THESIS

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON: POST-APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVE,

SOCIAL CRITIQUE, AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF EMOTION

Submitted by

Jeremy R. Grossman

Department of Communication Studies

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Master's Committee:

   Advisor: Cindy Griffin

   David Scott Diffrient
   Lisa Langstraat

ABSTRACT

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON: POST-APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVE,

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This thesis considers the ideological representations housed in post-apocalyptic narratives. These narratives, which are stories that take place after The End of the world, are examined in-depth as a way to begin theorizing about what kinds of cultural artifacts pass from contemporary times through the apocalyptic event, and what their ideological transmogrification or stability suggests about which discourses are legitimated in the culture from which these texts emerge. I label these leftovers "post-apocalyptic remains," and argue that their cruciality to the existence and operation of post-apocalyptic narrative invites us to consider how they constitute and articulate discursive statements, in the Foucauldian sense of the word.

I identify three categories of post-apocalyptic remains: material items, cultural knowledge, and rituals. Material items are physical, tangible goods that audiences will recognize as having come from contemporary times. Cultural knowledge is a broader, more fluid category that encompasses overt ideological beliefs, language, morality, and other identifiable aspects of thought or belief. Ritual post-apocalyptic remains reference modes of action, often drawn from the everyday, such as before-meal rituals, capitalist consumption rituals, and the ritualistic control of delinquent bodies.

I use a poststructuralist lens, drawing from Foucault and Grossberg to explicate how post-apocalyptic narrative articulates and legitimates discursive formations of thought. Additionally, I rely on Derrida and Jameson, who argue that stories about the future and about the apocalypse are strictly textual, and reflect current sociopolitical conditions rather than attempting to prophetically envision the future.

I identify social critique and the circulation of emotion, drawing from Ahmed, as two relatively stable points of entry in theorizing post-apocalyptic remains in their culturally situated context. Social critique can often help explain which of the various sociopolitical conditions these stories are emerging out of. Emotion, when conceived of as culturally political, brings discussion of the audience into the analysis and explores more ideological themes.

I use three contemporary texts as case studies to explore my arguments: The 2008 film *WALL•E*, the 2006 novel *The Road* and its 2009 film adaptation, and the 2006 novel *The Book of Dave*. Each of these texts represents a different attitude towards both emotion and social critique, and each of them is widely consumed by millions. Also, each text is unique in its use of post-apocalyptic remains, which is useful for rounding out the discussion of their roles in post-apocalyptic narratives. Overall, I argue that post-apocalyptic remains, as a crucial constituent of post-apocalyptic narrative, articulate the social critique and emotion in ways that allude to the purely textual nature of the apocalypse in order to situate stories about after The End within discursively-bound context.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Post-Apocalyptic Remains and Narrative Articulation

CLOV (straightening up): I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still, and each thing in its last place, under the last dust.

-Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, (1958)

Keeping the Lights On

Last summer, 2010, I visited my father's slopeside unit in the mountains above Glenwood Springs, CO. His condo is several miles outside of cell phone range, the internet is intermittent at best, the square footage is about four-hundred fifty, and only a handful of people stay year-round. Thankfully, the toilets and electricity are fine. My father's work is very much dependent upon the construction industry, and the current recession has hit housing and development heavily. Many of the architects he has worked with laid off all their employees and set up their practices in basements and garages. There were no more meetings. Even the projects that did go through the planning stages would ultimately have funding pulled. Since work had almost stopped the previous year, he had time to meditate on the simplicity of his mountain getaway.

During my visit we had a long conversation about living simply, and it struck me to what extent he was moving towards the themes present in many of the post-apocalyptic novels I was reading and films I was watching for this study. At the condo technology was minimal. Very small, isolated communities had to coexist to stay sane. Trips into town had

to be strategic. While many residents of rural areas will roll their eyes at this so-called new philosophy of living, my dad's transition from the hustle and bustle of the booming construction and housing development industry in the Roaring Fork Valley (read: Aspen) to a stalemate was as abrupt as the stock market plunge in the months preceding the standstill. In this way, it had the appearance of an apocalyptic event, an observation he has overwhelmingly confirmed, and my dad was attempting to survive in the aftermath, tucked away from the rest of the survivors with a select few.

During one of those strategic trips into town, I was trying my best to explain to him (and myself) what this project was about. After a few minutes of conversation, he concluded, "Well, I just hope that when it's all said and done there'll be someone to turn off the lights." The comment struck me in several ways. First, I wondered why we would need anyone to turn them off; without maintenance, the bulbs would almost certainly accomplish that task themselves. Then I felt convinced that my dad knew the odds against him (or any particular person) surviving an apocalypse, and wondered if he meant that hopefully the human race would come out, however meagerly, on the other side. But I think both of those missed the point. Even for someone emerging from what seemed to have been a transition away from our material neediness as a culture, it's very difficult to imagine the end as The End. The End of people, The End of material goods, and The End of an entire way of life. Expressing the desire that some vestige of our current ways of living might survive has proven to be a perfectly normal reaction to restless ideas. After all, every author or filmmaker who creates stories about post-apocalyptic scenarios is doing the same thing. Stories that actually depicted The End would resolve themselves quite quickly.

Depictions of complete and total global ruin follow patterns, reiterating the principles of concern, fear, hope, and certainty that have long constituted the cornerstone for visions of the future in Western society. On a deeper level, they have also reiterated principles such as excessive violence, patriarchy, racism, and misogyny. Apocalyptic imagery has proliferated in the imagination of the human race for millennia, articulating itself most notably within the confines of religious texts. However, in the past century, roughly speaking, we have seen an enormous number of cultural artifacts from popular culture in traditional narrative forms that propound visions of The End of the world in various ways. Perhaps more accurately put, they articulate visions of the world *after* a final cataclysm, distinguished as "post-apocalypse" (Berger, 1999). While tales of apocalypse operate primarily through representations of destruction and societal disintegration, post-apocalyptic texts concern themselves more with what happens after the dust has settled.

Generally, these latter texts have been treated by academics in two reductive ways: As fantastical constructions of utopian idealism, focused around the rebirth, renewal, and restructuring of humans' relations with the world and one another; or as dystopian wastelands in which humans must suffer to subsist and are often denigrated to a smattering of scattered, fragmented gangs and lone survivors that constitute the decaying vestiges of the failed project of modernity. But visions of post-apocalypse are far more complicated than this reductive utopian-dystopian dichotomy, around which a great deal of scholarly activity has congregated, because of the necessary involvement of the audience in the process of meaning-making within a text. A typical post-apocalyptic narrative inevitably contains elements of utopian longing alongside the corruption of anarchy or an oppressive

state. The two elements coexist and interact to create an amalgam of propounded social critique that can never fully shed itself of either element. As well, utopian and dystopian texts can fall outside the realm of post-apocalyptic narrative. For example, the original *Mad Max* (1979) was contextually ambiguous, but nevertheless dystopian, while the sequel *The Road Warrior* (1981) more overtly situated Max in a post-apocalyptic context. Categorizing texts in such a dichotomous manner therefore becomes not only difficult, but also extremely inappropriate. Analyzing the genre for what its unique qualities are, how it ideologically frames visions of the future, and in what ways these representations can be both problematic and instructive, however, is more appropriate.

What distinguishes post-apocalyptic narrative from other survival-themed stories (such as *Lord of the Flies* [1954]) or simply dystopian-themed stories (such as *Blade Runner* [1982], despite academic focus[1]) is its use of pre-apocalyptic refuse, its fascination with remains, or pieces of the past that are lost or forgotten, but carried forward into the narrative to assist audiences in "making sense" of The End. I argue here that post-apocalyptic narrative hinges primarily upon these post-apocalyptic remains and their abilities to structure what I argue is a bounded social critique and to influence the circulation of emotion. I suggest that these remains operate as sites of articulation, connecting narrative elements to one another and connecting the text to the audience. This thesis is an exploration and examination of what, why, and how certain remains are carried from present to future, what societal values they implicate for our culturally-defined possibilities for the future, and how these values act politically as the basis for sanctioned (and often unconscious) emotional responses.

Post-Apocalyptic Remains

I use the term "remain" to refer to the obvious cairns that the audience is meant to recognize as leftovers from her/his own world. Remains serve the function of situating the text in relation to the audience, providing both intertextual buoys and concrete touchstones that anchor the text to the audience's world. Often these remains play an important role in the syllogistic progression of the story, which Kenneth Burke (1931/1968) defines as "the form of a perfectly constructed argument, advancing step by step" (p. 124). Post-apocalyptic remains advance the logic of the plot, serving a narratively useful role. For instance, Denzel Washington's character in *The Book of Eli* (2010) is able to trade alcohol wipes branded "KFC" (a recognizable, bounded, and emotionally laden remain) for a trickle charge on his portable battery (which happens to power his iPod—a remain that also is politically loaded, bounded, recognizable, and emotionally infused). They might also coalesce in an attempt to paint the picture of post-apocalyptic ontology, as with the renaming of the physical and discursive world in *The Book of Dave* (Self, 2006). In instances such as these, the text uses references from the present (remains) to construct a worldview of the future. Secondly, remains work to circulate emotion, but an emotion intimately intertwined with cultural politics. When *WALL•E* (2008) depicts the namesake robot collecting things at random from the millions of tons of trash that litter the earth, the audience is delighted at his novel use for a discarded hubcap or a sheet of bubble wrap. But, as I show in Chapter 2, we can recognize that our amusement at his antics roots itself in the worldview of the middle class, corporatist consumer that accumulates unnecessarily from a place of economic privilege.

Post-apocalyptic remains function to make discursive connections within narratives in two basic ways: they connect sometimes unrelated pieces of the story together in meaningful ways, and they connect the text to the audience. Characters in post-apocalyptic narrative quite often are forced to interact with remains for survival, and it is this interaction that connects narrative elements to one another. In *The Road* (2006), the man and the boy literally scavenge in the cold for almost 300 pages, and the unfolding of the plot often hinges upon what sorts of material items they find and utilize (i.e., a gun, a shopping cart, a stocked bomb shelter, etc.). Secondly, they connect the text and audience by processes of identification, circulating emotional responses that span the affective spectrum. That a novel such as *The Road* can exist in roughly the same genre as *WALL•E* (2008) is a testament to the emotional flexibility of both the genre and the remain; in the former, they often reveal the conceptualization of a dark, violent side of human nature, while in the latter they allow the audience to laugh alongside an uninhabitable earth buried under billions of tons of trash. By articulating narrative features with one another and by connecting the audience with the text, post-apocalyptic remains bridge the gap between an audience member's inability to engage with a nontextual post-apocalypse and the wish to express real social critique.

I define remains in this study as falling into three general categories: material items, cultural knowledge, and rituals. The first, material items, is often the easiest to identify as having been carried from the present. When the characters in *The Book of Dave* collect bits of plastic that wash upon the shore, which they perceive as having been divinely created in the MadeinChina (space of creation), when *WALL•E* picks up boots and diamond rings, and when the four travelers in King's *The Dark Tower* series stumble upon a crashed Nazi

warplane, audiences immediately identify the familiarity of them. An important insight into material items is that, in stories that take place long after the apocalypse, they often mediate the carrying-over of cultural knowledge and rituals. Narrative that is situated almost immediately after the apocalypse frequently include characters that remember things before The End, negating the necessity for the interpretation of knowledge and ritual. But in tales like *WALL•E* and *Riddley Walker* (1980), hundreds or thousands of years have passed since The Event, assuring that the interpretation of material items is crucial to rediscovering the lost pre-apocalyptic culture.

Cultural knowledge takes many forms, but most often takes the shape of an ideologically informed epistemological and/or ontological philosophy. For instance, Chapter 3 in part examines systems of morality that a man who lived through the apocalypse attempts to confer to his son, born after The Event. His actions aren't always reflective of this value system, causing the boy to question whether that particular culture knowledge has use in his post-apocalyptic understanding of things. As well, the characters in *The Book of Dave* likewise possess a system of morality (this one more formally institutionalized), but also have a creation myth that includes the interpretation of a supposedly religious text and developed over hundreds of years. A third example is the philosophy of domesticated animals. The pack of wild dogs in Russell Hoban's novel *Riddley Walker* and the oversized feline hunting companions in Andre Norton's (1952) *Daybreak, 2250 A.D.* are obviously adapted versions of domesticated pets. These animals serve some function within the narrative, but their primary aim is to draw on pre-apocalyptic cultural knowledge, which audiences are likely to recognize, in order to construct their respective post-apocalyptic worlds. All three examples consider what

happens when the beliefs and values (not to mention the idiomatic references to language) are lifted from their moorings and placed into a foreign, futuristic world.

Finally, this cultural knowledge often informs the fulfillment of rituals that audiences, if unable to consciously recognize, will no doubt identify with. *Riddley Walker* relies on the knowledge of traveling puppet shows, but they are transformed in the story into something of mythological/quasi-religious sermons for both children and adults. The combining of the two rituals calls to mind both a group of children gathered around a puppet show, delightedly interacting with the puppets, and a group of churchgoers, devoutly and openly retelling the stories that comprise the mythology of that religion. *The Book of Dave* likewise takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to ritual, depicting a society based upon the principles of post-divorce custody exchanges. More simplistically, the boy in *The Road* expresses a desire to say grace to the people who, decades ago, stocked the bomb shelter they stumble across. The pre-dinner ritual lingers, while the religious sentiment it was intended to convey is curiously absent. Each of these three categories is somewhat fluid, as when material items convey cultural knowledge that possesses the requirement of particular rituals, but demarcating them in such a way at least helps clarify what, exactly, I mean by the term "post-apocalyptic remains."

The presence of remains, readily identifiable pieces of the audience's context, supports the idea that post-apocalypse imagines the future of only a single moment, an idea expanded upon later in the chapter. For instance, in *The Omega Man* (1971), the second film adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* (1954), Charlton Heston's character, Robert Neville, drives a sports car through an abandoned city while listening to his 8-track, soft jazz flowing from the convertible's speakers. In the third adaptation, *I Am*

Legend (2007), Will Smith's Neville drives a brand new Ford Mustang through the city by day and comes home in the evening to an iPod filled with Bob Marley. The iPod makes an appearance in at least two other contemporary films, *WALL•E* and *The Book of Eli*, as well. Further implications of these bits of debris will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters, but it is clear that there is a need to see the present in the imagined future, even in remains that should hold no practical value after the apocalypse.

As a last note, post-apocalyptic narratives are created under the pretenses of various ideological influences that inform both creators and consumers and, thus, the construction and placement of post-apocalyptic remains reflects and often perpetuates these ideologies. Authors and filmmakers decide what survives and what doesn't. Remains themselves are physically and discursively constructed just as much as the ideologies that their fictional contexts enable them to represent. When certain prioritized systems of knowledge stand behind the creators of cultural texts, remains are subsequently framed as being more or less important, are present or absent, and the narratives themselves emphasize hegemonic values that make a number of assumptions about the world. Therefore, discursive elements articulate in myriad ways, weaving the fabric of discursive formations, of systems of knowledge. Likewise, post-apocalyptic remains operate within a complex web of connections and separations. Every remain does not strongly suggest social critique, and may instead exist solely to elicit emotion. Conversely, others may be emotionally unstirring and yet provide profound social commentary. Ultimately, it is the intricate system of remains existing within and between each text that must pass judgment on social conditions and/or produce visceral, affective responses within the audience in order to operate as a successful artifact of contemporary post-apocalyptic narrative. That

post-apocalyptic remains are products of both the fictional and the physical contemporary

moment is without question.

Can We Imagine the Future?

Post-apocalyptic fiction necessarily envisions future events; as I write these

sentences no apocalypse has occurred. But this is not the same as actually imagining the

future or predicting it. Instead of prophesying, these fictions act as an ideological diagnosis

for the present day. By articulating a specific type of future, informed by socialized

influences of power and ideology, authors and filmmakers are doing no more than

highlighting particular pieces of today. This tension in science fiction between imagining

the future and simultaneously reflecting the present is teased out perhaps nowhere better

than Jameson's (1982) essay, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?"

He begins by postulating that science fiction's fixation with the future must have

underlying value:

> Whence the canonical defense of the genre: in a moment in which technological
> change has reached a dizzying tempo, in which so-called "future shock" is a daily
> experience, such narratives have the social function of accustoming their readers to
> rapid innovation, of preparing our consciousness and our habits for the otherwise
> demoralizing impact of change itself. (p. 151)

Jameson at first wishes to recognize the coping mechanisms science fiction can afford the

contemporary audience member in negotiating the technological advancements of the late

twentieth century. This is obviously akin to Burke's (1941) idea of equipment for living;

the texts prepare the audience for rapid change by giving them something substantive,

something tangible, from the text to carry with them into life. Jameson is initially

suggesting that depictions of super technologies help to prepare audiences for rapid

innovation by immersing them in a representational world. Using our frame, we might say

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that representations of post-apocalypse prepare the reader in terms of survival, methods of societal rebuilding, resourcefulness, avoidances, and the like. To imaginatively experience the improbable, impossible, and unthinkable would appear to necessarily prime audiences for the technological advancement (or destruction) of the physical world.

But Jameson summarily repeals this vision, stating that "for all kinds of reasons, we no longer entertain such visions of wonder-working, properly 'S-F' [science fiction] futures of technological automation" (p. 151). Instead, "[t]hat particular Utopian future has in other words turned out to have been merely the future of one moment of what is now our own past" (p. 151). Science fiction narratives of the post-WWII era articulated visions of the future that were wholly dependent upon their positionality, chronologically and culturally, within the specific context of which they were a part. Representations of nuclear destruction proliferated throughout this era and into the era of the Cold War, reflecting some apprehension about the political instability that came with the attempt of the U.S. and the Soviet Union to coexist in the midst of a nuclear arms race and competing, formidable economies. But today's science fiction is situated within a discursive and historical formation that has shifted, and that has broken many of the historical links that created the post-WWII and Cold-Era nuclear narrative genre, in order to rearticulate the perceived future in a way that reflects contemporary formations of thought.

What Jameson also implicitly references here are the hegemonic factors that frame the intellectual complexity of these fictions. Coupled with the obvious historical influences are underlying ideological structures such as capitalism, racism, patriarchy, U.S. nationalism, and heteronormativity. While at face value politics and history appeared to change daily, many sociopolitical principles have changed very little. So what we have

today is a genre full of fiction informed by more contemporary contextual elements, but which have failed to completely or partially shed the ideologically problematic ones. Because these fictions exist within discourse alone, their representations of the post-apocalyptic world necessarily take dominant discursive influences as cues.

As a part of the nuclear criticism movement, Derrida's concern is with the ways in which discursive practices represent the paradox between the imagination of life after nuclear war and the likelihood that people will even exist after it (Taylor, 2010). He posits the apocalyptic imagination a bit more radically than scholars traditionally have, which others have found unsurprising (see Heffernan, 1995; Robson, 1995). Derrida argues that nuclear apocalypse "is a speculation, an invention in the sense of a fable" (1984, p. 28), and that "nuclear war has no precedent. It has never occurred, itself; it is a non-event" (p. 23). Therefore, the apocalypse exists within discourse alone and carries with it the limitations that discourse generally has.

This is the first applicable principle of Derrida's work: his assertion that nuclear war is "*fabulously textual*, through and through" (1984, p. 23, emphasis in original). This is the case not just because "a nuclear war has not taken place" so we "can only talk and write about it" (p. 23); it "does not refer to anything that is or ever has been, so far" (Klein, 1990, p. 79). It is also because "*the sophistication of the nuclear strategy can never do without a sophistry of belief and the rhetorical simulation of a text*" (Derrida, 1984, p. 24, emphasis in original). In other words, fears of a nuclear apocalypse are hinged on the belief in its potential occurrence, and for "apocalypse" to exist as a discursive manifestation, appropriate (in this case) narrative reflections of "apocalypse's" meaning must be created. These narratives may be based on real events (such as newspaper stories, political

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speeches, or documentaries) or fictionalized (most prevalently seen as a science fiction genre). In this way, nuclear war is articulated through, for instance, discourse, technological warfare, and a speculative uncertainty about what has never occurred. These discursive objects are strung together in such a way to warrant particular cultural practices; an obvious product of this articulation is post-apocalyptic narrative. But if visions of the apocalypse are strictly textual, what is the importance of referencing the rhetoric of complete annihilation when, in fact, post-apocalyptic narrative specifically chronicles events that occur in the aftermath of cataclysm? More succinctly put, why study the textuality of the apocalypse when we are actually interested in post-apocalypse?

The answer to this question comes in a variety of forms, but reveals one specific point that deserves attention. Post-apocalyptic narrative has an interesting feature that reflects the story that began this analysis and also seems to negate the principles on which it is founded: "Very few apocalyptic representations end with The End" (Berger, 1999, p. 34). Instead, the imaginings contain "some remainder, some post-apocalyptic debris" (p. 34). This debris does consist of people, which in a sense is the point, but necessarily must also depict the rotting aftermath of human technological and cultural advancement (what I have called remains). Broderick (1993) also writes, "the sub-genre of SF [science fiction] cinema which has entertained visions of nuclear Armageddon primarily with *survival* as its dominant discursive mode" (p. 362, emphasis in original). In short, because it is impossible, as Derrida claims, to imagine a total apocalypse, "an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces" of literature and knowledge, or "the archive" (1984, p. 26), we must place ourselves somewhere in the aftermath. Brewer (1987) summarizes: "To the extent that literature, and other discourses as well, are hypothetically auto-telic and produce their

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referent as a fiction or fable, they cannot reconstitute themselves in the aftermath of their total destruction as archive" (p. 158). Paradoxically, the audience operates under the assumption that, should total destruction occur, they will most definitely weather the apocalyptic storm, come out on the other side, and proceed to interact with the flotsam and jetsam that have washed up on the post-apocalyptic shores. In reality, this is unlikely, if not completely outrageous, as Richard Klein (1990) pointed out twenty years ago:

> Imagine the effect on our society if one bomb, at very least twenty to forty times the power of the one that fell on Hiroshima, were to strike each one of the 197 cities in the United States with populations above 120,000. But then, instead of 197, imagine that 5000 fell, twenty-five for each such city—less than one half, I repeat, of the Soviet strategic weapons armed and pointed at this moment in our direction. (p. 79)

Clearly, then, visions of the future amount to little more than that: the assumption that there will be a future, and that humans will exist within it. Many scholars have criticized the idea of a winnable nuclear war (e.g., Derrida, 1984; Franklin, 2008; Klein, 1990; Seed, 1999; Schell, 1982; Sharp, 2007). There is a logical gap between the ability to imagine apocalypse and the assumption that we will be a part of what occurs afterward, so why the obsession with narratives of this type? Especially today, roughly two decades after the end of the Cold War, the fascination with these scenarios necessarily must point back towards the audience.

In imagining post-apocalypse, Jameson (1984) would argue that the audience is hopelessly entrenched in the current formation, and that visions of a future situated after cataclysm (as well as the overtness or ambiguity of The Event itself) do no more than reflect upon the speculative discursive manifestations that we desire or fear (bombs, plagues, asteroids, etc.). Early in the twentieth century, representations of "streamlined cities" gave way to nuclear post-apocalyptic fictional warnings that reflected the unease

about worldwide nuclear armament. These, in turn, have given way to the representation of a number of socially and ethically questionable outcomes relevant to today, such as environmental disaster or the post-cataclysm rise of theocratic rule. Therefore, science fiction "does not seriously attempt to imagine the 'real' future of our social system," because Jameson argues "it is for us either irrelevant or unthinkable" (p. 152). Instead, it provides us with a way of "transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (p. 152). Kermode (1967) previews this theory when he claims that apocalyptic prophecy, specifically millenarian conceptions of it, "are made to bear the weights of our anxieties and hopes" (p. 11). The shorthand answer to the question posed above, then, is: No, we cannot imagine the future. Or perhaps the answer better stated: Imagining the future is not the point; rather, we are more interested in interacting with the present. What our post-apocalyptic imaginings provide audiences is not a glimpse into the future, but rather a way of reflecting upon, and in many ways expressing, the discursive moments that define the present. Because there is no evidence that would suggest that the typical narrative patterns within the genre in any way reflect actuality, it is the trudge through a fictional future-present that provides some audiences the means to interact with "today" in ways that resonate meaningfully with their experiences. While comforting insofar as this exercise has therapeutic value, we must also remember that oppressive ideologies are also projected into post-apocalyptic fictions, and therefore resonate more actively with certain audiences while turning others off. What Jameson argues leads ultimately to only one conclusion: that the apocalypse can only exist in discourse.

Therefore, Derrida's concern is not completely off-mark; although we may seem more concerned with the material conditions of post-apocalypse than the discursive

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representation of it, the audience understands (if only at a subconscious level) that post-apocalyptic fiction is about discourse. Jameson is correct in asserting that we cannot foretell future circumstance, and Derrida is correct in stating that the apocalypse can only exist within discourse, but this in no way implies that audiences are oblivious to these facts or that post-apocalyptic fictions are in some way not useful.

Points of Entry

There are any number of ways I could approach the study of post-apocalyptic narrative, but some are more useful than others for exploring the role of the post-apocalyptic remain. I have chosen as my points of entry into this discussion the profound social critique that is often constitutive of these narratives and the circulation of emotion that feels out the intricacies of text-audience articulation. Both examine the primary operative tendencies of the remain; additionally, social critique tends to articulate within the text, connecting elements inside the narrative to convey the desired message, while the politics of emotion often gives a sense of the articulation between the text and the audience.

      Social Critique

Post-apocalyptic narrative has long been considered a form of social commentary and plays a particularly interesting role in helping audiences critique social conditions. Of the genre in general, James Berger (1999) writes, "Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic representations serve varied psychological and political purposes. Most prevalently, they put forward a total critique of any existing social order" (p. 7). Furthermore, "the cataclysmic imagination offers little more than a raging polemic against humanity's moral confusions and shortcomings" (Dewey, 1990, p. 13). In the last half of the twentieth

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century, the skeptical, and mostly fearful, response to the nuclear arms race prompted a

deluge of science fiction narrative to flesh out the fears, discontents, and hopes of much of

the U.S. public. Although science fiction has long-depicted nuclear weaponry and the

apocalypse that inevitably ensues (see Sharp, 2007, pp. 121-138), the actuality of the

technology "has given a new edge to what was already bound to be an 'age of anxiety'"

(Dowling, 1987, p. 83). For once, by the late 1940s post-apocalyptic scenarios had the

potential to realize themselves, and stories about them became "routine" (Seed, 1999, p. 8).

Seed points out the increasing tendency for science fiction to intervene, in a sense, in the

political realities that created the conditions under which post-apocalyptic representations

emerged (p. 9). In this way, representations of post-apocalypse serve a sort of political

function, and, as Berger (1999) reminds us, "[a]pocalyptic representation stands in the

midst of crisis and between two catastrophes: one historical (remembered and suffered),

and one imagined (desired and feared)" (p. 35). He, much like Derrida, argues that a

historical basis for the imagination to fictionalize representations of the future is created by

situations capable of bringing the apocalypse about.

These fictionalizations have been partitioned by Joseph Dewey (1990) into three

schools of thought: the "cataclysmic imagination," the "millennialist imagination," and the

"apocalyptic temper" (12-3). The "cataclysmic imagination" operates under the

assumption of total destruction, with no remainder, and "savors the radical violence of

imminent planetary alteration: the buildup and climax of the apocalyptic event itself" (p.

13). The "millennialist imagination" seems to operate oppositely, "accept[ing] endings

most cheerfully because of the fanatic commitment to better worlds emerging from the

ruins" (p. 13). These narratives focus primarily on what happens *after* the cataclysm. The

"apocalyptic temper," Dewey is not hesitant to point out, is the most reasonable of the

three, being situated somewhere between the two others. It represents a society with a

specific strategy for coping with a uniquely precarious situation, rather than sprinting

headlong into an inevitable end or adopting the "naïve optimism of the millennialist spirit"

(p. 14-5). This strategy, Dewey suggests, has been the most helpful for American writers,

who employed the apocalyptic temper in order to critique sociopolitical conditions and

make sense an uncertainty about the future. Dowling (1987) also writes,

> What circumscribes these [nuclear] fictions is the fact . . . that these fictions are
> directed at us now, before the blast. They are quite unlike millennial writings,
> which they otherwise imitate in terms of imagery, tone and so on, because they are
> concerned to avoid rather than to promote the apocalyptic event itself. (p. 86)

Most popular post-apocalyptic texts follow Dewey's conclusion that, rather than exalting a

cathartic rejuvenation due to, or running headfirst at top speed towards, the apocalypse,

authors and filmmakers are most likely to employ a careful, reflective stance towards

potential catastrophe.

Far from benign or naïve, as Dowling and Dewey depict them, utopian

post-apocalyptic narratives share many of the qualities of the millennialist imagination, but

often serve a larger purpose that supersedes Dewey's somewhat reductive consideration of

them. Frequently, these stories are framed as a complete cleansing. As Berger (1999)

points out, "[e]very structure of the old world is infected, and only an absolute, purifying

cataclysm can make possible an utterly new, perfected world" (7). In stories such as these,

there is a critique of the social order that runs deep enough to warrant a complete

obliteration of the institution in order to begin anew. Rabkin (1983) concurs: "Ending our

world, we simultaneously create a new one, one sometimes hopeful and one sometimes

fearful, but one that always depends for its emergence upon the destruction of the world

that preceded it" (p. viii). Whereas in the millennialist imagination, only the *threat* of complete devastation was necessary to bring about the "right" type of change, not The Event itself, to send humankind on the right path, utopian post-apocalyptic visions relish the catastrophe's actual occurrence for its cathartic properties. Gomel (2000) says, "All apocalyptic and millenarian ideologies ultimately converge on the utopian transformation of the body (and the body politic) through suffering" (p. 406). Bartter (1986) concurs: "purified through the sacrifice of a large percentage of its members (and perhaps by a return to primitive conditions), [survivors] might eventually be able to build a new, infinitely better world" (p. 148). Despite the obvious shortcomings of such a vision of any utopia (for elaboration see Mumford, 1965), utopian criticism employs "imaginative models of universal death and rebirth" (Gomel, 1995, p. 343), ultimately culminating in a new world order, and one that works.

But dystopian and utopian visions alike critique social conditions to the extent that the two categories cannot be so easily pulled apart. Dowling (1987) argues that "[s]ince [H.G.] Wells, writers have tended to use the post-disaster situation for dystopian rather than utopian purposes" (p. 87). But Miller (1998) argues that "any form of literature that seeks to help us see things anew is driven by a utopian impulse—even if the work in question is dystopia" (p. 337). Along the same vein, Staiger (1999) mentions that "dystopias seem to be fabricated as corrupted versions of some utopian . . . scheme rather than initiated outright" (p. 101). Similarly, Williams (1988) writes, "Dystopias are negative utopias, images of a future so terribly imperfect that, given a chance, people would prefer to flee as far as their wherewithal can possibly take them" (p. 384). What these perspectives suggest is that utopian and dystopian visions are not easily separated,

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and that the principles of critique, hope, and fear (as well as the ideological constraints) are equally present in both. In whatever manifestation, social critique remains a primary goal, and post-apocalyptic remains are crucial to developing that social critique. The broad scope of post-apocalyptic fiction indicates that whatever the critique being leveled, and whatever the assumed necessary means to transcend those conditions, millennialist and cataclysmic manifestations are no more or less capable at performing the duties of the average text.

Although many stories are mostly concerned with daily survival, this duty is almost always to explicate a larger skepticism. For instance, *The Book of Eli* (2010), while very much about a survivor's existence in a scorched landscape, also considers the role of religious doctrine and the power of the word to bring about The Event as well as rebuild culture in the aftermath. *WALL•E* (2008) propounds a discontent with our increasingly wasteful and complacent lifestyle. Hoban's *Riddley Walker* deals with the coming of age of an individual who is torn between the fearful tokenization and rejection of technological remains through folklore and the benefits of redeveloping these remains, especially weapons. *Daybreak, 2250 A.D.* explores the acquisition of relics of the past in order to further knowledge, history, and geography, all lost through nuclear devastation. A notable exception is the novel *The Road* (2006, film 2009), which provides a specific perspective of the assumed dark side of human nature in desperate times. Nevertheless, remains are an integral part of both the plot and atmosphere. Each of these fictions will be unpacked in greater detail later, but suffice it to say here that, at a most literal glance, each is simply an ideological interpretation of the possible day-to-day of a post-apocalyptic survivor. Remains often influence the nature of that survival (to what extent this is true is frequently

inversely related to the time elapsed since The Event), but they provide the means to layer post-apocalyptic stories with greater meaning.

Each of the next short sections examines some of the themes present in many post-apocalyptic narratives, most of which apply directly to the themes examined in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Governance, supposed human nature, and environmental destruction are all addressed later in the study. An examination of critiques of technological dependence, while a theme in the film *WALL•E*, is a regrettable omission in this work resulting from space restriction. Nevertheless, I find social critique of technological dependence important to address in this introductory chapter because of its influence on the genre as a whole, especially in regards to The Event itself.

Systems of Governance

The word "governance" is chosen deliberately: It refers to an exertion of power by one group/individual over another in some official, or at least relatively stable, way. "Government" seems to refer to something extremely organized, and something that can be pointed at; "governance," on the other hand, can be more loosely defined to include particular governments, and refers to a specific practice of displaying power rather than the specific entity that displays it. It represents the act of governing; "To govern, then, means to govern things" (Foucault 1978/2000, p. 210). The choice to use the word "governance" rather than "government" comes, unsurprisingly, via the conventions of post-apocalyptic narrative and the remain. Remains of governance are often intangible, like bodies of political and social power. They are equally as often very tangible, channeling power through various forms of violence or threat audiences are familiar with: the whip, the gun,

the priest, or the religious text. Post-apocalyptic fictions almost always depict some exertion of power or hierarchy, whether collective or individual.

This can manifest via either structural or ideological means. Desser (1999) describes the hierarchy that exists throughout futuristic science fiction in general. In *Metropolis* (1927), for example, "[t]he cityscape is divided between high and low: The city dwellers who live above the group contrasted to, and in conflict with, those who dwell beneath the streets" (p. 82). Likewise, 33 years later, a similar context is displayed in *The Time Machine* (1960). "This time, however, it is the underground dwellers who control the technology, the means of production, while the surface dwellers are the victims consumed, quite literally, by these futuristic capitalists" (p. 87). And yet, in *Blade Runner* (1982), the "figuration of racism…turns into the high/low spatial metaphor present in *Metropolis* and other films" (p. 94). It is in this sense that the word governance is used: to depict the seemingly official expressions of power between "upper" and "lower" (even if spatially inverted) groups of survivors in post-apocalyptic cities. Williams (1995), on the other hand, examines the imperialism of some post-apocalyptic narrative, wherein oppression comes in symbolic form. Considering, for instance, the Australian Outback a wasteland of nothingness is a reenactment of the attitudes toward natives that colonial Europeans held when they settled (p. 303). Post-apocalyptic "wastelands" are often discursively framed as such despite the proclivity for inhabitants one might be tempted to call "Other."

There are two primary forms of governance consistently found in post-apocalyptic storytelling, and each represents the deep-seated fear of any extreme principle of structured power. One the one hand, anarchy makes its appearance in an overwhelming majority of texts. Anarchist visions of post-apocalypse reflect the negatively socialized, often times

patriarchal, assumption that any form of positive collectivity will necessarily collapse along with the collapse of the original form of governance. On the other hand, many texts depict the development of theocratic rule. It should first be said that with the term "theocracy" I am referring to a kind of control by means of both formal religion and the power of secular folklore and/or mythology; both serve the same purpose; one simply happens to occur in a more institutionalized setting. The formation of theocratic societies in post-apocalyptic fiction reflects the ideological assumption that collectivity is possible, but that overly oppressive power structures will inevitably emerge from the ashes of the other society, poised and ready to conquer once more. Both of these systems of governance contribute to systems of knowledge and governance in post-apocalypse.

Patriarchy and Human Nature

Characters' actions in post-apocalypse, especially within narratives in which remains that assist survival have become increasingly scarce, reveal a very different form of social critique. It could be said that human motivation informs the systems of governance that arise in post-apocalyptic narrative, but that would be slightly misleading. It's true that, for those stories in which governance plays a crucial narrative role, human motivation is also under scrutiny, often indirectly. But particular narratives differ in emphasis.

Scarcity of pre-apocalyptic resources is a staple feature of post-apocalyptic narrative situated directly after The Event, and our imagination of human nature when the security of such resources are in question or nonexistent indicates both a total reliance on them and a reversion to uninhibited, unquestioning patriarchal violence. When situations arise in which people must find food, water, shelter, or power, the social acceptability of

stealing, murdering, cannibalizing, or raping becomes moot. The moral implications of survival among a severely reduced population that is, nevertheless, dependent on dead technologies and processes are evident nowhere better than *The Road*. With no larger social judgment to pass, McCarthy provides an avenue to consider the day-to-day for what it represents at the human level, devoid of concerns about rebuilding society, specifics about The Event, or positive connection with other survivors. Like other texts, however, McCarthy's version of the day-to-day is framed by patriarchal standards that do not simply suggest, but also demand, that women are unfit to autonomously exist in post-apocalypse and that most men will resort to violence, cannibalism, and sexual slavery in the face of total destruction and starvation. As we will see in Chapter 2, even the paternal love between the father and son in the novel follows patriarchal standards.

Interestingly enough, such companionship is another resource especially scarce in post-apocalyptic tales, particularly ones that take place relatively soon after The Event, and especially drawing itself out through the use of remains. Whereas post-apocalyptic narrative that suggests broad critique at the societal level often has characters connecting in various ways that tease out continuing social corruption, a standard feature of humanistic post-apocalypse is a profound loneliness that either drives or breaks characters. The remains existing in many texts that express this sentiment represent the characters' loneliness by confiding in a piece of the past. Each remain's pre-apocalyptic origin makes it especially worthy of such companionship. In stories such as these, it is the rejection of community and a profound mistrust of other people that sometimes causes the lack of companionship, especially in texts depicting post-apocalyptic wandering. Wolfe (1983) characterizes this lone wandering as the "*Journey through the wasteland*" (p. 10, emphasis

in original) stage of post-apocalyptic fiction. He points out that journeying "is often one of the most important elements in post-holocaust fiction," partially "serv[ing] as a kind of purgation of despair on the part of the central character" (p. 10). Humanistic stories like these are typically more concerned with the (male) characters' personal states of being than any issues on the societal level.

Environmental Destruction

Many scholars of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse downplay (or overlook entirely) the fundamental simplicity of an environmentalist social critique. Much research has gone into questions of sociology, gender and race studies, power, mythology, and religion. The inclination to zoom in on the topics most often discussed in the discipline create a "can't see the forest through the trees" scenario in which the most fundamental post-apocalyptic critique is bypassed: environmental destruction. The assumption that humans' (men's) abilities to negotiate and coexist with Mother Nature will collapse underlies other types of social issues that are uniquely post-apocalyptic, and is therefore often forgotten. For instance, Bartter (1986) convincingly argues that the annihilation of cities is often a prerequisite for social and structural renewal. The cathartic cleansing of the city by fire and earth is thus transformed into a human issue, and not solely because the environment exemplified happens to be a purely human one. Many narratives depict burn zones, nuclear winter, fallout, organic mutation, and generally uninhabitable conditions, but only as a backdrop to human issues. As an example, many post-apocalyptic fictions set far into the future depict residual mutation due to radiation poisoning in the gene pool (for example, *Davy* [Pangborn, 1964], *The Dark Tower* [King, 1982; 1987; 1991; 1997; 2003; 2004a; 2004b], and *Daybreak, 2250 A.D.*).While patriarchal issues such as religious

oppression, the inherency of evil in humanity, and social hierarchy exist, they do so often times at a layer deeper within the text. On the surface, the environment has collapsed. But beneath that, certain ideologies have withered while others continue to thrive. The texts claim that the human race has failed. In reality, they depict the failure of the white, capitalist, patriarchal system. At the most basic level, a very significant portion of post-apocalyptic narrative is about a specific, ideologically informed view of human sociality *as well as* the imagined consequences of large-scale environmental destruction. Therefore, I intend to address the environmentalist narrative theme in Chapter 2.

Technological Dependence

The dependence on technology provides a final major area of social critique, both inside and outside of the intellectual realm of environmentally interdependent living. Scholars are quick to point out apocalyptic narrative's overt hesitation about or resistance to technological weaponry through the actualization of The Event in the first place, but the critique on technology often continues past The Event and well into the post-apocalyptic phase. The anger, fear, and resentment that come from the whole process of technological apocalypse generally evolve into a stifling culture of anti-technology in many of the texts examined here. The ones that depict technological progression often display the cyclical ebb and flow of humanity's relationship with technology. There are more than a few texts that I will discuss in subsequent chapters that depict first an Event, then a long period of rebuilding based on pre-apocalyptic ideals, and finally the eventual re-experiencing of another Event (and almost always the same type as the first time).

There are a multitude of examples that demonstrate this principle. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is partitioned into 3 sections that chart the progression of a world emerging from

the ashes of a nuclear war, preserving and actively pursuing the rebuilding of structures of knowledge, and finally blowing themselves up once again. Towards the end of *Riddley Walker*, a character has finally obtained enough sulfur to produce gunpowder in a society terrified of the atom. The man promptly blows himself up, but the reader is meant to understand that sulfur imports are going to continue regardless of the consequences. Riddley himself is torn between the knowledge of his society's incredibly slow technological progress and the frightening mythological quality the previous society has been discursively constructed to represent. *Davy* depicts a society that has actually banned the spread of books and information except religious text, and the narrator writes the story in secret, hoping that it is found later.

The narratives that depict this societal return to destruction, like a moth invariably drawn again and again to a light it suspects might burn it, seems to legitimize Fukuyama's (1989; 1992) much debated views on technological advancement in the West. He writes of apocalyptic narrative:

> Yet even these extreme circumstances would appear unlikely to break the grip of technology over human civilization, and science's ability to replicate itself. The reasons for this again have to do with the relationship between science and war. For even if one could destroy modern weapons and scientific knowledge of how to produce them, one could not eliminate the memory of the method that made their production possible. (1992, p. 87-8)

Although Fukuyama clearly doesn't have much of an understanding of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narrative (as I just discussed, these narrative critiques often point towards the belief in this very flaw), the fictions discussed here indicate that storytellers generally agree with this assessment of the technologically unyielding human being. I have no desire to enter the extensive conversation about whether or not this is true; it is simply my

observation that the ways in which remains are used in post-apocalypse suggests that, ideologically, dominant discourses tend to agree.

A second scenario that insinuates a cultural apprehension about technology is what might be termed the "Rise of the Machines" genre. The category, whose name is taken from the third installment of the *Terminator* series, includes such titles as the *Terminator* saga (1984; 1991; 2003; 2009), *The Matrix* trilogy (1999; 2003a; 2003b), *9* (2009), and, while not post-apocalyptic, *I, Robot* (2004), along with countless other titles that came with the rise of the computer age. Generally speaking, these stories reflect Rushing and Frentz's (1995) arguments about the progression of technology as a reflection of postmodern sensibilities, all culminating in a scenario in which the technology, once a tool much like McLuhan's (1964) extensions of the human being, have turned upon their creator. As much as nuclear weaponry revealed the fear of nuclear apocalypse, narrative in the age of the computer reveals uncertainty about our ability to keep increasingly intelligent beings under control.

Kurt Vonnegut, ever the cynic, envisions a post-apocalyptic society in *Galápagos* (1985) that has done away with not only technology, but also big brains. While this novel, along with his *Cat's Cradle* (1963), may not seem the most fitting text for a study of post-apocalypse, Chapter 4 demonstrates that comedy is simply another way in which audiences choose to navigate post-apocalypse and work through social critique. As May (1972) observes, "Vonnegut belongs to a purer strain of apocalyptic writers, a tradition that imagines the worst because it believes in something better" (p. 192). Furthermore, "The reasons for its [*Cat's Cradle*'s] imagined apocalypse are patent: the pastiche of uncontrolled invention and absolutized religion" (p. 199) In May's estimation, Vonnegut's

unique form of social critique (humor) walks hand-in-hand with his general apocalyptic attitude. Vonnegut employs his classic sense of satirical wit to give readers a unique way to think about and interact with post-apocalyptic society—or lack thereof. After having looked at the abilities of these texts to critique social situations, the obvious difference between experiencing apocalypse through, for example, Vonnegut's, King's, and McCarthy's eyes is the emotional element to the consumption of texts.

One of the downfalls of technological critique approach to post-apocalyptic narrative lies within its reasoning, which holds that humans possess seemingly inherent flaws that cause them to return to destructive patterns of action repeatedly, when in actuality these patterns are not human, but rather distinctly patriarchal. The destruction of the environment and the building of the bomb in the contemporary day come from the ideologies that justify indifferently destroying nature for the benefit of people (some more than others), and likewise the legitimacy of building the bomb is predicated on the troublesome argument that nuclear weapons are the ultimate peacemaker. The idea, then, that all people are drawn to do particular things in the event of technological advancement even plays into the naturalization of patriarchal systems of hypercapitalist economies and international warfare. Harding (1991) points to a very similar reasoning, the idea that science benefits everyone rather than simply the dominant groups within Western culture, used to justify doing science in particular ways that normalize the ideologies of those discursive groups. Thus, the technologies produced and the scientific industries so influential in creating the means to destroy the world are assumed to naturally emerge out of technological development at large. But what would technology look like today if science took into account marginalized perspectives in scientific study?[2] Very different, no

doubt. That said, it is nevertheless important to critique what people *do* with these technologies once they are created, which many texts manage to accomplish.

As well as these four categories of social critique, which represent four commonly intended social critiques, I examine a number of ideologically troubling representations throughout this study that are seemingly unaware of or indifferent to their reliances on hegemonic norms. Some of these include conceptions of heteronormativity and love, gender roles in the face of survivalism, and consumerism as sanctioned wastefulness. The analyses will therefore balance intention and authorial intent with possible interpretation and unintended, though consequential, themes.

The Cultural Politics of Emotion

This research heavily relies on Ahmed's (2004) problematized theories of the circulation of emotion. Ahmed's central claim is that emotion and its expression are as political as other ways of thinking and acting, possess sanctions, consequences, expectations, and exist within structures that exert power in specific ways. In thinking about traditional views of human emotion, her theories are only oppositional to some of the existing literature.

In particular, Plantinga (2009) presents us with the idea of "cognitive-perceptual emotion" which suggests that emotion and affect operate both cognitively and viscerally, but that emotion involves a good deal more mental processing. He defines an emotion as a "concern-based construal," or "an intentional mental state . . . that is often accompanied by various sorts of feelings, physiological arousal, and action tendencies" (2009, p. 54). By outlining emotions as being intentional, implicitly by being about something, Plantinga is able to rely on the audience's appraisal of a particular situation to define how emotion is

elicited. The kinds of emotion an audience member experiences are necessarily dependent upon their assessment of the implicating factors involved, not of the actuality of the situation itself.

The idea that audiences' emotional responses occur as a response to the interpretation of situations may be on target, but it doesn't take into account the ways in which both the situations we respond to and the ways we respond are heavily sanctioned by cultural politics. For instance, Ahmed relates the example of asylum seekers in the UK (we might draw a parallel to Mexican immigrants in the US), who are portrayed in specific ways that organize hate. Public discourse positions them as Other, framing them in particular ways, so that hatred may be directed at them from places of relative privilege. Similarly, ideological norms work hard to define what specific cultures find disgusting or abject, building borders between subjects and objects that allow disgust or abjection to circulate around the "abnormal" object of marginalization. Thomson (1997) explicates the ways in which this disgust legitimizes Othering and voyeurism, discursively disfiguring the bodies of those exhibited at freak shows while simultaneously reinscribing their presentation as inherently disgusting. Even in children, issues of race and gender determine the sanctions for emotional expression by children and its interpretation by teachers (Ferguson, 2000, pp. 67-71). We can see that the circulation of emotion in what Ahmed calls "affective economies" is intimately wrapped up in cultural politics, mediating the concern-based construal in ways we cannot ignore.

A second idea that will crop up over the course of the study is Plantinga's (2009) idea of cognitive play. Authors often play games with audiences, asking them to discover, uncover, or piece together disparate elements in playful ways. This can be thought of as

akin to Gomel's (1995) theory of the ontological detective story, wherein the character attempts to situate her/himself existentially within a somewhat mysterious world. The audience, for my purposes, has become the ontological detective. These moments of cognitive play are, of course, also mediated responses to certain situations, but are most often less operationalized by troublesome ideologies than by curiosity. For instance, when texts feign knowledge of something (usually a post-apocalyptic remain), but the audience recognizes its actual purpose, we are invited to participate in a bit of cognitive play. Will Self's (2006) *The Book of Dave* does a marvelous job portraying the ignorance of interpreted religious prophecy by creating a game of puns and riddles that the reader is encouraged to solve. Similarly, two characters in *Riddley Walker* find a passage written in the audience's English and attempt to decipher exactly what it means. The result is a quite comical transformation of a simple encyclopedic summary of a painting into a mythical, prophetic declaration. The audience will often chuckle at the confusion of the characters' understandings of the world, especially of pieces of the past that have survived but that are often a mystery to be speculated about.

Each chapter's ideological critique, then, will also include discussions about the cultural politics found both inside texts and outside of them (in what seems to be the culturally appropriate emotional response to something). Paired with social critique, examining the cultural politics of emotion should adequately address not only the content of each text but also what it seems to ask of its audiences, what the appropriate response to post-apocalyptic remains might be.

Methodological Framework

A number of frames come together here to place the post-apocalyptic remain within a larger theoretical picture. Primarily, I will use Michel Foucault's (1972) framework for "discursive formations" and Larry Grossberg's (1992) theory of "articulation" to explicate how modes of discourse create and connect cultural artifacts to themselves, within themselves, and to the audience. These two perspectives on poststructuralism help establish the textuality of post-apocalyptic fiction as well as place the ever-present elements of social critique and emotion within a system of knowledge that acknowledges its constructed nature.

Discursive Formations

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) proposes his theory of discursive formations; in a general sense, discursive formations are defined as the "relations between statements" (p. 31). Statements, the silent, interwoven proclamations of legitimacy in a particular cultural context, are constructed alongside the development of that culture. Each statement is a single node within a network of other statements, and that network "is concerned, in a sort of vertical dimension, with the conditions of existence of different groups of signifiers" (p. 109). In other words, they develop and legitimize various levels of meaning among signifiers within a particular formation. In different formations, the same signifier can represent vastly different concepts. A common example of this is holding up one's first two fingers which, in various cultures, can either be a signifier for peace or a grave insult. By the same token, some contexts would necessarily warrant that the interpretation of this sign will be numerical specification. Holding up two fingers at the bakery is more likely to indicate that you wish to purchase two loaves of bread than that

you wish the clerk peace or misfortune. While it is often quite simple to sort through these

interconnected cultural factors to find the most likely meaning, the complex interactions

between statements, which are ever-evolving in the first place, becomes a matter of

concern for Foucault.

Therefore, he initially insists that the statements be grouped according to some

system. He outlines four distinct hypotheses to explain the specific groupings of

statements, and subsequently rejects each of them. First, he proposes that statements "form

a group if they refer to one and the same object" (Foucault, 1972, p. 32). But Foucault

concludes, after an examination of the concept "madness," that objects do not exist

independently of discourse, that

> mental illness was constituted by all that was said in all the statements that named
> it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its
> various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its
> name, discourses that were taken to be its own. (p. 32)

Therefore, statements cannot be readily assembled around the objects that they must come

together to create in the first place. The fact that objects are discursive constructions

precludes our ability to relate statements to them in a vacuum, outside of context. This

should be apparent for my purpose. Because post-apocalypse is a discursive reflection of

the present, statements that refer to "post-apocalypse" could not easily be grouped outside

of the discourse that creates "post-apocalypse" as an object, because of "the interplay of the

rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time" (p. 32-3).

Second, he proposes that statements are grouped on the basis of "their form and

type of connexion [*sic*]" (p. 33). He writes,

> It seemed to me, for example, that from the nineteenth century medical science was
> characterized not so much by its objects or concepts as by a certain *style*, a certain

constant manner of statement . . . . in short, it seemed to me that medicine was organized as a series of descriptive statements. (p. 33, emphasis in original)

Here again, though, Foucault decides that the complexity of the existence and evolution of medical knowledge was, in part, due to the statements regarding it that are constantly made, modified, and recodified. The connections are never stable, so any kind of grouping would be likewise volatile. As well, they interact with experimentation, instruments, and other entities outside the statement that influence this grouping. Social conditions evolve, like medical knowledge, from one period to the next, so the same must be true of "post-apocalypse." As we will see in the next section, the connections between statements and objects are constantly shifting, and partitioning statements based on these conditions proves not only arbitrary, but also extremely temporary.

Third, he proposes grouping them based on a "system of permanent and coherent concepts involved" (p. 34). He looks at grammar, specifically sentence structure, as a fairly stable, institutionalized construct (with subject, predicate, etc.). However, Foucault concludes that the emergence of new concepts precludes any sort of permanence, instead revealing the representation of a constructed "false unity" (p. 35). He suggests that the traditional sentence structure is not inherent, but "perpetrated" by discourse, by the arrangement of these statements. We might say about apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction that there are a fairly stable set of principles. In fact, Wolfe (1983) gives us this template:

> (1) the experience or discovery of the cataclysm; (2) the journey through the wasteland created by the cataclysm; (3) settlement and establishment of a new community; (4) the re-emergence of the wilderness as antagonist; and (5) a final, decisive battle or struggle to struggle to determine which values shall prevail in the new world. (p. 8)

While these remain true for the vast majority of post-apocalyptic tales, other factors remain

that would influence us to group statements. Literature from before WWII looks very

different than the wave of nuclear narrative that came from the Cold War era. The

emergence of new ways of obliterating ourselves revealed the lack of permanence in this

structure. Not only that, but much post-apocalyptic fiction takes its cue from age-old

stories of religious apocalypse, indicating that even the constructed nature of contemporary

Western fiction in this genre possesses little more than a manifestation of previous forms.

Finally, he suggests that we group them based on "the identity and permanence of

themes" (p. 35). He writes, "Could one not, for example, constitute as a unity everything

that has constituted the evolutionist theme from Buffon to Darwin?" (p. 35). Similarly,

could we not narrow our focus to perhaps trace a path from the first nuclear narrative to the

latest, incorporating all texts that openly depict elements of nuclear apocalypse? Once

more, he rejects this on the basis that similar themes can be approached from very different

positions, and therefore each approach is constituted by a different set of statements. It

would not be enough to simply pull post-apocalyptic narratives of a sort together. While

Wolfe is content with grouping the elements of post-apocalyptic fiction together, and

Miller (1998) is particularly interested in Octavia Butler, a black feminist author of

dystopian fiction, my perspective revolves around the study of communication generally,

and audience studies in particular. Therefore, the statements that inform my concerns here

are necessarily different those of than another scholar looking at identical texts.

What becomes apparent in this deconstruction, and which is no doubt the reason for

Foucault's time spent on the matter, is that no permanent system exists that can uniformly

define the relations of statements in all cases. Instead, statements are a product of

"enunciative modalities," the situations that merit and legitimize their utterance. Rather than the belief that language has an anchored, relatively permanent meaning, waiting to be uncovered, Foucault argues that statements interact with objects in way that preclude strict monosemy. Therefore, in analyzing post-apocalyptic narrative, the modes of expression that define non-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic experience have no permanence, and can therefore be examined as historical products of discourse rather than independently occurring forces. Foucault asks us to "question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset" (1972, p. 22). "Post-apocalypse" is simply an object of a discursive formation that becomes defined, demarcated, and existentially indebted to the statements made about it. The texts used here must be considered pieces of an object of the contemporary discursive formation of the West. But, more importantly, just as Foucault's example, madness, must exist within the institution of medicine, post-apocalypse, as it has been defined here, must exist within the institutions of storytelling. Grossberg's (1992) writings on "articulation" make clear how this is to be accomplished.

Articulation

In defining a theoretical basis for cultural studies, Grossberg echoes many of the principles Foucault outlines. He is suspicious of any "principle of interiority or essentialism which locates any practice in a structure of necessity and guarantees its effects even before it has been enacted" (1992, p. 52). In this line of thought, "[h]istory itself appears to be guaranteed in advance—the inevitable march of events spinning out their inevitable consequences" (p. 53). In short, he opts for a socially determined, fluid, and polysemic network of statements and objects. Furthermore, "one can only deal with, and

from within, specific contexts, for it is only there that practices have specific effects, that identities and relations exist" (p. 55). Clearly, Grossberg is operating within a poststructuralist paradigm of meaning, and his theory of "articulation" is an expansion upon the theories of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari, whose work in this area is, in Grossberg's estimation, inadequate in describing "either the complex multidimensionality of structure, or of the active process by which such structures are constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in history" (p. 54).

For this reason, Grossberg (1992) proposes the idea of articulation. "Articulation is the construction of one set of relations out of another; it often involves delinking or disarticulating connections in order to link or rearticulate others" (p. 54). In other words, articulation is concerned less with the discursive formation as a whole or particular statements themselves and more with the links that connect each statement with another statement, object, or formation. Articulation "links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics" (p. 54). Whereas Foucault (1972) is interested in a broader, more loosely defined "discourse" as "a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence" (p. 107), Grossberg (1992) seeks to define "the mode of articulation," and, rather than putting too much emphasis on context, asserts that "the practice of articulation does not separate the focus from the background; instead, it is the background that actually articulates the focus" (p. 55). He believes that, rather than treating the discursive object "post-apocalypse" separately from the conditions that allow its existence, the bridge between the two, as well as with other relevant connections, should be mapped and, to a certain extent, explained. Thus, while examining post-apocalypse, we

must take into consideration the hegemonic principles that govern our discursive practices. This is not to say that post-apocalypse cannot be instructive or genuinely therapeutic, but rather that, in certain manifestations, this instruction and therapy do no more than perpetuate the very ideological structures from which they are manifested. As well, rather than spending a great deal of energy illustrating how one cultural product reflects nothing but a context, Grossberg is interested more in theorizing about how that product articulates itself with other pieces of that background. For me, understanding post- apocalyptic remains' connections with other factors that influence their existence is important to understanding how they operate, under what conditions, and with what implications for the audience.

Grossberg's theory plays an essential part in this analysis because it avoids the slippery nature of poststructuralist critique. As with Derrida and Jameson, whose theories are equally valuable here, the notion of articulation precludes the assumption that meaning is structured, acknowledges contextual influence on statements and objects, and dismisses the idea that we could, or would, ever operate outside of contemporary systems of knowledge. But unlike Derrida, Jameson, and even Foucault, Grossberg seems to be demanding that we ask why the elusive nature of meaning and knowledge is relevant. In our engagement with cultural artifacts, what benefit might we gain from a profound understanding of our contextual binds? The power play that motivates articulations to develop and atrophy in particular ways, and that motivates the subject to become a part of these articulations, begs some interesting questions regarding the usefulness of post-apocalyptic narrative and the remains within those stories.

As the literature review has shown, much has been written about apocalypse and post-apocalypse. The phenomenon has attracted scholarly attention in myriad ways, and each approach seems to narrow its focus on one aspect or another of post-apocalyptic narrative. Therefore, a few caveats are in order. First and foremost, my research deliberately distances itself from prophetic religious conceptions of apocalypse (i.e., The Revelation of St. John) not so much for any dogmatic reason, but rather for a practical one: religious apocalypse carries with it the obligation to adequately cover its principles, which I am not in a position to do. Many texts have critiques of religion, but these are not the same as a *religious apocalypse*. Secondly, Broderick (1993), Brewer (1987), Desser (1999), Gomel (1995, 2000), and others focus on the components of the narrative. I will be as well, but only as means to examine the audience, not purely for the sake of documenting patterns and tendencies in the production of contemporary fiction. Thirdly, Derrida (1984), Dewey (1990), Franklin (2008), Gannon (2000), Kerckhove (1984), Seed (1999), and countless other scholars write about apocalypse or post-apocalypse within the setting of nuclear holocaust. Their work tends to focus primarily on the historical and political processes that surround popular imaginings of the bomb. Again, this study considers these perspectives, but only insofar as they can tell us something about the audience. Finally, others like Berger (1999), Heffernan (1995), and Robson (1995) associate apocalypse with less than total destruction. In fact, Berger mentions that,

> in the late twentieth century we have had the opportunity, previously enjoyed only by means of theology and fiction, to see after The End of our civilization—to see in a strange prospective retrospect what The End would actually look like: it would look like a Nazi death camp, or an atomic explosion, or an ecological or urban wasteland.(xiii)

In a way, Berger implies that the meaning of total apocalypse is somehow less than total, that we have, in fact witnessed a facsimile of it. In Berger's usage, the meaning of apocalypse becomes more fluidly applied and open for interpretation. This kind of loosely applied vernacular does not quite fit into the scope of this project. Here, it is more useful to consider the imaginings of a culture that wishes to, by and large, wipe itself out almost entirely.

But even the more useful accounts of apocalypse and post-apocalypse substantially neglect an important component in the artistic process: the audience. They play an important part in defining the meaning of any text, as Jenkins (1992; 2006) especially has noted. Additionally, discursive formations, as Foucault reminds us, do not simply create a particular kind of discourse; rather, they also are influenced and shaped by the discourse that interacts with them. With these two observations in mind, it's clear that audiences are an integral part of the discourse of post-apocalypse. Although many articles indirectly comment on the audience, to my knowledge, no thorough study has been conducted that unpacks to any great extent what the assumed role of the audience is in the realm of post-apocalyptic narrative. Remains are crucial in opening this discussion.

The Texts

I will be pulling many texts into this discussion in an attempt to make my claims representative of the larger genre, but I will focus much more closely on three: the 2008 animated film *WALL•E*, Cormac McCarthy's (2006) *The Road* and its 2009 film adaptation, and Will Self's (2006) *The Book of Dave*. Each of these will be unpacked systematically for their use of remains that assist the critique of social conditions as well as the elicitation of emotion.

WALL•E (2008) takes an interesting route to post-apocalyptic fiction. Many of the texts looked at in this study include elements of environmental tampering, but for that critique I will focus on Academy Award-winning Disney/Pixar film *WALL•E* (2008). Marketed as a "computer-animated cosmic comedy" by Disney's website,[4] it is often forgotten that the film is very much post-apocalyptic. The progressive ruination of a life-supporting environment is the crux of the social critique, layered with a human critique on the increasingly reliant technological culture of complacence that spurs a perpetually running advertisement: "Too much garbage in your face? There's plenty of space out in space! B&L Starliners leaving each day! We'll clean up the mess while you're away!" The main character, WALL•E, is a robot built to clean up the mountains of trash. After 700 years, WALL•E is the only of his kind still operational. He has created a home for himself inside some sort of storage shed and spends his days cleaning up trash, salvaging parts from his nonoperational siblings, and collecting various bits of trash that he takes a liking to. His interesting method of interaction with complete junk is both funny and somewhat profound. The social critique here is fairly clear, and the film is designed to please children as well as adults, so it is extremely lighthearted and comical.

The Road (2006) takes a very different approach to post-apocalypse. Emotionally, it is extremely depressing from front to back, and it is fairly unconcerned with larger social issues. McCarthy leaves the exact specifications of The Event in question, and readers (or viewers of the film) will find that whatever caused The Event is quite irrelevant. The novel is really about survival, about dealing with not only the aftermath of almost total destruction, but also with the corruption, frustration, and desperation that comes with the package. In a world only about a decade after The Event, most obvious supplies have been

scavenged, and violence and cannibalism are setting in. An unnamed father and son trudge slowly southward, hoping for warmer weather. Along the way they battle the bleak, sunless weather, cannibals, raiders, starvation, and loneliness. The novel makes readers think hard about what remains mean to a world in which they are truly irreplaceable. As well, the boy in the story was born after The Event, and so knows nothing of pre-apocalypse. This provides the reader with what seems like a bit more to grab onto emotionally than just depression, but proves heart wrenching considering the future prospects.

The Book of Dave (2006) is a satirical work, and uses remains deliberately to critique formal structures of governance, religion and religious interpretation, the family, and linguistic semantics. The hilariously cynical premise of the story only adds to the critique being propounded. The novel's main character, Dave, is a London cabbie working through a nasty divorce and custody battle. His underlying misogynistic and bigoted ideologies are severely amplified by the situation and by the drugs he's taking. After a short time on the drugs, he lapses into a psychotic episode in which he "channels" a book, has it printed on metal plates (the allusion to the Book of Morman is quite apparent here), and buries it in his ex-wife's new lover's yard, hoping that his son will find it someday. A recovering post-apocalyptic society at least five centuries after The Event discovers the text and interprets it as religious prophecy. They structure a society around its teachings, oppressing women and minorities, and adopt its vernacular to describe the world as they know it (i.e., the sun is the foglamp, the moon is the headlight, and MadeinChina is the space of creation). The novel spends quite a bit of time establishing the pervasive, controlling nature of the government that has been established under these questionable

pretenses. Emotionally satirical, readers are constantly pushed to connect the dots, potentially delighting them when they make a connection.

I have chosen these three texts for several reasons. First is recency: they have all been published or released within the past five years. This not only makes the social commentary particularly relevant (remembering Jameson), but also speaks to the continued ability of the post-apocalyptic genre to produce new, innovative works. Second, the texts all bring something different to the discussion in both of the areas of social critique and emotion. *WALL•E* makes an argument about megacorporations and environmental destruction in a lighthearted way; *The Road* focuses on loss and love through a hopeless lens; and *The Book of Dave* looks at theocracy and the family in a satirical way. The notion that the post-apocalyptic remain is the driving narrative element in all three of these (indeed, that the three texts can exist in the same genre of science fiction at all) forces my analysis to consider intended audiences heavily in this study. Finally, these texts are widely consumed artifacts of popular culture. Will Self is a very popular author in Britain, *The Road* is an Oprah Book Club selection and Pulitzer Prize winner, and *WALL•E* is an Academy Award winner. Each of them has a long audience reach, and each of them has been consumed by millions.

Analytical Process

The chapters herein are structured by text. While organizing around specific themes instead might have cleaned up the packaging, moving from text to text rather than from idea to idea lends itself more to the claims made and helps establish that much post-apocalyptic narrative operates similarly by returning occasionally to similar themes.

The questions that guide the analysis hover mostly around post-apocalyptic remains or around the concepts they implicate. First and foremost, what do post-apocalyptic remains inform us about what hegemonic principles expounded in popular culture assumes that we value? To depict such total devastation forces producers of these texts to carry very specific materials, knowledge, and rituals into the aftermath; presumably, the valuation of these remains must implicate ideological ideals. Each content chapter is structured according to this inquiry, thematizing ideological constructions that are often played-out via remains. Second, how do remains interact with discursive formations when it comes to putting forth social critique? And emotion? Because these two concepts are my points of entry into the discussion of post-apocalyptic narrative, it is useful to explore the ideological trappings that get reflected in post-apocalyptic remains that facilitate both the construction of social critique and the circulation of emotion. Third, how is each text, through its use of post-apocalyptic remains and other conventions, demonstrating its unfaltering reliance on contemporary discursive formations and articulations of thought? Each chapter contains a wrap-up section that pulls the analysis constantly back towards its poststructuralist roots.

Structurally, Chapter 2 examines *WALL•E* and is centered on the ideological reliance on principles of middle class consumption, ethnocentrism, and heteronormative romantic love. I present WALL•E (the character) as the prototypical middle class consumer, even as his premise rejects hypercorporatism and wasteful consumerist culture. Secondly, the text presents a homogenous picture of US culture, using a static geographic location to justify ignoring marginalized co-cultures no doubt existing within that location. Third, like other Disney products (or Disney-influenced products, for that matter),

WALL•E expresses the principles of heteronormative romantic love that permeate popular representation. This chapter mostly considers post-apocalyptic remains that take their material form, but are nonetheless indebted to the knowledge and rituals that material items often represent.

The Road is the focus of Chapter 3, considering such themes as loss, sacrifice, and parental love. I argue that loss is configured in the text based on our inability to conceive of losing our archive of cultural knowledge, especially so soon after The Event. Sacrifice and parental love are heavily gendered in the text, as are other themes in Cormac McCarthy's work, and each is defined and legitimized in particularly patriarchal ways that relegate the feminine (or anything positioned as feminine) to a discursively inferior space. The post-apocalyptic remains identified in this chapter principally take the form of cultural knowledge and ritual, especially due to the hypersurvivalist nature of the text; material items are of little importance.

In Chapter 4, the examination of *The Book of Dave* takes a somewhat different direction because the text is unconventionally self-aware, as much satire tends to be. Therefore, the sections looked at are themes that Will Self has intentionally troubled himself: theocracy (which includes notions of both governance and religious interpretation), the family and familial structure, and linguistic semantics. Each of these systematically attempts to confuse audiences' foundation for understanding the world by troubling governance and religion, the gendered politics of divorce, and the semantic articulations between words and the Other. This text combines the material (the religious text, especially) with ritual and knowledge to create a perfect storm of sorts, and the chapter therefore addresses all in some depth. In addition to its reflexivity, I operate with

the common belief that satire's primary goal is to deconstruct at its mildest, and demolish at its most severe. The interplay of this satiric destruction with post-apocalyptic remains causes me to conceptualize the process as a controlled demolition: Self places remains in crucial areas in order to challenge and, ultimately, bring down the structures of religion and knowledge that he intends to critique.

I reaffirm over and over in the course of this study my belief that post-apocalyptic remains are essential the post-apocalyptic text's ability to resonate in the hearts and minds of its consumers. Without these lonely artifacts, post-apocalyptic texts have little meaning. The discursive nature of these stories requires that pieces of today make the arduous journey into the future of our present moment, where they can remind and comfort us that such ultimate destruction is solely textual. The end is never The End within discourse, so there will be, as it happens, someone to turn the lights out.

Chapter 1 Notes

[1]Countless articles addressing *Blade Runner* has called it post-apocalyptic. I feel that this betrays the conventions of the genre, and I will therefore consider it dystopian instead.

[2]For a further discussion of her ideas, see Harding (1986; 1991), not to mention most of the rest of her work.

[3]Although there are important difference between the experiences of reading a book and watching a film, they are of little consequence to this analysis due to the fact that post-apocalyptic remains are my focus. For instance, when, throughout Stephen King's magnum opus *The Dark Tower*, the song "Hey Jude" repeatedly crops up at various points in the story, the audience is no less affected by the mere reference to the song than they would be in a film adaptation with an auditory rendition of it. The actual song probably does not stir the audience; rather, it is the nostalgic remembrance of its existence in the first place and a novel fascination with its transference into the distant future. Therefore, what post-apocalyptic remains try to accomplish for the audience does not appear to be dependent upon the channels of consumption. Naturally, the overall experience of reading *The Road* and watching it are going to have differences; however, I argue that the remains that find themselves present in both versions operate similarly enough to collapse the two mediums temporarily.

[4]Retrieved from http://www.disney.go.com/disneypictures/ wall-e

Chapter 2

WALL•E: Corporatism, Environmentalism, and Romantic Love

On the cosmic highway to the moon
Sensing arrival to be relatively soon
Gaze out the window to the surface of the moon
The Earth is rather dreary
Since we singed the sky
On the cosmic highway to the moon   -Les Claypool (2002)

An Amusing Post-Apocalypse

The launching textual examination of post-apocalyptic remains looks at a

somewhat odd text within the genre. First, *WALL•E* takes place, like many texts, in a

vacated urban space. It also involves the day-to-day of an extremely small number of

survivors—one robot and one cockroach. Although the protagonist is not human, for at

least the first third or so of the film the audience follows the microscopic, microcosmic

routine for life after The End. Second, there is a clear didacticism that is predicated on how

the Earth came to be the way it is. Like much science fiction in general, as well as most

post-apocalyptic fiction in particular, the moral of the story is fairly self-evident and

follows one of the common paths within the genre: environmental disaster by the hands of

industrialized people (men).[1] Third, the protagonist must overcome adversity and hardship

in order to continue living and, at the end of the story, those challenges have made life

immeasurably better. These texts often imply progress, as well. And, like many other

stories, post-apocalyptic remains proliferate in ways that resonate with the present and are

often drawn, largely unaltered, directly from the present. An especially important example

of this is WALL•E's hoarding of manufactured products, whether or not he can decipher the purpose of these material items. So it might seem, at a glance, that *WALL•E* fits very nicely into the construct of what we have determined a post-apocalyptic narrative should be.

What makes the film different is that the setting and social critique feel aesthetically inferior to the central theme of the plot: love. In fact, many folks that I talk to have forgotten altogether that the film is technically post-apocalyptic. Reviewers likewise find this coexistence curious (Howell, 2008; Puig, 2008). But it's no accident, really. Andrew Stanton, writer and director of *WALL•E*, has stated in many interviews that the social critique the film presents is somewhat incidental. The character WALL•E was the nucleus of creation, the love story was meant to characterize the plot, and the rest of the story, setting, and subsequent morality were all developed around that. He concedes that science fiction at large has an obligation to represent concerns about where we might be heading, but that's not the primary focus in this instance. At its core, Stanton confirms time after time, *WALL•E* is a love story, and the rest is commentary.

In realizing this, it's tempting to throw the narrative out of the analysis completely for not fitting well enough. Shouldn't the authorial intent of these be political in the first place? This temptation reveals the quickness with which narrative and emotion, reason and feeling, are sometimes divided. The second text examined in this analysis, *The Road*, likewise appears apolitical, without a larger take-home message. The inseparability of the two (logic and feeling) is revealed in the analysis of this chapter especially because the goal of the film, Stanton claims, is to simply immerse the audience in the story and visual spectacle, to make them forget where they actually are. If folks take the messages home

with them, that's a bonus. But, as other Disney productions have taught us, despite authorial intention, "we are left with [authors'] creations, not their intentions" (Wasko, 2001, p. 139).[2] In the interest of immersion, the immediacy of represented ideology reflects discursively sanctioned discourse. Discursive statements are articulated in ways that allow values to be accepted as fact, ideology as reality. It makes sense, then, to speculate that part of this immersive experience involves the ontological mystery of figuring out how the world came to be as it is while accepting the pretenses that made it so. Part of the emotional experience of watching a film is engaging in cognitive play like this (Plantinga, 2009). While post-apocalyptic remains certainly aren't the only tool that helps to immerse the audience in the experience of viewing the film, their existence does demonstrate that, despite intent, the film remains an integral part of the genre, conventional or not.

The nature and purpose of post-apocalyptic remains, especially material ones, are as much a crucial part of the immersive quality of the film as the narrative itself. The remains represented in *WALL•E* are mostly material in nature, but not exclusively. The text relies heavily on the things WALL•E collects, but the ritual of collecting things as a consumer might is important as well. Rituals and knowledge as post-apocalyptic remains exist, but play a much smaller part in constituting the values propounded by the text. In *WALL•E*, cultural knowledge and ritual, unlike some other texts, come directly out of the influence of material remains. Therefore, the focus in this chapter is primarily on the material items themselves, and secondarily on the rituals and cultural knowledge that find their way into post-apocalypse.

What I suggest in this chapter is that, although a bit different from the prototypical post-apocalyptic narrative, *WALL•E*'s use of remains and the representation of societal

ideology, both implicitly and explicitly, offers an amusing vision of post-apocalypse and, in doing so, begins the discussion about how post-apocalyptic remains influence an ideologically informed textual engagement. I start the analysis by briefly synopsizing the narrative and its messages. Then, I engage some ideological themes that post-apocalyptic remains help develop, specifically privileged corporatist consumerism, ethnocentrism, and heteronormative romantic love. Finally, I situate each of these themes within the poststructuralist framework for post-apocalypse that I outlined in Chapter 1.

WALL•E

Synopsis

The film establishes early that the world appears massively vacant. The protagonist, WALL•E (Waste Allocation Load Lifter – Earth Class), is seen traversing a garbage-filled urban wasteland, pet cockroach in tow, playing audial recordings of the *Hello, Dolly!* soundtrack from his incorporated recording sound system. The sound from the speakers bounces and echoes off of the crumbling edifices with an eerie quality. Day after day, WALL•E sorts through endless piles of garbage with two purposes. First, he has been programmed to shovel trash into the interior of his boxy frame, compact it into cubes, and stack these cubes into huge, imposing towers. We are led to believe that the human race sometime in the future has become immensely integrated into a hyperconsumerist, wasteful, corporation-driven culture that requires spending and dumping. As the advertisement's quote from Chapter 1 reveals, garbage has become a major problem. Rather than tapping into the ability to responsibly alter societal processes of consumption, production, and disposal, the BuynLarge (BnL) corporation coordinates space shuttles to transport people to what is billed as a temporary escape. The idea is to release thousands of

WALL•Es to clean up the mess while everyone else ignores the situation altogether aboard a starliner docked far away in space. This plan backfires and, seven hundred years later, people remain in space, having by this time evolved into immobile, horribly obese, and yet totally unaware victims of corporate subjugation. Meanwhile, WALL•E has managed to outlast the rest of his kind (often gleaning parts from his fallen comrades to repair himself) and is still patiently cleaning up the mess for a population that, as it seems, is poised never to return.

Secondly, WALL•E's purpose seems to be driven by a fascination with an idealized fantasy about the culture that once inhabited the planet. He continues to fulfill his directive to turn trash into towers of stacked cubes, but he also seems to have acquired a sentience that prompts him to pull artifacts of interest from the wreckage, keeping or discarding them as he chooses. WALL•E carries with him daily a red BnL-branded cooler that he uses to transport these bits and pieces and, when he brings them to his home (which is a broken-down BnL military-looking vehicle), he categorizes them on rotating shelves, perhaps for later use. This seemingly senseless hoarding reveals the banality of any one piece of trash he collects. Neither does WALL•E need them for survival nor do they exist in order to be permanently meaningful to anyone. As is discussed momentarily, WALL•E represents the packrat middle class consumer, collecting manufactured (domestic) goods without motive or purpose.

As well, WALL•E is perpetually in search of love. The expression of love as an emotional state is something he can apparently grasp, and he uses an old VHS of *Hello, Dolly!* run through an iPod to make sense of how one might express such an emotional state. By playing sentimental music and holding his own hand, he attempts to mimic the

ecstasy playing out on the screen. When the still-vacationing human population sends an

ostensibly female robot, EVE, to search for sustainable life, WALL•E falls in love. He

eventually takes her back to his home, where he delights in showing her these artifacts of

the past. His momentary heartbreak comes when, after excitedly presenting her with a plant

he had found, she automatically stores the plant, shuts down, and prompts the automated

shuttle to return her to the starliner. WALL•E, unable to give her up, stows away on the

outside of the shuttle, drifting off into space. The rest of the film takes place outside of the

post-apocalyptic setting (physically, in any case) and revolves around WALL•E and

EVE's tale of love.

     As the predictable romantic comedy-style love affair grows with resistance,

blossoms, and comes to fruition in the final moments of the film, the rest of the narrative

continues to reaffirm the social critique laid out in the beginning half. The cruise on The

Axiom was supposed to have been a five-year vacation. When cleanup efforts proved

unfruitful, however, the ship's autopilot, Auto (ostensibly the antagonist, as an extension

of and stand-in for the intangible BnL), is programmed to remain in space eternally; stay

the course. As a result, when EVE delivers the plant to The Axiom, the autopilot orders it

destroyed. We can clearly see the message here: amidst a world of environmentally

devastating corporate ruin, a plant is somehow eventually able to grow. Likewise, out of

the hegemony of the industrialization of the world has grown an environmentalist

movement. Of course, early resistance to this saw similar trends, out of which such fictions

as *No Blade of Grass* (Christopher, 1956), *The Drowned World* (Ballard, 1962), and the

film *Soylent Green* (1973) sprang. The lone seedling represents budding environmental

awareness and action, the spreading of roots into the garbage that covers a landscape once blanketed with grass, trees, and other flora.

But the text also indicates that, despite a façade that suggests otherwise, corporations' vested interest lies in squashing this movement. BnL continues to work under the guise that it wants this movement to succeed. It sends robots to Earth to find sustainability, and the ship is actually programmed to return once this has been discovered. Even the human captain of the ship has been left explicit instructions to enact Operation Recolonize once plant matter has been detected. However, the corporate entity, Auto, and his assistant Gopher attempt to keep this from happening, perhaps indicating the true motives of the corporation.

WALL•E and EVE, with the help of the naïve but productively inquisitive human captain, are able to return the plant to the ship's core, prompting the return to Earth. WALL•E has been fatally damaged in the violent conflict aboard The Axiom. Luckily, the spare parts he has hoarded over the centuries allow for EVE to frantically repair him the moment they land. In an at once joyful and heartbreaking moment, WALL•E comes back to life, but has lost his identity. The new computer chip seemingly erases his acquired cultural knowledge and habits, and he begins trash-compacting the treasures he has spent hundreds of years collecting. EVE places her hand into his, a gesture of love, and WALL•E awakens from his empty programming to fulfill the obligation of romantic love required of the story. The ending credits depict a movement towards the sustainable existence necessary for the regeneration of the planet's natural resources. One of the last shots we are given is the docked Axiom, covered in vines and evidently forgotten about.

Consumer Privilege and Heteronormative Love

Whether or not social critique was shuffled in through the back door, it's carefully developed throughout. Principally, the argument is very much an integration of the politics of globalized corporatism and frivolous consumerism on the one hand, and the environmental devastation that is apparently an inevitable outcome of such a system on the other hand. Additionally, the didacticism that plagues uplifting narratives leads us to believe that environmentalism (good) will triumphantly immobilize corporatist consumerism (bad) despite an immense amount of kicking and screaming. These two diametrically opposed sides meld together to paint a blissfully dystopian picture: the audience in front of the screen is asked to be appalled, but the humans we meet on the starliner later in the movie are totally unaware of anything but the screens in front of them and the drinks (which are often meals) in their hands. Once again, the vision of a human population subserviently plugged into the corporations that control them is overthrown by the will to ethically repopulate Earth.

As well as social critique (and, as I have argued thus far, as a part of social critique), specific emotions can be seen circulating from text to audience and back. I continue to approach this topic of emotion not as if the text or the audience *contains* emotion, because the lack of uniformity in audience response to any text dispels that notion very quickly. Rather, as an intentionally immersive text, I examine the hegemonic underpinnings of overarching emotional themes that allow emotion to *circulate*. In this section, I look at the ways in which post-apocalyptic remains facilitate social critique and emotional engagement with (or detachment from) issues of corporatist consumerism. In the next, I examine the ethnocentrism that further layers the unuttered issue of privilege structurally

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supporting a consumerist point of view. The two sections work in tandem to

multidimensionally unpack *WALL•E*'s reliance on privileged positionalities in

accomplishing the circulation and articulation of social critique and emotion that the text

provides. Finally, I look at the constitution of heteronormative love in the film and

conclude that, like many Disney-influenced artifacts, *WALL•E* perpetuates

heteronormative romantic love through material and ritual form. The post-apocalyptic

remains found in the text are principally material in nature, but the enactment of

consumerism and heteronormative romantic love both possess a certain ritual quality as

well as the required cultural knowledge that informs those rituals.

Consumerism, Corporatism, and Environmentalism

From the opening sequence of the film, the audience is presented, via

post-apocalyptic remains, a clear indication that the corporatization of the world has led to

environmental devastation. BnL appears to control every aspect of life. In one notable

montage, the audience is shown a series of images that convey the scope of corporate

power. As WALL•E (himself BnL-built) faithfully treads across the broken landscape, he

passes BnL Ultrastore, an incredibly immense shopping center reminiscent of Wal-Mart,

but vastly larger. He passes a BnL gas station, bank, burger joint, power plant, and transit

center. There are billboards for BnL luggage. On the street he rolls over scattered currency

with the BnL logo stamped on it, and he treads upon newspapers published by BnL. As

aforementioned, even the red cooler WALL•E uses to fulfill his position as a menial day

laborer has BnL stamped on its casing, indicating that perhaps even the workforce serves

BnL. They give you money, you give it back. The ontological detective must conclude, of

course, that at the time of the evacuation, BnL had literally infiltrated the existence of

society from the moment someone rose for the day to the moment they laid back down, and perhaps during slumber as well. Indeed, the starliner on which the world's population has settled, The Axiom, reassures them, "BuynLarge: Everything you need to be happy." In a bizarre and unsettling moment later in the film, we are given a glimpse of early childhood education: "A is for Axiom, your home, sweet home. B is for BuynLarge, your very best friend." It's a less depressing version of a similar vision offered in Margaret Atwood's novels *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) in which the CorpSeCorps (a far more violent conglomerate than BnL) runs society in its entirety until environmental devastation occurs as the result of a pandemic virus. Post-apocalyptic remains, including those listed above as well as others at various points during the film, reveal this information and make social critique possible, setting the stage for a larger didactic message.

The string of remains in the montage that launches the film simultaneously circulates a certain emotional experience. As the opening sequence pans over huge mountains of trash, countless wind turbines, coal, and nuclear power plants, the audience begins to understand the scope of the situation: the environment was abused, it collapsed, and then it was abandoned. Especially because these are the first sequences of the film, the audience is asked to figure out the world, to decipher how it came to be. Wonder, says Ahmed (2004), occurs when we see the world as if for the first time (pp. 179-80). Panning through wreckage like banks, eateries, and gas stations, and concurrently linking the collapse of these physical institutions with hyper-corporatism, situates the audience in a space that is at once familiar and wondrous, allowing them to see it as if for the first time. Like many narratives, at the same time that WALL•E is trying to rediscover the lost culture from before The End, the audience is invited to discover a new (although sometimes

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conventional) anticipation of the future. Like a great number of post-apocalyptic tales, the

first task of the audience is to situate the unfamiliar within a familiar context. The sky is

perpetually ashy, which is uncomfortable in the first place when paired with the

lighthearted number, "Out There" from *Hello Dolly!* Not only does there appear to be a

lack of human presence on Earth, we're also left wondering where they would even live

amongst the overwhelming amount of refuse. To add to this, the camera's entrance into the

Earth through a thick layer of satellites, as well as the proliferation of energy-generating

technology, indicates that the text is situated in the future. It's clear from the start that

humans have dealt this fatal wound to themselves.

   In a very mild fashion, the text allows hate to be organized around the corporations

that caused this destruction. "Hate," as an emotional attitude, does not exist within the

hated (here, the corporation) or those who hate (the ideal audience). It circulates via a

process of representation that allows hate to slide from one body to another (Ahmed, 2004,

p. 52-3). However comically presented, representations of the apocalypse are often (as in

WALL•E) meant to serve as a type of warning, implying that the apocalypse is not a

desirable end. This is, of course, the premise for social critique within post-apocalyptic

narrative. To be sure, *WALL•E* is not an especially hateful text in the same way as Audre

Lorde's encounter with a white woman who physically removed herself from the presence

of Lorde's adolescent, black body was hateful (quoted in Ahmed, 2004, p. 53). But we can

see that the principle remains the same: hate, an extreme form of the emotional attitude of

rejection and loathing, requires the distancing of oneself from what is perceived as being

the cause of that hatred.[3] Therein lies the didactic message that this particular vision of the

future attempts to convey. With texts organized in this fashion, audiences can be led to hate because where there is a problem, there must be a cause.

Via the montage described above, BnL is implicated from the start as the party responsible. Although the film has no qualms about satirizing the current human condition later in the film, the message is obvious from the start: corporations are to blame, not the people who support them. The first way this is accomplished is through the depiction of the totality of corporate rule. Material post-apocalyptic remains tell us that BnL controls food, money, transit, education, and the press. Perhaps commentary on the tendency for some to prefer corporate rule over governmental presence, this framing nonetheless allows the first stone to be cast against a body other than the physical, human one. Hate is then constructed around the seemingly inherent link between corporate influence and environmental destruction. As Ahmed claims, drawing on cultural valuations that help frame situations in certain ways allows hate to appear to originate from the bodies of haters in order to direct itself towards those hated. When we enact this process, we are able to transfer what might be self-hatred for our own involvement in and support of corporate interests (such as paying to watch the film or buying our children *WALL•E* merchandise; *WALL•E*, after all, was produced by Pixar, an entity of Disney) to the hatred of another. This process is commonly used, especially in texts that focus on the cause of the apocalypse, to shift blame from existing human problems to, for instance, the church (i.e., *The Book of Dave*, *A Gift Upon the Shore*, *Davy*), science (i.e., *9*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *I Am Legend*, *The Matrix*), or government (i.e., *The Postman*, *Riddley Walker*, *Cat's Cradle*). It is irrelevant, of course, that each of these constructs are created and perpetuated by people. The

demonization of something else conveniently absolves the audience (being people) of any complicity for the consequences.

One would think, then, that after the apocalypse has occurred, life after would convey the innocence humans clearly possess. Unsurprisingly, this is not the case. The only survivor, oddly enough, is a machine sprung forth from the devastation. As a trash compactor produced solely to solve the world's conundrum of trash buildup, WALL•E would not exist without the environmental destruction of the planet. Andrew Stanton says that, first and foremost, he wanted WALL•E to be a machine, and only after that a character. Despite this (or perhaps because of it), the robot is placed in a precarious position, somewhere between reflecting the human presence that is lacking on Earth and the corporate presence that continues to dominate the landscape. He is both human and not human, technically speaking. However, setting aside a brief moment towards the end of the film, WALL•E is essentially human in habit throughout. His facial and audial expressions come from Westernized culture, and he buys wholesale the Western definition of love and love's expression. These humanlike impresses appear to drive his continuance in far more meaningful ways than does his day job. Therefore, significantly, he is in a position to continue fulfilling his duties to the corporation as both robot and human while simultaneously reaffirming the infallibility of human action.

Like millions before him, WALL•E is required to go to work day after day, lunch cooler included, performing menial tasks long after the purpose for doing so has become unclear. He is a physical and cultural manifestation of the corporatism from and into which he was brought. As Wasko (2001) points out, Disney has produced no shortage of the whistle-while-you-work-type characters that convey capitalistic, individualistic ideals

for which the so-called American way of life purportedly strives (p. 117). Although an analysis of WALL•E's position regarding his fixed status as an apparatus of corporate exploitation would no doubt be worth writing, I find it drifting away from the main arguments. His position as a laborer is an important piece of the complicated representation of *WALL•E* as a literal piece of the machine (in multiple ways) with a trace of humanity, and is therefore crucial to acknowledge. But perhaps even more important to the message of the movie than his role as a laboring servant to corporations is his role as a material accumulator of mostly domestic cultural products.

Along with fulfilling his robotic obligations to BnL and the corporate mindset at large, WALL•E also conveys a distinct sense of humanity and, thus, is endowed with the ability to live out the human obligation that is missing on Earth. Because post-apocalyptic remains are themselves cultural products, as I have argued, WALL•E's obsessive collecting reveals a clearly articulated example of the operative link between social critique and emotion. He is no doubt merely a reincarnation of the careless consumer, perusing the figurative shelves of ruination that surround him and buying things, so to speak, with a negligible amount of inhibition. Very few of the things he has stowed away on his revolving containers associate intimately with his life. They are trifling, domestic, material goods picked up on a whim: bubble wrap, a light bulb, plastic utensils, small toys, dolls, an hourglass, an eggbeater, etc. The domesticity of these goods is a clear link to middle class consumption. There is also a clear link between these remains and heteronormative family life, a quality that is analyzed momentarily. To me, WALL•E's ritual calls to image a shopper at a big box store, throwing this or that into the cart without regard for function or necessity. It is the ritual of obtaining and collecting (and then ultimately discarding) that

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holds one's interest, not the *thing* itself, and in any case not for very long. That's what

makes "shopping" an activity as often as a medium for acquiring necessary goods.

WALL•E's desire to discover and absorb the culture previously inhabiting the place is

emblematic of this fleeting, unnecessary consumerism that is often unnoticed in our society

of spectacle.[4] In fact, it strikes me as quite funny that the text's critique exists as it does,

considering the documented impact that Disney has had in the way of merchandising its

texts into excessive material drivel designed around and for impressionable children (see

deCordova, 1994, pp. 203-13, Wasko, 2001, pp. 48-50). *WALL•E* is no exception to this

overtapped economic strategy.

The emotional atmosphere present in these moments of consumption is almost

certainly a result of the normalcy of the crazed collector in the first place. We might say

that post-apocalyptic remains help the text to be "amusing" to many audience members.

Because frivolous consumption is somewhat accepted culturally as normal, the

continuation of such an ideology remains fairly invisible. It is therefore ironic that folks

can so easily pick out the environmentalist critique of corporatism while laughing heartily

at WALL•E's antics. Wouldn't it make more logical sense, syllogistically speaking, for

WALL•E to use his rudimentary understanding of life, death, and pain in order to preserve

himself? To an extent, he does this by collecting piles of computer chips, batteries, eyes,

and other parts that serve as immediate replacements should something go wrong, but these

items are often hidden in the background. The eye is drawn to the domestic, the mundane.

The text most prominently displays WALL•E's excitement with the impractical. For

example, he is confused about how to classify a spork, he has accrued a pile of rubber

duckies in a birdcage, and we learn later that he has amassed his archive of BnL

Zippo-style lighters without ever having known that they conceived a flame (their utility). The lack of interest in the collection of necessary survival materials in favor of the evanescence of entertainment allows for emotion to circulate around trivialities, necessary goods having already been hoarded. We are comforted with the fact that, if WALL•E finds himself in need of new treads or a new eye, the concern is fleeting: he will always have access to the resources needed to repair (heal) himself. His moderately hard work has elevated him to a place in which he can comfortably spend his energy entertaining himself by purchasing things both inside and outside of the normal workday. Once again, the audience is shown a specific lifestyle, here most obviously spawned from privilege, that values consumerism in a particular, completely normal, way. While the ritual of shopping is certainly important here, it is the nature of the material items WALL•E collects that defines the pre-apocalyptic values being adopted.

To demonstrate this, we'll look briefly at three other texts. In many survival-based post-apocalyptic stories, characters exist in a place with few privileges. The man and the boy in *The Road* travel from place to desolate place in search of clean water and food, shelter, warmth, and relative safety. There is nothing taken for granted and nothing wasted, and certainly nothing frivolous. They scavenge all the time, but one would scarcely call it shopping. Similarly, Mary and Rachel in M.K. Wren's novel *A Gift Upon the Shore* (1990) barely survive a nuclear winter, emerging to begin the backbreaking work of building a sustainable abode. They do collect and store books, but Wren frames this as a necessity. There is a larger moral interest (the archiving of knowledge) at stake, not merely the entertainment of perusing, gathering, and closeting everyday items. The preservation of books does not come at the expense of raising food, but rather in addition to it. Finally, in

The Book of Eli, Denzel Washington's character Eli carries nothing with him that is not either strictly useful or an unseverable part of his identity. His King James Bible is his purpose, his iPod reflects the culture of which he was once a part, and everything else is indispensible in utility and/or currency. Once again, we can see a character who cannot afford to concern himself with needless accrual. In these three texts, as well as in many others, the real uncertainty of tomorrow doesn't allow for trivialities to be cherished, even for the brief moment their sparkle captures our interest. "Amusing," then, is clearly not the word we might use to describe characters' general interactions with post-apocalyptic remains (at least not in the lighthearted connotation of the word).[5]

It is only when one approaches the world with a sense of security that reaffirms the middle class mantra "don't worry" that we can excessively purchase without concern. A fine example of this is *I Am Legend* (Matheson, 1954), in which the protagonist, Robert Neville, lives in a barricaded loft in the city. The vampiric creatures that stalk the night are no real threat to him for most of the story, and he treats them as an inferior Other. In fact, the novel has Neville reconsidering this conclusion after having been imprisoned by them. Perhaps he was the Other all along, he thinks.[6] This elevated physical and discursive positioning allows Heston's Neville in the 1971 adaptation, *The Omega Man*, to collect in ways similar to WALL•E. His apartment is filled with junk, all of which is run by a generator in his garage, and he drinks liquor and plays chess every night with a statue of Julius Caesar wearing a pilot's cap. It's all quite amusing because it can afford to be. With this in mind, it becomes quite problematic for *WALL•E* to present the same attitude because this kind of privileged entitlement is the very ideal under the microscope. "Amusing" as an emotion, in this case, appears to be suffocatingly bound within the ideals of a privileged,

middle class consumerist attitude. That isn't to say that audience members who occupy

positions in society distinct from this one will not find the text amusing; however, we must

posit what it is that *makes* the text amusing rather than why it *is* amusing.

The West Repopulating the West

The second way the text assumes a place of privilege in its representations is by

ignoring that it's geographically and culturally situated at all. If the previous claim dealt

with the universalization of middle class experiences, this one examines the same universal

treatment of life in the West after the apocalypse. Many texts simply do not deal with other

parts of the world because, after infrastructures have gradually or forcefully collapsed, the

characters in the stories generally do not even communicate with, let alone travel to,

settlements or people far outside of their immediate circles. Even in the "*Journey through

the Wasteland*" (Wolfe, 1983) archetypal stage of the narrative, rarely do they end up in a

culture significantly different from their own.[7] I consider this reasonable from a syllogistic

standpoint: sometimes these stories are meant to amplify one moment in one space.

WALL•E, however, cannot claim to spring from that same contextual well, and I therefore

find its ethnocentrism blatant and disquieting.

What the film suggests is that only the moderately wealthy citizens of the U.S. are

likely to escape environmental collapse by flying into space. The material remains revealed

to audiences throughout demonstrate this soundly. As we know, WALL•E is set far into the

future, in a time during which space travel is commonplace. The satellites that the camera

blasts through at the beginning of the movie indicate that communication technologies

have proliferated as well. Considering the continual flattening of global communication

even today, it can be assumed that the world was fully connected at the height of

techno-industrialization. Capabilities were likely at their zenith. In fact, as much as any human-caused apocalypse, the severe reduction of life on Earth is totally voluntary: people fly away on spaceships to leave their problems behind. When things get bad, the mobilization of exodus is characterized as a vacation. In a holographic advertisement still operable on Earth, the narrator encourages folks to leave the planet:

> The jewel of the BnL fleet: The Axiom. Spend your five-year cruise in style, waited on 24 hours a day by our fully-automated crew, while your captain and autopilot chart a course for nonstop entertainment, fine dining, and, with our all-access hover-chairs, even grandma can join the fun. There's no need to walk! The Axiom: Putting the star in executive starliner.

The CEO of BnL, Shelby Forthright, finishes the ad with the witty truism, "Because at BnL, space is the final funtier!" In opposition to *WALL•E*'s presentation of the comfortable hiatus offered to those able, the final pages of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* depict a panicked population scrambling for room aboard the few ships escaping a looming second nuclear apocalypse. The contrast between the two uncovers a kind of controlled, deliberate extraction in *WALL•E* centered not around who is physically positioned to escape, but rather on who we can expect to escape, who can afford to escape. This ad, it appears, does not feel the need to include those who would not normally enjoy the luxury of a vacation at all. I've talked about privilege when it comes to consumerism, but we can now see that survival itself is reliant on socioeconomic and nationalistic privilege (which, no doubt, houses some discrepancies as a result of racial background). Everyone aboard The Axiom speaks English in an "average" Midwestern dialect. As previously referenced, the children aboard the ship, who are mostly white, learn the English alphabet. Moreover, each time we are shown a sequence in which a ship either approaches or departs from Earth, North America is displayed prominently on the surface of the rotating planet. There no question

that WALL•E's home, the setting for the first half of the film, is in a United States city. As well, it is to this city The Axiom returns at the end of the film in hopes of cleaning and repopulating Earth.

Post-apocalyptic remains help gloss over the omission of other cultures' and classes' representations by sharpening the image of U.S., white, middle class normalcy described above. The vantage point afforded the comfortably positioned white audience member allows for questions regarding the fate of other cultures to remain unasked. Perhaps *WALL•E* intended to remain a simple enough text that envisioning the fate of citizens halfway around the world (or even directly to the south) would have compromised the accessibility of the text.[8] "Maybe," the skeptic posits, "the governments of other countries evacuated in similar ways and are encamped elsewhere in space. We're only being shown the aftermath in the U.S., which is why we only see *Hello, Dolly!* and Rubik's Cubes." This may be so, but to make this argument is to neglect the crucial realization that other cultures exist within the U.S., thereby reaffirming the legitimacy of standards for what it means to be "American." Even if the last batch of escaping pilgrims departed a major U.S. city, where is the multiculturalism that, however silenced, actually does reside within our borders? This line of questioning makes privilege transparent: nowhere in WALL•E's archive do we see material artifacts that reflect Latina/o, African American, or any other nonwhite culture. In fact, a far cry from the sentimental reverie with which he treats the music from *Hello, Dolly!*, two of the vignettes included in the DVD of the film feature WALL•E stiltedly breakdancing to hip hop music, an exercise in patronization if there ever was one.

The normalcy of white, middle class privilege is reified throughout *WALL•E* and, as I have shown, post-apocalyptic remains assist in reiterating excessive consumerism and ethnocentrism. The universalization of white middle class values comes out of the wreckage of a seemingly progressive presentation of social critique; the universalization of heteronormative love in this same setting likewise further normalizes heterosexuality and romantic love.

The Love of Another

As aforementioned, Andrew Stanton wanted *WALL•E* to be a love story, above all. WALL•E returns from work every day to turn on the TV (a much-loved Western ritual) to his most interacted-with post-apocalyptic remain: a VHS of *Hello, Dolly!* For 700 years (or as long as he has possessed sentience) he appears to have longed for love. He records music to play throughout the day that, as Stanton has attested to, exposes a being that longs to be "out there," to escape the prosaic life of a day laborer. And the song's lyrics define the decisive goal of being "out there": "We'll see the shows/ At Delmonico's/ And we'll close the town in a whirl/ And we won't come home until we've kissed a girl!" The closing two verses of the song aren't played in *WALL•E* (though have likely been watched and rewatched by WALL•E for hundreds of years), but state that none of the characters, male or female, will return until they've fallen in love. The point of escaping the mundane is the eventual kissing of a girl and, ultimately, to fall in love with a member of the opposite sex. Because WALL•E learns what he knows of love in this video, we can only assume this to be strictly heterosexual and strictly romantic. He also ascertains the expression of love in the same way: holding hands becomes equated with professing love throughout the film, perhaps as the equivalent of the utterance, "I love you." I've argued that post-apocalyptic

remains are cultural products, and we know that hand-holding and kissing rituals are just as

much culturally-produced as art or material items. These ritual expressions of love are

culturally-created and -accepted. In this context, the love story between WALL•E and EVE

unfolds, as audiences have come to expect, by reifying heteronormativity, the performative

requirements of the gendered expression of love, and the acceptable end results of such

love. The amalgamation of all three categories of post-apocalyptic remains informs this

assumption: The material item relates cultural knowledge about love as well as the ritual

with which that love is expressed.

By far the most blatant ideological reification when it comes to love,

heteronormativity, is one that, unsurprisingly, Disney has been heavily criticized for many

times. Heterosexual love seems to be the only acceptable form of love in popular narratives

(homosexual love is only displayed when it is caricatured), and *WALL•E* likewise makes

sure this norm persists. Romantic love as a "universal" narrative works because

heterosexuality is discursively legitimized through repetitive articulation and action. As

Ahmed (2004) points out:

> [O]ne does not "do" heterosexuality simply through who one does and does not
> have sex with. Heterosexuality as a script for an ideal life makes much stronger
> claims. It is assumed that all arrangements will follow from the arrangement of the
> couple: man/woman. (p. 147)

Ahmed believes that, through the active reinforcement of what she calls "compulsory

heterosexuality" (p. 145), folks operating within this structure that identify with it (those

that are heterosexual) experience a sense of comfort, a sense of "ease and easiness." She

writes, "[t]o follow the rules of heterosexuality is to be at ease in a world that reflects back

the couple form one inhabits as an ideal" (p.147). And it has been demonstrated that

G-rated films (with a particular focus on Disney products) are instrumental in perpetuating

values that reinscribe heteronormative romanticism in the children that watch them (Martin & Kazyak, 2009). These values persist in the contemporary moment, before The End, and *WALL•E* makes sure that cultural artifacts, discovered long after the articulations between discursive statements and objects are broken, resurrect heteronormative values.

Film reviews overwhelmingly follow Stanton's lead in considering this a love story, and a picture of universal love at that. Almost every article premises the film as an archetypal love story wearing environmentalist clothing. Stanton is quoted in one review as saying, "I mean, in the end it's a love story and all good love stories are pretty universal" (WALL•E's world, 2008). In another interview he relates, "Love stories are actually very conventional: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back" (Reid, 2008). Others believe that the film "unfolds with all the poetry and emotional pull of the greatest movie love stories" (Graham, 2008) and is "a love story that elevates the spirits" (Out of this world, 2008). One critic believes that, amidst the "haunting" images of our own corporatist excess, the love story is "disarming" (Robey, 2008). As a contrast, it's probable that if *WALL•E* depicted homosexual romantic love critics would be up in arms. Another critic recognizes the invisibility of heteronormative love, first acknowledging the somewhat unusual pretenses of feeling charmed by two machines in love and then claiming that "the willing suspension of disbelief kicks in before we even realise how taken we have become with the affair between two robots" (Dwyer, 2008). While the author argues that suspended disbelief precludes our noticing, cultural critics would likely agree that the essentialization of heterosexual love probably works harder to keep us from noticing how silly audiences' responses to this story might seem. The iterative tendency to classify *WALL•E* as a universal love story goes hand-in-hand with the assumption of heterosexual love.

Disney certainly does have a proclivity for ignoring forms of love that deviate from standards of heteronormativity, but that does not exempt other texts in the genre. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find representations of homosexuality or bisexuality (in attitude or action) in the vast majority of narratives situated after The End of the world. Homosexuality, in particular, is sometimes referenced, but never directly addressed. Except when derogatory terms are used in violent and negative ways against people, the issue almost never surfaces. Once again, what it means to love and express that love is involved in a cyclical process of representation, omission, and constitution. The feelings, then, that audience members experience as a result of their individual reactions to the love story depicted in *WALL•E* constitute heteronormative love as universally experienced.

Secondly, as well as heteronormativity at large, *WALL•E* implicitly reinforces the notion that the goal of love is and should be heterosexual marriage and, therefore, romantic by nature. Although the text does break away from the gendered expectation of who longs for love, what is ultimately reaffirmed is "the Cinderella fairy tale of heterosexual love and marriage as the ultimate resolution for a fulfilled life" (Madison, 1995, p. 227). The so-called "marriage plot" operates successfully, after all, regardless who must enact romantic love (Murphy, 1995, p. 134).

Using an influential cultural medium (film) as his plane of reference, WALL•E relies on the pre-apocalyptic hegemonic values pulled from the material item *Hello, Dolly!* to demarcate the limits and purposes for love. At a moment in time during which love could be reevaluated and redefined in any number of ways, especially considering the blank slate that is WALL•E's developing sentience, post-apocalyptic remains carry with them the dominant cultural values of heteronormative romantic love, thwarting any chance

of operating outside of that now-extinct discursive formation.[9] Therefore, when EVE arrives on Earth, WALL•E immediately begins the courting ritual. At various points throughout the film, he attempts to hold her hand, with every attempt ending abruptly and often comically. As the plot rises, climaxes, and begins to resolve, WALL•E has still failed to produce that nonverbal utterance, "I love you," until we believe him to be "dead." In the final moments of the plot, the resolution comes when WALL•E and EVE hold hands at last, confirming that an excursion "out there" won't end until each of them falls in heterosexual, romantic love.

It seems that when authors have deliberately considered love in ways that surpass both heterosexuality and romanticism, profound intellectual and moral conundrums complicate any singular definition of what love is and how it might be expressed. For instance, *A Gift Upon the Shore* gives us a progressive and inspiring example of nonromantic love between two women. Mary and Rachel, a generation apart in age, live together before the nuclear apocalypse. Rachel, the older of the two, is an atheistic feminist who believes that reproduction in an age of overpopulation is irresponsible. Nevertheless, it is revealed that she had a male partner earlier in her life. Mary, somewhat coming of age in these moments of the story, is not entirely sure about her position on the matter of love and reproduction, but it is likewise revealed that was previously in a heterosexual relationship. Together, they manage to survive the nuclear winter as well as the blind summer, with its burning UV rays. For eleven years they live in solitude, growing continually closer as friends. Because there is no one else nearby, and no reason to venture far outside of their farm, friendship is constituted as the dominant formation of love. This is seriously called into question, however, when a man, Luke, appears on the beach,

desiccated and sickly. He is roughly Mary's age, and romantic love begins to bloom. He

eventually asks Mary to return to his village. The situation is complicated by two factors.

First, Luke, who happens to be a misguided but genuinely caring individual, comes from an

oppressive, patriarchal, radical Christian commune, which is fundamentally at odds with

Rachel's philosophies. The commune would not accept her even if she wanted to go.

Secondly, Mary feels the moral obligation to reproduce because the population has been

decimated almost completely. Over the course of the novel, Mary deals physically and

emotionally with her decision to leave Rachel, especially because her relationship with

Rachel is questioned by the revered priest and physician from the moment she arrives at the

commune:

> The Doctor rocked back and forth monotonously. "Sister Mary, how long did you .
> . . *live* with Rachel?"
> The inflections in that aroused the first hint of anger, but it was little more than
> annoyance sharpened by apprehension. "You say that as if you thought we were
> doing more than simply sharing a house." (Wren, 1990, p. 261)

Even though Wren presents the commune as fanatical, this is still heteronormativity

verbalized. Because two women cannot, in this system, love one another even platonically,

the normalcy of their actions is thus called into question. Fortunately, she finds herself

unable to handle such fanatical ideologies and decides to return to the farm. Unfortunately,

Rachel has managed to injure her leg with a machete, gangrene has set in, and she is clearly

dying. In trading a rewarding (but socially suspicious) friendship with Rachel for a painful

(but socially obligatory) romantic love, Mary comes to realize the flawed nature of social

expectations about love, specifically the expectation that heterosexual romantic love must

take precedent over any kind of platonic love.[10] *WALL•E* fails to be so self-reflexive, opting

instead for the tired, supposedly universal love story. Universality, unfortunately, comes at the expense of the legitimation of others' alternative narratives of love.

The Discourse of *WALL•E*

These three general themes (corporatist consumerism, ethnocentrism, and heteronormative romantic love) are, in my estimation, the most prominent of many ideologically informed presuppositions that the text makes. In concluding the chapter, I will situate these ideological critiques more firmly within the poststructuralist tradition from which I consider post-apocalyptic narrative. In this final section, I argue that each of the three principal ideological assumptions upon which the narrative rests operate within a larger system that reflects the contemporary moment by formulating post-apocalyptic doctrine (produced after The End) based on post-apocalyptic remains (produced before).

I've mentioned that Stanton believes the social critique to be incidental, built around the heteronormative love story between WALL•E and EVE, but I would now like to challenge the idea that the general narrative arc is anything but unsurprising. Subconscious, maybe, but still unsurprising. I have argued that social critique springs forth out of discursively legitimated discourse, so what strikes me as inevitable is that developing a narrative in 2008 around pollution and waste seems totally relatable. Stanton talks about what he considers to be the accidental environmental critique:

> I was just trying to pick a very gettable visual situation to make this the last robot on Earth. Trash just seemed obvious to me, because you didn't have to explain it. You'd get it visually. It allows him to look through the detritus of humanity and be fascinated by it. (Howell, 2008)

In this quote, Stanton has unknowingly situated *WALL•E* within a specific discursive moment, an acceptable worldview of today, in two ways. First, he explains to his baffled self why trash makes sense: you don't have to explain it. A century ago, this narrative

would have been outlandish. Nuclear narratives can seem trite and tired today. Each expression of the future, as Jameson should constantly remind us, is a projection of that moment and contains little predictive value. Authors writing in the Cold War era would likewise have suggested that simple visual techniques might have been used then to help audiences "get" nuclear apocalypse without explanation. This is the "*sophistry of belief*" that Derrida (1984) references, the historical foundation for self-evidence about what might realistically, to an audience, cause global catastrophe. Secondly, Stanton points out that post-apocalyptic remains, "the detritus of humanity," explicitly fascinate WALL•E and implicitly fascinate the audience (this is meant to be an immersive text, after all). Stanton demonstrates that at least material (but, I would argue, also knowledge-based and expressive) post-apocalyptic remains are specifically thanked for both their narrative capabilities (social critique) and their ability to fascinate (emotion).

Therefore, not only does the text's position within the genre confirm what scholars have written about visions of a post-apocalyptic future, but *WALL•E*'s conformity to each normative ideal further cements these ideas as normative. Even under the guise of social commentary about waste and consumerism, WALL•E's actions as a careless consumer subconsciously reify the appropriate emotional response to the unnecessary accumulation of domestic material goods: amusement. As well, the lack of treatment to cultural values that fall outside of (mostly) white U.S. middle class hegemony continues a cycle of representation which omits that which producers feel is unimportant or not marketable. Finally, presenting heteronormative romantic love as universal, as something that every person in the world can and should relate to, motivates that narrative's momentum, inhibiting even the possibility of reversing its direction. Each of these processes reflect

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Foucault's (1972) idea that discursive formations do not come from nothing, but are at once influential to and influenced by how statements and objects are articulated historically. The stringing together of hegemonic norms in ways that make consumerism, ethnocentrism, and heterosexuality seem comfortable is widely accepted, and therefore becomes so.

The principles that legitimate discursively accepted ideals exist in the majority of texts that come out of popular culture[11]; but, when this cycle is applied to post-apocalyptic narrative, the outcome is far more frustrating. Aren't we supposed to be working from a blank slate? Many of the contextual elements of post-apocalyptic fiction reflect anxieties (trash, nuclear war, plagues, the rise of the machines), a setting which is often intentionally crafted. The most problematic of representations, though, materialize from the self-evident, the invisible. These are the principles that defy the "blank slate" hypothesis. But that doesn't mean every text reiterates the same principles. In the next chapter I look at a text that's vastly different than *WALL•E*, one that seems to share only a decade and genre: *The Road*.

We're on the cosmic highway to the sun
This trip we're taking has really only just begun
Had to leave the moon 'cause we used up all the fun
The moon is rather dreary
Since we singed our minds
On the cosmic highway to the sun   -Les Claypool (2002)

Chapter 2 Notes

[1] The discursive positing of disaster as having been inflicted by "humans" seems to absolve men of any extra responsibility, despite their usual possession of power. The implications of this tactic are more thoroughly examined in Chapter 1.

[2] I don't wish to digress into a media industries discussion about the involvement of the Disney persona within Pixar's arena of creation, which in many respects operates somewhat autonomously from its parent company. In collapsing the two entities for the purposes of this analysis, I employ two lines of thought. First, the branding of *WALL•E* as partially the offspring of Disney begs the audience to read it as such, and in relation to other Disney products. Second, scholarship has thoroughly demonstrated that the Disney empire has "managed to gain a cultural stranglehold on the fairy tale" that has strengthened to this day (Zipes, 1995, p. 21). Even with the rise of non-Disney animated fairy tales (i.e., *Shrek* [2001]), it is safe to say that the influences on ideological representation has remained a product of this market stranglehold with or without direct intervention from Disney itself.

[3] We know that "hate" is actually not caused by a body (the racial Other, the corporation, etc.), but is rather a production of discursive, hegemonic organization. When I claim that corporatism is the cause of audience's hate, I refer exclusively to audience's perception that this is so.

[4] I use "consumerism" here as a double entendre. In the first meaning, the actual material consumerism that is being critiqued in WALL•E points towards the unneccesity of material goods. In the second, however, we might refer to WALL•E as reflecting human qualities and absorbing human culture as a type of voyeuristic consumption, a fascination with the Other (see hooks, 1999; Thomson, 1997).

[5] It may seem as if I'm suggesting that we all live responsibly in small, square, unadorned Modernist dwellings and ignore the beauty and joy that culture can provide. This is not the case—rather, my concern is that consumerism today comes on the backs of the poor, the underprivileged. This critique seeks to name privilege, not negate the aesthetic pleasantry that can layer over elements of sheer existence.

[6] This self-reflexive consideration of discursive hailing (see Althusser, 1971) is something that, regrettably, is not carried into either the 1971 or 2007 film adaptations. In *The Omega Man* (1971), the vampires are hailed as a fanatical religious cult. In *I Am Legend* (2007) they are hailed as animalistic, speechless beasts. Neither text opens the door for the audience to consider alternative ways of interpellating them. *The Simpsons* (season nine, episode four, HΩmega Man vignette) parodies this conclusion in its adaptation of the story. The vampires suggest that utopian coexistence might be preferable to warring; Marge and the children promptly murder them with shotguns. "Friends with mutants, right!" she exclaims.

[7] In the interest of not straying too far from the main topic (human culture), I am excluding in this generalization texts that depict travelers coming across whole species different from their own. For example, in *Daybreak: 2250*, Fors and his companions stumble upon a pack of intelligent wild lizards mutated from nuclear radiation. These lizards are not meant to represent human culture, and when Fors does encounter other humans, they are most certainly Westernized in many ways. This trend remains the case in other texts as well.

[8] Of course, accessibility, as we know, is often a result of the ethnocentric omission of cultural values that challenge the self-evident "truths" that a particular discursive formation avoids naming.

[9] Although systems of knowledge may be dismantled despite the influence of post-apocalyptic remains, it's important to keep in mind that legitimating discursive statements and objects remain very much alive in the minds of the audiences. In fact, these claims revolve around the idea that *WALL•E* owns some complicity in the perpetuation of these norms.

[10] An exception to this social norm is familial love, which is examined in Chapter 3.

[11] After all, Foucault presents the process as inherently benign; progressive and uplifting discursive practices undergo the same processes to legitimate themselves.

Chapter 3

The Road: Sacrifice, Loss, and Masculine Love

Banned from the end of the world
I've no millennial fear
The future is here, it comes every year   -Corin Tucker (1999)

A Depressing Post-Apocalypse

Every time I talk to someone about Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the response is

something along the lines of, "Oh, yeah. That was really depressing." Or, "I never picked it

up because everyone says you just want to curl up and die after reading it." In a way, many

feel that McCarthy's depiction of a post-cataclysmic winter, complete with constant

freezing precipitation and an ashy grey sky, is as bleak a depiction of post-apocalypse as

exists. Some excerpts from books reviews: "The imagery is brutal even by Cormac

McCarthy's high standards for despair" (Maslin, 2006). "*The Road*, Cormac McCarthy's

harrowing, holy and haunting tenth novel, was never going to be a comedy of manners"

(Cleave, 2006). "No stranger to violence and darkness in his fiction, McCarthy lays on

some nightmare-inducing moments in *The Road*" (Chong, 2006). There are countless other

affirmations by other book reviewers that *The Road* is not only one of the most favorably

received novels of the decade, it is also one of the most depressing and frightening. It is

described as "quiet" and "bleak" (Barra, 2006; Rudd, 2007), "grim" (Rabalais, 2006),

"daring, dark and desperate" (Penhall, 2010a),[1] and an "existential horror story" (Mordue,

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2009). Indeed, it is all these things. It perhaps embodies what one is "supposed" to think of when conceiving of The End of the world.

Aesthetically, politically, and morally, it appears diametrically opposed to *WALL•E*. The scenery in the opening third of *WALL•E* might seem similar, but the background music creates the juxtaposition that sets the stage for a more fanciful consideration of the text. *The Road* provides no such juxtaposition, neither in the language the novel employs nor the images and music within the film. *WALL•E*'s shirking of survivalism in favor of middle class consumption stages a very different template from which to consider post-apocalyptic survival in general. Remains, in the more comedic text, are disposable and only momentarily entertaining. Contrastingly, *The Road* depicts a man and a boy who search desperately for the next bite of food or dry blanket, the next pair of shoes. They must lie in ditches to avoid hordes of cannibals and murderers. Politically, *WALL•E* considers macroscopic issues such as corporatism, consumer culture, and the environment. In *The Road*, McCarthy is indifferent as to what actually caused the apocalypse in the first place:

> A lot of people ask me. I don't have an opinion. At the Santa Fe Institute I'm with scientists of all disciplines, and some of them in geology said it looked like a meteorite to them. But it could be anything - volcanic activity, or it could be nuclear war. It is not really important. The whole thing now is, what do you do? (quoted in Jurgensen, 2009)

This contrasts with the assertion by some that McCarthy is making an environmentalist statement (Adams, 2009; Monbiot, 2007). It is clear from this quote, though, that McCarthy is far more interested in taking a microscopic approach to what life might be like after the apocalypse rather than critiquing the systems of oppression that may or may not be leading us towards destruction in the first place. Because of this, social critique likewise

takes a microscopic form. Because the story centers around parenting in the face of a cruel

world, McCarthy seems to subtly comment on his assumptions about the inherency of

human fallibility and lawlessness. His critique revolves around not The Event itself, but

rather the cruelty that he sees as inevitable afterwards. Finally, the systems of morality that

underpin McCarthy's universe, as the excerpted reviews above indicate, are sometimes

shallow and primal. *WALL•E* reaffirms the inherent goodness in the heteronormative,

Western human condition and the inevitability of its triumph over the nonhuman

corporation. *The Road* reaffirms the goodness in humans as well, minus the inherency; but

as much as the audience is presented a picture of goodness as a result of fatherly sacrifice,

we are also shown the depths of despair that apparently let the goodness fall apart into

cannibalism and violence.

As well as the politics of *The Road*, its use of post-apocalyptic remains differs

significantly from *WALL•E*. Instead of focusing on material items, cultural knowledge and

ritual both play a prominent role in the novel. As I examined briefly in the last chapter, the

man and the boy are in no way positioned to consider anything but the utility of everything

they carry. The boy has a picture book and very early finds some crayons. The reader never

hears about either of these more than a time or two. The only important material items are

shoes, food, blankets, tarps, and other survival gear, and their relevance is to the current

moment, not pre-apocalypse. Cultural knowledge and ritual proliferate, however, and take

the form of everything from semantic idioms, to what mushrooms are edible, to saying

grace before an important meal. These two categories may seem more abstract, much less

explicable than something that can be placed onto a shelf, when it comes to defining

post-apocalyptic remains. Therefore, a key goal of this chapter is to pull apart these

abstractions of interaction and into manageable pieces. It is clear through this analysis that abstract post-apocalyptic remains constitute ideological formations just as much as items that characters find in the sand, or in the back of a forgotten closet.

The novel, at its core, relies on ideologies of sacrifice and loss to figure McCarthy's version of post-apocalypse. These two work together to define the standards for other issues like love, gender roles, cultural knowledge, and morality. For instance, the ways in which "sacrifice" itself is conceived of as cultural knowledge differs greatly from character to character, particularly between what we are shown of the boy's father and what each of them remembers of the boy's mother. Likewise, each person's sense of what ritual form "sacrifice" must take in a post-apocalyptic world frames gender roles in a troubling way. The audience sees the man especially sacrificing a great deal for the sake of his son, while the woman has abandoned them both. These questions surface in particularly vivid quality because the boy was born after the apocalypse and knows nothing of the world before chaos (or, at least, this brand of chaos). The man, on the other hand, was well into adulthood when The End came and needs no information to piece together the past. He lived the past. Because the novel primarily narrates from the man's point of view, the audience is presented a singular definition "loss" that is heavily informed by pre-apocalyptic cultural knowledge. And so, as the man imparts the wisdom of humanity before The End (like idioms, morals, and descriptions of animals) to his son, we begin to see the ways in which specific knowledge and rituals can be post-apocalyptic remains as well. The symbolic, expressive way in which the man frames his own sacrifice and loss engenders a way of thinking that the boy tries to decipher as the novel progresses. The boy is constantly attempting to situate himself in a world of good and evil based on the

transference of pre-apocalyptic definitions of sacrifice and loss (and, by implication, gender roles, morality, etc.), often questioning what kind of symbolism might actually constitute "the good guys," the ones who "carry the light," and "the bad guys."

Two closely connected themes that come out of sacrifice and loss, but which are comprised of more than simply those two elements, are love and gender roles. Surprisingly, Cormac McCarthy contemplatively echoes Andrew Stanton's view of his own text. Oprah Winfrey asked him in interview, "Is this a love story to your son?"[2] McCarthy replied, "In a way, I suppose so."[3] Principally, like *WALL•E*, *The Road* is a love story that plays itself out in ways that imply universalized ideals of love. Unlike *WALL•E*, the story features a parental love rather than a romantic love, and between two male figures. Thus, we have another heavily gendered configuration of what love can be after The End of the world, especially considering the strategic way in which the mother has been eliminated from the equation. This version of love in the face of terror, as well as the politics of emotion that surround father-son relationships, is one of the primary subjects of this chapter. The configuration of love here is clearly a gendered one, and demonstrates another problem that occurs in much post-apocalyptic narrative: the omission of women as serious characters. McCarthy has been criticized in book reviews for failing to represent women at all in his work or for representing them without any depth (Barra, 2006). In fact, the trend has been noted by scholars as well: "One hesitates to use the term 'female characters' because McCarthy paints no portrait of a lady. The girls and women do not emerge from the andocentric narrative with attributes enough to define them as distinct personae" (Shaw, 2000, p. 259). In the same interview with Oprah, he attempts to explain why:

> Oprah: Is there a reason why women are not a big part of the plots?
> McCarthy: Women are tough, you know, they're tough. I don't pretend to understand women. I think men don't know much about women, they find them very mysterious.[4]

By claiming to not understand women, he avoids including them as major players in the stories he writes. His position is informed by a clear socialization of dichotomized gender essentialization that is reflected in the portrayals he produces of both men and women.[5] On the one hand, women's lack of inclusion, at least in *The Road*, gives indication that they aren't "tough enough" physically or emotionally to survive a harsh post-apocalyptic lifestyle. On the other, it demonstrates wonderfully the presumed connection between violence and masculinity. That McCarthy writes only about men and that his stories are consistently hyperviolent is an unsurprising reaffirmation of the gendered stereotype of hypermasculine violence. According to McCarthy, a world run by men is by definition ruthless. Love and gender, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, are often framed as being attached at the hip, but each of these needs to be examined both individually as well as in relation to one another.

My objective in this chapter is, like the previous chapter, to situate the ideological themes that *The Road* represents, and the post-apocalyptic remains that support them, within my larger poststructuralist framework for post-apocalypse, and to flesh out what implications these ideologies have for textual engagement with regard to social critique and emotion. Physical, tangible post-apocalyptic remains in *The Road* seem to take a backseat to less easily defined ones. Therefore, in attempting to further articulate what remains can be and how they can work, an implicit discussion I engage in this chapter is how ritual and knowledge can be remains in ways as equally important as more readily apparent, physical post-apocalyptic remains. Whereas I spent a significant amount of time

in the analysis of *WALL•E* talking about things like material products, buildings, billboards, and films, my analysis of *The Road* primarily depends upon what once was, what has been lost and is therefore remembered.

The Road

Synopsis[6]

The Road defies summary for the sole reason that the story goes essentially nowhere. Therefore, instead of synopsizing it from front to back, as one normally would, I will characterize the story by theme. There are essentially three things that comprise the essence of the fiction. First is monotony; for all the miles the man and the boy put on their shoes and shopping carts, the plot never really moves anywhere from the first to the last page. The story frequently turns abruptly from this daydream-inducing sameness to scenes of sheer terror in which the two are confronted by murderous cannibals or the imprisoned, skeleton-like people they lock up. The tactic keeps both characters and readers on their toes and briefly departs from the walking/scavenging/sleeping routine, but the story always returns to that routine. Scholars have noted elsewhere McCarthy's penchant for nomadic protagonists, and *The Road* fulfills this completely (Evenson, 1995; Grant, 1995). Second, the man and boy engage in monosyllabic, heartfelt dialogue. In addition to the man's inner thoughts, it is in these moments that the ideologies of loss and sacrifice are developed throughout the novel. As well, these conversations slowly reveal the novel's accepted principles of familial (masculine) love. Finally, in the man's own daydreaming, the audience is granted small nuggets of information about the boy's mother, as well as her fate. Each of these themes runs throughout to infuse what, on the surface, would appear to

be a simple post-apocalyptic story with a great amount of meaning despite the lack

information about The Event itself.

As in *WALL•E*, we are given the sense of utter vacancy from the moment the story

begins. Unlike *WALL•E*, we aren't immediately sure what caused the apocalypse, and this

information is never revealed. There is nothing visual that lets us "get it" without further

explanation. The sky is perpetually ashy, as is the ground and every horizontal surface.

Even the precipitation is grey. It is often wet and always cold. Narratively and contextually

speaking, this weather never breaks, and the story doesn't seem to ebb and flow to any

greater degree than whether the man and the boy's shopping cart currently has food and

blankets. True to form, *The Road*, like other McCarthy novels, seems to situate the

environment almost as a background character (Grant; 1995). The two move continually

southward in search of warmer and drier weather, stopping occasionally to check houses

and stores for supplies, sleep, and talk. This monotony is the basic tenet of the narrative

(except, as aforementioned, when they are suddenly required to escape death); when the

man and the boy do either drift into a memory or run into trouble, it never lasts for more

than a page. This holds true even during one of the few moments of relief in the story: they

stumble accidentally upon a concealed bomb shelter, fully stocked with food, water, soap,

liquor, and other supplies. The clouds lift for only a moment, though, as the man realizes

the potential danger in anyone stumbling accidentally upon *them*, and he forces the two of

them onward into another cold, ashy morning.

The dialogue that the man and the boy engage in is infrequent and short-lived, and

often involves the uncovering of pre-apocalyptic systems knowledge and morality. Like

most children, the boy presents a barrage of questions throughout the novel in an attempt to

make sense of both versions of the world, before the apocalypse and afterward, his own time. As well as quenching the child's thirst for knowledge, these moments of dialogue require the man to carefully consider the ways in which he frames values like sacrifice, good and bad, and necessity. Because the man was socialized into a specific value system prior to the great cataclysm, these values are transferred into the post-apocalyptic realm. Out of these systems of morality comes the love story that McCarthy reluctantly admits to having written. Over the course of the novel, the boy's approach to death, morality, and other ontological quandaries shifts dramatically as he realizes that the man is slowly dying. He moves from a child with endless questions to a child who very carefully and self-reflexively adopts the majority of his father's ideas, even if the man fails to enact those himself.

The fourth theme, the use of flashbacks, fills in the blanks that the dialogue fails to address about the boy's mother, the man's wife. The woman was pregnant when the apocalypse occurred. McCarthy (2006) writes:

> The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions. He got up and went to the window. What is it? she said. He didnt answer. He went into the bathroom and threw the switch but the power was already gone. A dull rose glow in the windowglass. He dropped to one knee and raised the lever to stop the tub and then turned on both taps as far as they would go. She was standing in the doorway in her nightwear, clutching the jamb, cradling her belly in one hand. What is it? she said. What is happening?
> I dont know
> Why are you taking a bath?
> I'm not. (p. 45)[7]

Like this one, the rest of the flashbacks reveal, little by little, a very loose, general progression of their relationship, including the boy's birth, from this moment until the woman decides to end her own life. These flashbacks inform my analysis of how the text assumes that women will fare after the apocalypse, even under the protection of a male

figure. If the constant fear and expression of violence by men reveals an overly generalized

vision of masculine violence, these succinct but haunting memories reveal an equal level of

essentialization about women's role in post-apocalyptic conditions. The man saves her

from the apocalypse, but not even the man can save her from herself afterwards.

The Loss of the Archive

A great deal of post-apocalyptic fiction laments the loss of the "archive," the

mountainous accumulation of cultural knowledge and art, especially if the apocalypse was

recent enough for people to remember what life was once like. Loss is central to the

emotional journey the audience is invited to undertake in experiencing post-apocalyptic

stories.[8] For example, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the redevelopment of scientific

knowledge after the apocalypse drives the story until, in the face of yet another impending

nuclear apocalypse, a select few escape Earth *with* the archive.[9] Despite the obvious

commentary on the inevitable fallibility of humans (men) when they get their hands on

controlled substances, it is nevertheless crucial to avoid the loss of the information that

makes the advancement of technology possible. Similarly, in *A Gift Upon the Shore*, an

elderly Mary Hope chains herself to the vault housing tens of thousands of books when a

descendent of the religious commune of which she was once a part attempts to blow it up

with pre-apocalyptic TNT. In one last example, *The Book of Eli* is premised on Eli

journeying across the country to deliver a King James Bible (supposedly the last in the

world) to another male-run community in San Francisco that hopes to reassemble the

knowledge of the old world. Countless other stories share the sentiments of these three.

Each of them treats the loss of post-apocalyptic remains, specifically ones that constitute

cultural knowledge, as irreplaceable and invaluable. These stories respond to loss; *The Road* only grieves.

The Road takes a microscopic view of everything, and its treatment of loss is no exception. Rather than ambitiously envisioning a movement to cultivate seeds of knowledge from the past into a new archive, McCarthy appears more interested in confronting the issue of loss as it translates into the personal relationship between the man and the boy. The man, coming from an upbringing that occurred before The End, has a vast amount of cultural knowledge that he tries to impart to his son, a task that has proven to be difficult. The novel provides an interesting dichotomy between two people that, realistically speaking, are not very far apart in age, but who possess a vastly different grounding from one another for how the world operates. That fulcral moment between them, the apocalypse, wedges a separatory gap in their constructions of the world. Because of this, all the man and the boy can do is try. The boy tries to grasp the past, and the man tries to be courier in this process. Both the attempt to convey precious nuggets of ritual and culture and the frustrations with being unable to do so are expressed in two ways: the man's inner thoughts and the sparse dialogue between the man and the boy.

His inner thoughts reveal his own sense of loss, both of the culture before the apocalypse and of his wife, and reveal as well the abstracted loss he feels for the boy, who may never know the kind of comfort and security that previously existed. On a broader level, he reflects on the entirety of recorded knowledge while remembering standing in a burnt-out library. He begins to realize to what extent archives, in this case a physical one, constitute an expectation of progress, of a world that is to come. This differently fated world asks him to consider these expectations a series of calculated lies. There is a sense

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that what may have been lost is naiveté rather than the knowledge itself, although he finds

himself continually recalling past knowledge for the benefit of the boy. Later, he realizes

the unfortunate futility of the transference of this knowledge. In one of the rare moments of

relief that the novel provides, when they are momentarily safe, warm, and well-fed inside

the bomb shelter, the man has time to reflect on the ocean that separates each of their

experiences:

> He turned and looked at the boy. Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect. He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than he. (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 129-30)

He speculates as to what the dream from which he has just awakened was trying to warn

him of—"That he could not enkindle in the heart of the child what was ashes in his own"

(p. 130). Although the boy repeatedly asks questions, the man knows that a full

understanding of the answers he provides cannot possibly be achieved, that the

contextualized cultural knowledge has been irretrievably lost. The bleakness of

post-apocalypse has engendered hopelessness within a person who once knew comfort and

security, and who finds it difficult to cultivate anything but hopelessness in the heart of his

son.

Some of his struggle to resist this mentality comes from the irrelevancy of much of

the pre-apocalyptic knowledge he has—idioms and terms that refer to what is no more are

quite useless. For this reason, dialogue plays a large part in transferring (or the attempt at

transferring) cultural knowledge. At various points, the man explains to the boy what terms

mean, like "as the crow flies" (despite the nonexistence of crows) and "beachcombers"

(WALL•E-like scavengers in the throes of their own comfort). Each of these phrases relies

heavily on factors that have no bearing in this particular post-apocalyptic world, and each

reflects his attempts at letting the boy see into the man's world. Similarly, the boy picks

these idioms and phrases up as if he does have a cultural bearing for them and, in more than

one conversation, surprises the man with them. In the aforementioned scene in the bomb

shelter, the man is finally able to fix a warm bath for the boy:

> What do you think? the man said.
> Warm at last
> Warm at last?
> Yes.
> Where did you get that?
> I dont know.
> Okay. Warm at last. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 124)

The man is clearly baffled by the boy's adoption of the idiom. Perhaps the boy genuinely

longs for a culture of which he was never a part; perhaps he only does it for the man. In any

case, conversations like these underscore the sense of loss that the man has, and the sense

of loss he unsuccessfully tries to impart to the boy.

It seems to me that the grieving process that is necessarily associated with

significant loss is the man's impetus to feel that the transference of culture is necessary

without admitting to himself that the boy cannot grieve over that which he never had. As

Ahmed (2004) notes, "[o]ne has to recognise oneself as having something before one can

recognise oneself as losing something" (p. 156). The audience is likewise asked to

grieve—probably that's the root of the general sense that the novel is so incredibly

depressing. There is no hope that things will ever improve (to "go back" to the way they

were). But the boy, always in a constant negotiation of personal and collective history,

morals, and culture, never seems to grieve much of anything. At times he mentions his

mother (something he did know), but otherwise he remains modestly apathetic about anything beyond which applies directly to his existence.

Audiences are also expected to grieve, and many do, but it's not likely that the majority of readers give conscious thought to what they're actually grieving. Ahmed (2004) does a good job teasing out the arguments between those who believe grieving should be a "letting go" process and those who believe it unproblematic to "hold on" through grieving (pp. 159-60), so I won't re-summarize here. Regardless, the more relevant piece is not *why* readers may grieve while reading *The Road*, but *what* they mourn the loss of. Like all emotional responses, grief is heavily mediated by societal standards for what is acceptable to grieve, what a "healthy" response to certain situations is. Admittedly, audiences are certainly in a position to grieve over things like security, a sustainable environment, billions of lives, peace and community, and hope. But this text and others, including the three mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, consider the loss of culture and knowledge, save a few remnants, worth grieving. There might not be an inherent problem with this (other than that cultural knowledge and history are often legitimated from and organized around the privileged), but it's important to recognize from a poststructuralist perspective that what we value today may have no relevance to someone without that cultural grounding. To think that it our entire body of history and knowledge may actually be largely irrelevant and useless to someone only several years post-destruction! It's somewhat axiomatic to us that cultural knowledge *is* important. The contrast between the man and the boy is a wonderful example of the values that inform this axiom: the man stands in for the audience member, who has the socialization necessary for grief, but the boy does not, and thinks only from the perspective of someone who needs

shoes, food, and blankets to keep from joining those grieved-for billions. The boy does not actually need to know the phrase "as the crow flies" because there are no crows, and most people he encounters will want to eat him rather than converse with him about distances anyway.[10] As well as Ahmed's treatment of what is and is not allowed to be grieved for, we can see that even the most self-evidently mournful losses come from somewhere to tell us how to respond and what emotions to have when confronted with particular circumstances.

Ritualistic Sacrifice

The loss involved in the discussion above is collective—cultural knowledge is collaborative, and its loss in this case was involuntary. But sacrifice is presented in *The Road* as a much more personal, voluntary form of loss. Furthermore, sacrifice is posited as a primary avenue for morality, a ritual that makes the man and the boy good guys. Post-apocalyptic remains appear in the form of the ritual of self-sacrifice. While the boy's socialization is necessarily different from the man's, especially when it comes to grieving and loss, he still must grapple with morality from his own perspective. The blanket term I use to describe the particular brand of ritualistic morality found in McCarthy's post-apocalyptic world is "sacrifice," and it manifests within the story in both thought and action. In comparison, lack of sacrifice (other than literal, cannibalistic human sacrifice) is presented as immoral, especially when used as a convenient tool for depicting characters we are not supposed to identify with. As the boy journeys through a wasteland rife with violence and plagued by the cold, he sorts through his own post-apocalyptic experiences and knowledge and his father's pre-apocalyptic experiences and knowledge in an attempt to settle on a system of morality that makes sense, considering the circumstances. Some pieces of his father's pre-apocalyptic psyche, like the characterizations of loss described

above, don't fit into his developing model, but some do. In the context of the boy's

piecing-together of what works and what doesn't, I describe both action and symbolism to

show the post-apocalyptic psyche's development (the boy) through the negotiation of

pre-apocalyptic morality through sacrifice. Implicit in this discussion is the constructed

nature of morality, drawn out in the novel with mixed results.

Symbolically, the man attempts to sell morality under the guise of sacrifice using a

couple of dichotomizing key phrases that the boy holds onto for dear life. The boy is

adamant throughout in continuously clarifying that he and the man are "the good guys,"

diametrically opposed to the "bad guys," the ones who kill and eat people.[11] This phrase

reaffirms again and again that, despite desperate responses to dire circumstances, their acts

are still morally justified, the ones "carrying the light." The other task accomplished in this

reaffirmation is the socialization of binaries. The boy is learning a distinctly

pre-apocalyptic tactic: setting oneself in moral opposition to another. In a conversation

after the man kills another man out of self-defense, the boy wonders if murder, even here,

somehow forces them to renounce their title.

> He sat there cowled in the blanket. After a while he looked up. Are we still the good
> guys? he said.
> Yes, we're still the good guys.
> And we always will be.
> Yes. We always will be
> Okay. (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 65-6)

But, as the novel progresses, and as he watches his father seem to drift further and further

from those ideals in the interest of the preservation of the both of them, the boy becomes

doubtful. He asks versions of this question many times in his attempt at situating himself

within a larger structure of morality that works for him in post-apocalypse. The father's

seeming slide in and out of good guy territory at once challenges the self-definition of good

guys and the creation of strict binaries, hinting instead at a malleable role in the morality of post-apocalypse.

Thus, when his father's actions morally contradict the operational symbolism about good guys that the boy has come to understand, he begins to realize the fluidity of these systems. In one scene, they stumble upon an old man who claims to be ninety and hobbles along pitifully. The man, uninterested in discussing whether the old man is one of the good guys or one of the bad guys, unsuccessfully tries to convince the boy to stay the course. The boy talks the man into providing the old man with dinner that night. Later, another man steals their cart and everything they own, shoes and all, while they are momentarily away. They track the thief, eventually catching up with him and threatening him with their gun.[12] In this harrowing scene, the man forces the thief to not only return the items, but also to strip every bit of clothing off. The boy attempts to talk the man out of it but, in the end, they leave him penniless and shivering on the side of the road. The boy, however, has firmed his own values by this point, and demands that they turn around and bring the thief his clothes and shoes. When they return, he's gone, so they leave his garments piled in the middle of the sandy road.[13] The depiction of heartlessness by the desperate man, who is approaching death anyway, causes the boy to question what it means to carry the light, to sacrifice oneself for the image of good. This enacted symbolism, a Western ritual if there ever was one, is hence transformed from a pre-apocalyptic ideal that is discarded when times are troubled into the boy's own post-apocalyptic understanding of moral righteousness despite circumstance. He comes to realize that the ritual of material and symbolic sacrifice, which clearly take a purer form in the boy's world, in some ways epitomizes what it means to be the good guys.

Rituals, many of which no longer hold any relevance, can convey a sense of sacrifice in this way and others. The man and the boy are not particularly religious but, after finding the safety of the bomb shelter, the boy wishes to say grace. Rather than thanking a God with whom he has no attachment, he chooses to thank the people who built the shelter, having decided that they must have been good guys. He assures those people that, had they survived the apocalypse, the man and boy would not be eating their food. What the reader sees here is the ritualism of saying grace, but without the religious grounding that the boy's post-apocalyptic perspective lacks. He fits this ritual within his own world while simultaneously acknowledging that good guys have sacrificed much to allow the continuance of the protagonists. In a less dramatic fashion, one of the most heartbreaking moments in the novel is, as referenced in Chapter 1, when they find the Coca Cola. The drinking of a Coke is a ritual of the everyday, like saying grace, and therefore holds value as a post-apocalyptic remain. Nutritionally vapid, it should hold no practical value; however, the longing for the comfort of the mundane elevates the drinking of this can of sugary water to a meaningful gesture, chock full of emotional appeal.

The most overt form of sacrifice that the man is committed to is parental in nature, but stems from the material and cultural loss of the previous section. He sees himself as the caregiver, often putting the wellbeing of the boy before himself. The man is engrossed in this role to the point that he ignores requests from the boy to act otherwise. Early in the novel, he mixes the boy a cup of powdered hot cocoa and pours hot water for himself. The boy forces him to take half, angrily chastising him for breaking his promise not to overdo his self-sacrificial gesturing. Later, the man insists that the boy drink the Coca Cola. The boy's understands that the man wants him to experience things he may never have the

opportunity to experience again, but resists the man's overextension of his own wellbeing in the pursuit of that cause. We can see that the entire charade of providing for one's children at the expense of oneself, while commendable in many ways, is a ritual that has been legitimated in contemporary discourse. For the boy, this selfless ritual makes little sense.

Despite the boy's insistence in this regard, parental sacrifice is nonetheless conceived as emotionally uplifting. This is no doubt the attitude with which McCarthy approached the story, having dedicated it to his son, after all, and it is also the way that some audiences have perceived it. When asked about the reaction of McCarthy has received from fathers, he said:

> I have the same letter from about six different people. One from Australia, one from Germany, one from England - but they all said the same thing. They said: "I started reading your book after dinner and I finished it 3.45 [*sic*] the next morning and I got up and went upstairs and I got my kids up and I just sat there in the bed and held them." (Jurgensen, 2009)

The parental response to this constant sacrifice the man makes for the boy causes some readers to enter a protective state in which they feel the need to do the same for their own children. This response (love for one's child) certainly isn't a bad thing but, at least in this figuration, the larger narrative applies only to fathers and sons, a restrictive conception of parental roles to say the least. Indeed, it has been noted that McCarthy's books on the whole are about fathers and sons (Mordue, 2006) and, as previously discussed, often omit women in general. Avoiding the inclusion of developed, believable women in *The Road* (as with other novels) likewise avoids including them in the novel's themes.

Masculine Parental Love

Perhaps the most depressing part of this book for feminist scholars would be the deliberate exclusion of the woman from the lives of the boy and the man. Her portrayal is minimal in the first place and, when we do see interactions between her and the man, she is oppositional and frustrating. She appears ungrateful for the sacrifices the man has made to sustain her and the boy, and she's unconcerned with the ritual self-sacrifice that seems necessary for the expression of love in *The Road*. Because the acceptable paradigms of who can survive catastrophe, as well as acceptable parental roles in post-apocalypse, are extremely gendered, her system of morality is degraded as self-serving and sad. The legitimized way to love a child in the story is through sacrifice, but the woman's stance holds that subjecting *anyone*, much less a young child, to live in such hellish circumstances is beyond cruel. The implications for both gender roles and the performative expectations for parental love clearly demarcate boundaries for how gender "works" in this particular post-apocalyptic world.

The woman, who likewise remains nameless, appears only in flashbacks and once in conversation. The reader learns that she was pregnant when The Event occurred, delivered the boy shortly thereafter, and survived with the man and the boy for a number of years.   Nothing of the nature of those years is mentioned, except that the question of suicide is raised frequently. Just before the reader enters the story, she decides that surviving is not enough, and walks into the darkness alone.[14] As the film's narration confirms, "There is no other tale to tell." This is apparently so, because, after 50 pages of the novel and roughly 30 minutes of the film, we never hear from or about her again except via passing pronouns.

The first relevant lesson an audience member can glean from this depiction is the quite obvious precept that women aren't really fit to survive in the brutal, masculine world that McCarthy assumes will coalesce post-apocalypse without a masculine support system. The woman in *The Road* supplements a number of characters that support this thesis. To begin, the man facilitates her immediate survival during The Event by drawing a bath while she stands to the side, confused as to what he's doing and what's happening. In the years following the boy's birth, it is implied that the man has always professed his self-sacrifice to protect his wife and son (which, as I argue, is an expression of love in this world), even to the point of death (McCarthy, 2006, p. 47). To this end, the man is even a necessary piece of her own suicidal act: "She would do it with a flake of obsidian. He'd taught her himself. Sharper than steel. The edge an atom thick" (p. 49). The ritual of suicide has even taken a pre-apocalyptic form. In contrast, the man is determined to keep going, despite the knowledge that very little is likely to come of it. The back-story, then, is one of the stoic male traveler in the company of his child and his wife, a woman with a weak stomach for survival. This clearly sets the stage for other the rest of the novel, in which men enact violence and women are either slaves or food.

This is obviously a very extreme example of the discursive subjugation of the feminine within post-apocalyptic narrative, but other examples exist. Scenes in both *Mad Max* (1979) and *The Book of Eli* (2010) depict gangs surrounding an assumedly innocent couple, killing the man and raping the woman. In Atwood's (2009) *The Year of the Flood*, immediately following the plague that decimates the population, criminals take women as sex slaves until they are rescued. These acute acts of violence against women exist alongside the more subtle examples that suggest that women in post-apocalypse are in

some way unfit for the terrain, many of which do so via omission. Out of the many texts surveyed for this analysis, only a few depict women in positions of capability, let alone leadership. One in particular, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), does, but only in order to hypersexualize her. When the women are capable, they are often shown "growing into" this capability under the tutelage of a male figure (i.e., *The Book of Eli*, *The Dark Tower*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Waterworld*, *The Year of the Flood*). The assumption is, of course, that males enter post-apocalypse with built-in rationality that informs their ability to survive, while women must push beyond their emotionality, must harden themselves to the realities of a cruel world. Thus, on the whole, post-apocalypse is depicted as a man's world into which women might somehow have the opportunity to fit, given adequate time and instruction.[15]

The arena of instruction (in a sense, the melding of sacrificial empowerment and cultural knowledge), provides an interesting look into how post-apocalyptic remains can constitute the world after cataclysm as a male-dominated one. The subtlety of women's subjugation through male instruction allows authors to continually reproduce images of women as incapable. The clearest example comes from *The Book of Eli*. After Eli rescues the mostly helpless Solara (born after the apocalypse) from the city's mercenaries, she tags along in the obligatory "dead weight" role. Along the way, she learns from the dominant male who comes from before The Event about how to survive (cultural knowledge) and about performing Christianity through selflessness (ritual). Eli himself realizes that he's betrayed his own morals, and the audience is dutifully reassured that self-sacrifice (here, as in *The Road*, sacrifice for a person of seemingly lesser capability) is morally righteous. At the end, after Eli's death, Solara dons his attire (sword and iPod included), and sets out to

continue his legacy. This ending scene demonstrates perfectly how a melding of the three categories of post-apocalyptic remains constitutes gender roles in post-apocalypse: she is using her acquired cultural knowledge about survival to uphold the Christian ritual of self-sacrifice, and with the aid of useful pre-apocalyptic materials gleaned from Eli's belongings. While this may present itself as a version of the strong, capable woman, the fact remains that a man is required to get there, and that a man has determined her own moral path.

Alongside women's subjugation is the role of the masculine in McCarthy's work, which conveys a sense of inherency with respect to violence and cruelty. Because it operates within the same patriarchal paradigm as the assumption of the incapability of the feminine, definitions of masculinity as intrinsically violent and hateful present a similarly damaging essentialization of gender for two reasons. First, it absolves the men in these stories (and the authors who create them) from what is apparently very natural violent behavior (hooks, 2004). Because they are violent and unfeeling by nature, men cannot be expected to operate outside of this model. This not only prompts a shoulder-shrugging apathy towards changing the socialization of gender norms, but reifies the positing of the feminine in a position of physical and survivalistic inferiority. Secondly, defining men as intrinsically violent as opposed to women legitimizes (and prompts) continuing to teach men to be violent when they want something, especially against women. Because they cannot be blamed for their actions, we are taught that, should the apocalypse come, men will certainly resort to murder, cannibalism, and sex slavery under the guise of genetic primalism. It is because men are assumed to be this way that women are constantly in

danger in McCarthy's world, and their inability to deal with it well enough has implications both for survival and for parental roles.

Therefore, the second lesson the text professes is that, because of their inability to stomach suffering and cruelty, women are mostly unfit to exercise an acceptable form of parental love in post-apocalypse and, thus, are unfit to handle children in this world. Men on the other hand, are able to express love, but only in very gendered ways. Sacrifice, as I have argued, is the primary method of expressing love in *The Road*, and the adoption of this definition can reaffirm the gendered expression of emotion and the acceptability of that expression.

The woman in *The Road* finds peace in escaping the misery of daily existence in McCarthy's post-apocalyptic world. She wishes to also grant the boy this peace in removing him from the hopeless world she sees. In articulating this, she also questions the idea that sacrificing for the boy actually constitutes a productive form of love:

> You have two bullets and then what? You cant protect us. You say that you would die for us, but what good is that? I'd take him with me if it werent for you. You know I would. It's the right thing to do. (McCarthy, 2006, pp. 47-8)

She stands in for an attitude that many would likely have after the apocalypse. It's probable that lots of people would rather relieve themselves of the burdens of living in this world than push indefinitely on. For animals, and sometimes for people, we call this an act of mercy. But her Kevorkian ideals are shunned as cold and heartless, and McCarthy's admittance that *The Road* is a love story between father and son informs the reader that the woman is misguided and cruel for wishing to take her son with her. The stoic male martyr is far more justified in his expression of love than the tired, depressed woman. Because of the gendered representations consistent throughout both *The Road* and McCarthy's other

work, femininity itself is implicated in this cruelty. As in *The Book of Eli*, a decidedly masculine performance of morality takes precedent over the apparent incapability of the feminine.

But, as before, within a patriarchal system, masculinity is never off the hook with respect to gendered representation. McCarthy has been described as a "man's man" writer (Lincoln, 2008, p. 13), and thus his stories conform to many of the accepted standards for masculine expression. Of particular interest to me in *The Road*, unsurprisingly, is the way in which the man is "allowed" to express his love to the boy. Sacrifice, we know, takes the place of tenderness and compassion as the most easily accessible form of love. The man clearly feels that ensuring survival at any cost trumps an emotional connection with his son: throughout the story, the man endangers his own life to ensure the safety of the boy. On top of that, he is always pushing the boy into situations the boy isn't comfortable with, dismissing his son's pleas to do otherwise. Whether the boy is uncomfortable with entering an abandoned house or uncomfortable with stealing the cart thief's clothes and shoes, again and again the man pushes the boy to the side in favor of his own decisions. His inability to emotionally connect with his son relives the expectation that men suppress emotions in order to appear capable, and distorts love as emotional engagement into love as martyrdom. Martyrdom can certainly operate as an expression of love, but all too often this is the only socially sanctioned way for men to express their love besides violence. hooks (2004) notes throughout her book *The Will to Change* that, in order to resist the patriarchal bedrock that defines the gendered expression of emotion, men must learn how to love genuinely. The man in *The Road*, it's safe to say, fails to live up to this suggestion. Even when the man does die, the reader only momentarily wonders if the woman was actually

correct. Immediately following the man's death, another man, his family in tow, approaches the boy in order to "adopt" him. The boy agrees, and (in the film) the woman in the family places her hands on his cheeks in a moment of wonder and love. In the novel she is equally emotionally connected:

> The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget. The woman said that was all right. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 241)

The woman in this family acts as an emotional outlet for the boy, something his father never provided. The man in the family holds the shotgun. The boy thus moves into another similarly structured framework for acceptable love, seeming to want to step into his father's shoes by talking to him in the afterlife. In McCarthy's world, it's likely that he'll slowly drift away from the innocence and compassion that children are purported to have, and towards the hardened stoicism of a man's man.

The Discourse of *The Road*

The Road, more firmly entrenched in a microscopic view of one world, and unconcerned with the social conditions (or natural ones) that spurred the apocalypse, is nevertheless operating within a particular discursive formation. Reflections of discursively legitimated statements and objects, as should be evident, inform the analysis of this text greatly. Loss, sacrifice, and love are situated within systems of knowledge and ritual that recognize and approve of their existence. The post-apocalyptic remains that appear to be the most important here are therefore the constitutive knowledge and rituals that legitimate those values. Therefore, the minimal social critique that allows emotion to flourish is facilitated by the self-evidence of these three concepts, of course among others.

It's been stated that, contextually, the scenario appears less obviously critical, which makes social critique appear incidental. Unlike *WALL•E*, which spawned a deluge of recycling awareness and trash programs, *The Road* doesn't appear to have an ulterior motive. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter states, McCarthy wasn't trying to warn us of impending doom or attempting to change some troubling habit that our culture has developed. He simply wanted to depict the relationship between a father and his son after The End of the world. A staple for love stories, of course, is emotion. The development of emotion through this love story takes the front seat, forcing any sort of social critique into the background. The emotional movement of the audience, in this case, far overshadows any didacticism that comes from social critique.

Love stories are not often depressing, though. Loss, sacrifice, and love come together to create what many have called a depressing text—but what makes the text so depressing? What makes (primarily) fathers meander upstairs to hold their children after having pulled all-nighters to finish the novel? That fathers have this response is a testament to the stirring emotionality of the text. But, as I have shown, this emotionality is hinged on pre-apocalyptic ideals that spring forth from such hegemonic systems as patriarchy and the archiving of knowledge. Loss, sacrifice, and love only circulate emotion to the extent that the audience identifies with the messages underlying the representation. A Pulitzer Prize would indicate that McCarthy was mildly successful in this area.

Therefore, the cultural politics of individual relationships, specifically between the man and the boy, can be presented in a way that conforms to expectations that many audience members have in order to situate the text as a legitimated love story of sacrifice and loss in a depressing circumstance. Because social critique has been largely abandoned

in favor of emotionality, audiences may feel that genuineness and authenticity underline the narrative without the tainting of an agenda. Systems of knowledge and gender roles only work in this text, and others, because the discourse has been legitimated. Consequently, the success of such messages can only reproduce belief in the self-evident truths that tell us that our knowledge is invaluable for all time, that women cannot survive post-apocalypse without male support, and that sacrificing oneself for another is a way for males to express love, rather than facing the embarrassment of tenderness.

The Road, while relatively simple in many ways, is through discursive analysis deemed a fairly complicated text. If *WALL•E* was a lighthearted, charming version of apocalypse, *The Road* may very well be its opposite emotionally. But if *The Road* lacks a great deal of social critique, Will Self's *The Book of Dave* may very well be its opposite in that regard.

Chapter 3 Notes

[1]Penhall, in addition to writing this particular article for *The Guardian,* also wrote the screenplay for the 2009 film adaptation (Penhall, 2010b).

[2]The novel is dedicated to McCarthy's then-eight-year-old son, John Francis McCarthy.

[3]Retrieved from http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Oprahs-Exclusive-Interview-with-Cormac-McCarthy-Video.

[4]Retrieved from http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Work-Women-Food-and-Shoes-in-Cormac-McCarthys-Life-Video.

[5]I regret resorting to using the term "both" regarding gender but, as a good friend and avid McCarthy fan has assured me, it's not likely that transgendered or intersexed individuals will ever play a serious part in a Cormac McCarthy novel.

[6]Unless otherwise specified, examples come from the novel. I summarize the novel here, but the film adaptation follows the story almost identically, and many lines are similar or verbatim between the two.

[7]Throughout the novel, McCarthy espouses a grammatical philosophy that challenges the traditional use of some apostrophes and other punctuation. Wherever he has omitted them, I have as well.

[8]The emotional reactions to loss are mediated, of course. What a particular audience member despairs at losing is informed by ideology and privilege.

[9]Although the monastery is coed at the time of the second blast, the males are still in charge of evacuation and the protection of the archive. Additionally, one gets the distinct sense that every person boarding is white. Nonetheless, it's commendable that the escapees are made up of males and females, especially considering its date of publish.

[10]This observation applies only to McCarthy's world, where eating people is a common response to hunger and 90% of survivors are cannibals. I, personally, reject his assumption that cannibalism would be so widespread, but even that opinion comes from my own ideological assumptions about the world.

[11]The terms "good guys" and "bad guys" are obviously gendered, but considering that women are invisible in the novel anyway, McCarthy probably is writing about guys.

[12]One of the particularly disturbing bits of information from this scene is that the man in the novel is implicitly depicted, through his cadence and vernacular, to be black. In the film, a black actor was cast to play the part and is the only nonwhite character. The commentary about theft and race here is fairly problematic to say the least.

[13]In an interesting departure from the novel, the film depicts the boy also carefully placing a small tin of food on top of the clothes, furthering the compassionate framing of the boy in contrast to his father.

[14]The film is quite forgiving in this regard, considering McCarthy's stark lack of compassion for the woman's character. For instance, in the novel, she deliberately leaves without saying goodbye to the boy. In the film, she stays up to give him a bath before leaving. As well, the dialogue between the man and woman just prior to her suicide, while basically aesthetically congruent, is far more muted and forgiving in the film. McCarthy

apparently had no apprehension in framing the woman so as to deter readers from sympathizing with or even liking her.

[15]A delightful exception to this rule, as might be expected, is *A Gift Upon the Shore*.

Chapter 4

The Book of Dave: Satire, Linguistic Articulation, and Textual Hate

Time to bring it down again.
Don't just call me pessimist.
Try and read between the lines.
I can't imagine why you wouldn't
Welcome any change, my friend.
I wanna see it all come down.
Bring it down.
Suck it down.
Flush it down.   -Maynard James Keenan (1996)

A Satirical Post-Apocalypse

If there is one narrative style that most reflects the principles of post-apocalyptic

thinking, it is satire. The satirical lens often serves as a warning, especially within

projections of the future. Post-apocalyptic fiction frequently uses satire as an approach to

that warning (to be "the watchdog," as Quintero [2007, p. 4] puts it), comically gesturing at

what might transpire should we fail to fix this or that. It might be said that the didactic

nature of science fiction, almost always taking its cue from political and social discontent,

is such that satire, also taking its cue from discontent (Connery & Combe, 1995, p. 2),

would fit marvelously into the genre. Indeed, it has many times. But even the most overtly

discontent texts do not always rely on the satirical attitude, and certainly satire

encompasses a body of narrative that expands well beyond the borders of the

post-apocalyptic genre. *WALL•E* has a sociopolitical bone to pick, but incorporates a

minimal amount of satire to convey that message. Furthermore, the recycling programs

begun as a response to the film suggest that the message most certainly was conveyed.

Because of the obvious conclusion that satire is simply one potentially successful approach, it's important to note how the technique operates in relation to the other post-apocalyptic texts I have examined.

For one, audiences often cannot ever be certain of what's intentional and what isn't. Satire prides itself on being tongue-in-cheek, and this sarcasm ensures that accidental reliance on ideological norms may very well be seen as potentially intended. For instance, in *WALL•E* it is safe to assume that the reliance on heteronormative, romantic standards of love was either unintentional or ignored. *The Book of Dave*, however, posits both romantic and familial love in a cynical light and, therefore, reproductions of problematic ideological values are assumedly realized and satirized.[1] The text is understood to be self-reflexive, and so is often immune to certain criticisms.

Second, like The Event itself, satire houses naught but destruction. As literary theorists have pointed out:

> Most satirists—indeed, virtually all English satirists from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century—*claim* one purpose for satire, that of high-minded and usually socially[-]oriented moral and intellectual reform; however, they *engage* in something quite different, namely, mercilessly savage attack on some person or thing that, frequently for private reasons, displeases them. (Connery & Combe, 1995, p. 2, emphasis in original)

The point of satire is most often the attempt at dismantling institutions through the demonization of satiric objects. As Bogel (2001) points out, "the satirist is set in opposition to the satiric object, and the audience is at once unproblematically aligned with the satirist and sharply distinguished from the object of satire" (p. 3). For us, this means either implying that the satiric objects will be the cause of the apocalypse or that these satiric objects will have profoundly negative societal ramifications afterwards—or both. Kurt Vonnegut, a master of satire, accomplishes the framing of both of these in *Cat's Cradle*.

The protagonist, charged with writing a book entitled *The Day the World Ended*, resolves

to uncover as much information about Dr. Felix Hoenikker, a fictional scientist involved in

the creation of the atomic bomb, as possible. In usual Vonnegut style, the reader traverses

through myriad ridiculousness until, at what might be called the climax of the novel, we are

formally introduced to *ice-nine*. Previously alluded to in the story, *ice-nine* is a technology

developed by the eccentric scientist that turns any moisture it comes in contact with into

ice, instantly and permanently. The dictator of an insignificant island, possessing a vial of

ice-nine, ingests it as a part of his last living moments. This spurs a chain reaction that very

succinctly freezes everything in the world with moisture (almost everything) into ice. The

ridiculous, utterly useless technology clearly alludes to another: the atomic bomb. Without

a legitimate purpose, and in the hands of the destructive, the apocalypse will come at the

hands of these useless technologies. Without hope for survival, even post-apocalypse

occurs satirically. The novel ends:

> If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would
> climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a
> pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes
> statues of men [*sic*]; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back,
> grinningly horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who. (Vonnegut, 1963,
> p.191)

Even in post-apocalypse, after there is no apparent reason for which to laugh, the satirist

earns her/his keep by situating the satirical object (*ice-nine*, or the bomb) as a cynical thing

to be ridiculed. Theis (2009) writes of *The Book of Dave* in this very light, arguing that

satirical deconstruction of fathers in patriarchy "obliterate[s] any remaining hope for a

better life that is based on any of the faiths of our fathers, and in this manner attacks what

he holds are the sources or mainstays of oppressive situations" (pp. 148-9).

The third defining feature of approaching post-apocalypse with satire is that, because the post-apocalyptic world is deliberately being constructed through the destruction of contemporary values, its use must be recognized as being limited. The academic, in particular, will note the balance one must strike, either as a scholar or a satirist, between deconstruction and construction. We pride ourselves, much like the satirist, in our abilities to lay bare transparent ideologies, uncover hidden assumptions, and critique the unknowing perpetuation of oppressive power structures. The act is necessary, because without denormalizing the normalized there is no apparent reason to act. Likewise, in satirical post-apocalypse the motive of deconstruction may be crucial to understanding how we perceive life after The End. The combination of self-reflexivity and deliberate destruction may make for a text that is more self-aware, but it also makes for a text that is only interested in destroying. This, ultimately, is the downfall of the satirical post-apocalypse: the world is supposed to be a blank slate and, like the academic who is uninterested in proposing something different and constructing nothing in the wake of the hated world (even while helping to uncover hidden societal problems), the satirist's support of progress is obviously limited by their own futuristic vision.

Finally, we must recognize the cultural politics of audience response to satire. At least considering the intended goal of ironical amusement, why would destruction appear so obviously funny to many audiences? As aforementioned, situating the satirical object as the Other allows hate to drive the motives of the reader. In a society that sanctions demonization in many forms, hate then becomes legitimacy for laughter. Much like children in a schoolyard, who demonize other kids that are too smart, to dumb, too feminine, or too outspoken, openly marginalizing their positions creates the sanctioned enactment of amused hate—usually by means of laughter and destruction—by virtue of

their "weaknesses." Participating in satirical destruction, then, is to be partially complicit in the Othering of ideas. This isn't to say that satire doesn't have its benefits, but self-reflection about this on an audiences' part is as crucial to uncovering the ideological influences on our emotion as satirizing people and institutions can be crucial to uncovering the ideologies that normalize these institutions.

For these reasons, the approach to analyzing *The Book of Dave* is necessarily slightly different than that of *WALL•E* or *The Road*. Rather than structuring the sections of analysis by the ideological themes the text perpetuates, it can only be assumed that each of the ideological constructions is deliberately developed by Will Self. His obvious commentary on religion, family, and language leave his own beliefs implied, but unarticulated. We can infer that theocracy is a poor excuse for governance, but what would Self have rather seen? This is precisely what critics mean when they argue that satire only destroys, and rarely creates. As a result, authorial intent appears to matter less. The reader may get the sense that, based upon what is being brought down, Self is left-leaning (which is most certainly true), but his lack of seriousness calls into question how relevant that fact is. Therefore, the sections will be demarcated by the themes that Self appears to deconstruct: theocracy, familial dynamics, and linguistics. Each of these is presented in such a way as to lay bare the ideological assumptions of the reader in a progressively thorough fashion. In the first, religious interpretation melds with the epistemology of governance to create an absurd society predicated on faulty religious interpretation that audiences are likely to want to distance themselves from. In the second, audiences are asked to question the ethics of familial dynamics in our divorce-ridden, Western, contemporary moment. In the third, audiences must deconstruct language itself, what many

would argue is the basis for our understanding of the world, in order to ponder the extent to which power structures mediate how we name the world.

Post-apocalyptic remains are responsible for this mediation in all three incarnations (material, ritual, and cultural knowledge) even more so than the other texts examined in this research. Each of the three plays a significant part in helping the inhabitants of post-apocalypse name and understand the world, and the textual interaction with the audience is developed to be much more intimate because of this. The novel truly is an ontological detective story, but for the reader rather than the characters, who are hopelessly steeped in their own ideology. The type of cognitive play dabbled with in other texts becomes an outright game in *The Book of Dave*, so much so that my mother, for whom reading is a serious hobby, confessed to having been completely exhausted after the first chapter. The reason of course, is that so much of our own world has been carried into the post-apocalyptic one in a distorted fashion, prompting the reader to connect the present to the future in unique ways. In the analysis section, I show how post-apocalyptic remains, mostly ritual and cultural knowledge, help develop this experience via the most important remain, The Book itself, which is clearly material. Overall, I argue that Self's requirement that audiences reflect on their own ideological values enhances the audience-text articulation so principally engrained in the genre, but that the inherency of destructiveness in this satirical post-apocalyptic narrative unnecessarily distances the audience from the satirical object, a process that I have referenced as being profoundly hateful.

Perhaps the most useful way to conceptualize the post-apocalyptic remain's significance in the satirical form is, appropriately, by envisioning careful destruction in one of its physical incarnations. I'll be using the violent metaphor of controlled demolition to connect the intentional placement of remains (explosives, of a sort) to the larger goal of

satire (to bring the structure down). For example, The Book of Dave itself is a material remains that obviously stands in for other religious texts. Placing it as he does, Self intends to demolish one of the load-bearing structural supports for religion at large: the official interpretation of religious texts, whose divinity can then be easily challenged as well. Perhaps this leads the structure of existential spirituality to falter as well but, regardless of the extent of consequence, the first destructive blow has been dealt by the material post-apocalyptic remain itself. A synopsis of the novel, even without a great deal of analysis, should begin to explicate how and where these explosive charges are placed.

The Book of Dave

Synopsis[2]

Dave Rudman is a cabbie who operates within the heart of contemporary London. His father, also a cabbie, influenced him to take up the trade, and was likewise a part of the troubling cabbie culture into which Dave integrates himself. The first chapters that address Dave introduce the audience to his life, complete with the vernacular of the cab drivers' preferences, his own bigoted inner thoughts drawn from this culture's well of hatred, and his life with what was supposed to be a one-night-stand and the (assumed) byproduct of said night. The picture we are given of Dave is not pleasant, and depicts the transformation of a somewhat depressed and unsure young London cabbie into an older, worn thin, psychotic raving lunatic.

Familial trouble coupled with substance abuse exacerbates Dave's generally strange demeanor. He and his wife, Michelle, were wed out of obligation to their son, Carl.[3] They are never happy, and openly abuse one another, both physically and emotionally.[4] As the years slowly sink into the drain of time, Dave becomes increasingly depressed, and his alcohol and drug usage steadily rises without concern for his or

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anyone's wellbeing. Doctors put him on handfuls of drugs, and he continues to slowly melt into his own madness. In the story, cab driving serves as a useful tool to demonstrate this. First, the culture is notoriously rough, allowing this sort of madness to ferment, undetected under the guise of "regular" hatred. Second, as a cabbie Dave is forced to encounter myriad types of people, as well as driving through different parts of the city that have different ethnic cultures. As he drives through neighborhoods filled with people that don't look like him, he constantly issues a spate of hateful thoughts. This variety of interaction allows a constant stream of craze to slide in and out of his thoughts, allowing the audience to track the extent of his descent from one moment to the next.

Michelle leaves him for her longtime lover, successfully garnering primary custody of Carl due to Dave's psychological history, not to mention the newly acquired knowledge that Carl is actually biologically related to her lover. For Dave, this is the tipping point. He pulls his old apricot-colored iMac from storage and proceeds to write a book for Carl—The Book of Dave.[5] In essence, the book contains a bigoted rant advising his son about such things as family and gender roles. Other things, like cabbing routes, the endeavors of his equally eccentric friends, and what is sacred versus what is to be loathed in the world, apparently also make their ways into the book. Having attended a sermon at his aunt's Mormon church, Dave evidently stores away the idea to engrave his book onto metal plates, similar to the supposed origins of *The Book of Mormon*. He actually manages to have the book engraved, at a great cost, and proceeds to bury it in the front lawn of his ex-wife's lover's house.

An important part of this psychotic period is the increasingly shaky relationship he has with his son. Dave's mental problems spurred a restraining order that demarcates a "forbidden zone"—a term usefully employed in the post-apocalyptic sections of the

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novel—an area radiused around Michelle's lover's house into which he cannot enter. He trek in and out of rationality has him often forgetting about his son completely, dwelling on the legitimacy of processes of custody changeover, and occasionally and fruitlessly wandering into the forbidden zone. As this continues, Carl reaches adolescence and seems to begin the process of pushing Dave out of his life.

Later in the contemporary arc, Dave meets a woman who begins turning his life around. Doctors realize that the medication he's been taking is causing his insanity and quickly rediagnose. He and the woman move out of the claustrophobia of the city, Dave quits cabbing, and he slowly regains his wits and his sanity. He doesn't remember having written the book, or at least believes it was a delusion. In a moment, though, it suddenly occurs to him that the book actually exists, and he frantically rushes to retrieve it. The family has unfortunately built a porch over the spot in which he has buried the book, and it isn't recovered until after the apocalypse. Dave writes another book for Carl, this time renouncing everything in the first, handwriting it in a notebook. This, of course, is not likely pass through The Event.

An undefined amount of time later,[6] a neo-medieval society recovering from apocalyptic floods discovers The Book of Dave and takes it as prophetic doctrine that defines their formal rules and influences the informality of everyday life. They begin structuring a society based on its teachings, and audiences notice that the most psychotic fragments of Dave Rudman's book have been the most profoundly influential to the developing ideology of this new society. Religiously, each member of society must be devoutly devoted to Dave, the creator, and a formal part of the religion of Dävinity (one is said to be Dävine). Each community has Drivers, which are priests of a sort, and always male, who ensure that the principles of Dave are being adhered to. Familially, mummies

and dads (these are the labels for the gender of adults) are forbidden to live with one another, even though many of them would be happier if allowed to do so. Children alternate between houses on a weekly basis (changeover) until they are old enough to live permanently with the dads. Adolescent women are placed into position of servitude, tending to the children and serving the needs of primarily the dads. Linguistically, the country of Ing (England) has two dialects that somewhat resemble either modern "proper" English or contemporary broad cockney. In addition to the phonetically written dialogue, which is exhausting in itself, this rising society has named the world based upon The Book of Dave—their only point of reference. Consequently, the sun is the foglamp, the sky is the windscreen, and the Milky Way is the dashboard. As aforementioned, the two primary genders are mummies and dads, the day is broken into tariffs (a cabbing delineation of pricing based on time of day), and the origin of the universe is the MadeinChina (one can just hear Dave prating about the fact that everything in the world is made in China). There are hundreds of other double entendres and clever associations, some of which will be analyzed momentarily, but suffice it for now to say that the amalgamation of this process of naming creates an extremely unique experience for audiences, one that asks them overtly to engage in a process of discovering how the world came to be conceived of the way that it is (which touches on wonder, the seeing of the world as if new).

The reader enters the novel approximately 500 years after The Book of Dave is discovered, which is more than enough time for ritual and cultural knowledge to have come into their own, cemented into the everyday understanding of the quasi-primitive society. The story revolves around the island of Ham (Michelle's new family lived in Hampstead) and its inhabitant Hamsters. Although extremely rural, Ham is nevertheless under the rule of the PCO (Public Carriage Office) and conforms to its theocratic doctrine. In line with the

interpretations of The Book of Dave, a number of misogynistic and generally oppressive

laws inform a curious conception of everyday rituals. There is an area of land on the island

called the Ferbiddun Zön, which is unsurprisingly forbidden to enter, in which the

discovery of The Book of Dave occurred. This area is what's left of the broken down

remains of London.

The narrative arc in these sections of the book is somewhat inconsequential as

compared to the larger message of the book, but nevertheless helps the audience

experience the extent of The Book's influence. Carl, a young Hamster, engages in a quest

that takes him all the way from the Ferbiddun Zön to the city of Nú Lundun in search of his

father, a supposed flyer (heretic). His father, Symon, was tortured and exiled long ago for

claiming that Dave spoke to him over the intercom (the divine word) about a second Book,

one that denounces the principles of the first.[7] Each of their trips through Nú Lundun

further explains the mysteries of this strange society, all the while asking the audience to

continue the process of connecting the obvious knowledge and rituals from the present

with the contorted ideological construction of the future. The narrative ends with Carl and

his companion, another exile, returning to Ham to face what will inevitably be the

overthrowing of Ham's individuality by the oppressively conformist PCO.

Organizationally, the next three sections are structured based upon their increasing

abilities to unhinge audiences' ideological foundations by placing post-apocalyptic

remains in ways that facilitate increased destruction. Each section can be thought of as an

increasingly crucial part of the foundation upon which the satirical object (contemporary

religion and its influences) rests, prompting the placing of post-apocalyptic remains in

progressively more foundational knowledge. In the first section, I address theocracy as a

form of governance. This includes governance of both the mind and body, both of which

are situated within communities. Especially for those readers familiar with Will Self's

other work, a challenge to such huge, intangible, and contestable structures such as religion

and government probably do little to unseat audiences' assumptions, if for no other reason

than the frequency with which popular culture challenges these bodies.[8] Second, I address

familial structure. Self asks readers to consider such things in the contemporary moment as

custody laws, fathers' rights, and the effects of such hostile custody disputes on the

children in question. These issues attempt to take readers a step further in unseating their

ideological foundations, and the scenario likely resonates more with some than others.

Finally, I address language itself, exploring the connections and associations that both

audiences and characters have to words and meaning. In this final examination, I examine

how Self asks us to suspend even our connection with language in an attempt to further

complicate the act of naming and interpreting the world. This final step reveals how

language itself, when framed adequately by texts, can be a post-apocalyptic remain.

Theocracy as Governance

In thinking about the kinds of theocratic regime Self depicts in *The Book of Dave*,

one can easily make connections with the ideologies of other post-apocalyptic texts by

examining similar systems of both religion and governance. Sometimes, they are collapsed

into one, the melding of church and state, an almost always oppressive entity that seeks to

control the lives of a redeveloped society. The word "governance" is used in the sense

described in Chapter 1, as an exertion of power over one group/individual by another,

formal or otherwise. Edgar Pangborn's *Davy* is a particularly similar example. In it, the

narrator confesses to writing the book whilst aboard a secret ship due to the illegality of

literacy—except for the literacy of priests. Pangborn's fictional world is something of a

caste system, a form of governance that ensures the stability of social standing for better or

worse, that is ruled by the church. The story depicts Davy, an adolescent male, wandering between cities by himself or within groups, constantly changing his identity in order to avoid living out his social standing as a laborer. Pangborn's warning about governance is clear here, every bit as much as in *The Book of Dave*. Many other texts address the issue of religion, and almost all texts address governance (even in the form of anarchy, such as in *The Road*), but the complications that arise when the two are integrated is worthy of attention as well. As well, because they are attached so thoroughly, I resist the temptation to examine each component individually, opting rather for an approach that demonstrates their coexistence.

Theocracy as Mind Control[9]

The ability of the religion of Dävinity (or, rather, the Drivers in the PCO that run it) to control the minds of the Dävine comes as a result of their stranglehold on the semantics of the doctrine housed in The Book of Dave. The PCO possesses the book, they decide how it must be interpreted, and they punish those who defy their interpretations. While this punishment often comes in the form of bodily coercion, the process nevertheless forces the citizens of Ing to believe the things the PCO desires them to, precluding the need for coercive action. By the time the reader enters this post-apocalyptic world, this coercion has mostly transformed into normalization. There are, as might be expected, dissenters like Symon, but they're summarily taken care of by the PCO.

This is nowhere more evident than on the island of Ham, where, despite the fact that The Book was discovered within mere miles of the village, it took almost 500 years for the dogma of the PCO to begin a formal politico-religious imposition on the mummies and dads of Ham. The influence of Dävinity may have been present, but not so much as a form of governance. Mostly due to geography, the delay in official theocratic control of the

island defines the extent to which the PCO relies on the suppression of small-community ideology (favoring conformism instead) to expand its control over the minds of the people of Ing. As a part of this monitoring, the PCO sent a Driver to live permanently on Ham to ensure conformity. As an example of this imposition, a council of dads meets periodically to discuss the managing of the community on Ham. Self writes:

> Although there were only twelve dads and granddads now, Fred [Carl's guardian] had told Carl that in his own youth twenty dads had deliberated, while a generation before that there has been more than thirty—all pitching in to argue and dispute the business of the community.
> In those days the Council had been a babel, but in the years since the Driver came among them the order had been imposed on the noisy little assembly. (Self, 2006, pp. 22-3)

Self goes on to describe the dejected little council, always cognizant of the watchful eyes of the Driver. More importantly, they only infrequently question whether or not they are also under the watchful eyes of Dave, whose image has been contorted by the Driver, an operative tool of the PCO. The Hamsters were always Dävist (practitioners of Dävinity), but enacted their religious existence in ways that worked for the community on Ham.

Furthermore, dissent is conceived of very differently after the PCO begins influencing the will of the community. In the past, Self relates, petty crimes had petty punishments, and absolution was frequently as simple as paying "a ticket of a few quid" (Self, 2006, p. 23). But with the entrance of the PCO, and as rules consequently became more rigid, the Council finds itself dealing with crimes a bit more rigidly as well:

> That the Council had to judge the most serious crime on the island in thirteen years weighed heavily upon all of them, not least because until thirteen years previously the concept—let alone the actuality—of flying had been unknown on Ham. (p. 23)

A "flyer," to Dave Rudman, meant a cab fare coming to or from the airport; specifically, the novel implies an association between one particular cab fare who hates flying and the man Dave's wife left him for. To the PCO, flying means heresy, in this case the entrance

into the Ferbiddun Zön, and flyers are heretics. But, as the above quote indicates, flying

was defined as a crime on the island only thirteen years prior, with the arrival of the PCO.

Official misinterpretation imposes itself on the islanders formally only when sedition

becomes a possibility (which is to say, when there is official governance to subvert).

The commentary on religious interpretation and ideological development in this

complex relationship between events demonstrates the trouble with carrying

post-apocalyptic remains' meanings from the present to the future. Presumably, the section

of The Book of Dave that details flyers is fairly vague, perhaps recounting the negative

reaction to "a flyer" or "flying" in general. Consequently, the inhabitants of Ham interpret

nothing from it in the early stages of their own religious devotion to The Book, stemming

of course from their own readings of the text. For hundreds of years they operate with this

interpretation. But the power of the formal entity of governance, the PCO, allows them to

monopolize the semantic interpretation of The Book, imposing meaning where meaning

was previously lacking. Thus, as the influence of the structure of governance

systematically infiltrates the lives of the Hamsters, their consciousnesses must change to

conform to the more acceptable (and more violently coercive) vision of Dävinity

prescribed to them while simultaneously being disallowed to even begin the process of

subversion. Where meaning is foggy, this society relies on the authority of the theocratic

regime, ironically distancing themselves from the very text that guides their existence.

Theocracy as Body Control

The coercion that ritualistically forces ideological conformity plays an important

role in spreading and perpetuating religious doctrine, but ritualistic control of individuals'

actions appears somewhat more oppressive because it is often done contrary to the will of

those individuals. Whereas ideologies are purposefully shifted to metamorphose into

something more usefully exploited by the religious state (and, therefore, which may not be detected by the individual), coercion of one's body often comes despite resistance. For instance, the separatist familial structure of Dävinity, discussed further momentarily, is imposed against the true wishes of many Hamsters. As well, the Hamsters breed pre-apocalyptic, genetically-spliced creatures called motos, which are something of a cross between a massive pig and a child. The motos are friends to the children, produce oil and meat for myriad purposes, and clear weedy underbrush for farming. In short, the motos are crucial to the existence of the Hamsters. The PCO, however, claims them to be toyist ("fake, unreal, or taboo" [Self, 2006, p. 495]) and motion to have them all slaughtered. The cultural knowledge of the audience interestingly enough sides with the PCO for once, considering that the bioengineered creatures are, strictly speaking, toyist: they are unnatural, synthetic offspring from a tampered-with bit of nature. Additionally, the anointing of infants with moto-oil is causing enormously high infant death rates, a sign that the Hamsters' cultural knowledge is somewhat failing them. Nevertheless, audiences may very well recognize that some of the rituals we engage in today are killing us by the tens of millions (driving, smoking, eating), but resistance to governmental intervention in these arenas might indicate that coercion, even under the guise of founded paternalism, is heartbreakingly oppressive. The final scene of the novel depicts the Hamsters watching helplessly as representatives of the PCO slaughter the motos one-by-one, stripping the act of its ritualistic significance while stripping the Hamsters of their economic and communal livelihood. There are other examples of body control, whether through knowledge or ritual, within the text, but the most profoundly familiar to audiences is likely the nature of the penal system in Nú Lundun.

This prison, in which Symon is forced to spend years of his life as a flyer, is a loathsome structure prone to torturous punishments. For flying, Symon is eventually spun on the big steering Wheel, has his tongue cut out, and is exiled to a remote island somewhere near Ham. Post-apocalyptic remains take their ritual form here, satirically embracing a society in which punishment is implemented in a formal, governed way against the bodies of the heretical. While perhaps not identical to the structure of prisons audiences in the West know of today, it nevertheless reinforces the tradition of a coercive apparatus used to make prisoners' bodies both docile and useful (see Foucault, 1977, p. 231). In this case, Symon is docile as a speechless, exiled freak and useful as an example of potential consequences for opposing formal governance and religious interpretation. The purpose and ritual of the prison serves an identical purpose in Self's post-apocalypse as it does in audiences' minds. In opposition to this is the rowdy but just Council of the Hamsters—before the PCO intervened, that is. While in some ways less structured, these councils are framed as mostly effective and overwhelmingly representative of communal standards. Self-governance, the localized negotiation of punishment for the violation of community norms, is starkly contrasted to the brutality of the PCO as a means to name governmental coercion for what it is or, for us, as a means for satirically devaluing post-apocalyptic remains as cultural knowledge and ritual.

Another Organization of Hate

So what is it that makes post-apocalyptic government and religion so easy to satirize, and what makes audiences so easily absorbed by the overtness of the critique against each? Furthermore, why don't these critiques ask for as much self-reflection (such pervasive themes like government and religion *should* by most accounts) as other critiques of issues like family and linguistic semantics? No doubt this comes as a result of the

organization of hate. In Chapter 2, I discussed how *WALL•E* structures representation of

the aftermath of The Event so as to direct audiences' hatred towards corporatism at large,

and corporations in specific. The organization of hate around the intangible absolves the

humans (men) that develop these apparatuses of accountability.

In *The Book of Dave*, a similar tactic is employed to direct hate towards institutions

of organized religion as theocratic governing entities. Dävinity, presented as a

post-apocalyptic remain made of cultural knowledge and ritual, is created to reflect

organized religion in a form many will recognize. While the most profoundly influential

post-apocalyptic remain in *The Book of Dave* is The Book itself, the society sprouted from

its pages nevertheless takes a somewhat familiar form, with similar rituals and knowledge.

Organized religion is also conceived of as the intangible form of the PCO, an entity without

identity. Like organizing our own hate around "the state" or "the church," it becomes an

easy thing for audiences to conceptualize their hatred for this oppressive force that we

cannot exactly pin to the bulletin board.

As the process of sinking into Self's world gradually continues, and as audience

members may begin to ground themselves in his overt critique on religion, the

deconstruction process continues as the critique on familial structure solidifies.

All in the Family

Unlike the critique of theocracy, Self's reflections on the nature of familial

structure and gender roles is less hateful and, predictably, more self-reflexive. Ahmed

(2004) continually reminds us that the hated, the abject, and/or the disgusting all require

that we distance ourselves from their presence. In essence, she ensures that we understand

the extent to which even one of our perceived "basest" emotions, hate, is organized around

Othering the hated and is therefore wrapped up in its own politics. When we Other, we fail

to understand or even try. Therefore, the examination of familial structure is allowed

further "into" our consciousness because it is not organized around the principles of hatred,

it does not distance us as much from what we are examining. Part of the reason for this is

that, unlike the intangibility of the PCO, familial structures are intimately associated with

living, breathing human beings. We can see into their eyes, so to speak, and we are

probably more likely to try to understand their motives.

The Breakup

Considering that Dave Rudman's world is steeped in custodial struggle as well as

general familial struggle, it's unsurprising that the dominant post-apocalyptic remains

projected into this recovering society are those rituals and pieces of cultural knowledge that

define how the family operates and, thus, the gender roles associated with this operation.

Like the last section detailed, Ham is a unique case study in this world because the more

communal tendencies of the Hamsters' traditional practice of Dävinity remain harbored

behind the façade that appeases the Driver's orthodoxy. Therefore, action and ideology

have not been melded quite as significantly and the communities the reader comes on the

journey to Nú Lundun, which appear more thoroughly and unconsciously integrated into

the PCO's theocratic laws as we near the city. The minds of the Hamsters betray their

bodily obligations to the Driver and the PCO.

Their bodies are required to adhere to the principles of the Breakup, defined in the

novel's dictionary as "the time in the distant past when the promulgation of Dävinity led to

the separation of the sexes" (Self, 2006, p. 481). Along with the perhaps secondary

interpretation of the definition (an implied critique on the tendency of divine writ to

attempt to explain nature and biology), the basic definition of the term explains much. The

"promulgation" could only have come from the theocratic governing body—the

PCO—and the separation of the sexes refers to the requirement that mummies and dads live apart, indeed without contact at all. Except when it's time to breed, the Breakup demands that mummies and dads have no emotional or physical interaction at all, an obvious leftover ritual from the estrangement Dave endured throughout both his marriage to and divorce from Michelle.

According to the Breakup, the children are expected to bridge this emotional gap by spending Wednesday through Sunday with mummies and the other half of the week with the dads (in between these half-weeks is the Changeover, a symbolically significant time for contemporary Dave Rudman), but there is little indication that they ever could manage to negotiate the detriments of patriarchal separatism. The girls become opares (au pairs) at puberty, requiring them to tend to the housework, the children, and the sexual demands of the dads. Boys simply grow into their future roles as patriarchs, ending contact with the mummies completely at age seven, the age of Dave's son Carl when Michelle gained permanent custody. As Theis (2009) notes, "[o]nly time with the motos helps to preserve a communication link between them [the children] and their mothers" (p. 147). As a result, many of the children contemplate on the idea of what Self calls their "mummyself," their emotional, vulnerable, nurturing, intuitive cores. Carl (from Ham) often ventures inside his mummyself in order to reflect, because it's the only discursive space in which he can question what is supposed to be self-evidently righteous. He knows there is no safe space outside of his intrapersonal reflections within which he could voice his apprehensions about the ideologies he's supposed to believe and the actions he's supposed to perform. Despite this, however, the children and adults both are supposed to reject the propaganda of the mummyself in favor of rational orthodoxy.

But on the island of Ham, where distance has tempered the suffocating effects of the PCO, some contact remains. Self relates an exchange between Carl who, at twelve, is long past contact with his mother:

> Carl was too young to take part in this work [the slaughter of a moto]; nevertheless he loitered near by and even risked smiling at his mum, Caff. She smiled back while the others chose not to notice this exchange.
> For twelve long years the Driver had sought to snuff out such intercourse between the sexes; however there were some of the Hamsters' rituals that he could neither proscribe nor modify. (Self, 2006, p. 16)

Even though the simplest expressions of affection, i.e., a smile, are a violation of the principles of the Breakup, coed congeniality is somewhat tolerated as a result of the longstanding communal rituals that rooted long before the PCO decided what implications the Breakup should have, how far-reaching its doctrine should be, and which rituals are legitimate.

Daddytime and Mummyselves

This kind of familial structure is intentionally patriarchal. Whereas Cormac McCarthy simply fails to understand the problems with positing women as incapable, Will Self presents the image of life according to the Breakup to intentionally call attention to the limitations of patriarchy. The satirical quality relies on the text's careful awareness of these issues, as well as a careful placement of post-apocalyptic remains. Some of these items, like the cultural knowledge that underpins the misogyny of the dads, audiences are likely to reject as easily as they can distance themselves from theocracy. Others, however, are likely to push some readers a bit more outside of their comfort zone.

Particularly, these familial requirements strangely resemble families in which custody has become leverage, and parental visitation is an obligatory practice that primarily demonstrates principle. Children of ugly divorces know the extent to which

parents can, and often do, place them in the middle of things—forcing them to be messengers, demanding allegiance, and openly debasing the other parent. In an ironic reversal, Self shows us a world in which mummies and dads actually do want to interact with one another, but can't. He has placed a common ritual in an uncomfortably out-of-place post-apocalyptic circumstance. The satirical object here is divorce in general and the practice of scratching and clawing for custody (and the ensuing trauma to the kids and parents involved) in particular, and the mangled way it survives the apocalypse implicates us in ways that satisfy the satirical form.

Self also causes us to seriously consider the nature of custody, challenging gendered norms while disallowing audiences to actually want Dave to gain custody or even visitation rights. In the contemporary arc, one of Dave's friends is active in an (incidentally radical and violent) activist group that advocates for fathers' rights. Dave never buys into the movement, but the audience is nevertheless aware of its existence throughout the narrative. The actions of Dave as well as the radical group don't exactly give us the sense that these fathers are capable of taking care of themselves, let alone their children. Why, then, would custody be accordingly granted to these degenerate dads? Later in the story, as Dave recovers, he becomes a sort of adopted parent to an autistic child, proving that he is, in fact capable given appropriate circumstances (which I think is true for most of us). The post-apocalyptic arc, on the other hand, depicts a completely "fair" society in which dads and mummies get equal amount of time (daddytime or mummytime) with the children. But the irony of the situation is that the dads are patriarchally and oppressively trained to degrade and exploit both mummies and opares, and the group doesn't even keep track of who parented who. The question of motherhood or fatherhood becomes fairly irrelevant as children anonymously shuffle in a group from one side of the village to another. Issues like

custody and gender roles have all been gathered up from the contemporary moment, mashed into a complex ball, and thrown hundreds of years into the future. It is only through knowledge and ritual, as well understanding of how the prototypical satiric form operates, that audiences are able to recognize them as they exist.

Also underlying the question of the structure of families in the text is a somewhat progressive argument about gender roles with respect to emotion. The existence of a mummyself requires a barrier to the expression of emotion, something that very obviously exists in Self's post-apocalypse. In fact, the world is so patriarchal that no one is allowed to express emotion in the text—at least in the contemporary moment it is only the men that are disallowed. Nevertheless, the term "mummyself" implies that emotion is still associated with the feminine, a point that will be expanded in the next section. Men, especially, are required to live on the "daddy side" of things, retreating only secretly into their mummyselves. Theis (2009) rightly points out that those characters in both narrative arcs who seem to be in touch with their mummyselves are seemingly immune to Self's criticism; in short, they are almost never the satirical object. Situating them in such close proximity to the reader discourages hate to develop, asking audiences to consider what is being valued in both the present and in post-apocalypse. We are left with the feeling that being in touch with our mummyselves is a good thing, and indeed Publishers Weekly determines that young Carl's quest takes him to create "a less cruel world that responds to the 'mummyself' within."

Self uses what audiences in the West may expect out of the cultural knowledge of family, as well as the rituals with which families are expected to comply, in order to implicate the satirical object of divorce as it relates specifically to gendered familial norms. Audiences know about the patriarchy of the heteronormative modern family and, even if

unreflective about the truly oppressive shape it takes today, *The Book of Dave* exaggerates its existence by placing well-known rituals in odd situations. Likewise, audiences almost assuredly absorb the social critique of divorce practices and the negative effects of custodial negotiation on children and parents alike. For a reader to comprehend, let alone identify, that social critique requires that post-apocalyptic remains (mostly in the form of ritual, influenced in part by cultural knowledge) to be placed strategically. Self creates a world in which certain objects of study are carefully guarded until their unveiling, at which time the direct influence of the contemporary moment on post-apocalyptic society can be, if not clearly seen, at least deciphered. Families provide an intimate venue for this process to unfold, taking audiences a step closer towards something they likely hold dear. The final step, I argue, is to call into question our processes of the very naming of our world.

Mokni and its Articulation

Language is decidedly the most unique aspect of *The Book of Dave*. Much like the bizarre vernacular of its precursor, Russel Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980), Self creates his own phonetic version of contemporary broad cockney. Alongside the aforementioned renaming of the world, the dialogue in the post-apocalyptic narrative arc is often written phonetically, forcing the audience to sound out each phrase either aloud or in one's head: "C eer, Sal, he said beckoning her closer, iss an éd, C ve eer, an vose lyns muss B . . . Eye dunno . . . sowns aw sumffing . . . mebë" (Self, 2006, p. 4). The text isn't nearly as exhausting as *Riddley Walker*, however, which is written as a similarly strange linguistic exercise in its entirety. In this section, I examine the Dävists' language in *The Book of Dave* as it relates to audience-text articulation. That is followed by a discussion about the ideological implications of Self's semantic deliberateness, a deliberateness which has thus far significantly informed his usage of post-apocalyptic remains to satisfy the satirical

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form. The exercise of language creation, following the principles of satire, attempts to tear down audiences' belief in the inherency of meaning within language, and tries to uncover the articulation between words and ideologies. Because language is one of the primary forms of the symbolic mediation of meaning, Self digs even a level deeper in his goals of unseating the reader's ideological worldview by explicating the arbitrariness of perhaps the most pervasive form of cultural knowledge.

The ontological detective story that necessarily ensues as a result of such linguistic exercises creates a sense of amusement, not unlike that experienced in *WALL•E*. The dictionary provided in the back of the novel is absolutely crucial to working one's way through the first few chapters but, within a surprisingly short period of time, it falls out of usage almost entirely. From the first few pages, we are introduced to the foglamp (the sun), the screen (the sky), tariffs (demarcations within the day), Daveworks (bits of plastic),[10] and the phoneticism of both dialogue and the formal naming of people and places. As the reader constantly flips from page 2 to page 492, the feeling of Self's world slowly begins to sink in and, before long, we are tempted to call the moon in our own world the "headlight." This gradual process both reveals the arbitrariness of words and asks the reader to engage in the ontological detective story, for it becomes obvious early on that the world has not been renamed in a random fashion. Audiences have cultural knowledge that they can recognize as being distorted by the process of interpreting The Book, and the reinterpretation of that decipherment becomes a form of cognitive play. Amusement, then, comes in the form of this cognitive play that situates the audience in a position superior to the characters, showing them the justifications for both ontologies, as well as the offspring of those ontologies. As in *WALL•E*, amusement comes from a place of privilege, though perhaps not as problematically so. In the same way that audiences might chuckle when

WALL•E uses the lid of a galvanized trashcan as a derby hat, they're likely to find amusement in the idea of calling one's soul a fare, a house a gaff, a dad who owns a fair amount of land a Lawyer, and his lawyerly palace a fuckoffgaff.

Because of the obvious commentary on both the ambiguity and the arbitrariness of language, the examination of linguistics is the first layer of the critique of language. Perhaps more importantly to the ideological focus of this research, however, is the way in which semantics informs the articulations between words and other words, and words and power relations. While it might be fun to think of things universally encountered by everyone (the sun, the sky, water, etc.) as having new names that all connect in ironic and comical ways, the association of some Dävist words with ideological constructions and cultural knowledge pulled from the present may slip past audiences. Self, no doubt, intended these articulations of language and meaning intentionally. Dave exists as a bigot and a misogynist during his psychotic period, and semantic articulation therefore bleeds through in these rantings. For instance, a "boiler" is a "grandmother, or any woman past childbearing age" (Self, 2006, p. 480). "Bint" is a derogatory term for a woman (this word has apparently survived the apocalypse relatively untouched). To call someone "chellish" is derived from the name Michelle, and is to say that they're "evil, bad, deceiving, wanton, licentious, [or] venal" (p. 482). The "mummyself," as mentioned in the previous section, is the place of nurturing and intuition, drawing on the cultural misconception that the feminine is inherently more nurturing, more sensitive. As a result, the term draws first on the patriarchal construction of the feminine as being inherently emotional and then one that affirms it to be rationally vapid. Constructing the feminine in such a way, we know, results in a perceived justification for disallowing intellectual involvement in community decision-making, creates the expectation that women either stay at home or work two shifts

(one professional and one domestic), and generally assures that women's rational and intellectual competence is always justifiably questioned. Secondly, articulating the term in such a fashion ensures the discursive positioning of reason (as defined by Dave and the PCO, of course) as intrinsically superior to intuition. Although the Hamster children might know that they can always descend, even momentarily, into their mummyselves during times of inner turmoil, they also comprehend that this is not something done openly. It would not be appreciated. Words like "mummyself" and "boiler" are, like more everyday words, equally misinterpreted by Dävists, but carry much more baggage than does calling spring water "evian." The terms come out of Dave's misogyny as cultural knowledge in order to discursively regulate and degrade women.

Physically, women are also regulated through semantic articulation. Early in the novel, Dave's fare relates his opinion of the degrading way Muslim women are treated. Dave's inner monologue responds automatically:

> *So far as I'm concerned the way they treat their women is the best thing going for those fuckers . . . keep those bints in line, I say . . . you take my ex, she's only gone and slapped a fucking restraining order on me, now that'd never 'appen in Kabul, I'd have 'er trussed up in one of them black cloaky things before she could say CSA . . . 'Coz they should go a bit bloody further—take the kids offa them—no kids, no bloody power over us.* (Self, 2006, p. 30, emphasis in original)

This short but violently outrageous rant contains a wealth of ramifications for the Dävist population. It begins by laying the foundation for oppressing women verbally by explicating a specifically derogatory term as well as by treating women as generally contemptable. Broader are its societal ramifications, causing women in the Dävist community to wear cloakyfings, confiscating their children at age seven, and ensuring that they will never possess any power, so says the Word of Dave. The violence of his attitudes, even though he is only occasionally physically violent, causes Dave's influence to extend

to myriad acts of violence at the hands of the PCO. To this end, the amusement with the Dävist ontology becomes troubling.

In other ways, however, words are stripped completely of their former meaning.[11] For instance, the word "queer" is defined as a "childless man" (Self, 2006, p. 493). The Dävist society seems to care little for the sexual orientation of its constituents, for dads of any sexuality may be called queer without much stigma at all. Someone identifying as homosexual (in our vernacular) simply does not procreate, and is therefore relegated to other societal functions. A "Hack" is someone (a dad) who collects rent, debts, and generally manages land for an aristocrat. In contemporary times, a hack can be an amateur or a taxi driver. Far from the status of a lowly tradesperson, the term reverses itself to connote someone who actually has a reasonable amount of power, shedding itself of negative articulations in the reversal and allowing pawn to rise farther towards the king. Each of these demonstrates the how easily meanings can be modified: the term "Hack" loses its negative associations for readers early on in the novel, a demonstration of the relative ease of the reversal, given the appropriate, immersive circumstances.

What can clearly be seen from this linguistic gymnastics routine is the attempt to challenge audiences' grounding in what they might see as the inherency of meaning (or the banality of it, in the case of derogation) in language while simultaneously asking them to connect the dots. Because the novel is so self-aware, readers may get the sense that the novel is written for them rather than for the narrative.

This third satirical theme, language, underwrites Self's satiation of the satirical form by his, once again, very careful and contrived placement of linguistic post-apocalyptic remains, which can easily fall into the "cultural knowledge" category. Even while engaged in a bit of amusing cognitive play (the renaming of the physical world

based on parts of a taxicab), Self is priming the reader for the more scathing deconstruction of words and their articulations with and within structures of power and oppression. These "fun" terms can be thought of as bait, in a way: audiences can see clearly the reasons for which one might interpret the dashboard as a reference to the Milky Way, or why the headlight is thought to be the moon. Once this connection is made, it begs the reader to wonder how everything came to be named the way it is. Why chellish? What exactly is a mummyself? If the deliberateness is self-reflexively overt, then everything seems to be intentional. And while the post-apocalyptic cultural knowledge surrounding these linguistic remains is in question, the ritualism with which the terms are used to connote power structures may also then be called into question. If the purposes and origins of "chellish" can be sought out (the cultural knowledge housed within the material remain, The Book of Dave), why not extend this to the purposes and origins of our own derogation "bitch?" Language, in particular, is a fantastic example of how satire, in its attempt at deconstructing, can set those dynamite charges in the places that bear the most weight, and thus that will come crashing down the hardest.

The Discourse of *The Book of Dave*

Satire may be limited in the sense that it fails to do anything other than destroy, but there's something to be said, at least in the satirical post-apocalypse, for the deliberateness with which it places post-apocalyptic remains. Many of the texts examined thus far, both *WALL•E* and *The Road* in great detail and many others in passing, have envisioned post-apocalypse in terms of realism: "This is probably what would happen if such-and-such a post-apocalyptic event destroyed this many of the world's magnificent people and/or scorched its magnificent surface." This, as the second and third chapters demonstrated, is ultimately their shortcoming; Jameson and Derrida remind us that we can

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no more successfully envision a realistic sense of the future, especially one in which the context is deliberately distorted, than we could prevent it from happening. Thus, *The Road* must rely on hypermasculine principles of love and gendered violence, the negotiation of a world in which the cultural knowledge and ritualistic self-sacrifice before The Event is of little consequence to life after, and a conception of survival itself as constructed in such a way to reaffirm the weaknesses of the feminine alongside the unnecessary stoicism of the masculine. As well, *WALL•E* is forced to rely on the everyday legitimation of corporatist consumerism, normative configurations of heteronormative romantic love, and the ethnocentrism so blatantly a staple of Disney products. The attempt to convey realism, it seems, must face the complications inherent in the process of constructing worlds.

The Book of Dave is not backed into such a tight corner (which is not to say it isn't complicated) simply due to the fact that it seeks to construct nothing. I have examined three principal deconstructions: Religious governance, the family, and language. Self is a complex writer, and there are other themes that could have been extracted from the text, not least of which is the psychogeographic undertone that his work, always indebted to his native London, takes on.[12] Dävists' chants consist of reciting the runs and points of cabbing, The Knowledge of the city (a necessary understanding of the complexities of moving through the metropolis) having been also transcribed in The Book of Dave.

More importantly, the novel isn't backed into such a tight corner because Self is picking up post-apocalyptic remains and carefully and deliberately depositing them into the post-apocalyptic world. As a result, he does a lot of the legwork for the poststructuralist by laughing heartily at his own destructive creation. The overt acknowledgement that the narrative is not only indebted to the present, but also relies almost completely on its principles to discover and define its ontology, while it averts the criticism of an ideological

critique. One may challenge the productivity of satire at large, but the inability to take the text seriously disallows genuine accusation: the text is intentionally steeped in warped ideology!

Therefore, situating the text in a discursive formation is a fairly simple matter. Satire, self-reflexively emerging from the discontent of the present moment, carefully sets itself down inside its own context, never claiming to make any prophetic claims to realism. As a journalistic addendum to the novel, Self writes that his novels usually come from the collapsing of two ideas. By combining ecological disaster with the notion of revealed religion, which Self (2007) perceives as "a necessary function of the state formation," he places the text inside the contemporary in a very controlled and calculated way. Self therefore laughs at the loss of the archive, opting to demonstrate its absurdity by destroying it through satire. He may seem to construct an alternative, but it's clearly not done with the pen of realism.

Each of these chapters of analysis has accomplished the examination of a very different text. All three technically fit into the framework for post-apocalyptic narrative, and all three rely as heavily on post-apocalyptic remains as the other texts in the genre. Some are clearly more ideologically problematic than others, but all rely on the discursive formations that pervade today. Luckily for us, as pervasive as patriarchy can be in the realm of popular culture, other discursive formations exist. The worldview that feminism offers, for instance, is at least influential to the genre in the form of a few progressive writers; for where there is patriarchal representation, there is resistance to it. The example that I have consistently given, for instance, is *A Gift Upon the Shore*. In addition to reiterating this example of how a seemingly patriarchal genre *can* operate progressively, the final chapter will also place each of the texts examined within what I have conceived of

as a poststructuralist post-apocalypse in an attempt at partially circumscribing the

ideological scope of theorizing The End of the world.

Chapter 4 Notes

[1]The sleeve for the hardcover edition of *The Book of Dave* is littered with book review quotes that reaffirm both the satirical quality of the novel and the satirical tendencies of Will Self in general.

[2]The novel alternates between the contemporary and post-apocalyptic eras, even bouncing nonlinearly within each. For reasons of clarity, I will summarize in a linear fashion.

[3]Carl later turns out to have been borne of another man, one who Michelle has a longstanding affair with. This detail isn't crucial to my summary, though, because Dave raises Carl as his own, establishing the emotional connection that is necessary for the events to come.

[4]It is important to note that Dave inflicts the majority, but not all, of the physical abuse.

[5]For purposes of clarity, I italicize Will Self's novel *The Book of Dave* and keep Dave Rudman's fictional ravings unitalicized, as The Book of Dave.

[6]The book sleeve says 500 years, other sources speculated up to thousands. The only information the reader is given is that the story takes place roughly 500 years after the book was found. The principles of the story remain intact, however, despite the specific number of years.

[7]This piece of the story has been, I think, wrongly interpreted by Theis (2009). Symon's goal was always to challenge the rule of the PCO by starting a revolution. There is never any finality as to whether Symon actually found the book, causing the reader to question what might have happened. One of three things might have happened: 1) Symon actually did find the book, which is entirely improbable, 2) Symon made the story up to garner support for his revolution, not knowing that there actually was a second book that refuted the principles of the first, or 3) Symon never found a book, but Dave actually did speak to him over the intercom in order to inform him of the second book. Each of these has profoundly different implications for the nature of spirituality and governance in Self's world, which is probably why Self left the issue up for interpretation.

[8]It could also be argued that simply reading the book sleeve would filter the likely reader of *The Book of Dave*. In the hardcover edition I use here, the publisher's comments include the following: "Equal parts dystopian fantasy, religious allegory, detective story, and tribute to the sometimes fraught relations between fathers and sons, *The Book of Dave* is a profound meditation upon the nature of religion and a caustic satire of contemporary life." Such a description is likely to turn certain audiences away from the outset.

[9]I avoid addressing linguistics and semantics here, even though they clearly represent a form of ideological governance. Their importance to the novel is profound enough to merit a dedicated section of analysis, found later in the chapter.

[10]Daveworks are, besides The Book and the bricks scavenged from the decaying structures, the only material post-apocalyptic remains of any consequence. They are usually pieces of plastic washed up on the shore, and their origin is thought to be the MadeinChina (creation). Citizens wear them around their necks like charms, and it's important to ensure that they're real, not toyist.

[11]While audiences might have predisposed attitudes towards certain words, Self seems to want to disarticulate these attitudes with the words themselves.

[12]For his specific philosophy of psychogeography and psychogeographic influences, see Self & Steadman (2007; 2010).

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Why It's Not The End of the World

There will be no commitment and no confessions
And no little secrets to keep
No little children or houses with roses
Just the end of the world and me
'Cause all has been gone and all has been done
And there's nothing left for us to say
But we could be together as they blow it all away
And we can share in every moment as it breaks
. . .
If your intentions are pure
I'm seeking a friend for the end of the world   -Chris Cornell (1999)

A Progressive Post-Apocalypse

Post-apocalyptic remains, I have shown, are the linchpin of the post-apocalyptic

text, constituting these narratives within the genre while allowing for various processes to

occur within and between texts and audiences. Without them, these stories would likely fail

to resemble what we know of the genre; if everything is destroyed, there is no "post." But

we know also that these are never randomly littered across the post-apocalyptic landscape.

If authors operate under the guise of amusement, they will likely draw from the wellspring

of the normative experiences of dominant groups in order to win that laugh. If authors hope

for realism, what the world "really would" look like in a devastated Western nation, their

approach to realism is likewise mediated by normalized perceptions of gendered and raced

behavior. And even if authors are aware of the power of post-apocalyptic remains to inflict

their own kind of mass destruction, they are still operationalized for strategically

destructive (though humorous) ends more often than not.

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What these three disparate uses of post-apocalyptic remains explicate is that remains are inherently value-neutral. They may be somewhat loosely categorized into material, ritual, and knowledge-based incarnations, but the discursive implications of each categorized post-apocalyptic remain depends entirely on the ideologies undergirding its reemergence. *WALL•E* might depict a lighter purely for amusement, the man and boy in *The Road* might use it to survive another night in an evil, hypermasculine world, and the children on the island of Ham in *The Book of Dave* could pick it up on the shore, pressure one another into believing it chellish and toyist, and skip it over the surface of the water back into the ocean. The lighter is a complicated symbol in our own culture, signifying one thing at a rock concert, another in an elementary school, and yet another on a backpacking trip; it is no surprise that these complications can move with the item into post-apocalypse based upon the context. The same is true for knowledge and ritual. Saying grace to a divine presence that one is not sure whether or not to believe in draws on specific cultural values; likewise, the symbolism with which the concept of morality and "the good guys" is dispatched in post-apocalypse underlies the symbolism with which it is dispatched today. The fluidity with which the remains can slip in and out of post-apocalypse as the consumption of texts commences allows for representation to construct itself in various ways, most often reflecting the dominant themes of their moment of creation. As the analysis has shown, many artifacts of contemporary popular culture do very little to challenge dominant discursive formations.

But if post-apocalyptic remains are value-neutral, then we must be able to construct these worlds inside our feminist, and thus somewhat less troubling, discursive formations. The satirical post-apocalypse might be thought of as a step in the right direction, but its limitations preclude me from truly considering it progressive. For one, as reiterated

throughout, satire only destroys. As well, in a genre so reliant on audience foreknowledge, Self's world is perhaps too craftily constructed; we might question whether audience members are likely to decipher the complexities of his critique. Therefore, one place to start might be Wren's novel *A Gift Upon the Shore*, referenced periodically throughout this thesis. In it, she challenges consumption patterns by valuing sustainable living practices. She challenges heteronormative romantic conceptions of love by valuing the friendship between two women above the socially expected romanticism of love. She depicts the two women as strong *and* sensitive, allows a discursive space for the males in the story to be sensitive as well, and calls into question myriad assumptions about gender performance. She even complicates her own critique of fundamentalist religiosity by forcing audiences to care about its stewards in spite of their presentation of oppressive naïveté. The text concerns itself more with construction than deconstruction, but is every bit as self-aware as *The Book of Dave* (albeit in a different way), playing with narration styles and timelines. I consider it an exemplar of the ways in which post-apocalyptic remains can, and do, represent progressive ideologies, critique social conditions, and circulate emotion in ways that challenge popular convention and, therefore, popular dominant ideologies.

Despite their seeming fluidity, I hold that post-apocalyptic remains in some ways constitute the genre itself, allowing for the surfaces of these narratives' emergence to engender particular ways of discovering post-apocalyptic worlds. These surfaces allow for particular discourses to emerge and be legitimated, rearticulating themselves in a continuous cycle of constitution and influence. As Wren reaffirms, these cycles of troubling representation *can* be broken, and post-apocalyptic remains *can* be used in myriad ways that implicate more egalitarian principles and that don't rely solely on patriarchal standards for economy, gender, love, language, and religion. As problematic as

they can be, it's crucial to consider them during the analysis of post-apocalyptic narrative, for post-apocalypse, as a piece of a fabulously textual mode of thinking, is necessarily constituted by what is left behind or overtly lost, and therefore what is valued.

Research Questions Revisited

I find it useful at this point to return to the questions posed at the outset of this study. Parsing and piecing together each chapter of analysis explicates the articulation of these texts within a larger generic framework, as well as within the theoretical tradition on which I have relied so heavily.

What do post-apocalyptic remains inform us about the hegemonic principles expounded in post-apocalyptic popular culture that explicate what we value? Some of the most obvious answers to this question present themselves in the material form of post-apocalyptic remains: we are obviously supposed to value guns, food, shoes, popular cultural artifacts, religious texts, etc. The material remains in *WALL•E* especially demonstrate the extent to which certain physical items are "supposed to" make it into post-apocalypse, either for survival or for entertainment.

But these material items consistently point to abstractions of thought and action, which often end up being more important than the items themselves. Cultural knowledge and ritual, especially in texts that occur a long time after The Event, more subtly weave their way into the fabric of post-apocalypse either by troubling the legitimacy of these conventions or reaffirming them. When the boy says grace in the bomb shelter, the ritual takes on a special meaning because he is negotiating the legitimacy of both rituals and cultural knowledge (in this case, the usefulness of religious spirituality). Will Self openly challenges these conventions by deliberately warping ritual and cultural knowledge and placing them at ideological linchpins in an act of satirical destruction. But *WALL•E*

invisibly reaffirms the principles of heteronormative romantic love by ritualistically reenacting the courtship ritual and playing out the marriage plot. And, in *The Road*, the man's hypermasculine stoicism sets the stage for a son who must live in a brutally conceived world, to believe and perform the duties assigned to the masculine presence so at home in this world.

In short, post-apocalyptic remains at any level represent what cultures value, cathartically cleansing the extraneous and sifting out the solids, the things worth keeping. While we can be aware of this process, like *The Book of Dave* is, constructions of post-apocalypse most often rely heavily on sifted principle and ignore the more fluid ideologies that almost always pass through the placer undetected.

How is each text, through its use of post-apocalyptic remains and other conventions, demonstrating its unfaltering reliance on contemporary discursive formations and articulations of thought? A major goal in this study is to further the idea that post-apocalyptic narrative is situated historically. In the past, sociopolitical conditions have done much to constitute the conventions of post-apocalyptic narrative, from the imminent dangers of nuclear weaponry to the potential mutations that could result after the blast. In the present, sociopolitical conditions do similar constitutive work, but it can be less visible either because we lack sufficient temporal distance and/or because the child has cried wolf for nearly seventy years. Since the mid-1940s we have been constantly reminded of our own technological abilities to remove ourselves violently from the face of the Earth. In addition, perhaps later we'll see contemporary post-apocalyptic rhetoric as obviously situated in certain fears; after ten years, *The Matrix*, for one example, clearly comes out of a purely technological experience of postmodern simulacrum. In even another twenty years, will this be so obviously a product of our negotiation of the

capabilities of computers as to be laughable? Each text will no doubt be seen as a product of its time, making the critical scholar's job of uncovering self-evident truths all the more important.

In what ways might post-apocalyptic narrative create particularly unique emotional experiences for audience members? The texts looked at here are emotionally disparate, and the choice to do so was conscious and deliberate. Despite the lack of focus on complicating notions of genre, which was unfortunately outside the bounds of this thesis, I believe that such different emotional atmospheres in each forced the realization that, although each had a different "feel," they all operated emotionally within the same discursive paradigm. Ahmed's (2004) framework unveils the cyclical process of affective economies, in which emotions circulate amongst and between subjects and objects, simultaneously drawing on and constituting discursive formations.

WALL•E uses the predictable Disney formula for heteronormative romanticism to create a feel-good, light-hearted, immersive text that nevertheless organized the circulation of emotion in patriarchal ways. Audiences are invited to consider the text a universal love story that draws on universally held values, when we might actually question whose story gets to be universal. The anti-corporatist environmentalist argument is made at the expense of the corporation (the hated), but stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the absolved consumer of corporate goods. The audience member is delighted by middle class consumptive practices that reaffirm principles that led to The End in the first place. Their undying devotion to these values explicates the naïveté with which they consider The End: as a happily-ever-after construct in which cultural knowledge and ritual endure unaffected. These emotional moments are crafted carefully to circulate emotion in directed ways that reinscribe power relations.

The Road is almost the polar opposite, espousing the reader's depression at every narrative turn (of which there are few). McCarthy organizes emotion in a similarly patriarchal way, but by ignoring the absence of the feminine in the masculine post-apocalyptic space, by deliberately removing her for reasons of incapability. The loss so pervasively emblematic in this tale doesn't, as it seems, have to do with the loss of the feminine; rather, they explore the loss of a more general cultural knowledge and the paternal obligations between fathers and sons. The inability for these values to breed anything but depression and desolation is somehow ironic, strengthening and exploitive the discursive articulations between hypermasculinity, violence, and hopelessness.

The Book of Dave deliberately organizes hate in ways that force audiences to loathe the satirical object, which Self characterizes as the compulsive religiosity of patriarchy and its supporters, and that positions them as superior to the characters. The issues implicated in Self's brand of patriarchy include religion itself, the family, and even the language we use to name the world (as well as the semantic articulations those words have). He structures the narrative around hatred for these institutions in an attempt to chisel away at their vulnerably solid foundations. And in the process of deciphering the ontological detective mystery, audiences are positioned above the discursive Other (both the institutions and the people that comprise and support them). Audiences are afforded a sense of superiority with respect to subjects within the text, but are simultaneously left without solutions to the inherent problems they perceive because of the inherent destructive negativity of the satirical object.

Emotion in these three texts takes radically different forms, but undeniably operates within the capitalist, patriarchal politics of the circulation of emotion, whether at a conscious level or not. The characterization of emotion within the texts as well as the

seeming intention to elicit certain emotions from audience members are both continually informed by the politics that tell us what is funny, what is depressingly "real," and what is appropriate in practice.

I've demonstrated, as well, the uniqueness often found in the form of cognitive play as audience members engage in the post-apocalyptic ontological detective story. Audiences can laugh at the frequency with which WALL•E misinterprets the purposes of consumer goods, they can rediscover pieces of the world as the boy in *The Road* negotiates his existential morality, and they can piece together the linguistic trickery of Self's post-apocalyptic world in *The Book of Dave*. This particular aspect of post-apocalyptic narrative, melded with some of the more ideologically influenced ones, creates a decidedly unique experience for audiences.

Limitations

Because of the nature of this study, the major limitation to supporting the kinds of claims made herein are due to the microscopic focus on three carefully chosen texts. These are only three of the many contemporary texts I might have examined. An in-depth look at other very recent narratives (*9*, *I Am Legend*, and *The Book of Eli* come to mind first) could yield different results, although I suspect that many of the claims presented here would hold up in the face of any complications these texts might present. I'm not sure a more survey-oriented approach would have served the research, considering the depth to which I was forced to pull each text apart in order to tease out the role of post-apocalyptic remains, but keeping somewhat myopically focused on only three texts comes with its own drawbacks related to generalizability.

Also, only having the space to examine contemporary post-apocalyptic narrative leaves out a wealth of insight that might come from historicizing, for instance, Cold War

era film and literature. Considering the temporal distance, looking back upon a historical moment in the examination of that moment's post-apocalyptic texts might have helped achieve a further rounded conception of what post-apocalyptic remains can be/do, more universally speaking, in the Western apocalyptic imagination.

Further Potential Research

While this analysis may have preliminarily answered many of the questions put forth, there are some nuances that I was unable to either fully unpack or address at all. To begin, the brief summary of critiques of technological dependence in Chapter 1 points toward a potentially rewarding expansion on the potentialities of post-apocalyptic remains. Especially in what I've referred to as "The Rise of the Machines" genre, it would probably be fruitful to further address the idea of evil sentience, an embodiment of human characteristics within a nonhuman entity, as well as the general apprehension of headlong development of increasingly complex (and often destructive) technologies. WALL•E, while in no way evil, stands in for the human presence that is lacking and thus enacts that body's obligations, but it actually a material item. The sentient machines in the film *9* do similar work, but in an evil, destructive way. The fear of technological takeover, theorized thoroughly in Rushing & Frentz's (1995) *Projecting the Shadow*, might contribute a new dimension to my loose categorization of post-apocalyptic remains.

Next, more time spent theorizing about the post-apocalyptic genre has the potential to shape the dynamics of post-apocalyptic remains significantly. For the time being, I have operated with the idea that *WALL•E*, *The Road*, and *The Book of Dave* actually are in the same genre, but this been taken for granted for reasons of clarity. Although we might comfortably call them all post-apocalyptic narratives for the sheer fact that they are stories about after The End, are there other generic conventions within the larger genre that allow

for post-apocalyptic remains to operate in different ways? To tease out the differences between realism, satire, comedy, horror, etc. would no doubt reveal a more nuanced understanding of the post-apocalyptic remain as well as the post-apocalyptic narrative itself.

Another consideration, in my opinion, would be the post-apocalyptic stories that are told for and about our children. Especially pervasive in our culture is the Young Adult section of the library, helping to shape ideologies in a formative period of adolescence. *WALL•E* is likely too watered-down for these ideological themes to implicate the construction of youth culture, but there are plenty of stories created specifically for young adults, and about young adults, that grapple with the mature themes also found in some of the novels referenced here. For instance, a student of mine recommended a trilogy by Suzanne Collins, which consists of *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010) and deals with issues of governance, surveillance (in the Foucauldian sense), heteronormative love, survival, and male violence. When I checked the local library listing, *The Hunger Games* had 170 holds on the total 17 copies of the novel. My hunch is that young adults are reading these books. Looking specifically at the remains and themes in these novels in relation to the theories presented here as well as theorizations about Young Adult fiction would be an interesting comparison.

I also believe that an additional analysis of texts that subvert the generic expectations, like *A Gift Upon the Shore*, would provide useful tactics to begin dismantling these pervasive conventions. Feminist science fiction, especially, from authors like Wren and Octavia Butler, should provide the analyst with more than enough substantive evidence for the progressive use of the post-apocalyptic remain.

Finally, I believe there is more to be said about audience interaction with these texts. One piece of analysis that did not make it into this final product draws on Kenneth Burke's (1941) theory of literature as equipment for living, and argues that there is a therapeutic benefit for audiences to work through these texts because of their inherently textual nature. Gannon summarizes Susan Sontag's argument that narratives of apocalypse "may effect a form of catharsis, a grappling with the unimaginable" (Gannon, 2000, p. 106). Plank (1984) suggests that we have a psychological need to imagine post-apocalypse because it reassures us that humans will continue to exist after the great cataclysm. Looking a bit further into the psychology of post-apocalyptic text-to-audience articulation would help round out the emotional component to this analysis. Using Ahmed, an ideological and political take on emotion, may have momentarily fit better into the final product, but psychology and audience studies is a pervasive scholarly pairing and should not be ignored.

Turning the Lights Off

Since first making the analogy between post-apocalyptic narrative and my father's living circumstances in the mountains of Glenwood Springs, on a personal level we've continued to thread the two together. Now that it's winter and he's skiing literally every single day, he has strengthened his relations with not only the other tenants of the condominium complex, but also the employees of the ski resort. There is nothing short of a community arising out of the wreckage of the housing crash (at least one ski resort employee is an out-of-work architect), and my father has taken to considering himself either the mascot or the mayor of it. Perhaps they amount to the same thing.

The significance of what and who are left over in these scenarios matters more than anything—without a bunch of architects- and salespeople-turned-ski bums, the community

is only a bunch of ski bums. But having survived the apocalypse of the hypercapitalist, hypercompetitive world of housing and development, the surviving community is able to rummage through the debris in order to refashion pieces of the world and of themselves; we can only hope to accomplish the same textually.

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