beyond it, that need for abandonment finds a deeper expression in a different passage, wherein the Man removes his wallet, and directly recreates his own identity through the abandonment of the old identifiers. In an effort to overcome his tie to his now-dead wife, the Man discards his Wife's picture and his own billfold full of old proofs-of-identity,

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[21] The disdain towards the Wife, I believe, is encapsulated in the quotation on page 11, in which the man seems to address her in his frustration. The fear comes through in 56-57 where the Man expresses doubt about continuing on as a survivor without her presence.

beginning to remake himself anew:

> He took [the billfold] out and went through the contents. Some money, credit cards. His driver's license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gambling cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and stood and they went on.
>
> (51)

Taking that scene on its own leads to a number of potential interpretations, but the impetus behind the scene is clearly one of unburdening the self of dross (specifically, tethers to the past), in order to be able to move forward in this world and take power over it. The Man himself takes a seat "by the roadside" but unlike the earlier scene, he does not sit silently, brooding on his fate. Instead, he chooses to actively remove his burdens. He takes out his billfold, which itself is a marker of history-- a relic, as described by the length of time he had carried the item: "He'd carried his billfold till it wore a cornershaped hole in his trousers," we are told, before "one day" deciding to make a change (51). The Man rifles through its contents, and here we can note two things. That the wallet itself, as well as the things inside it, represent both history and identity for the Man. A credit card, driver's license and money are all from the previous world and are all now useless, yet previously (and in our society) they were prescribed methods of valuation and identification that all were expected to carry. A driver's licence, for example, is a government issued document with a name (which we never learn in the novel) and a photo (which is never described in the novel) while a credit card represents yet further participation in the system-that-was and its rules, expectations and regulations. It too contains a name, and is thus part of the link between rules and identity that modern capitalism establishes. Money too, is often how we

establish a kind of identity-- the things we buy, the coin we earn, our purchasing power, our savings--these are all indicators of who we are today, and more importantly, who this man truly was. And, to make no mistake, these were things the Man evidently held dearly, given the wear of the wallet on his jeans. So all of this represents part of the proverbial ties that bind, part of the Man's inhibitions, part of what is holding him back.

It is long in this contemplative state before the Man finally cuts these ties, before he discards the cards and the wallet. In doing so, the Man takes charge of his own identity and banishes these corruptions that might inhibit his ability to not only move forward in the current world but gain mastery of it (51). The age-old wallet is gone, along with the money, the images of self, and the purchasing power associated with an old capitalistic system of debt and payment. The ties are gone, the proverbial debts are paid, and, presumably, the Man is unburdened by "looking back", effectively flushing the "slurry" of the previous life that has muddled his potential (49-51). This is a moment of power and a moment of purging that highlights just how important the concept of "forward movement" is when seeking to define the acquisition of power in this world. Amidst the credit cards, money, driver's licence and wallet itself, the one thing that clearly has the most power over the Man is the last item he removes from the billfold: "A picture of his wife" (51). Certainly, the picture has the most significance as he quickly tosses the wallet and speaks not of the other things again, but "sat holding the photograph" (51). We might expect that McCarthy would elect to draw this scene out, but it is just a sentence later that we are told that the Man "laid [the picture] down in the road also and then he stood and they went on" (51). In *that* quick moment, we learn that the Man is not like the lightning-struck man after all, for he *does* get up from the road, and he *does* press on. We learn also, that the Man is not like the world around him, to be made static by his own forms of corruptive "runoff" and "ash" and "slurry" left

from a prior life (51). Instead, the Man will value what the novel itself values: forward movement, and being on a proverbial (or actual) road to a perceived goal. And, of all things, perhaps the discarding of the photo of the Wife suggests that she is the most corruptive, in the sense that she is the strongest binding-tie that would seek to lodge the Man in a stasis of the past. He will not have it, however, and this scene suggests that the Man will not allow his history to weaken his potential power any longer.

Don't Look Back: The Necessity of Forward Movement

If the wallet scene articulates a schismatic break into a new sense of self, two scenes immediately prior to it demonstrate the forward movement toward self-definition that is crucial to that key scene. The first is their encounter with another road-wanderer, who has been burned (evidently "struck by lightning") (50). As is typical, the Boy inquires whether the two can aid the lightning-struck wanderer, but the Boy is rebuffed:

> Cant we help him? Papa?
>
> No. We cant help him.
>
> The boy kept pulling at his coat. Papa? he said
>
> Stop it.
>
> Cant we help him Papa?
>
> No. We cant help him. There's nothing to be done for him. (50)

At this rejection, the Boy sheds tears, and the Man turns to look at the lightning-man, only to see him fallen to the ground, presumably dead. At this, combined with his son's sadness, the Man seems to feel a twinge of regret, followed by further explanation:“ I'm sorry, he said. But we have nothing to give him. We have no way to help him. I'm sorry for what happened to him but we cant fix it. You know that, dont you? The boy stood looking down. He nodded his head. Then

they went on and he didnt look back" (50).

With the lightning struck man, the overriding sense seems to be a certain tension between forward movement and a refusal of that movement as is suggested by the scene's focus on "looking" and "looking back". There are six separate uses of the term "looking" and the majority of them are regarding what is behind them, and the need to press on beyond that--the need to move forward-- as if an awareness of one's self (or one's identity) is essentially locked in a tension, and necessarily related to the concept of 'progress'. The tension between moving forward and being stuck in a kind of stasis, which is symbolized by the desire to 'look back' at the lightning-struck man, raises a number of points worth considering. The first is simply that we must recall that the two are on a "road", and that the very structure upon which their journey rests (and the structure for which the novel is named) *necessarily implies* a focus on movement. Meanwhile, while the Boy wishes desperately to intervene in assisting the lightning-struck man, the ultimate denial of that aid seems to suggest that forward-movement and progression in the post-apocalypse will indeed require a staunch commitment to see that forward travel through, if it is to succeed. Indeed, for the Man, being so frequently haunted by the ghosts of his past as he is, no pausing of their forward movement is permissible, especially when we note that pausing to aid the lightning-struck man would simply be futile.

The need to move forward and the refusal to "look back" at the lightning-struck man suggests that this new 'road-based' world *requires* a 'moving on' from old concepts and structures of morality as well. That is, while the Boy is so driven to help this lightning-struck man by what we may assume is a child-like hope to do 'good'; the Man knows that in this new world perhaps some things simply cannot be solved, and that the only option that will preserve our sense of power and progress is to continue on. Though the nature of the tether is different (the Wife being

historical, this man being moral), this lightning-struck man must be abandoned in a manner not dissimilar to the way in which the Man previously discarded his last remaining tie to his Wife. Though the Boy "looks back" towards the lightning-struck man at least twice and sheds tears, wracked by the need to aid him, the Man seeks to uphold no such notions, instead suggesting that the pure practicality of this world demands that they cannot offer the lighting-struck man any aid: "No we cant help him...we cant fix it... We have no way to help him. You know that, dont you?" (50). We might just regard this scene as one that is typical of the post-apocalypse: a simple description of the moral decline of humanity as accelerated by the bleak state of affairs. And while that may certainly be part of what is at work here, such a reading would be overly reductive, as it has been my premise throughout that this is a novel about far more than just decline.

The takeaway, then, for the lightning-struck man scene is a focus on a kind of 'movement' tension that is embodied in 'the concept' of a road -- the press towards understanding that things are not like they were and that the focus of this new world is about going "on" and not "look[ing] back again" (50). The focus is to abandon *all* that once was, and label it as needless, corruptive or even destructive. To make that statement a tad more crystallized, we might simply say that power in this world can only come (once again) from shirking history, abandoning what was, and turning attentions only to what lies ahead. The fact that 'what lies ahead' turns out to be nothing but "Cold. Desolate. [And] [b]irdless" beach that is so grey that the father feels the need to apologize for it "not [being] blue" (215) may seem to suggest an ultimate futility to this narrative of forging ahead, but I do not believe it undermines the empowered world-view the two share. The power of their belief in moving forward is not obliterated because it was based on false promises, but instead, seems to endure. After all, the child himself responds to the apology

with that communal affirmative that Knox discussed so deeply, saying "It's okay" that the sea was grey (215). Moreover, not long after that disappointment, the Man and the Boy already reengage with their hopeful worldview, when they imagine the possibility of "another father and his little boy...sitting on the beach" (216). It seems then that as much as not eating other humans is central to their world view, so too is the notion of the journey and the continuance of both forward movement *and* the will to keep imagining. That aspects of the journey are revealed as falsities does not stop the empowerment of their internal philosophies, their mental community or their creative ability.

Motion and the Corruption of Stasis

The theme of moving on past a 'decayed history' (for which there is no 'salvation' or to which there is no return) is actually embodied in the lightning-struck man himself. The duo notes that there must have been someone who emerged from the "woods at night" and who since had elected to continue "down the melted roadway" (49). At this, the Boy asks "who is he?" to which the Man replies, "I dont know, who is anybody?" (49). The person in question, we soon find, is the lightning-struck man, who *physically represents* the fact that there *is no return* and that forward progress and a "go[ing] on down the road" mentality is the main method for power and relevance. Indeed, the Man's statement, "who is anybody?" is a direct dismissal of the role of the past, and of history. The past has no purchase here, and it is not the place for power. The lightning-struck man represents just one such decaying vestige of the past that must be left behind.

We noted the manner in which the lightning-struck man scene helps to emphasize the tension of movement, the ultimate primacy given to the concept of forward movement or progression in the novel, and the abandonment and historical rebuking it requires. Now, when we

look at the way that the lightning-struck man is physically described, the suggestion that he represents a faded vestige of the past could not be clearer:

> They came upon him shuffling along the road before them, dragging one leg slightly and stopping from time to time to stand stooped and uncertain before setting out again... They followed him a good ways but at his pace they were losing the day and finally he just sat in the road and did not get up again...he was as burnt looking as the country, his clothing scorched and black. One of his eyes was burnt shut and his hair was but a nitty wig of ash upon his blackened skull. As they passed he looked down. As if he'd done something wrong. His shoes were bound up with wire and coated with roadtar and he sat there in silence bent over in his rags. (49-50)

Continuing with this theme of the lightning man as a faded vestige , though this man is *attempting* to move forward, it is very quickly clear that such a movement is impossible for him to sustain. His "shuffling", "dragging", and overall slow "pace" marks him as damaged, and this damage is met with stasis and finality when he takes a seat in the road "and did not get up again" (49). In this way, the shuffling man himself represents both a faded vestige-- a broken down, 'corrupted' or useless dreg-- and the embodiment of the inability to' progress' and the fate that bestows. To be a useless dreg in this world is synonymous with being unable to move forward. He cannot move forward, he cannot push onwards, and, as such, he is powerless. His powerlessness, in fact, is suggested also in the statement that "as they passed he looked down. As if he'd done something wrong" and, further, when we note that, in his final decision to cease his forward progression he elects to "[sit] there in silence, bent over in his rags" (50). Essentially, the man is entirely aware of his inferiority, his powerlessness-- and reflects it in his self-elected

silence. He "cannot be helped" and indeed *is* weak *because* he cannot progress. In that fashion, the lightning-struck man (as both an overall scene and actual physical body), represents the immense importance of forward movement and a sense of progression in the search for power in the post-apocalypse. Moreover, any association with him seems, in some manner, to risk an association with the past (and the Man's lingering ghosts, with it) that is not worth the risk.

Next, immediately following the lightning-struck man's scene is a brief paragraph based only on a description of the environment that nonetheless carries the same obsession with forward movement as the previous scene. It carries with it also a kind of fixation on the movement and concealment of a certain kind of dross, and the way in which 'scum' or unwanted substance both invades, corrupts, and is possibly purged:. After a time lapse in the novel, McCarthy offers a short descriptive paragraph of the nature of the world around them, which seems to highlight a kind of flushing of corruption (much like the discarding of the wallet) in which movement of unwanted substances and an overall decay and concealment seems to be the primary interest:

> At evening a dull sulphur light from the fires. The standing water in the roadside ditches black with runoff. The mountains shrouded away. They crossed a river by a concrete bridge where skeins of ash and slurry moved slowly in the current. Charred bits of wood. In the end they stopped and turned back and camped under the bridge (51).

Note the focus on movement and emissions in the first lines (highlighted in italics), and how those emissions seem to be undesirable: "a *dull sulphur* light *from* the fires. The *standing* water...*black with runoff.* The mountains *shrouded*...They *crossed* a river by concrete bridge where *skeins of ash and slurry moved slowly* in the current. *Charred bits* of wood. In the end

they *stopped and turned back* and camped under the bridge" (51, emphasis added). Clearly, this short paragraph places the issue of movement as a primary concern, but it is the movement and existence of dross that interests me. It is as if to suggest that all things in this world contain corruptions: a fire that emits sulphurous light (sulphur being often linked to hell, devils, and putrid stench) and a body of water that is stagnating and black because corruptions have moved into it. Mountains that are covered by what we must presume is the slow drift of clouds or fog, and a river that carries ash (a prevalent sign of decay in the novel) and 'slurry'-- which is the very definition of a corrupted kind of mixture in which the liquid body in question has become mixed with solids. Of further interest too, is that amidst all this corruption and movement, we learn that the Man and the Boy *halt* their *own* movement after having crossed a river, and elect instead to enter a small stasis to "camp under the bridge" (51). But what is the significance of this paragraph? Taken alone, it might seem to be a simple descriptor of the degrading state of the world and nothing more, but beside our explication of the lightning-struck man and the focus that is placed upon movement and his 'corrupted' physical state, perhaps it becomes more. It would seem to suggest, most importantly, that those things which are most burdened by their 'corruptions' cannot properly move-- cannot rightly progress. Much like the lightning-struck man whose progression was halted by his state, the paragraph just afterward highlights a body of water that has been rendered inert by "black runoff" while another river is "slow[ed]" by "ash and slurry" (51). Perhaps the Man rejects the Boy's request for intervention because he cannot dare risk the progression of their quests through associations with any entity conceived as not only stationary, but corrupted also.

Perhaps more interesting is the fact that the Man and the Boy are indeed "stopped" and "turned back" at the point of coming to this river and elect to hold their movement, taking up a

static position with a camp. Given these last scenes, it is fair to assume (or at least imagine) that, like the lightning-struck man and the corrupted nature previously highlighted, the protagonists must themselves be inhibited by a kind of 'corruption' in order to have their movement halted. Indeed, only a paragraph later is the wallet scene, which has already been cited as a scene of unburdening and a removal of the corruption that holds the Man back from his new identity.

That is not to say, however, that (like the Boy and the lightning-struck man) the Man does not "look back", for just the next day, the novel sees the Man look to the Boy and say: "there's nothing we could have done" (as he recalls and engages with the issue of the lightning- struck man again) (51-52). Indeed, more importantly, some pages later after a coughing fit and a musing about histories and stories (which I discussed earlier) the Man "thought about the picture in the road and he thought that he should have tried to keep her in their lives in some way but he didnt know how" (54). It is not as if the Man does not look backwards-- nor do I mean to suggest that he has completely removed himself from the past that weakens him-- often, it is quite the opposite, in fact, with the Wife appearing in several separate dream sequences[22] throughout the text, while his own "mind...betray[s] him" by summoning "Phantoms not heard from in a thousand years [which] rouse slowly from their sleep (116). Such moments suggest that the Man is anything but fully emancipated from his past, but still fights with everything he has to continue his forward-driven quest. The point, though, is that *all* aspects of one's history and all systems of the past provide a potentially corrupting weakness, and must be avoided in favour of new goals and focuses as well as entirely new methods of creation, identification, and community building , each of which is foundational to new forms of post-apocalyptic power .

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[22] pages 219, 55-58, 18 and 19

The Phantom Wife

For the Man, the Wife is the central 'ghost' who continues to haunt him. The Wife's place as the Man's most disruptive "Phantom" is first solidified when the Man wakes in a coughing fit, and, stumbling out into the dark, falls on his knees in a kind of séance with her: "[C]ough[ing] till he could taste blood" the Man is driven to 'speak' with his Wife, "sa[ying] her name aloud" (54). So powerful is the Wife's hold over him that the Man is evidently unaware of what is real or unreal while attempting to commune with her memory, with the narrator noting "He thought perhaps he said it in his sleep" (54). He did not say it in his sleep, of course, and was instead overheard by the Boy, who eventually states that he wishes he had perished along with his mother (55). In that, then, we can note the mere utterance of the Wife's name threatens to undo the entire "survivors" construct that the Man and Boy have laboured to build. Rightly or wrongly, then, the wife-as-Phantom becomes a major detriment to the conception of the Man's and the Boy's possible powers, their progressions, and their very will to live. This conception of the Wife as a kind of antagonist to the ideologies of progress and power in *The Road* can be taken to an odd and contentious direction when we note that, besides dreams, the female as present and positive entity in the novel is non-existent, and, further, when we note that, despite all that has been said about the positive power of creation, the concept of female creation is entirely disempowered and supplanted with notions of destruction.

As this study places much importance on the act of creation as a major route to power, the most startling of realizations regarding the Wife is the way in which her *creative* power (and thus the creative power of all women) is supplanted by concepts of destruction, limitation, negativity, or consumption. *The Road* puts the potential message about creative power between men and women in a space of damnation, first, by obliterating the motherhood presence. As we

have seen, the novel paints the Wife as pining for the death of her own son, rather than fighting for her son's survival, just as she chooses death for herself, and is a threatening call of "languour and death" to the Man via dreams (McCarthy, 18, 51-59).Why must this be so? If creative power is exceptionally important to understanding 'new routes' to power within ourselves in a ruined world, as I have argued, why must the female's creative power be absolutely denied, and the female instead be transposed into a kind of "angel of death' who takes "Death" itself as a "lover" (57). I would offer that far from just a focus on *human power*, *The Road* is a novel very much about the establishment of *new* power while discarding the old shell. Thus, if the novel is to truly make a point about power and new avenues to it, it must discard the previous structures, including pre-existing conceptions of by what both men and women can be empowered. That is, if we consider that in some early societies of pre-history human males occupied positions as "warriors" and " hunters" more prone to violence, while females frequently were viewed as home-makers and child-rearers, we see that males were once empowered, in part, by their ability to destroy, while females were defined by their ability to create and nurture those creations.[23] In McCarthy's rendition of a post-apocalyptic world, those roles are inverted, and males are empowered for their capacity for creation, and females, for their penchant for destruction. At the very least, the central male figure, the Man, finds his conceptions of survival-through-creativity at odds with his own wife's rejection of the continuance of life, and the value of living.

Further, the only other example of female creation comes in the form of those roving bands of cannibals, which include pregnant women. Those pregnancies, though, are about

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23 Discussed, in part, in "Evolution and the psychology of intergroup conflict: the male warrior hypothesis," by Melissa M. MaxDonald, Carlos David Navarrete and Mark Van Vugt. Also in "Why are Men so Violent?" by Jesse Prinz.

producing a child as the resource of human meat for consumption rather than empowering the act of procreation on its usual terms. Moreover, these women seem to rank very low in the hierarchy of the band, following behind even the slaves.[24] These women, in short, have had their former creative powers all but stripped to their most degraded form, and in some sense, can be aligned to that same conception of destruction that the Wife occupies (if only due to their likely use of birthing for the goal of consumption).[25] The female as a birthing figure capable of the most powerful act of creation can be a conservative trope. Perhaps McCarthy's obliteration of that expected structure by painting the Wife as a corruptive figure who is closer to death than life, and the pregnant women who are used in the act of creation-for-consumption rather than creation in the name of creating life may be yet one other way to demand attention for *The Road*'s unique understanding of power through creation. McCarthy may have sought a method to strongly state the novel's own detachment from its usual tethers. However, that possibility stated, McCarthy's obliteration of the female ability for creation by inserting the female's physical absence from the novel and her drive for death should also concern readers**.** It is fair to wonder whether a novel that perpetuates *male* power, *male* creation, and *male* parenthood as the primary structures and concerns could ever possibly be anything *but* patriarchal.

I have argued that this situating of the female as related to death is 'problematic', just as I acknowledge that this is because the mother has been conventionally viewed as the epitome of

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24 The Man notes that among the roving bands of cannibals were "slaves in harness and piled with goods of war, and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant" (91-92). The notion that these cannibals give birth to children as a means of sustenance rather than for the goal of procreation is suggested when the Man and the Boy come across "a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (198).

25 That the Wife appears to choose her own suicide matters little to increasing her empowerment, as it is a choice wholly informed and made palatable only because of the state of the physical world, and in this sense, it differs little from the cannibal marchers who choose to sustain themselves by human conception. They are both capitulations and pure reactions to the force of their current reality. I would contend that both cannibals and the Wife are both thereby less empowered than the Man and the Boy, because they are deeply altering the state of their existences, lives or morality because the world demands it, whereas the Man and the Boy maintain (most) of their imaginations, values and creative expression.

'creative power' (through procreation). However, throughout this study, I have also clearly stated that methods of power in *The Road* appear to demand a moving-on from the structure that was, and the old traditional means for such power. As such, while creative power is a vital focus of this thesis (and thus, the marginalization and obliteration of female creative prowess and the swapping of it for a kind of 'death drive' is a momentous occurrence in defining the nature of the novel's power) I must also give a degree of credence to the fact that the Wife herself enacts the same kind of abandoning-of-tethers that I professed was a means to power for the novel's protagonists as a whole when she chooses to abandon life.

Of all of the shifts we have discussed in order to express the nature of *The Road*'s power as being dependant on cutting relationships with the past and every form of its expression, perhaps no move is as potentially powerful as one in which a female not only moves beyond her tethered expectation of female-procreation, but also chooses the ultimate in chaotic freedom, in death. After all, when we encounter the memory of the Wife's final discussion with the Man, it offers a woman who is not weak, but instead, sure of herself and her decisions. She says to the Man when speaking of her choice to die and her thought to kill their progeny too: "You cant protect us. I'd take him with me if it werent for you. You know I would...It's the right thing to do" (56). And when she is accused of "talking crazy" she responds with the equally ardent feeling that she is "speaking the truth" and that the Man "wont face it" (56). After this, the Wife ends the argument by suggesting that the Man has "no argument because there is none", and that she does not care what labels he assigns to her because of her choice (such as "faithless slut"), to take "Death [a]s...a lover" (56). To the Wife's mind, only death can give her what the Man cannot, and perhaps, her pursuit of her goal, no matter how destructive, might be conceived of as a method of empowerment for her. Furthermore, she states this all while "she sat there smoking a

slender length of dried grapevine ... with a certain elegance" (56, 57) -- the picture of confidence, we might suggest, against which the Man can only grovel and beg. This kind of description assigns the Wife some agency in the selection of her death, suggesting that this choice, like any choice, is one made not by a disenfranchised and powerless creature, but by one who chooses, beyond doubt, this end. It is indeed quite possible that the Wife's obliteration is not *only* a problematic powerlessness, but a suggestion that, just as the Man and the Boy must move past prior structures to gain power (including, for the Man, the 'corruptive structure' of his own Wife), so too must the female move beyond the typical trope of motherhood and female creative power, to secure something truly unrelated to the past. In the novel, this is best symbolized by suggesting that this primary female figure select the absolute antithesis of what we may expect--death over life, obliteration over survival, flight over "taking a stand" and the killing of progeny over the creation of it (57). While one might be right to find it difficult to view death in any manner as an expression of power similar to that which we have described as our protagonist's main goal, it is possible to at least view the Wife and her obliteration as a perpetuation of the novel's notion that the post-apocalypse uniquely provides the human creature with the capacity to move beyond the past, break all binding ties and become a powerful entity as a result. And the final note here is that progression is power, even if the movement leads to the most grim of results.

Certainly, the Wife's move to a desired demise, and the upending of old conceptions of male and female power is an extreme example of the casting-off of one's tether. But it may express just how unique human power in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* can be. This should remind us about a truth we have sought to establish regarding post-apocalyptic power: that one *must* move forward from (and even vilify) every example of the past, including its

structures, forms, expectations and tropes, in order to achieve power. And though the Wife's movements result in her death, it is possible to suggest that, similarly to the Man and the Boy, the Wife ought to be admired for her stubborn forward movements. The fact that the Man moves forward on the pretense of faith in his role and as survivor, and the Wife moves forward as a "faithless" woman towards her own destruction may not need to be understood as a disempowering juxtaposition for either character, so long as they always move forward towards their goals.

Faith and the Power of the Boy

Next, as the final expression of power in *The Road*, let us turn to the Boy and his important questions and contentions towards the structure supported by his father. We will see how the Boy is cast as a prophet of a new faith, and as such, is raised to a nearly transcendent position. Throughout *The Road* there are a many references to God and his will, and part of the interesting construction of identity and ability in *The Road*'s chaotic landscape of self-definition is the manner in which the Man believes his son to be a kind of icon of faith and religion, claiming that "if [the Boy] is not the word of God[,] [then] God never spoke" (5); while the Man also calls the boy "God's own firedrake" among other identifications like comparing his son to a "golden chalice [that is] good to house a god" (31, 75). However, while the early portions of the novel suggest that the Boy occupies some kind of position as a loyal footman or helpful prophet to God and his wishes, the tone and gravity of the Man's claims for his son suggest he should be seen as a kind of divine being unto himself. These descriptions of his son as a divine entity grow in potency and outlandishness as the novel moves forward. Towards the end of the novel, for example, when the two of them meet Ely, the Man goes out of his way to not just call the Boy a creature of God's, but a God himself. In fact, the Man offers to Ely "what if I said he

was a God," and while Ely rejects this notion, saying that he is "passed all that now," and that if the Man's son were a God he would be "The last God on earth", the old man *does* entertain the thought of the Boy as an "angel" -- a creature not as potent as a God, of course, but still divine and much more than a simple human (172-173). This is the power that is possible under the circumstances for creation in a post-apocalyptic space with minimal attachments to the past, and the *creation* of his own son as a kind of holy figure (by his father's own 'hands') is hinted at in the following passage: "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 on them" (74).

So far, I have made much of the concept of creation as it expresses power within the post-apocalyptic space. This is because of the post-apocalypse's relationship to apocalyptic literature. As a religious text, apocalyptic literature, at its core, deals with creation and the manner in which our planet's creator devised, created and enacted a plan for us all, even if it means the demise of others. The post-apocalyptic genre is the follow-up to this ultimate plan-- but the power shifts. While the creator (a god) intends to build a plan, and create a new home for the righteous, the result of the post-apocalypse is that, even after this grand design, there still remains a world with possibilities, and there is, as far as we know, no edenic land of salvation. In its stead, especially in *The Road*, is a land of ruin. A land of ruin in which that all-mighty creator has ceased to be, its plan faded, and its goals gone. Here, as the novel itself notes, "There is no god" (170), no society, no laws, no rulers, no presidents or dictators, poets or priests (and so on). As such, the proverbial throne of creation and the seat of power is open. We have already noted the ways in which the Man has the power of a creator, such that he can pick and choose what history will be remembered, known or heard, just as he can create the structures of games, hopes and faiths. This ability is afforded to the Man in the novel because he and the Boy are the primary lenses

through which we can see the world, and they are the principal shapers of it in that respect. The Man, of course, is the principal shaper of the child, and as one of the only children in the novel, the Boy represents something integral to the concept of human power within the post-apocalypse, as much as he represents an important piece of the potential future of the world they make. In that capacity, the Man is both teacher and maker, and strives to educate his Boy, and in turn, perhaps define the world-that-will-be. The Boy's power, however, is not simply a power that occurs by association or due to his place as a kind of tabula rasa upon which the future of the world can be drawn. Instead, he comes to actively take a role in his own power, while making his own choices, and even keeping his father from falling into oblivion. That is, the Boy may be the *single* most powerful human in the novel, contrary to the expectations held of children in the time before the apocalypse.

Before we move to the child's power, though, I will turn to the Man's vestigial power in his role of teacher, and the issue of didacticism as it helps us understand how the Boy may be seen as powerful, not in a manner that is truly independent of his father, but rather, in the manner in which he grows to challenge and be somewhat skeptical of the knowledge that his father attempts to pass on to him. I have already raised the question of whether the man loses his power when he becomes uncertain of the world he is portraying to his son. This occurs most openly when the Man, after being asked to talk about the past by the Boy, elects to reject the concept of the past entirely (54). Then, following this moment, the narrator continues to note that the Man felt poorly about telling fictitious stories, but that despite his reservations, ultimately could not make himself limit the "fantasies" of his son: the Man "...tried to keep a reign on [them] but his heart was not in it. Whose would be?" (53-54). Here we see the Man's uncertainty-- his reluctance to proceed with the world he is building for the Boy, and the power that goes

with that. This is not so much a detriment to the power of the Man, as it is an essential *shift* in *The Road*'s conception of power and its power-holders, in favour of the Boy. Prior to this point, the Boy seems to be little more than a sponge collecting whatever information the man elects to provide. In *that* space, the Man has the sole role of world-maker, and thereby holds the power. He defines the history and controls the conception of the world today as a result of that power-- at least as it flows through the Boy, a representation of hope for the future. At this point, however, we see a glimpse of the Boy as more than a receptacle in which the Man can place his definitions, rules, histories, and created world. For we are again told that "The child had his own fantasies. How things would be in the south, Other children..." and that even though the Man *tries* to exercise his power and act as a world-maker *for* his son, that power falters, and it allows, as we will see, a chance for the Boy to assert his own power and ability through didactic world making.

Didacticism and the Challenge of Power

Claire P. Curtis argues that "Postapocalyptic fiction, as a genre, is didactic: *this* is what we need to be careful of, this is how we survive such an event." She notes that "these two teachings are in tension with one another as the real warning ... is to avoid the event itself" (17). She continues by suggesting that it is this didactic mechanism that seeks not to develop new conceptions of humanity, but simply warn us how *not* to act, and what might happen if we hold 'incorrect' values and develop destructively. This mechanism, Curtis notes, causes "so many post-apocalyptic works to read like how-to manuals... the [attempt to provide] advice is always there " (17-18). In short, Curtis argues that post-apocalyptic fiction contains the need to instruct and provide teachings and information-- that the core of Post-apocalyptic texts is a ' didactic spirit', if you like. However, Curtis proceeds to note that *The Road* is an "outlier" in this space, as

there is "no attempt to recreate social society" within the novel nor any attempt to "come together" or "focus on the [apocalyptic] event itself". As a result, *The Road* does not participate in the didactic convention of the genre. In fact, Curtis notes that *The Road* never "fully embraces the framework of the genre", choosing instead to "explore the end of humanity (and...the end of all life on earth)" (18-19). Now, Curtis may well be correct in her assessment of *The Road* as a novel that is uninterested in some of the 'usual generic trappings' of the post-apocalyptic genre, but I would contend that the 'didactic spirit' *does* exist-- only in a different manner, and that it does so, importantly, *only for a time*. That is, in *The Road* the didacticism and the act and power that goes with teaching is vulnerable to being reconfigured or repurposed.

The Road's 'didactic spirit' is different from the general didacticism that Curtis highlights as a fundamental principle of the post-apocalyptic genre, in that it is *not* between the novel and the reader (per se), but within the relationship between the Man and the Boy. It does not seek to offer solutions, warnings or practical advice to the reader, but it does offer teaching moments-- between the characters-- that set up a place of power, before turning it on its head. More importantly, in *The Road* the didactic hierarchy does not *remain* in place just as it was, and in *that* fact the novel exercises a fascinating shift away from the conventions of the post-apocalypse, at least for a time. Let us look at some of the unique moments of 'didactic spirit' within *The Road* and how it is in this teaching site that *The Road* not only approaches the post-apocalyptic didacticism differently, but also sets up a tremendously important repositioning of power within the didactic hierarchy (and in an overall sense) from the Man to the Boy.

While Curtis notes that the didactic moment is essential in the post-apocalyptic space, we also know that *The Road* handles the concept of post-apocalyptic didacticism differently than most of those texts she highlights. In this different handling, it becomes clear that the teaching

moments that are shared between the Man and the Boy offer not only a unique expression of human power via world-making, but also, a number of unique moments in which the Boy clearly shifts from a merely receptive 'tabula rasa' to a powerful force in his own right. It is a move that essentially 'upends' the post-apocalyptic didactic tendency, while it also marks the beginning of a reconfiguration of the power-hierarchy which uniquely favours the Boy and not the Man. The Man and the Boy's relationship is punctuated by a number of teaching moments in which The Man seeks to educate his son about what was, what is, and what might be. In these moments, issues of history-creation, knowledge and world-definition come to the fore. There are also important moments in which the Boy reveals a growing sense of self.

In one of the earliest teaching moments in the novel, the Man shows the Boy how to read a map after they speak about their journey. First, after enjoying themselves near a waterfall, the Man and the Boy find a rare outcropping of wild mushrooms that serve as a reminder of the tenuous space they occupy, the Boy's initial lack of knowledge, and the world that was. In this scene, the narrator describes the mushrooms as "small alien-looking things" found beneath the "mulch and ash" of the dying world. A "small colony of them, shrunken, dried and wrinkled" (40). The reference to them as 'alien looking' and juxtaposing that with finding them beneath the ash of the late world works to suggest just how out of place they are--symbolic of something that once was but is no longer-- a kind of last vestige of a fading world that the Man and the Boy share, if only for a time. But such is the Boy's lack of knowledge and innocence regarding this prior world that he knows nothing of these 'morels', a gesture that speaks more widely, I think, about his overall displacement from the past. After the Man picks up a morel, and chews it the Boy asks:

What is it Papa?

Morels. It's morels.

What's morels?

They're a kind of mushroom.

Can you eat them?

Yes. Take a bite.

Are they good?

Take a bite.

(40)

Eventually, the child reluctantly agrees to try them and confirms that they "are pretty good", which eventually leads to the Boy's rapt watching of The Man picking and cooking the mushrooms, before deciding that where they were currently stationed was "a good place" (41). After supper, the Man and the Boy take refuge while the Man tells the boy stories; "Old stories of courage and justice as he remembered them" seemingly culminating in the Boy's brush with an old world full of 'alien' things, for their world as it stands at present would seem to have no frequent displays of justice or courage, or mushrooms for that matter.

Indeed, the death of courage and justice seems encapsulated, at least in part, when the Man notes that he and the Boy cannot make a home of the waterfall area, as it is "an attraction to them...[and]...others" and that because they "wont know who [those others] will be" (i.e., good or bad people) it simply is "not safe" (42). The next day, despite the Boy's insistence that they should stay, or at least follow the River, the Man holds to his position that such an act would be unsafe and unwise, and in that, their world seems to be clearly unrelated to the world of the stories that were told on the prior night. Still, the Boy presses, hopefully attempting to assert some knowledge to make his argument: "we could find some other place on the river" he says,

attempting to fight his father's assertion that they must keep going south by asking "doesnt the river go south?" "No it doesn't," the Man responds, and here the Boy's interaction with the past, and building knowledge-base, continues when he asks to see the map (42).

The suddenly cagey and opinionated child learns more of maps, but the map itself, like the morels, is both a symbol of the past world and a reminder of its decay, with both concepts implied within it. The map is described as a "tattered oil company roadmap [that] had once been taped together" but now has been broken up "into leaves" and "limp pages" and numbered with crayon in the corners" for aid in its "assembly". The map, like the world that it represents, has decayed, and is even broken, containing as it does now obsolete information regarding "state roads" (42). Fittingly, the Boy asks what such a concept means, and the two share another interactive teaching about the past-world. The Boy begins:

> Why are they state roads?
>
> Because they used to belong to the states. What used to be the states.
>
> But there's not anymore states?
>
> No.
>
> What happened to them?
>
> I dont know exactly. That's a good question.
>
> But the roads are still there.
>
> Yes. For a while
>
> How long a while?
>
> I don't know. Maybe quite a while. There's nothing to uproot them so they should be okay for awhile.
>
> But there wont be any cars or trucks on them.

No.

Okay.

Are you ready.

The boy nodded.

(43)

This exchange showcases a quiet strength for the Boy. First, it is in this innocuous scene that we learn that what was once the United States of America no longer exists. In this rare moment of exposition, the extent of the world's 'structural' collapse is made clearer, and the manner in which that information is revealed (essentially in passing) suggests perhaps just how far decayed it is. However, while there are no more 'states' the Man also has no knowledge of exactly what happened to them. In this, while the Man certainly takes on the role of a teacher, the power of that role seems to give way, with the Man unable to fully answer the Boy's questions.

This kind of knowledge gap tends to be common with the Man, and while his position is weakened by the frequency of "I dont know[s]" that he utters, it suggests a potentiality for new growth-- that is, a potentiality for a re-focusing of knowledge not upon what was, but what *is*, while it also affords The Boy more space to ply his own knowledge (43).The Boy, squarely working within the present, is sure to confirm that while America is gone "the roads are still there" and that, in addition, they will likely not be traversed by car or truck. The Boy is continuously inquisitive about the past, surely, but only inasmuch as it relates to what *is* in the world today, and his focus on fact is made more present when he seeks to clarify exactly how long the roads are likely to be left standing, asking "how long awhile". As he often does, the Man lacks specifics or at least does not pretend to possess them, so the question goes unanswered.

Finally, both the assertive quality of the Boy's role in the conversation and the underlying

message of progress are noteworthy. In the above conversation the Boy presses, electing not to take his father's word as fact on the issue of the river, asking to "see it on the map" for confirmation (42). Following this inquisitive pressing, of all the queries the Boy levies towards his father about the world and the roads, with the exception of "what happened to them" each of his queries contains a nugget of knowledge which the Boy applies-- an assumption or feeling that he simply needs his father to confirm. As the dialogue progresses, the Boy's statement no do not have question marks, but instead, periods, and are thus statements that reflect the Boy's knowledge. Both inquisitive and pressing, it seems as though the child grows in power and ability, and it is in this growth that an underlying message of hope can also be found within that conversation, however simple it may be. The message, given further life when juxtaposed against the Boy's own inquisitive growth, is that despite the obliteration of a once-progressive and forward-moving structure that was a nation-state like the United States of America, there is still hope for forward-movement, both literal and figurative, as it exists on the roads themselves. As the Boy states, "...the roads are still there," a phrase of hope for the possibility of progress, both actual and abstract. The duo can still progress on their journey not only southward but, as a survivalist team that requires faith and focus. The world may not be as it used to be, but progress is still possible, and as he notes when asked about his readiness, the Boy is indeed "ready", nodding in quiet determination towards what may come. Indeed, the Boy will not be stuck in the past, but will hold hope for the future. And as we will see, the Boy's focus on the present, on progress, and on what is to come and the maintenance of his own world view is fundamental to the duo's continued empowerment. In fact, the boy's ever increasing identity and 'visionary fervor' becomes especially important when the Man falls deep into the abyss of memory, and nearly loses himself in a return to the past from which he must be saved.

With the didactic principle functioning as a central pillar in the post-apocalyptic genre, as well as a potential space for the construction of hierarchies of power, looking at the moments of teaching between the Man and the Boy is essential in order to reiterate the structure of power within the novel, while showcasing the Boy's steady transition into a much more powerful figure. As we proceed, we find too that in these didactic moments, the power begins to shift towards the Boy, as he moves from weak and pliable child to determined visionary, inquisitive mind, and the ultimate hope for the future. The Boy's independence, confidence and focus grows as time passes, and, in that, the nature of power shifts too. In a post-apocalypse defined by structural collapses, it would seem that in defiance of past expectations for children, this child grows, gains power and becomes a kind of leader faster than we might believe possible. Presumably, the more the boy is faced with the damaging sights of a post-apocalyptic world, the bolder he grows, and the more sure he becomes of his principles, ideals and focuses. Yet, we know already that he refuses to give up his "fantasies" or his search for other children, just as much as he maintains an ability to deal with the facts as they are, without becoming disillusioned. The Boy's growth is one of the most important shifts in the novel, which indicates the Boy's unexpected potency (and the strange uniqueness of human power in *The Road*'s post-apocalyptic space) when the Man returns 'home'.

Dreams and the Risks of Illusion

There are more than twenty references to dreams, memories and fantasies throughout *The Road*. As such, they constitute an integral part of the structure of the novel, but these dream sequences also represent a major region of tension within the novel for their work as a potential space for breakdown and descent into a disconnected meaninglessness and dissolving reality. Dreams in *The Road* are *essential* to the novel's structure, then, just as they simultaneously place

its conceptualization and continuity utterly at risk. In fact, so threatening is the realm of unreality in *The Road* that the narrator highlights the fear that it causes in the mind of the Man, and the ability of dreams to shake even the optimism of a child:

> He mistrusted all of that. He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and death [...]he was learning how to wake himself from just such siren worlds. Lying there in the dark with the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard fading in his mouth. He thought if he lived long enough the world at last would all be lost. Like the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory. (18)

The sentiment regarding the threat of dreams continues a few pages later when, placed in the mind of the Man, we are told that he "dreams so rich in colour", but far from being a haven of pleasantness and safety, such a dream represents "the call of death": "Dreams so rich in colour. How else would death call you? Waking in the cold dawn it all turned to ash instantly. Like certain ancient frescoes entombed for centuries suddenly exposed to the day" (21). To the Man, the threat of unreality is a foe that can undermine the truth of the world, and undermine one's ability to survive. We will recall that the Man places a great importance in the truth of things as they are, electing to terminate his own creations that are not true. And yet, so potent are the 'denizens' of unreality and dreaming that the Man, quite clearly, cannot seem to shake the hold that unreality has upon him. In a real way, in fact, the prevalence of over twenty instances of dreams and flash-back memories suggests just how powerless the Man might be in the wake of a pressing unreality.

No scene or quotation better illustrates the way in which the Man's power is put at risk

than when the Man returns to his childhood home with his son. In this moment the power fades from the man, and passes quietly to the Boy. Shortly after the scene in which the Man and the Boy interact with a vestige of the past via a can of Coca-Cola, and after passing by a city full of burnt corpses that seems to represent a decay of faith due to their likeness to "shriveled...latterday bogfolk" and shoeless "pilgrims of some common order" (24), the Man and the Boy stumble upon a momentous discovery: The Man's childhood home. Here, we are told that the two "came upon an old frame house with chimneys and gables and a stone wall" with "peeling wooden clapboards" ripped away for "firewood" and "rotted screening on a concrete terrace (25). Essentially, his home is the picture of dilapidation and decay, and yet, stunned by the sight of it, the Man stops in his tracks with intentions to enter the ruin with a sense of reverence that makes it seem as if it were a temple. The Boy is not so keen:

> Are we going in [the Boy asks]
>
> Why not?
>
> I'm scared?
>
> Dont you want to see where I used to live?
>
> No.
>
> It'll be okay.
>
> There could be somebody here.
>
> I dont think so.
>
> But suppose there is?
>
> [the Man] stood looking up at the gable to his old room. He looked at the boy. [and said]
>
> Do you want to wait here?
>
> No. You always say that.

I'm sorry.

I know. But you do.

(25)

After the Boy's clear reluctance and a failed attempt to divert the Man's desire to visit his old place, the two enter the home, and the Man begins to interact with the "empty room[s]" and visualize a past that is so long faded. The narrator notes "All much as he'd remembered it... [the Man] stood there" (25). And feeling the "tacks that held stockings from 40 years ago, says 'this is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy... On cold winter nights when the electricity was out in a storm we would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters, doing our homework'" (25). Of course, as the Boy was born at the time of the catastrophe, such concepts as Christmas and homework are utterly alien to him, -a fact implied in the following key line: "The Boy watched him. Watched shapes claiming him he could not see," before stating "'We should go Papa" (26-27). Importantly, the Man says "Yes", they should, "but he didn't" and instead, the Man continues to walk through the house (26-27).

The most significant part of the scene is the Boy's visualization of the father "being claimed by shapes" that the Boy could not see, which deserves explication. Here, we witness the novel's practical expression of the power of dreams and unreality that the Man warned against. While the "shapes" the boy "cannot see" may well be rendered invisible to suggest that the Boy simply cannot understand or make sense of them for not having lived in a world with homework, Christmas and the like, it is much more pertinent to say that these memories, taking the form of consuming "shapes," represent just such "phantoms" and "siren" songs that unreality is a threat to produce and use as a kind of weapon against post-apocalyptic survivability (26; 21; 18). In short, then, this scene is the first *true* moment in which the Man's striving for truth, practicality, reality

and survival is broken down, and is instead replaced by a glaring weakness-- a powerlessness in the face of the whispers of the past. In this scene, the Man is being consumed by the siren songs he warned against; we are shown a foreshadowing of the eventual waning of his power.

It is important that the Man refuses to leave the home at the child's request, and instead continues to interact in this world of phantoms. Crossing through the living room that contains the bones of a "small cat", the two go upstairs to the Man's childhood room (27). "This is where I used to sleep", the Man says, "My cot against this wall. In the nights in their thousands to dream the dream of a child's imaginings, worlds rich or fearful such as might offer themselves but never the one to be"(27). Following this moment, the Man catches "raw cold daylight...Gray as his heart" and after a small bit of rustling around, the Boy, once again, can handle it no longer, fearful that his Father has been lost for good:

> We should go, Papa. Can we go?
>
> Yes we can go.
>
> I'm scared.
>
> I know. I'm sorry.
>
> I'm really scared.
>
> It's all right. We shouldn't have come.
>
> (27)

And the scene ends, leaving an indelible mark on the power-hierarchy between the two. Now, we know that for all of the Man's wisdom, advice, and bravado regarding how to treat the past, he is still exceptionally vulnerable to it. He is, in a manner, powerless when faced with certain moments of the past, whether poignant memory or faded image. Indeed, for all the control that he claims to have over the past, and all of his potential as a kind of world-builder who can write

exactly the kind of history he wishes to in the slate of his son's mind, the Man is very clearly at risk, and powerless in the face of the real past.

Now, I noted earlier that this scene is the first one of overt weakness in the Man, and therefore part of an essential shift in power between the Man and the Boy, which occurs later. With his father at risk of being consumed by his past, eventually his power is most decidedly on the wane. Later on, the Boy knows of his father's weakness when he openly questions the point of his father's false storytelling as well as his continually failing health (267-270). Moreover, he begins to better understand the coming transition that he too must take power over the unrealities and the foes they will face, as his father may not be able to. This shift is ultimately best realized in the scene in which the Man and the Boy clash over helping a traveller, and the Man calls to the burden of power that seems to be slowly defeating him. In this passage, the Man "squatted and looked at [the Boy] [and says] I'm scared....Do you understand? I'm scared" (259). More importantly, the Man tells the Boy that "You're not the one who has to worry about everything" (259). Now, initially, the Boy cannot muster up more than a whisper that "said something but... couldnt be [understood]" (259). In the next moment, however, the Boy makes his most overt seizure of empowerment. For all their clashing on knowledge, decisions, and storytelling that develops over the course of the novel the Boy finally takes his share of power as he "looked up, his face wet and grimy. Yes I am, he said. I am the one" (259). Of all the moments in which power shifts between the two, this moment is the defining point when it becomes clear that the Boy believes himself to be a formidable and indispensible entity within their intimate 'community'. He is, in his mind, the chief guardian of their morality and the overseer of their membership to 'the good guys'. In that sense, as a moral overlord, this impassioned statement is a momentous scene in *The Road*'s treatment of power, and it is a pivotal one in understanding

just how it is that the Boy takes on the central role of the two late in the text,-- especially in the context of the Man's failing health and looming death.

The Free Agent and the Flute

The Boy not only gains a degree of empowerment, but also differentiates himself from the Man in his lack of vulnerability to the past. For the Boy, then, the past is a mere curiosity, and it is a foe that he cannot be disempowered by nor made vulnerable to, as the Man so clearly can, haunted as he is by memories of his wife, images of the once plentiful wilderness (18) and the 'ghosts' of his former home. As a result of this development, the Boy gains his own unique place of power that can only be had in a world in which the past is a heap of ruin, and thus, not guaranteed to be recorded, understood or processed in the same way-- that is, it is a power that is only possible for a child who exists in a post-apocalyptic space.

As the card scene demonstrates that the Man is a force of creative power, the flute scene showcases the evolution of the Boy's own prowess. In this scene, after days of walking, the Man offers the Boy a flute, which he himself had "carved from a piece of roadside cane" harvested from the very road that structures their journey (77). First, the fact that the Man is capable of creating a device that allows further creative expression is a significant example of exactly where his power-niche resides. That is, while he is undoubtedly vulnerable to the past, his specific ties to that realm also allow him to act as a master or intermediary for all of the creative potential that exists in the liminal space between the post-apocalyptic present and its past. The Man is a potent storyteller and game-master because he is able to take elements from the past and mould them into new stories and new concepts and, in the case of the flute, 'new' methods of creativity. While the flute essentially amounts to a relic of the past world, the Man's creativity allows the

music of the flute to be possible in the first place. For the Boy though, the flute represents a source of interesting empowerment in its own right.

We are told that the "boy took it wordlessly [...] [and] after a while he fell back [in their march] to begin playing with the flute (77).. The Boy begins to play "A formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the last music on earth called up from the ashes of its ruin" (77), and that he was so wrapped in this flute-driven trance that he "was lost in concentration", almost as if he were removed from reality entirely (78). Here, McCarthy centralizes a temporal tension that is a strong reminder that the Man and the Boy are makers in their own way. Moreover, the paradoxical description of the Boy's music as both the last music to be heard or a song of the future suggests that he is placed beyond the temporal structure in which his father (and others) exists. The post-apocalypse is, of course, continually haunted by the ruins of the preceding world, and as we noted in the scene in which the Man returned to his childhood home, the spectres of the past world can present a kind of mental danger with the potential to paralyze the Man and halt his forward movement. While the flute does share a tie to the past that makes it so that, of the two protagonists, only the Man could create it due to his knowledge, in the hands of the Boy, the flute risks no temporal paralysis because the Boy does not have an anchor to any past world beyond what his father built for him. As such, in the hands of the Boy, given his lack of tethering to the past, the flute can be interacted with in a manner that is much more fluid than it is dangerous. This fluidity is suggested when the Boy plays a 'formless music for the age to come', but is called to even further when the Man visualizes that the Boy "seemed...a... changeling child, announcing the arrival of a travelling spectacle...who does not know that behind him the players have all been carried off by wolves" (78). While this image partly risks jeopardizing the power of this creative space for the Boy (because it allocates him only a sense

of innocence and ignorance in the bleak procession toward the future), it also places the Boy, knowingly or not, as the lone speaker for the future, and the only one we know of who is capable of shirking the lethal sirens lodged in the memory of the past world. After all, it is the Boy who maintains a heedless shifting between the ruin and faults of the past that are represented as 'the wolf-eaten players' (78). In short, the flute acts as a symbolic key that unlocks a visualization of the Boy's power inasmuch as he is empowered by being unchained-- by being free to explore the liminal space of the post-apocalypse, 'changeling space' between past, present and future. In this space, he can afford to be heedless of the reality around him, because it too is, for a time, impermanent. Thus, while the past certainly has the potential to overpower and destroy the human, (and the Man specifically), the Boy is a free agent, and has the ability to modify the past of which he knows nothing.

The Boy becomes a maker for but a moment, creating musical copies of the very forces (past and future, structure and chaos) that are supposed to demand his fealty in the broken world (78). In playing either the music of the future (an abstract structureless tune), or the last song of the past, the Boy becomes the summoner of these spectres, and the banisher of the old-world, and he gains mastery over these temporal forces. Where the Man was "claimed" by the shapes of his memory when he visited his old home (26), the Boy can evidently summon and dismiss those entities of the past however he wishes, via the symbolism of the flute. In fact, here, the Boy's power is not a power limited only to a card game, or hindered by the past, but it is one that also places the Boy, knowingly or not, as the lone speaker for the future, as someone who is entirely heedless of the ruin and faults of the past represented by the wolf-eaten players. In this understanding, like the Christian God of the apocalypse, the Boy appears ready to begin anew in songs. Once again, however, as with the Judaeo-Christian God central to the apocalyptic myth,

no creation need last forever. And some eighty pages later, when the Man asks the Boy "what happened to your flute" we learn that he simply "threw it away" and for the duration of the novel, it is never mentioned again (159). In this way, between the card games and the flute, both the Man and the Boy show a propensity for creativity that allows them to evade the pressures of time and define the world in the way they see fit, while ultimately holding the power to banish their very own creations whenever they wish, as gods of making and unmaking in their turn. However, again, the important shift of note here is that though the Boy's power is similar here to the power that is shown by the Man in the card scene, unlike the Man the Boy is not a victim or the prey of past memories. He can move freely among them, and cast them aside at will. The flute scene is just one example of the astounding power that is placed upon a small boy in the space of the apocalypse, but, it is not even the most potent. The Boy's ability to call up a tune of his choosing or to throw away the flute suggests a propensity for creativity that empowers him enough to evade the pressures of time and define the world in the way he sees fit. In this, he still ultimately holds the power to banish his creations whenever he chooses, and gains authority for humans that posits him as his own kind of world maker (and perhaps mimics a kind of Godhood). Even if the control the Boy has is at most mental, and not applicable to the physical world, his ability to reject the temporal and the present physical reality is reminiscent of a god of making and unmaking. Yet, while these moments imply the ability of creation, and suggest, perhaps, a status of authority for humans that posits them as world makers (and perhaps mimics a kind of Godhood), no portion of the novel so clearly expresses the potential for human authority in the ended world in such a surprising space as the Man's elevation of the Boy into a pseudo revered-godhood of a kind that is all his own. In short, the Man, being ever-haunted by the past, actively places the Boy as if he is related to the divine.

"Good to House a God": The Boy as Divine

The Boy's inclusion as something divine (and his most overt placement in a position of power) first begins when, "stroking the boy's pale and tangled hair," the Man equates the Boy to a vessel for a supreme being, calling him a "Golden Chalice, good to house a god" (75). The reverence for the Boy continues when we consider the character of Ely on the road. Though the old man claims there is "No God" he implies that the Boy is an "angel", and that "when he saw that boy [he] thought he had died," offering the Boy some form of empowered transcendence, suggesting he belongs to a world beyond this one (172-173). To this notion, the Man elevates the Boy's authority further, placing him above mere angel or even transcendent-being when he asks Ely "What if I said he was a god" (172). Indeed, the reverence and empowerment of the boy reaches its peak when, just before the end of the novel, the Man notes that "when [The Boy] moved the light moved with him as if he were some holy seraphim" (277). And, more importantly, when the Man seems to address him as a higher power directly in his mind, saying: "Look around you, he [thought]. There is no prophet in the earth's long chronicle who's not honored here today. Whatever form you spoke of you were right" (277). In this, the Man bequeaths the Boy his highest honours: a sense of near-divinity, holiness, and the ability to commune with the very forms and truths of the universe--his universe. Further, in a final moment between three travellers, the Man and Ely wonder why the Boy chooses to give Ely more food, and find no easy explanations. Ely concedes that perhaps "he believes in God" and while the Man confesses that he doesn't know "what he believes in" he is certain that The Boy "wont get over it" (174). Whatever drives the Boy, though, hails not from the past, nor a fear of the future, but a simple desire to "carry the fire" (83) and be "The good guys" (128-129). And it is that will, that determination to do good, uninfected by the defeatism of old Ely or the ashen heart (153-

154) of his father, that allows the Boy a great power.

When the Man dies and the Boy must rely only on himself to survive in the world he learns to trust in his own power, believing in his dying father's will that he "must go on". Indeed, as the Man notes, the Boy "has to carry the fire"-- a will to live and make the world "inside you" and that was always there" (278-279). And the Boy does-- after staying by the corpse of his father for several days, and electing to keep him company, the Boy finally moves on with the focus to survive. He grabs the Man's pistol, and gear, and readies to set off when he encounters another man. Here, the Boy is faced with his first true decision—whether to go with the man and his group-- and he does not give in lightly, pointing the pistol at the man, and seeking to assess his moral character in querying whether he is "carrying the fire" and is a good guy (282-283). Now, while the Boy's joining with the new group at the completion of the novel might be considered a move away from independence or the embracing of his own power, one line exists as a reminder of the prowess of the Man and the Boy, and the effect that they had on each other and the broken world that they traversed.

The argument that *The Road* expresses the sheer power of humans to make their world just as they wish it to be comes in the final notation that, even when the Boy finds another group of humans to be with, and one of those humans "would talk to him sometimes about God," the Boy believes he owes God no allegiance nor fealty (286). Instead, though the Boy "tried to talk to God" it always remained "the best thing to talk to his father [the Man], and he did talk to him and he didn't forget", and, indeed, even if it was just "talk that you imagine" in a world of "[your] own fantasies" (286, 54), we begin to understand the true depth of power that the post-apocalypse provides these two. The Boy will never build a bond stronger than the one he built with his father, nor will he be beholden to any religion beyond his reliance upon the teachings of

his dad. The Boy may call up the past, and represent the future, and, at times, to men like his father and Ely he represented the only hope. As such, in this world, there is no greater force than the human self. It is powerful enough that the narrator notes that if the Man or the Boy indeed" were God, [they] would have made the[ir] world just so, and no different" (219) for the post-apocalyptic world provides the human with just such potential power, such creativity, and such space for growth -- and an amount of each that would never be possible in a modern world of order, systems, hierarchies, expectations and indefinable social mores.

"My Brother at Last": Finding the Human Form

When the Man comes across "the first human being other than the boy that he'd spoken to in more than a year," his descriptions seem, like the sun and sea of their post-apocalyptic landscape, oddly "alien", and inhuman (75; 180, 215). "My brother at last," the Man thinks of this human: "The reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes. The gray and rotting teeth. Claggy with human flesh. Who has made of the world a lie in every word" (75). As disheveled and grotesque as this image of the human form is, the unrecognizable nature of it is an apt, if indirect, parallel to the human that we have, ourselves, come to discover through the course of this study. The human we have outlined here is itself alien, for it has come to understand itself to be trafficking in terms and capacities that today's western society has not often seen. *The Road*'s human is a human who deals in lies and falsity in place of empirical fact. It is a human who prefers the world of the mind, replete with imaginations, stories and conjecture to that of the grand narrative of truth. Moreover, *The Road*'s expression of the human relies not on city, land, home, community, or conquest but on the home provided by familiar affirmations and likeminded philosophies. This human is a human who grows by being able to detach from the physical world, and who manages, in turn, to somehow make the world exactly as he wishes

it to be. The Man and the Boy are humans driven by the capacity to create, but who have also learned to nurture those creations as the only structures that can be relied upon. This is a human who knows the art of resurrection, for though they live in a world that is quite clearly dying or dead, they manage to be world-makers by sheer force of will and the capacity to reinvent the terms of that world's existence within themselves. Free from the bureaucracies of capitalism and the expectations of society, they redefine themselves as much as they redefine their world and their engagement with it. They are faithful folk and yet are "prophets" of "No God" (170), and it is in such contradictions that meaning itself is made fluid. In short, the central truth of *The Road* is that the human is empowered *because* it defies all expectations of the world in which it resides, recognizing creativity where others see only practicality, and surviving in the mind where imagination might be deemed expendable. Almost ironically, while the point of the post-apocalypse is often to avoid clinging to any one structure in their ruination, the humans in *The Road* are empowered because they cling to the one structure that remains: the inner self. And undertaking a reliance on the self that places the mind, a capacity for speech and storytelling, as well as the creative spirit, as the central mechanisms for survival is precisely why they survive. The human in *The Road* is, in fact, a "transcendent-humanist", as Mullins wrote, because he or she is able to transcend the reality of this dead world, and situate a new and *living* world within his or her own human mind, and nowhere else (76).

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