VISIONS OF AFTER THE END: A HISTORY AND THEORY

OF THE POST-APOCALYPTIC GENRE

IN LITERATURE AND FILM

by

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ABSTRACT

Textual genre criticism and close readings of novels and films reveal that, in addition to chronicling catastrophes' aftermaths, the post-apocalyptic genre envisions a future world in which traditional apocalyptic ideology is inadequate and unsatisfactory. While the full apocalyptic trajectory traditionally includes an end met by a new beginning, moments of cultural crisis have questioned the efficacy of apocalyptic metanarratives, allowing for a divergent, post-apocalyptic imagination that has been reflected in various fictional forms.

The post-apocalyptic genre imagines a post-cataclysmic world cobbled together from the remnants of our world and invites complicated participation as readers and viewers engage with a world that resembles our own yet is bereft of our world's meaning-making structures. The cultural history of the genre is traced through early nineteenth-century concerns about plagues and revolutions; *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and the devastation of the First World War; the post-apocalyptic turn in the cultural imagination following the Second World War, the atomic bombs, and the Holocaust; the Cold War and societal tensions of the 1960s and 1970s; late twentieth-century nationalism and relaxation of Cold War tension; and renewed interest in post-apocalypticism following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

Textual analysis reveals that the genre is particularly interested in formal experimentation and other postmodernist ideas, carnivalesque transgression, and concerns about survivorship and community. The mobilization of these themes is examined in case studies of the novella "A Boy and His Dog," the novels *The Quiet Earth* and *The Road*, and the films *Idaho Transfer*, *Night of the Comet*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Nana, Grandma, and Grandpa, who passed from this life

while I was working on this project. Thank you for always being sunshine, even during times of

shadow.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

With the recent release of films such as *World War Z* (2013), *The Hunger Games* series (2012-2015), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and television series like *The Walking Dead* (2010-present) and *Revolution* (2012-2014), 21st-century entertainment media (including film, television, print media, and video games) have demonstrated interests in zombies, end-of-the-world themes, dystopian futures, and societal regeneration. These interests have often been labeled as "apocalyptic" and/or "post-apocalyptic," with little discrimination between the two. This lack of distinct categorization may convey a general idea that all of these texts are concerned with dread, survivalism, and societal transition; however, grouping apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian futuristic texts together in indistinct, ambiguous categories fails to acknowledge their differences.

The aim of this dissertation is to undertake a close examination of the common themes and ideology of the post-apocalyptic genre as well as its history. Additionally, as it examines post-apocalyptic as a distinct classification, this study separates the post-apocalyptic genre not only from apocalyptic and futuristic texts but also from the broader science-fiction genre. By so doing, the term "post-apocalyptic" will be given greater critical and generic utility to describe a group of texts that have specific, common themes and concerns. Further, distinguishing post-apocalyptic from apocalyptic will provide the latter term with its own power to identify and describe a group of texts, rather than merely being an ambiguous term applied to any text with a relation to the end of the world. Bounding the post-apocalyptic genre will allow for meaningful

discussion with a mutually understood vocabulary and based on a specific definition of the genre.

While attempting to narrowly bound the post-apocalyptic genre, I acknowledge that this endeavor is far from the definitive approach to studying these texts. Much of the work currently being done in genre studies seeks to broaden the approach to genre, rather than to delimit it. These more inclusive notions of genre are often offered as attempts to reconcile narrow definitions of genre and arguments that such formulations are subjective and fail to recognize that genres are constantly evolving. The trend in recent genre scholarship toward more expansive and inclusive views of genre formation and definition is necessarily dependent upon the work (as well as the debates and discussion) of those scholars who sought to definitively bound genres. The attempts at narrow definition and characterization have allowed for continued discussion as scholars agree with and/or argue against such definitions. Since there is to date relatively little work that has narrowly defined the post-apocalyptic genre, it is my intention to offer an examination of the genre that, although perhaps not definitive, will contribute to the discussion and scholarship in this area of study.

Just as the medium of film has evolved and endured in response to aesthetic, economic, cultural, and technological influences, genres themselves have also changed in response to these influences, and further, genres may be defined differently depending upon which influences are emphasized. Genres can be defined by scholars in an attempt to examine common elements across texts, by distributors to attract audiences by comparing a new text to a previously successful one, and by media producers to create a sort of shorthand relating aspects of a new production to those of previous ones. Therefore, it is difficult to establish definitive generic boundaries that serve all groups equally. For example, an examination of the film musical genre

is challenged by a film starring Elvis Presley. A scholar may categorize *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) as a film musical because it meets certain criteria that the scholar has defined for the genre. However, a distributor may categorize the film as an Elvis movie because his presence is the dominant attribute that will drive the economic success of the film. In fact, this film participates in multiple genres, but how it gets classified depends on the individual defining the genre, the chosen criteria which will determine inclusion and exclusion of texts, and the factors motivating the individual.

Therefore, in order for this study to examine the post-apocalyptic genre as a consistent, identifiable genre, it is important to clearly establish the criteria which define it. As I attempt to do this, I readily admit that these criteria are subject to a certain degree of subjectivity because they have been determined by a single individual, myself, and employed for a specific purpose, namely to conceive of the post-apocalyptic genre as its own unique entity independent of yet interdependent with other genres of fiction. However, these criteria have been determined as a result of scholarly rigor, and the subsequent examination of texts attempts to be objective as it builds upon them. I welcome further study of the genre—both agreement and contestation, as both are necessary for beneficial discussion.

When setting out to examine the post-apocalyptic genre, it is necessary to begin by looking at the term itself. Much of the ambiguity in the popular use of the term "post-apocalyptic" results from a lack of consistent agreement about what it denotes, particularly because there are different understandings about the meaning of its root word "apocalyptic." There are two common conceptions of the apocalypse—the popular and the traditional. In the popular sense, apocalyptic refers to the events, especially destruction and chaos, leading up to the end of the world. However, derived from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, apocalypse

traditionally denotes revelation. Thus, in the traditional view, apocalypse is not only concerned with the end of the world but also the unveiling of a new world. The traditional myth of apocalypse emphasizes the revealing of a higher power, a higher order, that follows the end and which gives meaning to the end. Apocalyptic myths are seen in many traditions, both religious and secular. The biblical book of Revelation is a seminal apocalyptic text, in which John the Revelator witnesses a vision of the widespread destruction that leads to the end of the world followed by God himself revealing a new heaven and a new earth which his faithful followers will inherit. Secular society celebrates the end of each calendar year (as well as each century and each millennium) with festivities that usher out the passing year and welcome the commencement of the new year, often accompanied by statements of hope and resolution to improve oneself in the coming year. In literature, the traditional narrative structure (inciting incident-rising action-climax-falling action-denouement) also follows the tradition of apocalypse, with the denouement serving as a revelatory after-the-end segment which gives meaning to the events preceding it. In both religious and secular cultures, the traditional apocalyptic myth provides a faith-promoting, orienting structure that gives meaning to beginning, middle, and especially end events through the revelation that comes after the end.

Although these two views of apocalypse have contributed to the lack of consistent definitions of the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic, both the popular and the traditional views of apocalypse are significant for defining the post-apocalyptic genre. Post-apocalypse is a condition existing after the apocalypse in both common senses of the term. The post-apocalyptic world exists both after the end of the world and after the end of belief in a mythic structure that makes ending meaningful. Rather than simply rebooting history or creating a new historical point of origin, the post-apocalypse is a gap, a dilation, between one ordered existence and the

revealing of the next. As a result, this post-apocalyptic interim is fraught with temporal, spatial, existential, and ontological concerns as survivors construct lives and worlds from fragments of the meaningful, ordered, pre-apocalyptic world. The post-apocalyptic genre, then, takes up the task of depicting this world and does so through both form and content.

While post-apocalyptic narratives depict fictional accounts of an imagined post-apocalyptic world, these texts are, significantly, created in certain historical and cultural moments, times which influence both their form and their content. As with other genres, the post-apocalyptic genre has its own history of formation, evolution, hybridity, parody, proliferation, and stagnation, with each period being a product of many contributing factors including aesthetics, technology, culture, and economics. Therefore, in addition to examining the form and content of the post-apocalyptic genre, this dissertation must also consider the various factors influencing the genre at various points in its history. In broad strokes, the post-apocalyptic genre became an identifiable genre in the post-World War II period, proliferated during the 1970s, hybridized during the 1980s, stagnated during the 1990s, and again proliferated in the 2000s. In each of these periods, the genre reflects cultural attitudes concerning endings and future possibilities. By establishing the elements of the post-apocalyptic genre, we can see more clearly how it is unique in comparison to other genres and how it responds during different sociocultural climates.

Postmodernism

Perhaps because the popular view of apocalypse has led many to consider the post-apocalypse as a general resetting of the global historical timeline, post-apocalyptic narratives are often grouped together with futuristic, dystopian, and science-fiction tales. However, the

recurring themes and divergence from apocalyptic ideology of post-apocalyptic texts

distinguishes the genre as it seeks to depict existence in an interim that is (re)constructed from

artifacts of the pre-apocalyptic world. While futuristic and science-fiction narratives generally

seek to extrapolate the present condition into plausible futures that could exist if science, politics,

technology, and culture continue their current course, post-apocalyptic narratives imagine

devastated worlds in which social and scientific progress has also been devastated, leaving the

survivors to piece together an existence from remnants of the pre-apocalyptic past.

Significantly, the post-apocalyptic genre emerged in the same post-World War II period

in which postmodernists were expanding upon and repurposing the formal experimentation of

the modernists. Formally, post-apocalyptic texts are themselves reconstructed from fragments of

other texts and genres, which both reflects the patchwork worlds of the narratives and also

demonstrates the post-apocalyptic loss of faith in meaning, order, and structure. Although both

modernism and postmodernism use elements such as bricolage and intertextuality, they use them

to convey different ideas about meaning and order. Intertextuality, quotation, and allusion are

integral in the work of modernists and appear in works such as Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922)

(which some consider to be post-apocalyptic). Many modernists, Eliot in particular, are often

discussed in relation to the post-apocalyptic because they were concerned with eschatology,

destiny, and final judgment. In response to these concerns, they experimented with formal

conventions to reflect feelings of disillusionment and futility, which were widely and deeply felt

in the wake of the First World War. However, the modernists ultimately hoped that their formal

experimentation would have the power to control, to order, and to provide significance to the

chaos that informed it. Thus, by maintaining faith in order, modernism is, in the end, apocalyptic.

However, after the Second World War, in addition to postwar disillusionment, many experienced

a loss of faith not only in previous ordered structures of meaning but also in the very possibility of meaningful order amidst the chaos. With the devastation caused by atomic bombs and Nazi concentration camps, the trauma of World War II was of an entirely different magnitude than World War I, leaving a general fear that the next human holocaust would be the total annihilation of the world. The nihilistic anxieties of this postwar period were similarly of a different magnitude than previous cultural periods, one result of which was a shift from modernism to postmodernism, which abandoned the hope of finding order and significance amidst chaos and accepted the inescapability of disorder and multiple, shifting meanings.

The questions which serve as catalysts for modernism and postmodernism are an important point of distinction between the movements, a distinction which is also important for defining the post-apocalyptic genre. While modernist texts explore epistemological questions through formal experimentation, postmodernist texts push that experimentation even further to question their own ontology. Unlike the modernists who hope to find a kind of meaningful order amidst the disorder, the postmodernists have abandoned such faith. Instead of engaging in the task of examining how meaning is made, postmodern works often self-reflexively examine what it even means to be a text. Rather than hoping to convert chaos into order, postmodernism accepts the possibility of multiple, shifting meanings and the inability to find significance in disorder. Postmodernism is an essential element of the post-apocalyptic genre as it seeks to capture a world that has abandoned faith in meaningful and significant order. Additionally, whether overtly or inherently, post-apocalyptic texts raise ontological questions. If the apocalypse destroys all but a few survivors, who authors a post-apocalyptic text and, further, who reads it? If the post-apocalyptic world is bereft of the meaningful structures of the past, what hope is there that a post-apocalyptic text will be readable if it survives? In addition to

authorship and readability, the construction of post-apocalyptic texts also raises the question of ontology: if the post-apocalyptic world is reconstructed from whatever remains after the end, are texts similarly composed of fragments of pre-apocalyptic texts? Such self-reflexivity is also a postmodern idea. While modernists explored reflexive narrative forms in which authors are aware that texts are dependent upon other texts and repeated conventions to convey meaning, late modernists and postmodernists pushed even further toward a form in which texts are aware of their own constructedness. This push provided a freedom of narrative form which could adequately represent post-apocalyptic ideas of loss and ambiguity in a world that is no longer bound to traditional norms and meanings.

Significantly, postmodernism and post-apocalyptic thinking (in relation to both eschatology and myth) emerged in a postwar period bereft of adequate explanations for nuclear and genocidal atrocities committed during World War II. Such atrocities caused many to question their beliefs and lose faith in many culturally-held myths and traditions. Postmodernism questioned the importance of identifiable, unifying meanings in cultural products, and post-apocalyptic thinking was typified by a loss of faith in apocalyptic traditions through which new beginnings give meaning to endings. The systematic, inhuman genocide of the Jewish Holocaust shook the foundational myth of humanity as an essential force for progress and achievement in pursuit of the good of humankind, and the potential global annihilation of nuclear war threatened to bring a final end from which there would be no rebirth. This disillusionment about meaningful endings led postmodernists not only to experiment with formal conventions such as intertextuality and allusion but also to challenge the notion of ending.

Similarly disillusioned, post-apocalyptic texts are concerned with the adequacy of meaningful endings. Therefore, in addition to often incorporating postmodern ideas like

bricolage and self-reflexivity in the construction of post-apocalyptic worlds and texts, the post-apocalyptic genre is also significantly concerned with problematic endings. For example, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) sets up its protagonist Robert Neville as a scientist-hero who fights vampires while researching the cure for vampirism. However, the novel's ending destroys this image when Neville realizes that he has actually been the threat to the world's new race and that his exploits will become legend in this new world. The ending subverts the expectations established by the preceding plot elements. Just as postmodernist texts vary widely in subject and degree of experimentation, post-apocalyptic texts vary widely in story and use of postmodern elements. However, the post-apocalyptic genre often uses formal elements of postmodernism such as bricolage, intertextuality, allusion, self-reflexivity, and problematic endings to explore concerns of nihilism, finality, and meaninglessness that are particularly bereft of hope in apocalyptic revelation and renewal.

The Carnivalesque

As mentioned above, in traditional apocalyptic myths, endings are met by a reordering revelation—the passing away of one world, year, or century gives rise to a new one. In contrast, the post-apocalypse is a condition resulting from the lack of such a renewal. The post-apocalyptic genre is primarily concerned with the world that exists without the hope of renewed order in the apocalyptic tradition. Even if there may be a future reinstitution of order, the post-apocalyptic world exists in the interim gap between ordered states. While this world is a kind of postmodern bricolage by (re)constructing itself from fragments of the past world, it is also a Bakhtinian carnivalesque world. Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque is a theory which posits that those in authority maintain their power by periodically allowing subservient groups to revel

in a break from rules and order. The carnivalesque has its roots in various festivals of carnival in which the fool reigns as king for a day as social hierarchies are inverted and riotous debauchery goes unpunished as rules of decorum are suspended. By allowing such periodic revelry, the king could keep lower classes willfully in subjection the rest of the time. For Bakhtin, the status quo is maintained in modern societies by allowing outlets, such as parodic media, for carnivalesque expression. Although the post-apocalyptic genre may not employ the carnivalesque for the same ideological purposes that Bakhtin proposes, the post-apocalyptic world does reflect the carnival square. The interim, post-apocalyptic dilation is a carnivalesque period in which vertical social hierarchies have been made horizontal, cultural norms have been abandoned, and the order of the day is disorder.

During carnival, the masses created a "second world" in which the ritual spectacles reversed or suspended hierarchies, played with language conventions, and focused largely on grotesque realism. Each aspect of carnival was concerned with social transgression. During carnival, all that was high, sacred, and noble was brought down to earth and mingled with the base and profane. Ritual spectacles were an important component of carnival, but these spectacles were modified such that they mocked sacred rituals, such as the crowning of the fool as "king." In addition, language was an essential element of carnival, in particular the language of the common masses—language inappropriate in acceptable society—including curses, threats, and profanity. Grotesque realism was fascinated with the ways the body transgresses itself. The areas of transgression are those parts of the body that interact with the world—the open mouth, the excretory organs, the genitals, etc. Thus, the activities of interest are those moments of the body extending beyond itself in acts such as copulation, pregnancy, birth, defecation, eating, drinking, and so on. The carnivalesque brings such grotesqueries into the public square not only

to revel in them but also as a way to suspend hierarchical order. While vertical social hierarchies rank certain classes higher than others, the carnivalesque seeks to place everyone on the same level, to create a horizontal social hierarchy, by emphasizing the commonalities between classes, particularly the profane commonalities exemplified by these bodily transgressions. As with other carnivalesque practices, post-apocalyptic texts are concerned with and fascinated by these transgressions. For example, defecation is often depicted as a part of the carnivalesque, post-apocalyptic world, and it has been used in the post-apocalyptic genre both dramatically (the reality of trying to quarantine large numbers of people in Saramago's *Blindness* [1995]) and comedically (the humor of seeing Phil Miller [played by Will Forte] use a swimming pool as a toilet in *The Last Man on Earth* [2015-present]). Additionally, S&M attire, associated with private sexual relations, would be inappropriate to wear in public in our society, but it is perfectly acceptable in *The Road Warrior* (1981). The post-apocalyptic world is a kind of carnivalesque, "second world" version of our own, which allows these transgressions to be acceptable because it is no longer bound by traditional societal norms.

Bakhtin considers the greatest utility of the carnivalesque to be in facilitating dialogic discourse between higher, authoritative classes and lower, subservient masses. This dialectical ideal provides an avenue of emancipation for the powerless, yet it is contingent upon a limited, controllable carnival. However, rather than seeking progressive social goals, the use of the carnivalesque in the post-apocalyptic genre seems to be more of a postmodern borrowing in order to imagine the baseness and depravity that would result in a world of unlimited, uncontrolled carnival. Although some post-apocalyptic texts could be read as warnings against the abuse of power, such themes are not universal in the genre. Further, as opposed to disaster pictures, post-apocalyptic narratives seem less interested in the cause of destruction and more

interested in depicting the carnivalesque world free of specific intended meanings, which is perhaps itself a result of postmodern futility of ordering chaos and post-apocalyptic hopelessness in shared myths.

Landscape, Memory, Survivorship, and Community

Commonly, the post-apocalyptic is associated with a wasteland setting, a devastated landscape. While this is often the case (such as in *The Road Warrior* and *The Road* [2006]), there are other important defining characteristics of the post-apocalyptic world. As mentioned above, the meaningful hierarchies and beliefs that established order in the pre-apocalyptic world are absent in the post-apocalyptic world. Although post-apocalyptic loss may be conveyed by a setting of a barren landscape, it is neither the only nor the most important means of doing so. The post-apocalyptic nature of *The Road Warrior* is established not only by its bleak setting but also by the social structure of the world depicted in the narrative. This distinction can be further examined by comparing the first two films in the *Mad Max* series. While *The Road Warrior* is a post-apocalyptic narrative set in a post-apocalyptic world with a devastated setting, the first *Mad Max* film (1979) is not set in a post-apocalyptic world although it is set against a bleak landscape. Max Rockatansky works for a governmental agency as a policeman and ultimately embarks on a revenge quest. The narrative and the world in which it transpires do not support *Mad Max* being an ideal post-apocalyptic text. If a barren or desolate setting were the only requirement to be post-apocalyptic, then any film shot in the Australian outback and any Italian neorealist "rubble" film would be post-apocalyptic. Although a wasteland may certainly be an element of a post-apocalyptic world, the genre is defined by more than its setting.

In the post-apocalyptic genre, the landscape of memory is as important as the landscape

of the setting. While the post-apocalyptic world is often visually represented by a barren wasteland, post-apocalyptic memory is also a wasteland. A devastated setting reveals the absent presence of the physical world that once was, yet the landscape of memory itself is also an absent presence in the genre, as survivors in a time after the end must face the loss of the people, the places, and the time to which their memories refer. As post-apocalyptic is not simply a time after the apocalypse (in the popular sense) but is also a time existing after faith and hope in meaningful existence, memories have also lost their meaning—what once allowed for nostalgic mental and emotional connections now haunt those who continue to survive after all that was once meaningful has become severed from the referents. Although its setting is not the wasteland that has popularly become characteristic of post-apocalyptic films, Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) is centrally concerned with a post-apocalyptic landscape of memory. The narrative of the film comprises memories that may or may not be accurate reflections of events, relationships, or even time. In this sense, the wasteland is not a barren physical location but rather a jumble of memories, the meaning of which is left ambiguous. Instead of being conveyed through a devastated locale, the post-apocalyptic nature of the film is expressed through its absence of meaningful narrative structure and lack of reliable narration. Although it is unclear whether or not *Last Year at Marienbad* is set after the apocalypse in the popular sense, the world of the film certainly exists after the loss of faith in traditional apocalyptic myths. An end has come, and there is no power (divine or otherwise) to reveal a renewal of order. As with the physical setting, the landscape of memory is not the only criterion defining the post-apocalyptic genre, but it is a significant aspect that defines the genre more narrowly than many popular conceptions of post-apocalyptic fiction.

In addition to and often associated with memory, the post-apocalyptic genre is also

significantly concerned with notions of survivorship. A recurring narrative throughout the post-apocalyptic genre is the story of survival—an individual or a small group that has survived an acute, catastrophic event must struggle to continue to survive in the inhospitable post-apocalyptic world. For example, the protagonists in *The Road* and *The Walking Dead* must continually scavenge for resources and fight others who threaten their survival. However, the theme of survivorship is not simply about surviving conflicts with nature and other survivors. Those who survive must also confront the hopelessness and meaninglessness of post-apocalyptic life. As depicted in the novel *I Am Legend* and the film *Zombieland* (2009), winning one fight for survival simply means that you are still around to fight another. The difficulties of surviving in the post-apocalyptic world are typically meaningless, even in the end, when there are no answers to the question of what it means to be a survivor in a world bereft of hope and haunted by the absence of the world and the individuals that are gone.

Related to survivorship, the post-apocalyptic genre also explores ideas of community. In the post-apocalyptic world, communities often form to facilitate survival. However, these communities take a different structure than those that existed before the apocalypse. Traditional hierarchies are replaced by communities of convenience and communities of necessity with power structures based on survival abilities rather than political or monetary ascendency. Additionally, these communities are vulnerable to breakdown not only from physical threats but also from the lack of cohesiveness among their members. In the post-apocalyptic world, individuals have been dislocated from communities which had met social needs beyond merely basic survival by offering shared rituals, practices, and symbols. As these individuals from disparate backgrounds come together simply for survival, these ad hoc groups are often unstable and unable to provide shared social and emotional connections. Also, large imagined

communities are not viable, for the immediacy of the post-apocalyptic world does not allow for simultaneous engagement in shared practices and symbols across space. In the post-apocalyptic world, connections are lost when old communities are disrupted, and constant threats challenge the possibility of forming new, stable social connections.

Theory and Method

Methodologically, this study employs textual generic criticism, including textual analysis and close readings of texts, to identify recurring themes, track these themes through the history of the genre, and examine how they get implemented in specific works. Having read and watched several post-apocalyptic texts, I had a general idea of certain generic elements. In the course of further examining the topic, studies of the post-apocalyptic genre, specifically Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* and James Berger's *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse*, offered theoretical frameworks through which to consider the genre. These frameworks led to additional, related studies, such as theories of genre, apocalypticism, endings, postmodernism, and trauma. Considering these theories in relation to studies of post-apocalyptic fiction and the texts themselves allowed for an initial understanding of the definitional and cultural dimensions of the genre.

To further examine the genre, I employed textual analysis to identify recurring themes in post-apocalyptic texts. Several studies, chief among them Warren W. Wagar's *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* and Charles P. Mitchell's *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema*, provided helpful lists of and references to significant post-apocalyptic novels and films. Additionally, researching specific texts often revealed connections and debts to other post-

apocalyptic works. I read and watched many of these texts and researched many others, noting recurring themes, how they are depicted, and their resonance with the definitional and cultural aspects of the genre. From this analysis, I formulated the specific approach to the genre that I present in this study.

Additionally, to historically contextualize different periods of the genre, I grouped post-apocalyptic texts according to the period in which they were produced. This grouping helped to highlight trends in the genre during these periods as well as attempts to work against trends. By studying other trends within these periods that were not specifically related to the post-apocalyptic genre, I was able to consider how the genre was reflective of and reactionary against cultural attitudes borne from various historical crises. Overall, this study employs rather traditional textual generic criticism and presents a formulation of the post-apocalyptic genre, a history which contextualizes its evolution, and case studies that, through close readings of texts, examine how specific texts mobilize the genre's themes.

Reflecting the postmodern, patchwork nature of the post-apocalypse, the various themes and concerns of the post-apocalyptic genre are themselves a patchwork of meaning. Therefore, this study cannot examine the genre using a single theoretical model. The genre operates as a kind of postmodern genre of bricolage and pastiche that, rather than operating as a subgenre within a single genre, is pieced together from deconstructed fragments of multiple genres, styles, and texts. Similarly, the theoretical framework of analysis employed here necessarily draws upon multiple theories as it explores the postmodern, ontological crisis of living in a world distinguished by ruptured space and time and plagued by a past of absent referents, intrusions of memory, and an obsession with survivorship.

Some of these theories (including theories of post-apocalyptic culture, postmodernism,

the carnivalesque, and community) are mentioned earlier in this chapter in order to provide a foundational understanding of the premise of this study. In addition to these, genre theory and theories of trauma and memory offer important ideas that contribute to the theoretical framework of the post-apocalyptic genre. Subsequent chapters in this dissertation further explore each of these theories to elucidate their salient aspects as they pertain to the post-apocalyptic genre. After an explanation of the relevant theory and its contribution to the theoretical framework applied to examine the post-apocalyptic genre, each chapter then presents two case studies of specific post-apocalyptic texts which consist primarily of close readings of the texts. These textual analyses examine how the theories discussed are represented in the generic products themselves. The close readings consider various aspects of the texts including narrative structure, plot, characterization, and stylistic elements. The twofold objective of this method of analysis is to support the claims of this study (1) by examining the dominant themes present in the post-apocalyptic genre through a number of theories that will generate useful understandings of the genre and (2) by examining the cultural artifacts that are actually representative of the genre. Although the texts in the case studies will receive emphasis, the discussion within each chapter is not limited to these works. On the contrary, as each chapter seeks to provide thorough support for the arguments presented, the study will freely incorporate examples from the post-apocalyptic corpus. This dissertation aims to be a useful resource by identifying a number of post-apocalyptic texts; however, close reading of specific texts is the chosen analytical method in order to offer more detailed analysis of the execution—the praxis—of the genre.

Chapter 2 presents a review of scholarly research examining the apocalyptic, the post-apocalyptic, and genre theory. As well as highlighting certain relevant theories that will provide a useful approach to the genre, the chapter demonstrates the relative scarcity of academic work

specifically focused on the post-apocalyptic imagination. This chapter discusses genre theory and various approaches to studying genre in order to develop a useful approach for examining the post-apocalyptic genre as well as highlighting key elements and delimiting boundaries of the genre that will be further discussed throughout the dissertation.

While this introduction and the literature review introduce the concepts of the post-apocalyptic genre, Chapter 3 presents an overview of the genre's history. In so doing, it assumes the task of specifically examining the cultural contexts which have given rise to the periods of most significant proliferation of post-apocalyptic texts. Although there were 19th- and early 20th-century visions of post-cataclysmic worlds, the post-apocalyptic genre, as it is defined here, fully emerged and proliferated in the post-World War II environment, and many post-apocalyptic texts were produced during the 1960s and 1970s. As is common for genres, the genre in its initial conception evolved and parodied itself. It also became a source from which other texts could borrow elements. There was a resurgence of interest in post-apocalyptic fiction around the turn of the millennium, and that interest continues to influence the production of post-apocalyptic texts currently as well as texts that significantly borrow from the genre. This chapter endeavors to culturally situate these peaks in production in an attempt to identify the similarities between the social climates during the times of greatest production of post-apocalyptic fiction.

Building on the introduction presented in this chapter, Chapter 4 further discusses postmodernism. The chapter provides additional context for the emergence of this theory with particular interest in how they influence the form and content of fictional texts. Akin to postmodernism, which seeks new ways of constructing narratives that question assumptions about meaningful resolution, the post-apocalyptic genre reflects a dissatisfaction with dominant cultural narratives and often employs postmodern elements to tell stories that challenge

apocalyptic ideology. The postmodern nature of the post-apocalyptic genre is explored in case studies of Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) and the film *Night of the Comet* (1984). *The Road* is an important example of the reemergence of post-apocalyptic fiction that not only imagines a bleak landscape but is also centrally concerned with questioning the viability of apocalyptic notions of progress, reflecting societal concerns in the wake of 9/11 and the protracted "war on terror." It has had a significant cultural impact—it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and has received a lot of scholarly attention—and exemplifies contemporary post-apocalypticism. *Night of the Comet* was produced during a time of genre hybridization and blends the common post-apocalyptic setting of the empty city with elements from comedy, horror, zombie fiction, and teen movies of the '80s. Its use of pastiche helps to demonstrate how the post-apocalyptic genre employs postmodernism to challenge traditional narrative paradigms and to play with intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Including it here offers a chance to examine a text that has received relatively little scholarship.

Chapter 5 focuses on Bakhtin and the carnivalesque. It offers further discussion of this concept and argues that the post-apocalyptic world is, in essence, the carnival square. The features of the carnivalesque are identified, such as the subversion and/or inversion of social structures and the emphasis on bodily processes. The representation of the carnivalesque in the post-apocalypse is examined, and the texts of interest in this chapter are Harlan Ellison's novella "A Boy and His Dog" (1969) and the film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). Harlan Ellison is recognized as an influential science-fiction writer, who, along with others, brought new ideas and forms to that genre, which also significantly impacted the post-apocalyptic genre. "A Boy and His Dog" is among Ellison's best-known work, and it is a good example of the post-apocalyptic genre during the 1960s and '70s as well as the carnivalesque nature of the post-apocalyptic

world. *Mad Max: Fury Road* is the fourth entry in George Miller's *Mad Max* series, a series that has been instrumental in defining and perpetuating the frequently recurring character of the post-apocalyptic wasteland warrior. It further heightens the wild, exuberant, carnivalesque world of the Mad Max franchise that has generally become associated with the post-apocalyptic genre. *Fury Road* was critically and commercially successful and revitalized interest in the franchise, continuing Miller's influence on the genre.

The post-apocalyptic genre's obsession with survivorship is mentioned in this introductory chapter, but Chapter 6 more fully explores notions of survivorship in conjunction with trauma and memory. Trauma narratives differ depending on the nature of the trauma, and they demonstrate particular concerns for individuals and communities. The theoretical aspects of trauma are expounded in the chapter, and their representation in post-apocalyptic texts is studied. This chapter further explores how the concept of community is threatened by the post-apocalyptic world. In the genre, communities that are cobbled together by diverse individuals from disparate social groups simply in order to survive are often unstable and vulnerable because they lack the ability to cultivate strong shared social and emotional connections. These aspects of the post-apocalyptic genre are examined through case studies of Craig Harrison's novel *The Quiet Earth* (1981) and the film *Idaho Transfer* (1973). *The Quiet Earth* is an important work from New Zealand, which reflects social tensions that are part of that country's history. These tensions are reflected in the novel as a pair of survivors, both burdened by personal trauma, form a necessary yet inevitably untenable companionship. Despite its importance in New Zealand and the cult status of its 1985 film adaptation, this novel has not received much scholarly attention, so by including it here to explore the themes of trauma and community in the post-apocalyptic genre, this study will hopefully bring attention to Harrison's remarkable novel. *Idaho Transfer* is

a low-budget, independent film, an example of the exploitation fare of the 1970s. Like many of these films, it has fallen into obscurity and, in scholarly work, has received only occasional mention in studies of time-travel films. Its scant means and nonprofessional actors are noticeable and tend to be criticized, but the story offers a rather fascinating exploration of survivorship, trauma, and community following the protagonist's disconnection from the past and from her family when she gets stranded in a barren, ecologically devastated future.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 7, posits that the formulation of a post-apocalyptic genre serves a critical function in understanding its representative texts and contributes to the ongoing process of genre studies. It provides a summary of the findings of this study, reflects on the study's limitations, and offers possible avenues of further study that would be of benefit to scholars interested in genre and the post-apocalyptic imagination.

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature and Approaching a Definition of the Post-apocalyptic Genre

As discussed in the previous chapter, this work claims that the post-apocalyptic genre is concerned with a number of themes that evoke the cobbling together of life from disparate pieces during the post-apocalypse. To examine a genre that seeks to portray such a bricolage experience, it is beneficial to apply a patchwork of multiple theories that reflect a post-apocalyptic existence reconstructed from multiple, deconstructed elements. Each theory which helps to illuminate the post-apocalyptic genre has been used in various studies across many disciplines. A comprehensive review of literature that encompasses the wide range of prolific discussion drawing upon each theory is impractical and unnecessary for this study. This literature review focuses its examination on the studies and discourses that are most pertinent to the present study. Although the theories that are discussed in these studies are often not explicitly related to post-apocalyptic texts or the post-apocalyptic genre, they provide theoretical frameworks which help to meaningfully understand many of the concerns and anxieties which shape the post-apocalyptic genre as it depicts life in a post-apocalyptic world.

Apocalypse, Apocalypticism, and Apocalyptic Eschatology

It has been previously discussed that there are two general conceptions of apocalypse: a way of thinking that anticipates new beginnings following endings and a popular notion that focuses on the end of the world. As both concepts derive from the ancient tradition of apocalyptic religious writing, the differences between these two ideas has necessarily been

addressed in the field of religious studies, in which there is abundant scholarship examining the subject of apocalypse. Even within the field of apocalyptic religious studies, terminology has led to confusion and perplexity; however, scholars have sought to clarify terms and definitions, and recent scholarship "distinguishes between apocalypse as a literary genre, apocalypticism as a social ideology, and apocalyptic eschatology as a set of ideas and motifs that may also be found in other literary genres and social settings" (Collins, Imagination 2). Such distinction is helpful when examining different strains of apocalyptic thought in religious as well as secular texts.

There are specific, often nuanced differences that must be considered when attempting to categorize ideas or texts as apocalypse, apocalypticism, or apocalyptic eschatology, and scholars working specifically in that field have discussed the difficulties presented by such nuances (Collins, Apocalyptic Literature 2). Detailed recapitulation of those discussions is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but highlighting the key distinctions between these three modes of apocalyptic thinking is important for illuminating (1) how apocalyptic ideas have been employed in fiction and popular culture and (2) how post-apocalyptic fiction has evolved from apocalyptic narratives, specifically by diverging from these apocalyptic modes.

In broad strokes, apocalypse is a genre of religious writing in which a celestial messenger visits a terrestrial individual (often a prophet) to unveil a revelation concerning the events leading up to the end of the world (destruction, plague, etc.) and the events following that end (namely, the salvation of the chosen and the renewal of the earth). Although the argument is not universally espoused, some claim that apocalypses are intended for a "group in crisis" because the very nature of the genre of apocalypse offers hope in future relief for those currently suffering crises (Collins, Imagination 41; Daschke 470-1). Apocalypticism is a social ideology that has manifested itself in both religious and secular ways. Certain communities (such as

Qumram) have established overtly religious societies based on principles of apoclypticism. The beliefs of these communities have centered on the death and rebirth of the earth. A secular mode of apocalypticism has pervaded cultures generally throughout time. In this sense, apocalypticism is a cultural myth that helps give meaning and instill hope. The apocalyptic myth is manifested in a wide range of traditions, both religious and secular, from annual celebrations associated with rebirth (such as ringing in the New Year, Easter and other rites of spring, rituals of planting and harvest, even birthdays) to celebrations of new political regimes and remembrances of declarations of independence through which nations are (re)born. In this study, in addition to "apocalyptic myth," the terms "apocalyptic imagination" and "apocalyptic worldview" are used to refer to the notions of apocalyptism that pervade society generally, influencing the way cultures celebrate progress and imagine ends that bring new beginnings. This is different from works of popular culture that conceive of apocalypse only as apocalyptic eschatology, conflating apocalypse with the end of the world. The primary concern of apocalyptic eschatology is the end itself, placing emphasis on the destruction of the earth.

Popular conceptions of apocalypse tend to emphasize apocalyptic eschatology. In his essay "Apocalypticism and Popular Culture," Lorenzo DiTommaso explains that the "vast majority" of items in lists of apocalyptic fiction "are, strictly speaking, not apocalyptic . . . The root of the misunderstanding about 'apocalyptic' is its modern conflation with the notion of 'the end of the world'" (478). Because of the conflation of apocalyptic and end-times ideas, the popular definition of apocalypse has focused on apocalyptic eschatology since "apocalyptic eschatology is one form of the study or doctrine of the 'last things'" (473). This popular view of apocalypse has diverged further from the religious genre of apocalypse and the cultural apocalyptic myth. DiTommaso continues, "Since 1945, 'apocalyptic' has increasingly come to

refer to any planetary catastrophe or its anticipated effects, and a code word for any kind of impending disaster or radical change, real or perceived. The conflation spills into every aspect of everyday life" (478). This use of "apocalyptic" to refer to any catastrophe, disaster, or radical change has been applied to works of fiction including films, novels, and comic books, but it has also been applied to other areas of study to describe future events such as impending, projected, or imagined economic and political crises. Further, the "conflation of 'apocalyptic' with 'the end of the world' is also mirrored in the scholarship" (478). Therefore, even authoritative guides to apocalyptic fiction and academic studies of apocalyptic texts and anticipated politicoeconomic crises have perpetuated a notion of apocalypse that differs from the concepts and themes related to both the religious genre of apocalypse and the worldview of apocalypticism.

The Post-apocalyptic Imagination vs. the Apocalyptic Imagination

To date, relatively few studies have specifically examined post-apocalyptic fiction as a genre apart from the science fiction genre. Further, the post-apocalyptic has most often been studied as a component of apocalyptic fiction and/or futuristic (science) fiction. This general lack of a distinct conception of the post-apocalyptic genre is, in part, caused by (or, at least, evidenced in) the lack of consensus regarding the distinctness of post-apocalyptic definitions and boundaries. This lack of distinction between apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic is common across disciplines that approach the subject: from studies of popular culture, literature, film, and television to religious studies of apocalypse.

The short-story anthology *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse* (2008), edited by John Joseph Adams, in itself provides an example of the continuing difficulty caused by the generic indistinctness of the post-apocalyptic. Although the title indicates that the collected works are

"stories of the apocalypse," Adams' introduction makes it clear that his volume is interested in "the wasteland of post-apocalyptic literature" (2). Thus, even the title of this anthology perpetuates the lack of distinction between apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic. In his introduction, Adams identifies post-apocalyptic fiction as a subgenre of science fiction while Claire P. Curtis, in her study *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* (2010), identifies a distinct post-apocalyptic genre. Additionally, the Library of Congress classification system uses the term "apocalyptic films" primarily to indicate post-apocalyptic films—"films set in a world or civilization after a catastrophic event (e.g., nuclear war, an alien invasion), sometimes also including the period immediately preceding the event" ("Apocalyptic films"). These examples illustrate how conceptions of post-apocalyptic fiction are inconsistent and indefinite.

The concept of post-apocalypse in religious studies generally fails to offer more specificity. Lorenzo DiTommaso approaches the topic of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts from the discipline of religious studies in his essay "Apocalypticism and Popular Culture," in which he considers the post-apocalyptic imagination to be a "facet of apocalypticism," largely reinforcing the popular, ambiguous view that post-apocalyptic fiction merely requires a post-catastrophe setting (495-7). As mentioned earlier, this dissertation characterizes the post-apocalyptic setting as one that exists in an interim period between states of ordered society: after the end yet before a new beginning. Given this definition, "post-apocalyptic" does not simply indicate a state, setting, or period *after* an apocalyptic one. However, the nature of apocalypse does not allow for such a definition, for as DiTommaso writes, "Strictly speaking, 'postapocalyptic' is an oxymoron. In the biblical mode of the worldview, the end time is a literal event, not a literary setting. Armageddon is the last battle; the final judgment is for all time. After the salvation, the narrative terminates; there is no sequel. There cannot be anything

'postapocalyptic' in the classic apocalyptic texts, or in the mode in which they are expressed"

(496). Although he sees the oxymoronic quality of "post-apocalypse" sufficient to conflate it

with post-catastrophe, post-apocalyptic texts themselves reveal that they are not particularly

concerned with the temporal claims of apocalypticism (the end of the present world accompanied

by salvation for believers). Rather, the post-apocalyptic genre is more concerned with subverting

and dismantling the ideologically meaningful apocalyptic narrative of ending, renewal, and

"salvation *out of* this world" (496). Thus, this dissertation seeks to more clearly define the

boundaries of the post-apocalyptic genre and the meanings which are attached to it. By so doing,

this study hopes to provide a distinct and consistent conception that will allow for beneficial

discussion based upon mutually understood terminology.

Endings, Postmodernism, and Post-apocalyptic Thinking

Mentioned above, Claire P. Curtis' *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract:*

"We'll Not Go Home Again" is one of few studies to specifically analyze post-apocalyptic texts.

Curtis analyzes several post-apocalyptic novels in order "to think through the idea of the state of

nature and the social contract and to reveal the ways in which this genre of fiction appeals to our

fears and our desire to begin again" (12). Her intent is not to fully elucidate the boundaries of the

post-apocalyptic genre but to examine how the genre employs political theory, specifically

theories about the social contract. As she explains, "certain postapocalyptic accounts nicely

fictionalize the theoretical arguments given by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau on the social

contract and the human invention of government" (9). In establishing her argument about post-

apocalyptic texts and the social contract, Curtis offers a brief description of her conception of the

post-apocalyptic genre. She writes, "I define postapocalyptic fiction as any account that takes up

how humans start over after the end of life on earth as we understand it" (5). According to her definition, the post-apocalyptic genre is simply defined by the time period in which the text is set—after the apocalypse. Further, she only takes into consideration the popular meaning of apocalypse—"a disastrous, violent and catastrophic end event"—and does not consider the biblical, revelatory notion of apocalypse in her definition (5). Additionally, Curtis identifies particular players in the social drama of the post-apocalyptic genre, namely the survivor, the companion, and the Other (8). She is one of the few who has defined specific boundaries for the post-apocalyptic genre, and her definition is useful. This dissertation adopts her conception of the genre as texts taking place after an apocalypse and necessitating a renewed social contract. However, as this study seeks to more fully develop the dimensions of the genre, not simply examine the nature of social contracting, it is necessary to expand upon Curtis' conception of the post-apocalyptic genre and define additional boundaries.

When discussing such a conception of the post-apocalyptic genre, it is important to acknowledge the work of Teresa Heffernan and James Berger, who have both sought to examine the notion of post-apocalypse in a broader sense. In his book *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (1999), Berger claims that the history of the world has witnessed several apocalypses, including the atrocities associated with World War II such as the Jewish Holocaust and the dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus, because these catastrophic events were apocalypses, the world has lived in a time of post-apocalypse ever since the latter half of the 20th century. Berger specifically recognizes in late-20th century American culture the presence of the post-apocalyptic sensibility. This sensibility is present in all cultural products, and it is evoked in themes such as trauma and survivorship. Even the cycle of violent action movies in the 1980s were the product of this sensibility. The post-apocalyptic sensibility, which

pervades the creative efforts of American culture, reveals a feeling of helplessness that is a product of the traumatic past haunting the present. This feeling of helplessness will endure as long as the past remains a collection of absent referents; however, Berger maintains hope that the referents of the past can be reconnected to the symbols of the present. For him, the post-apocalyptic sensibility is a symptom of a societal ailment that does have a cure.

In contrast, Heffernan does not maintain the same hope. Her book, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (2008), also recognizes that late-20th century cultural products (specifically novels) are the product of a post-apocalyptic culture resulting from those cataclysms of history also identified by Berger—world wars, Nazi concentration camps, and so on. However, for Heffernan, the post-apocalyptic culture is not merely a symptom that will be remedied by connecting present signifiers to their historical signifieds. Rather, the post-apocalyptic culture is a state of being that persists because it is impossible to reconnect the present with the past because the referents have been destroyed—thus, they will always be absent. Such inability has created a post-apocalyptic culture that not only exists after the end of the world (after the apocalypses of Hiroshima and Dachau) but also exists after the end of faith in the emergence of something better. In her discussion of the post-apocalyptic, Heffernan specifically discusses narrative structure. While apocalyptic narrative structure is patterned after the biblical model of Genesis-to-Revelation—beginning, middle, end, and revelation—the post-apocalyptic structure does not allow for the revelation or unveiling of a new heaven and a new earth. Even in a time when narratives were not overtly religious, the modernist narratives of Man, the Nation, and History still followed the apocalyptic structure as men and women and their actions were pushing progress forward toward an ultimate unveiling. The post-apocalyptic culture no longer possesses faith in such progress. Therefore, post-

apocalyptic narratives are strongly postmodern as they question the notion of meaningful endings.

Daniel Grausam also discusses the prevalence of the difficult relationship with endings in postmodern novels of the late 20th century in his book *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War* (2011). In his work, Grausam associates the rise of postmodern fiction with the aftermath of the Second World War—specifically, the Cold War, nuclear proliferation, and the cataclysms already mentioned. He is less interested in how postmodern fiction reflects anxiety of nuclear threat. He is more interested in how the complicated relationship to futurity created by the bomb is reflected in the complicated relationship to reference employed by postmodernism. He argues that postmodernism was a narrative that allowed postwar authors a way to comment and reflect on the world and society that were created by the atrocities of war. Grausam contrasts this view of postmodernism against common criticism of postmodernism articulated in a book review by Dale Peck. According to Peck, contemporary writers are "heirs to a bankrupt tradition"—postmodernism (Grausam 1). Peck argues that postmodernism is "a tradition that has systematically divested itself of any ability to comment on anything other than its own inability to comment on anything" (1). Building on this criticism of postmodernism, Grausam continues by explaining that postwar fiction has generally been divided into two categories—either realist or postmodern, committed to mimesis or not. "Depending on the critic's commitments, 'postmodernist' fiction becomes either powerfully world-making and ontologically rich or hopelessly narcissistic and autotelic, and the 'realist' tradition either an expression of the possibilities of representation or evidence of imaginative failure" (2). With this divide as his impetus, Grausam then introduces Hutcheon's idea of "historiographic metafiction" into his argument, claiming that postmodern fiction is actually seriously interested in debating

and representing recent history. Specifically, he is interested in how postmodern fiction is concerned with historical time, especially futurity—the unknowable future and how the Cold War nuclear threat could suddenly and instantaneously destroy any possible future.

By examining post-war postmodern fiction from a perspective of historicity, Grausam historically situates the emergence of postmodern American fiction as a response to an altered perception of space, time, and futurity as a result of living during the Cold War. He claims that "the narrative experimentation of American postmodern fiction is an effect of, and, increasingly, an attempt to understand, life lived under the threat of total nuclear war: Postmodernist fiction is, in short, the literary symptom of new understandings of space and time produced by the nuclear age with which it coincided" (4). Thus, he supports Hutcheon's view of postmodern fiction as historiographic metafiction because, as it emerged in the Cold War climate following WWII, it was ultimately about the Cold War nuclear threat. This view differs from that of Fredric Jameson, which sees postmodern narratives "as uninterested in history or interested in history only as depoliticized pastiche or nostalgia" (3). However, Grausam does acknowledge that both Jameson and Hutcheon share the idea "that postmodern fiction has, at the very least, a complicated relationship to history and historical representation" (3). As mentioned previously in this dissertation, postmodernism is foundational to the post-apocalyptic genre, and it functions in the genre in ways that reflect both Hutcheon's and Jameson's views of postmodernism and history.

As cultural products, post-apocalyptic texts reflect the cultures that produce them, and in this way, the post-apocalyptic genre is historiographic metafiction. Referring to the divide between realism and postmodernism, Grausam goes so far as to "designate postmodern fiction a form of realism, insofar as it tries to find models of representation adequate to the Cold War's

changed understanding of historical time" (5-6). According to Grausam, stories of cataclysmic nuclear destruction must take a metafictional form and must be, to some extent, self-reflexive since the text would have to be aware that the story is being told by a narrator that would not actually be around to tell the story if the world were utterly destroyed by a worldwide nuclear war. The presence of such a narrator complicates the relationship between time and space and between narrator and reader, highlighting one of the postmodern aspects of narratives of the post-apocalypse. Cold War-era post-apocalyptic fiction supports Grausam's claim that postwar fiction adopted postmodernism in order to reflect the strained conception of futurity that resulted from the catastrophic destruction caused by nuclear bombs. Grausam limits his study to Cold War-era American literature, yet post-apocalyptic fiction has continued to endure beyond the end of the Cold War. If postmodernism and post-apocalyptic fiction emerged in temporal proximity to one other in response to postwar anxieties, then the post-apocalyptic genre would certainly be considered culturally specific as it reflects a specific cultural moment. However, how does one account for its continuation beyond this moment? This question is answered, in part, by considering the evolutionary process of genre. As discussed previously, genres change as time passes. This change is the result of various factors, including generic invention, parody, and changing sociopoliticoeconomic climates. Such evolution can be witnessed in the post-apocalyptic genre, as will be discussed further in the next chapter. Additionally, it is important to note, as has been mentioned above, that the events during and concluding the Second World War were of such destructive magnitude—physically but also psychologically—that those events are often considered apocalyptic, thus contributing to the emergence of post-apocalyptic fiction after the war. The succeeding decades have brought additional catastrophes, such as the Vietnam War and 9/11, to which the post-apocalyptic genre has also responded. The next chapter further

discusses this, but at this point, it will suffice to say that the genre endures because it offers a means for authors and filmmakers to reflect and examine how catastrophes and concerns about a future totalizing apocalypse continue to affect their cultures.

Although Hutcheon argued against Jameson's ahistorical view of postmodernism, the post-apocalyptic genre is, in fact, influenced by his work. While post-apocalyptic fiction serves as historical metafiction to reflect the concerns of society, post-apocalyptic texts themselves create worlds which reflect many of Jameson's ideas about postmodernism. In his seminal essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson describes postmodernism as being the "cultural dominant" of capitalist societies in the era of late capitalism (190). He writes that although not every product is postmodern, the "postmodern is however the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses . . . must make their way" (193). The post-apocalyptic genre is one those "cultural impulses" that must pass through the "force field" of postmodernism. As mentioned previously, the post-apocalyptic genre is a bricolage reflecting the patchwork existence of post-apocalyptic life. The nature of the genre is such that is constructed of various pieces of other genres and conventions (including science fiction, horror, drama, action, and even comedy). Jameson writes that "the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (201). According to Jameson, this has led to pastiche eclipsing parody, since there is no longer a norm to parody. Like the life cycle approach to genre, time has proven this idea of pastiche eclipsing parody to be less definitive than Jameson posits in his essay. It is clear from many postmodern texts—i.e., *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *The Onion*, etc.—that pastiche has not completely eclipsed parody, but rather, parody and pastiche both continue to be significantly employed. In fact, they often coexist within the same text, such as in the *Scream* films. Despite Jameson's claim not being fully

supported, his conception of pastiche is important for understanding the post-apocalyptic genre. He describes pastiche as "blank parody"—mimicry that lacks the meaning and motive of parody. The post-apocalyptic genre is similar to Jameson's view of postmodern pastiche in that it is "a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm." For this reason, post-apocalyptic texts include such varied texts as Louis Malle's *Black Moon* (1975), Michael Haneke's *Time of the Wolf* (2003), Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), and *The Walking Dead* (both the comic and television series). There is no traditional "norm" that defines the post-apocalyptic genre. Even though post-apocalyptic texts span a wide array of component genres, they resemble each other in the sense that they are bricolage texts, postmodern patchworks. Post-apocalyptic texts do not adhere to an apocalyptic structure—origins and ends are inherently problematic. Further, the genre occurs in a certain time period—after an eschatological event (an acute, traumatic cataclysm that is eschatological for a narrative world whether that is a city, nation, or the entire world).

As mentioned, one product of the postmodern condition is the eclipsing of parody by pastiche, which is "blank parody" according to Jameson. The "blank" nature of pastiche means that it lacks the meanings and motives that still exist in parody. Signifiers and signifieds become separated; referents become absent. Since they are postmodern, post-apocalyptic texts employ pastiche. The post-apocalyptic genre is characterized by such blankness. Additionally, postmodernism has led to "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the 'neo'" (202). Jameson claims that the postmodern has modified the past because the past has become "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum . . . the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing

but texts" (203). Although this statement may ultimately be less defensible than Jameson claims (like some of his other arguments), he sees this process of bracketing and effacing reflected in nostalgia films, especially of the 1970s and '80s, which he argues demonstrate "the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience" (205). Similarly, the post-apocalyptic genre cannibalizes the styles of the past, separating them from their original meaning. The referent is bracketed and effaced—the signified is separated from the signifier. By doing this, however, the post-apocalyptic genre is able to reflect the disconnect and loss of meaning between past (pre-eschatological) and present (post-eschatological). Before the eschatological event, the past was a meaningful referent. In the post-apocalyptic world, this referent has been bracketed and then effaced. Thus, individuals are left in an ontological crisis because the past is no longer meaningfully connected to the symbols of the present. There is a breakdown between signifier and signified. Yet, the past (through flashbacks, objects from the past, locations, and so on) is essential to the post-apocalyptic genre. Although the referent is gone, those living in the post-apocalyptic world cling to the objects of the past, are burdened by memory, etc. Not only are they "incapable of fashioning representations" of their current experience, but they are also incapable of comprehending the meaning of their current experience/existence. The norms that gave meaning to life, the universe, and everything before the apocalypse are gone.

Elizabeth K. Rosen, in her book *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination*, examines how postmodernists have employed the apocalyptic myth in their work. She concludes that by adopting and adapting this myth, postmodernists "nudge us toward active engagement with the complexities of human language and relations, and away from the deadly consequences of oversimplifying human motivation and behavior" (178).

According to Rosen, the story of apocalypse is a cultural myth "just as real and influential as our myths of origins" (xi). As it "is a means by which to understand the world and one's place in it," the apocalyptic impulse is "a sense-making one" (xi-xiii). Quoting Joseph Dewey, Rosen writes, "An apocalyptic narrative 'resists the crisis of change by inculcating change into its very vocabulary,' assuring its readers that 'the apparent disorder of history will finally affirm order'" (xii-xiii). Thus, she sees the apocalyptic myth as one tending to (or, at least, with the potential to) reduce the complexity of human experience, history, and change. This, she argues, is one possible motivation for the postmodern narratives of the apocalypse. "By illuminating the complexity and power of human language and symbols, by exposing (and challenging) the systems which that language creates and within which we move, postmodernists may help to deepen our appreciation for the complexity of human relations, and, importantly, they may make it easier to resist the reductionism which apocalypse encourages" (178). She accepts that the apocalyptic myth exists in various forms—including the traditional, biblical apocalyptic framework featuring renewal as well as the disaster structure focusing on destruction and a lack of renewal, which Rosen terms "neo-apocalyptic"—yet finds in postmodern appropriation of the apocalyptic a means by which to reexamine and question cultural myths in order to emphasize the complexity of human existence.

Although Rosen is concerned with apocalyptic narratives rather than post-apocalyptic ones, her examination of how postmodernism is manifested in apocalyptic texts is helpful for understanding the postmodern nature of the post-apocalyptic genre. Drawing on Lois Parkinson Zamora's study of apocalyptic literature, she writes that the apocalyptic myth "is a narrative riddled with ironies and paradoxes, a story that 'mocks the notion of conclusive ends and endings even as it proposes just that—the conclusive narration of history's end' . . . What other word is

there but 'ironic' for a myth that is built on an earnestly predicted End that doesn't arrive, only to repeat itself with equal earnestness and the same unrealized expectations?" (xxi). A similar irony is present in post-apocalyptic texts, which are being told by narrators whose very existence is ironic about characters whose existence is also ironic because the stories imagine a time and a space that exist after the end of time and space.

Rosen identifies three specific aspects of the apocalyptic paradigm that are "tangibly affected" by postmodern adaptation: God, time, and judgment (xxiii-xxiv). In postmodern apocalyptic tales, God may be dead or humanized. "These secular deities are often imperfect characters, neither absolutely omniscient and omnipotent, nor absolutely benevolent. The absolutist Judeo-Christian depiction of God ceases to be a factor; plurality and ambiguity are stronger influences here" (xxiii). Further, in postmodern versions of the apocalypse, linear time is generally supplanted by of cyclical time. "In this shift one can see again how rigid delineations are abandoned in favor of a more flexible interpretation: endings become beginnings and vice versa. Moreover, *absolute* beginnings and endings disappear" (xxiv; emphasis in original). The third aspect that Rosen identifies is an altered concept of judgment. She writes, "Because of postmodernism's refusal to privilege one culture or point of view over another, judgment often becomes an amorphous and ambiguous concept in postmodern apocalypse . . . [Characters'] moral bearings are sometimes unsteady. They are fully aware of, sometimes even paralyzed by, the moral complexities of the modern world, and they are frequently unsure what is 'right' and what is 'wrong.' Part of what is at stake in postmodern apocalypse is the question of whether objective judgment is possible" (xxiv-xxv). These three aspects of the apocalyptic framework are modified by postmodernism in the post-apocalyptic genre in similar ways. As discussed by Heffernan, the post-apocalypse exists after faith, after the end when God was supposed to reveal

Himself. Therefore, the post-apocalyptic world has a difficult relationship with the concept of deity. Post-apocalyptic deity reflects the postmodern apocalyptic deity described by Rosen—in some post-apocalyptic imaginings, God is dead while in others, deity is humanized. Whether absent, plural, or ambiguous, depictions of deity in the post-apocalyptic genre are far from absolute. Post-apocalyptic time loses its absolute delineations and becomes cyclical and/or ambiguous. In so doing, it loses its meaning. Characters in post-apocalyptic narratives also struggle with the loss of absolute moral distinctions between right and wrong. Judgment is subjective, and morality is ambiguous. In these ways, Rosen's understanding of the postmodern apocalypse also applies to the post-apocalyptic genre as it is influenced by postmodernism.

Rosen's work is also helpful in identifying specific aspects of postmodernism that are reflected in post-apocalyptic narratives and that help to define the genre. She describes postmodernism as "intensely subjective, aggressively theoretical, unabashedly self-absorbed, and skeptical of established ideas, of value judgments and norms, of traditional aesthetic models in general and of grand narratives in particular. Such qualities seem inimical to the apocalyptic myth, even to the idea of apocalypse itself" (175). While she sees these aspects of postmodernism being used by postmodern authors to adapt the apocalyptic myth for their purposes, these elements are essential to the post-apocalyptic genre. Further, the same list of defining characteristics of postmodernism, quoted from Stanley Trachtenberg, which Rosen sees being applied in postmodern apocalyptic narratives, help to shape post-apocalyptic texts— "pluralism, . . . [opposition] to closure, the absence or erasure of plot, indeterminacy, and parody and pastiche in place of unified or organic style" (176). As an essentially postmodern genre, the post-apocalyptic genre functions much like the postmodernists with whom Rosen is concerned. Postmodernists and the post-apocalyptic genre "seek to get beyond the limits of time and space,"

and they both "seek to strip away the fictions that govern our lives, to expose the metaphoric structures that lie under our way of understanding the world and the narratives that the status quo uses to maintain its position of power" (175). While these postmodern characteristics and ideals are used as a way of adapting the apocalyptic paradigm, the post-apocalyptic genre is inherently postmodern. The post-apocalyptic world is defined by postmodern notions such as ambiguity, pluralism, and pastiche. Rosen is clear in explaining that her study "is not primarily intended as an examination of genre" (xxv). However, she makes many connections between postmodernism and apocalyptic narratives that are essential, defining aspects of the post-apocalyptic genre.

In addition to Jameson and Trachtenberg, many others have examined postmodernism and its characteristics, including Thomas Schatz in his analysis of Woody Allen's 1977 film *Annie Hall*. Although his essay, "*Annie Hall* and the Issue of Modernism," specifically identifies modernism as the operative issue, Schatz was writing in a period of late modernism that was already moving toward and overlapping with postmodernism. It is also worth noting that the characteristics of modernism which he describes in his essay are merely expanded upon by postmodernists, for many modernist concepts are more fully expressed in postmodernism. For example, the modernist "impatience with the focus on ends is there in its nascent state in some modernist works and finds fuller expression in many postmodernist works" (Heffernan 11). Essential aspects of both modernism and postmodernism are narrative experimentation, formal inventiveness, and self-consciousness (Grausam 4-6). However, postmodernism is particularly noted for taking these to greater extremes and for using them to explore different ideas. As postmodernists expand upon the ideas of modernism, modernist self-consciousness and reflexivity becomes self-reflexive metafiction as postmodern texts "make their own fictionality a central issue" (85). Although modernism and postmodernism share many characteristics, the two

approaches employ these characteristics to explore different concerns. As stated previously, "a modernist concern with epistemological questions morphs into a postmodernist concern with ontology" (5). Therefore, the characteristics discussed by Schatz are helpful in identifying specific ways in which postmodernism may be exhibited in the film medium.

While modernists used narrative experimentation to question the epistemological nature of narrative forms, a fundamental idea of postmodernism is that texts contain multiple meanings which do not remain constant but are, rather, continually shifting. Thus, postmodernism moves beyond questions of meaning and focuses more on the nature of being—it is less concerned with how a text makes meaning and more concerned with what makes a text a text—and how this reflects contemporary society. Many of the tools employed by the modernists to examine epistemological questions are adapted and expanded by postmodernists to examine ontological questions. Drawing specifically upon Roland Barthes idea of the "plural" text, Schatz writes that

> the more overtly plural (i.e., modern) text will subvert conventional codes along these broad guidelines: to portray characters, objects, and events as a "galaxy of signifiers" without stipulating their "meaning"; to develop a narrative structure which allows the reader various points of access (which generally is accomplished through some manipulation of the traditional chronology of exposition-complication-resolution); to elaborate the ironic interfacing of author, narrator and character and thereby subvert the traditional conception of the "central character" as a primary organizing sensibility within the text. (181)

Further, he explains that the modernist text (and thus, by extension, the postmodernist text) "is characterized by thematic ambiguity, by an ironic interrelationship among author, narrator, and character (and, by extension, the reader/viewer), and by a convoluted narrative temporal structure" (182). It is exactly this kind of "ironic interrelationship" that Grausam identifies as an essential component of the postmodern nature of post-apocalyptic narratives—ironically, the narrator exists in a time and place after the world has ended. Readers and viewers of post-apocalyptic texts are drawn into this ironic interrelationship as they simultaneously identify with

and reject identification with ambiguous characters struggling to survive in a world composed of the vestiges of the audience's own world. Although Schatz is not specifically studying post-apocalyptic texts, he helpfully synthesizes many key aspects of postmodernism that are exhibited in and fundamental to the post-apocalyptic genre.

Bruce Comens argues that the shift from modernist "strategy" toward postmodernist "tactics" was related to the two World Wars and the Bomb. He explains that the strategy-based approach to World War II led to an escalation in the fighting, which ultimately concluded in the Bomb. Thus, the "Second World War . . . confirmed the inadequacy of attempts to derive and implement a 'grand strategy' for the elimination of war, and thereby confirmed the real lack of purpose of the First" (16). As illustrated by WWII, such a pursuit for a "grand strategy" is dangerous because it is ultimately inadequate and results in further destructive means in order to impose itself. Comens draws a connection between this notion of strategy and modernism. He writes, "Formally the works of modernism are characterized by a dissatisfaction with existing structures (strategies like the traditional lyric, epic, or novel), a dissatisfaction expressed in the fragmentation and evident play with the conventions of form" (16). Thus, the modernists sought for an all-inclusive strategy that would integrate form and content, building upon a center of meaning. "Finding the difficult center and then building on that basis a greater strategy—these are the driving impulses behind the modernist enterprise" (18). Thus, Comens finds a correlation between the Bomb, which demonstrated the danger of such strategy-driven endeavors, and the postmodernist shift. "Not until after the Second World War and the actuality of the Bomb do we find a general rejection of both the search for a center and the attempt at a superior strategy" (18). That rejection was expressed in postmodernism, which he claims was not a strategy but, rather, tactics employed by the postmodernists "to transform their culture and society" often with

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the objective to focus on the diversity of human lives and human practices that had been overshadowed and sublimated by a focus on the Bomb (19). Comens characterizes postmodernism as the implementation of narrative tactics in order to reject grand strategies that ultimately endangered a focus on the diversity of humanity. This characterization reveals an important post-apocalyptic concern which differs distinctly from a key apocalyptic concern. While apocalyptic, pre-apocalyptic, and neo-apocalyptic narratives are concerned about the impending annihilation of human diversity, post-apocalyptic narratives are altogether different in that they are concerned with the ambiguity of life after all grand strategies have failed. The actuality of deconstruction leads to new concerns about the reconstruction of life in the post-apocalyptic world. Grand strategies have failed and will not suffice in such a world, and human diversity is simultaneously inspiring and threatening. The post-apocalyptic genre is, by nature, postmodern and is characterized formally by the tactics of postmodernism. Although Comens' study does not discuss the post-apocalyptic fiction, it does help to describe how the shift toward postmodernism provided a set of formal and thematic tactics that could address postwar concerns—tactics and concerns which are fundamental to the post-apocalyptic genre.

As discussed above, there has been relatively little academic literature focused specifically on post-apocalyptic narratives in comparison to the many volumes that analyze the impact of apocalyptic thought on American culture and fiction, particularly in the wake of WWII and the atomic bomb. This discrepancy is certainly a result, at least in part, of the trend to include both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic considerations in the same discussion. While this is a motivating factor for the current study, the limited amount of literature devoted to post-apocalypticism, separate from apocalypticism, and the common lack of distinction between apocalypse and post-apocalypse necessitate that this review of literature address important

studies which primarily examine apocalypse. Additionally, doing so should also help to further clarify how post-apocalyptic fiction is distinct from apocalyptic fiction.

Apocalypse and Meaning-making

The previous section discusses the importance of postmodernism in the post-apocalyptic genre by offering a new perspective on narrative structure that allows for problematic endings as well as for ambiguity of meaning. While many traditional narrative structures attempt to provide more definite, meaningful resolutions, postmodernism, significantly, seeks to deviate from these structures to highlight the complicated, shifting nature of meaning in the world and the impracticality of traditional ideologies. Apocalypse (including apocalypticism) is such a traditional worldview. Apocalypse as a narrative structure makes sense of current struggles, crises, indefiniteness, and anxieties about imminent endings by offering hope in a definitive, ameliorative, emancipatory, revelatory new beginning.

This tradition of apocalyptic thought influences many religious and secular aspects of society, including history and literature. Apocalypticism shapes how history is perceived and why change and progress are sought. New regimes replace old ones in the hope that the new regime will subdue conflict, relieve the burden of the disadvantaged, and overall raise the nation to a higher order, thus being a secular form of apocalyptic transcendence. As alluded before, the book of Revelation in the New Testament is perhaps the most iconic and prototypical work in the genre of apocalypse. In *A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization*, Jonathan Kirsch argues that the book of Revelation has been integral in the shaping of history as its apocalypticism has influenced individuals and peoples that have initiated historical events in an attempt to bring about a new

world order and/or has been used as a supportive reference to describe the character and explain the inevitability of such events. "The conquest of Jerusalem by medieval crusaders, the Bonfire of the Vanities in Florence during the Renaissance, the naming of the newly discovered Americas as the New World, and the thousand-year Reich promised by Adolf Hitler are all examples of the unlikely and unsettling ways that the book of Revelation has resonated through history" (3). He offers these historical events as examples of how the "idea that the world will end (and soon)—and the phantasmagoria of words, numbers, colors, images, and incidents in which the end-times are described in the book of Revelation—are deeply woven into the fabric of Western civilization, both in high culture and in pop culture, starting in distant biblical antiquity and continuing into our own age" (2). The book of Revelation, its language, and its images are inextricably connected to the way the end of the world is perceived and discussed, and its vision of the renewal of the world and salvation of the chosen followers.

Although Kirsch focuses on the book of Revelation, it is only one example of the apocalyptic tradition that had existed for at least a few centuries before the book of Revelation was written. The majority of apocalypses were written between about 200 BCE and 200 CE, and the common themes of the ancient apocalyptic writings are the decline and destruction of humankind (as a result of sinfulness) as well as the revelation of the divine, celestial order that will replace the old, terrestrial social and governmental structures (Lumpkin 380). "Every society possesses apocalyptic texts. Every race and every nation carries in its literature and religion the implicit reiterating and unrelenting question; is the end near?" The answer offered by apocalypses is "yes . . . and here are its signs" (380). In addition to the signs of cataclysm, however, the ancient apocalyptic writings also included "the happy side and beneficial outcome of the event" (Nibley 68). The book of Revelation is one apocalypse in a long series of texts that

follows this apocalyptic tradition, offering a pattern that provides hope in a future system that is better than the present one.

Others have more fully studied certain areas in which the apocalyptic tradition has greatly influenced the history of the world. Kirsch mentions many important events, including the rise and deeds of Nazi Germany which was rooted in apocalypticism. David Redles further examines this topic in his book *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation*. Kirsch highlights how the book of Revelation has inspired apocalyptic views throughout history, including the 20th century and beyond, yet Bart D. Ehrman argues that Jesus Christ was an apocalypticist who believed that the end of the world would occur within his own generation (3). According to Ehrman's claim, Jesus' apocalypticism was as myopic as that of each generation which believes that the end is imminent. History has shown that thus far every generation that espouses such a belief has been wrong. However, the apocalyptic tradition has impacted and continues to impact the history of the world—historical events themselves as well as the narrative explaining those events.

As evidenced in the examples given above, the apocalyptic pattern and apocalyptic texts have been used to justify and make sense of historical events. Michael Lieb, in his study *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time*, claims that an apocalyptic text, the vision of Ezekiel in the Old Testament, unites the disparate terms listed in the title of his book. The revelation given Ezekiel has inspired "visionaries" in many different areas of progress including race relations, technology, and exploration (1). "Inventors, scientists, technologists, evangelicals, and poets, they are visionaries all. For them Ezekiel's *visio Dei* represents the wellspring of the impulse to fashion a technology out of the ineffable, the inexpressible, the unknowable. Drawing on the forces within the vision, they reinvent it, re-

create it, 'technologize' it in their own terms" (3). In one half of his book, Lieb discusses how

Ezekiel's vision inspired these visionaries to "augur a brave new world of locomotion, of flight,

of mechanized conquest, of interplanetary space travel" while in the second half he discusses the

influence of the revelation on the ideology of the Nation of Islam (18, 129). Thus, Lieb sees how

the apocalyptic tradition has influenced modern society in many different ways from

technological innovation to ideological consciousness. Inherent in this tradition is the desire for

and assurance of progress, a transformation of the present state into a better one. The apocalyptic

imagination promises change, and history is a narrative of change.

The apocalyptic myth is inherently a form of storytelling: the story of God delivering his

followers, the story of a nation's progress, the story of humankind's technological advancement,

and so on. Kirsch writes that "the authors of the Hebrew Bible embraced the revolutionary new

idea that the God of Israel is a deity who works his will through human history—and history, like

any well-crafted story, has a beginning, a middle, and an end" (23). In addition to the narratives

of history, the influence of the apocalyptic myth is also evident in the story structures of

literature. Apocalypse is an archetypal framework through which humanity conceives of its own

existence. From Genesis through Revelation, the existential trajectory offers the beginning of the

world and man, God's relationship with man on the earth, the end of the world along with the

destruction of the wicked, and the rebirth of the world in a glorified form upon which the

righteous will dwell in the presence of God. The apocalyptic biblical narrative is a linear

conception of time and progress with a distinct beginning and middle and with an end that gives

meaning to what has come before. The idea that endings give meaning to their preceding

beginnings and middles is one the central arguments in Frank Kermode's study *The Sense of an

Ending*. For Kermode, an ending is essential for apocalyptic thought to occur. He explains,

"Broadly speaking, apocalyptic thought belongs to rectilinear rather than cyclical views of the world" (5). The notion of apocalypse is only meaningful if existence is steadily moving on a linear path toward an end. The model of apocalypse provides for hope and faith in a renewed world that will replace the present, known world. Kermode argues "that apocalyptic writings are always caught up with the idea of 'renovation,' of a 'better future'" (Heffernan 6). Thus, Kermode's understanding of the apocalyptic myth has positive connotations as it is looking hopefully forward to an end which brings not only resolution to the beginning and middle but also revelation. This hope associated with a "better future" alleviates the fear of the otherwise unknown state of existence after the destruction of the earth.

According to Frank Kermode, the apocalyptic model is replicated in the structure of narrative fiction. As in this model, wherein the revelatory apocalypse makes meaning of all that comes before it, the end provides meaning to the beginning and middle of a fictional narrative that follows the apocalyptic pattern. He states, "Men in the middest make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17). Because humanity perpetually exists in the middle, fictional narratives offer a meaningful framework through which it can hope to understand the meaning of its own "middest" existence by placing it within a larger pattern. Heffernan explains, "Endings in fictional narratives, [Kermode] argues, are mini-expressions of a faith in a higher order or ultimate pattern that, though it will remain perhaps forever obscure, nevertheless lends a sense of purpose to our existence in the world" (4). The apocalyptic ideal— beginning, middle, end, and renewal—influences narrative structure itself in order to provide a "coherent pattern" which can offer hope in a meaningful end as these narratives serve as "mini-expressions" of faith that humanity's existence is itself coherent and meaningful.

Studies in Apocalyptic Literature

Although apocalypse has been fairly widely studied, the specific approach to and definition of apocalypse ranges from the traditional myth of revelation and renewal to the popular conception of destruction and ending. Such variety will be demonstrated in the following review of literature, and it will also demonstrate that studies in apocalyptic literature and studies in apocalyptic cinema typically gravitate toward different conceptions of the apocalyptic. While apocalyptic film criticism (such as that of Peter Y. Paik, mentioned below) generally limits its use of apocalypse to the popular connotation of cataclysm and catastrophe, work in apocalyptic literature generally draws upon the myth of biblical apocalypse. In a collection of essays concerning apocalyptic literature, Eric S. Rabkin offers this introductory statement: "At one level, stories of the end of the world display the consequences of our social values; at another, the meanings of our wishes. The end that the world meets it meets as its end: the goal of world destruction is world creation, pro-creation, and re-creation for the citizen, for the child, and, most importantly, for the self" (xv). Such an understanding of apocalyptic literature differs from the common perception of apocalyptic film as disaster fantasy, yet there are exceptions, which will also be discussed below. This review of literature demonstrates the scope of apocalyptic scholarship in literature and film as well as other disciplines, and it ultimately reveals a lack in post-apocalyptic scholarship.

In his book *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper in the American Novel of the Nuclear Age* (1990), Joseph Dewey argues that American fiction did not really respond directly to the atomic bomb, Hiroshima, and the subsequent nuclear age until the 1960s, close to two decades after the end of the Second World War. Although the first novels to directly respond to

the nuclear were often labored, artificial, unconvincing, and didactic, according to Dewey, they were adapting the apocalyptic temper to their own situation. "The apocalyptic temper is an attempt by a culture that is genuinely puzzled and deeply disturbed to understand itself and its own time" (9-10). Traditionally, this understanding was seen to largely come about by situating crises in the context of a larger order with a meaningful end, certainly reflecting the ideas of Frank Kermode discussed previously in this dissertation. Prior to the nuclear age, this conception of the apocalyptic temper was a "steadying vision" resting "[b]etween the certain destruction and the hopeful construction" (14). This pre-nuclear apocalyptic temper resides between the notions of cataclysmic imagination, which conceives of "how-to manuals for species extermination," and the millennialist spirit, which "accepts endings most cheerfully because of the fanatic commitment to better worlds emerging from the ruins" (12-3). However, facing the realities of nuclear power as witnessed in the blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this conception of the apocalyptic temper seems somewhat naïve. "The reality of living in the nuclear age implies that humanity is no longer spinning imaginary endings" (41). Therefore, it took almost twenty years for the revival of the apocalyptic temper; however, Dewey finds that, emerging in the '60s and continuing into successive decades, "contemporary American literature is finding a way to encompass the meaning, if not the fact, of the nuclear threat. It has found a way to guide its most authentic characters to positions where, despite the reconciliation to the menace of instant and, hence, meaningless death, there pulses the will to live and to love in a fragile world" (43). Therefore, as Dewey argues, the revival of the apocalyptic temper brought fictional narratives that provided renewed hope while facing the constant threat of annihilation. Such narratives "offer nothing less than what the awesome destruction of the nuclear age threatens most profoundly by salvaging human life with its dignity and passion in the face of evidence that

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human life has been reduced to the murderous calculus of species genocide" (43). Such an apocalyptic temper is certainly evident in apocalyptic stories; however, Dewey's work on the apocalyptic is insufficient for examining the post-apocalyptic, for apocalyptic narratives are of an entirely different order than those of the post-apocalyptic genre. Although the post-apocalyptic genre, for the most part, also emerged in the 1960s, it is not imbued with this revived apocalyptic temper. Rather, it finds no faith in such a revival and rejects such a renewal of hope. The post-apocalyptic reflects the concerns, anxieties, and ambiguity of a time without this apocalyptic hope. It resides not between the cataclysmic imagination and the millennialist spirit but after them.

The studies mentioned above, including those from Rosen, Comens, and Dewey, are generally typical examples of the kinds of work that has been done in regard to apocalyptic literature in that they trace the influence of the apocalyptic tradition on American literature. These are particularly noteworthy for our discussion because they are concerned with connecting the evolution of American literature with specific historical events that allowed for the resurgence of apocalyptic thinking. These studies have explored apocalyptic ideas in the work of novelists such as Kurt Vonnegut, Robert Coover, Walker Percy, William Gaddis, Don DeLillo, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Louis Zukofsky. Additional studies have explored the expression of apocalyptic themes in literary texts by Herman Melville, Ralph Ellison, Thomas Pynchon, Susan Sontag, John Updike, C.S. Lewis, Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, and more.

In *The Bang and the Whimper: Apocalypse and Entropy in American Literature*, Zbigniew Lewicki follows "the development of apocalyptic and entropic tendencies in American literature in order to explain the fascination of American writers with the vision of universal destruction" (xvii). As discussed previously, destruction is a (if not *the*) primary concern of

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apocalyptic fiction, both traditional, biblical apocalyptic stories and secular, "neo-apocalyptic"

tales. Lewicki writes, "It seems that the indispensable elements [of apocalyptic literature] are the

Antichrist figure, the battle between the forces of light and the powers of darkness, and the

destruction of the book's world by violent means. The last element is particularly crucial, and no

other image can be substituted for it" (xiv). He notes that rebirth is essential in the traditional

apocalyptic narrative while it is absent in the secular apocalypse, again emphasizing the focus on

destruction.

David J. Leigh's *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction* offers another list of

apocalyptic themes: "Among the themes of apocalyptic literature from Daniel to Percy are an

imminent end-time, a cosmic catastrophe, a movement from an old to a new age, a struggle

between forces of good and evil (sometimes personified in angels and demons), a desire for an

ultimate paradise (often parallel to an original paradise), the transitional help of God or a

messiah, and a final judgment and manifestation of the ultimate" (5). He, then, analyzes how

these themes are reflected in a number of 20th-century fictional texts. He also provides an

additional list of formal traits that often recur in apocalyptic literature, including "visions or

dreams by seers or guides, characters in spiritual turmoil, pseudonymous authorship, mythic

imagery, a composite text, a crisis situation, a sense of ultimate hope, and signs of an end-time"

(5). Interestingly, Leigh's analysis draws heavily upon a theological framework of apocalypse.

In contrast to the studies of Lewicki and Leigh, Douglas Robinson is less concerned with

the examination of specific apocalyptic themes and is mainly interested in the specific

apocalyptic notion of transformation from old to new. His central argument in *American*

Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature is that "the whole

question of the apocalyptic ideology, of the historical transformation of space and time from old

to new, from corruption to new innocence, from death to rebirth, is fundamental to American

literature" (3). In addition to analyzing the works of several of the American authors already

listed above, he offers analyses of the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe,

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and others. His study is quite inclusive, for as he claims, the

"great majority of our writers have insistently attempted to come to grips with the problems

raised by the apocalyptic thrust of the American Dream" (3). Robinson finds the apocalyptic

myth operative throughout American literature as authors are often concerned with the pursuit of

the American Dream, a notion which he suggests is apocalyptic itself in its emphasis on renewal

and rebirth.

Anthony Dyer Hoefer applies the notion of apocalypse (specifically, apocalypse of the

eschatological variety) to a regional study of the American South and its literature. In

Apocalypse South: Judgment, Cataclysm, and Resistance in the Regional Imaginary, he claims

that apocalypse has always and continues to be a fundamental factor that shapes the Southern

social imaginary. The work of Southern authors reflects the anxiety that "the South is always

already at a moment of sublime, often cataclysmic transformation" (7). Accordingly, Southern

culture has been formed as a result of eschatological concerns—the continual threat of an

imminent end. Importantly, Hoefer emphasizes how the apocalyptic has influenced African

American culture in the South.

In American literary scholarship, there has been a significant focus on studying

apocalypse in African American literature In addition to Hoefer, both Lewicki and Leigh devote

portions of their books to analyze the apocalyptic tradition as it is reflected in and influential on

African American literature, and this is the subject of an entire book by Maxine Lavon

Montgomery. Montgomery's *The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction* traces the apocalyptic

tradition through African American literature, focusing on texts by Charles Chesnutt, Richard Wright, LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), and others, in addition to Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison, whose works often appear in other analyses of apocalyptic literature. She writes, "Because African Americans have been excluded from full participation in America's social, political, and economic mainstream, they have been forced to develop a theological perspective at odds with that of White America" (ix). Therefore, this unique theological perspective has created a unique image of apocalypse in African-American fiction. "Apocalypse in the African-American tradition evolved because of the contradictions between America's democratic ideals and the daily realities confronting the majority of African Americans. It reflects a people's response to the paradoxes of their times" (7). Apocalypse has been essential in African-American fiction from slavery to the urban migration of the early 20th century and beyond. Montgomery explains, "From slavery and its aftermath there emerged a large body of folk material revealing an imaginative concern with Judeo-Christian eschatology among rural blacks, even as they attempted to adjust to life in the New World" (7). During the 1920s and 1930s, there was a great migration of blacks from the rural South to the urban North, which "had the most profound influence on the conceptualization and development of the apocalypse" (12). In this conceptualization, "the notion of the end of the world is refracted into ideologies that are directed toward resolving complex modern issues in a literate, fast-paced, technological society" (12). She also explains that apocalypse was an important idea, in later decades, in the ideologies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Revolution. The centrality of apocalypse in African-American fiction "is evidence of the crisis-ridden African-American experience" as it provides "a mode of expression revealing a concern with the end of an oppressive sociopolitical system and the establishment of a new world order where racial justice prevails" (1). Montgomery's

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work examines a unique literary tradition that operates on different terms than white, heteronormative American literature, and it reveals how a unique conception of apocalypse has been and continues to be adopted to enable a marginalized group to express their concerns and hopes.

The studies mentioned here focus on analyzing apocalyptic fiction as a tradition itself, which encompasses a great variety of texts (a fact that can be inferred by the authors whose works have been studied as apocalyptic literature). For those who consider this tradition to be a genre, it is a genre set apart from others. However, there are studies which examine how apocalyptic notions have been incorporated into other, established genres. For example, in his book *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction*, William H. Katerberg (as the title suggests) explores how the apocalyptic myth has been an essential formal and structural influence on science fiction stories concerning frontiers. As Katerberg explains, frontier science fiction, which builds upon the same frontier mythology as the western genre, draws upon apocalyptic ideas. In general, frontier stories are set in a time and place on the boundary of old and new, ending and beginning. The traditional apocalyptic myth is concerned with a similar boundary—the end of the old world and the revelation of a renewed earth. Katerberg argues that utopian hope is operative in frontier science fiction just as the apocalyptic framework offers hope in renewal and rebirth.

These studies, which trace the influence of the apocalyptic tradition in American literature, are beneficial in exploring definitions, meanings, and iterations of apocalyptic ideas. However, the arguments and analyses presented in them are quite limited in scope to the apocalyptic. While this work is beneficial for understanding how cultures confront and pacify their anxieties about the future through apocalyptic literature, it does little to examine the generic

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boundaries that distinguish apocalyptic tales of hope and destruction and post-apocalyptic stories devoid of such hope. While the apocalyptic tradition provides a narrative structure that gives meaning and hope to an uncertain present, the post-apocalyptic genre offers texts defined by ambiguity and uncertainty. Thus far, this area of literature has received relatively little scholarly attention in contrast to the work that has been discussed above.

Studies in Apocalyptic Cinema

As evidenced in the preceding review of apocalyptic literature studies, the literary apocalyptic draws significantly on the traditional, biblical apocalyptic myth. With few exceptions, most work regarding the apocalyptic in film studies focuses primarily on the apocalypse as the final, eschatological event rather than on the revelatory nature of the traditional myth. One of the exceptions is a collection of conference papers edited by JoAnn James and William J. Cloonan. In her introduction to this collection, James states, "All of the essays included here deal with revelation, understanding, new perception. The topic is the human condition, the terrors that stalk us, the stubborn hope that persists, the debasement of our dreams and the courage to formulate new ones, and our pleasure amid chaos in the aesthetic contemplation of a film or a literary text. We have survived our catastrophes" (12). However, like typical literary studies of the apocalyptic, these essays, including the film-related ones, are not interested in doing genre work but are focused on analyzing the influence of the apocalyptic myth on various texts. In one selected essay, Paul Tiessen argues that in the novel *The Childermass* (1928) by Wyndham Lewis, cinema was used as an apocalyptic metaphor to comment on mass media-influenced society. He claims, "Society's need for cultural and intellectual renewal within the context of its technological environment, Lewis was saying in *The*

Childermass as elsewhere, is desperate" (32). However, such renewal is illusory, as is cinema: "In the mechanized world of cinema, surrogate forms of rebirth are all that can be attempted" (33). As an apocalyptic metaphor, film and technology are accepted by society as the hoped-for renewal, thus preventing actual rebirth. He concludes, "Mass-man, Lewis insisted, had become the uncritical heir to what he was invited to consider as the benefits of this century's media explosion" (33). In another selected paper relating to film, John Gourlie reads the landscapes in Akira Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* (1980) as apocalyptic, meaning revelatory. As he states, "If 'apocalypse' means revelation, *Kagemusha*'s concluding image reveals at once the fate of man and the power of art to give it voice" (53). These examples offer a glimpse into the relatively little work in film studies that has applied the apocalyptic myth as it has been frequently applied in literary studies. Certainly some work, including a few previously discussed in this literature review, has examined film in addition to literature and other media. However, these studies focus more on literature and draw heavily upon the tradition of apocalyptic literature.

In *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*, Kirsten Moana Thompson offers a different view of the apocalyptic by tracing a certain resultant dread through various film genres. She uses the traditional understanding of the apocalyptic myth to help define this "apocalyptic dread," rather than restricting her approach to apocalypse to end-times destruction. She defines apocalyptic dread as "a free-floating anxiety and ambivalence about the future that is displaced onto the specific dread embodied by each film's monster, and that dramatizes a compulsive eschatological need to perceive and decode signs" (2-3). As she explains, apocalyptic dread is a tendency to anticipate and eliminate the dread created by the freedom of existential choice and an open-ended future. Just as the apocalyptic myth "transforms the random, the aleatory, and the meaningless into the preordained, overdetermined, and

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meaningful," films in the 1990s and into the early 2000s exhibit this apocalyptic dread by displacing such anxiety and ambivalence onto recognizable and manageable genres (25). She claims that this apocalyptic dread pervades many genres, being especially prominent in the science fiction genre (11). She argues that with the turn of the millennium, the apocalyptic dread "[mapped] the demonic, the eschatological, and the uncanny across the family" and supports this claim in her analysis of several case studies, specifically "a melodrama-thriller (*Cape Fear*), a psychological horror film (*Candyman*), a melodrama (*Dolores Claiborne*), a serial-killer film (*Se7en*), a science-fiction thriller (*Signs*), and a science-fiction disaster film (*War of the Worlds*)" (3). She briefly summarizes her argument, "While Hollywood's disaster spectacles of the nineties suggest truly apocalyptic dread in their anxious imaginings of the end of the world, [these] case studies of hybrid horror . . . suggest more coded anxieties about family, patriarchy, religion and 'family values'" (25). This argument is among the few in film studies that uses the apocalyptic myth beyond merely portended disaster. However, by exploring the displacement of apocalyptic dread onto family horror, Thompson's work is not useful in examining the apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic genres. She even relegates these to cycles within the science fiction genre (11-2). Her study does demonstrate the benefit of examining the apocalyptic influence on the horror genre, and it explores an interesting application of the traditional apocalyptic myth while the majority of apocalyptic film studies view the apocalyptic more narrowly.

Although there are a few scholars who approach their study of cinema from the traditional apocalyptic framework, the majority of work in apocalyptic cinema defines the apocalyptic primarily by the eschatological event itself. Such is the case in Charles P. Mitchell's *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema* wherein he offers his definitions of apocalyptic and post-

apocalyptic: "In order to be classified as an apocalyptic film, the event threatening the extinction of humanity has to be presented within the story. If this catastrophe occurs prior to the events depicted on the screen, the film is post-apocalyptic" (xi). These definitions are similar to those of the terms "pre-eschatological" and "post-eschatological" offered in the previous chapter. Such definitions offer distinct settings but do little to distinguish the theoretical and thematic concerns of the genres. Mitchell continues, "Naturally there can be a blurring of the lines of these two genres, and a number of pictures can legitimately be labeled as both" (xi). He then provides synopses and critiques of fifty films that he classifies as apocalyptic. In an appendix he lists fifty more films categorized as post-apocalyptic and acknowledges that there are "thematic and stylistic differences between these two similar classifications [apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic]" (279). He writes, "The range of post-apocalyptic films is generally far narrower than the apocalyptic . . . This type of film was particularly popular during the 1980s, and a case could be made that to some degree they adopted the characteristics of the American Western. They usually took place in a desert setting and involved a confrontation between forces of good and evil. There are also a number of quality pre-1980s titles" (279). Mitchell should be noted for being one of the few scholars to make a distinction between the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic; however, temporal relation to the eschatological event being the defining characteristic does little to distinguish the two in terms of the apocalyptic myth. There are many film texts set in a post-cataclysmic world that has already been renewed. Thus, they are post-eschatological while still being apocalyptic. In fact, this was the dominant trend that he witnessed in the 1980s. Thus, this dissertation is concerned with further defining the post-apocalyptic genre not only according to themes and stylistics but also theories that influence the form and anxieties of the genre.

The focus of apocalyptic cinema studies on the eschatological, cataclysmic aspect of apocalypse rather than on rejuvenation and revelation is perhaps a response to apocalyptic film texts themselves. In his introduction to a collection of essays (published in 1993) examining the evocation of the apocalyptic in late-20th century postmodernism, Christopher Sharrett claims that "cultural production of the last two decades has consistently represented the catastrophic sites of the epoch, and the apocalypse of postmodernity is almost always couched in that very popular misuse of apocalypse not as revelation but doomsday, disaster, the end" (4). Further, Sharrett argues that the postmodern cultural products of the late 20th century were heavily influenced by this "misuse" of the apocalyptic, and the essays published in his volume are primarily concerned with examining how this is reflected in cinema. The chosen essays explain that these postmodern films frequently use the end-of-history ethos to present sociopoliticoeconomic conditions "as sealed-over and seamless, as unproblematical and uncontentious not because a return to a halcyon yesteryear has been achieved by the neoconservative reaction, but because conditions are portrayed as beyond transformation" (5). For Sharrett, these bleak, nihilistic depictions are dangerous because they have a real-world, material impact. "Contemporary theory aside, critics must pay attention to the apocalypticism of the postmodern moment simply because the horrific nihilism of cultural production indeed has a relationship to measurable, material circumstances of society" (4). According to his argument, although postmodern texts play with reflexivity, point-of-view, editing, and subject positioning, they are not politically radical and are unconcerned with contemporary issues such as race, gender, and social and economic justice. Through its nihilistic misuse of the apocalyptic, postmodern cinema recognizes "the bankruptcy of capitalism and patriarchy, but validates them anyway" (5). This apocalyptic postmodernity, as he sees it, essentially promotes and encourages

an acceptance of inevitable doom and powerlessness, which will have serious and real material consequences. Thus, his volume of collected essays seeks "to confront the inexorable logic of reactionary postmodernity, to accept its major premises, while holding out for the resistance of difference and human intervention" (9). This work is an interesting contribution to apocalyptic film studies in its political motivation. Although its clear agenda may differ from other studies, the essays do contribute to the understanding of how postmodernism is exhibited in apocalyptic films through self-reflexivity, challenging dominant social structures and hierarchies, playing with traditional mythic narratives, and bricolage.

In addition, the essays collected by Sharrett make no generic distinction between the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic. Further, these essays are not engaged in genre work. However, they do acknowledge that there is a connection between the apocalyptic and postmodernism in the late 20th century. This connection is essential for understanding the post-apocalyptic as the post-apocalyptic genre is defined, in part, by postmodern characteristics such as bricolage, self-reflexivity, and play.

Peter Y. Paik uses the popular notion of apocalypse to discuss the depiction of political revolution in science fiction. Such a popular understanding forgoes the revelatory meaning of apocalypse and suffices to limit it to "the disintegration of human society" (124). In *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*, he argues that science fiction uses depictions of disintegration, destruction, and decay "to achieve wakefulness" to real political issues "through the exercise of the literary imagination" (22). The main argument of his study is that imaginative depictions of struggle, collapse, and revolution pervade science fiction, and he provides close readings of the politics in various texts. His is not a study of the

apocalyptic nor of the post-apocalyptic, but it does reveal the common usage of apocalypse to merely indicate large-scale catastrophe.

Rather than focusing on a specific film genre or the influence of the apocalyptic myth on cinema, Wheeler Winston Dixon views the state of cinema at the beginning of the 21st century to support his claim that the world is ready and willing for the end to come. In his book *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema*, he limits the meaning of apocalypse as do most scholars who write about apocalyptic cinema. For Dixon, apocalypse does not refer to renewal and revelation but to the end of existence. Although he briefly discusses films that he calls "Dystopian fantasies" and "postapocalypse films," he is not chiefly interested in films or genres that depict the end of the world. Instead, his main argument is that the world is ready for the end to come.

He examines early 21st-century cinema to support his claim that the world is ready for its own end. He describes his study as "a book about the end of cinema, the end of the world, and the end of civilization as we know it. The signs are there, waiting to be deciphered" (1). The threats of nuclear weapons, terrorism, depleted natural resources, international political tension, and more are among the signs of the end, and the means by which this information is presented to and accessed by the public is controlled by media. "Images seek to control and dominate us," and largely the public does not resist because they accept the media's message that "resistance is futile" (1). "Indeed, as a culture, we seem tired with life. As we enter the 21st century, there are signs of exhaustion everywhere" (1). Among these signs are prominent features of early 21st-century cinema, particularly the obsession with remakes and sequels, the recurring depictions of terrorism and invasion, and the rise of digital filmmaking signaling the death of film. In his study, he discusses the state of cinema in regards to each of these areas. He writes, "Increasingly,

it seems that audiences do not wish to be entertained; they want to be bombarded by an assault of light and sound" (14). Thus, originality is sacrificed in favor of visually spectacular remakes and sequels. Further, there continues to be very little penetration of international product in the U.S., and Hollywood films dominate many foreign markets, shaping international audiences into the same sensory-bombardment mentality. He then argues that tales of terrorism and invasion are prominent as a result of 9/11. "Just as Pearl Harbor shaped the cinema of the 1940s, so September 11 will serve as the template for the new 21st century conflict" (59). This potential for (final) conflict exists, and Dixon suggests that the general attitude is one of expectation and inevitability (96). Finally, he addresses digital cinema, claiming that "film itself has become a twentieth-century artifact, rendered obsolete by the technical advances of twenty-first-century digital imaging" (97). He sees *Star Wars: Episode II* (2002) as the perfect example of how digital cinema and the death of film threaten to be the end of cinema. "*Attack of the Clones* is the perfect postfilm movie; it lacks soul, inspiration, originality, and style," for "technology is the driving force here, not creativity" (9, 11).

For Dixon, digital filmmaking, depictions of terrorism and invasion, and the dominance of sensory-bombarding cinema are examples of how cinema itself witnesses of the approaching end of itself, the world, and civilization. He describes a general attitude of ambivalence toward and acceptance of the end. Such an attitude responds to what he views as "the true and humbling nature of genuine apocalypse," which is that "not an atom of the Earth will remain to bear witness to our birth, life, and death" (3). He continues, "What makes this appealing is the thought that if none shall survive, then, at last, all class, social, and racial boundaries will have been erased. No more slavery, no more sweatshops, no more prejudice, and no more inequality. As the Earth atomizes into cosmic dust, we will at last achieve the true perfection of nonexistence with

nothing but some space debris to bear witness to our passing. We are all, thus, equal in death"
(3). As he sees it, the promise of such equality gives rise to apathy toward the loss of invention
and the appeal of the end of existence. Dixon's argument is an interesting yet limited approach to
apocalypse; however, it fails to consider and imagine the what-if of life after such an apocalypse.
This is the terrain of the post-apocalyptic.

Beyond Apocalyptic Literature and Film Criticism

In addition to studies focused on apocalyptic literature, scholars across disciplines have
employed ideas of apocalypse in their work. Simply by the nature of differing disciplines, many
of these are less relevant to the present discussion than those pertaining to literature. However, it
is worth introducing certain avenues of study that have engaged in critical thinking about the
apocalypse. It also needs to be noted that, like literary studies, these other scholarly disciplines—
which include gender studies and religious studies—rarely discuss the post-apocalyptic, drawing
instead on theories of the apocalyptic.

Richard Dellamora uses apocalyptic theories, specifically those of Jacques Derrida, to
examine gay male identity politics at the end of the 19th century as well as the end of the 20th
century. In his book *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending*, he
analyses a number of different kinds of texts, including not only literary texts but also critical,
theoretical, cinematic, and visual texts. By encompassing various media, he seeks to demonstrate
that the progress of each medium is eventually impeded, becoming what Derrida described as "a
non-totalisable totality" (1). He seeks "a better understanding of the circumstances that make
gaps, losses, and ruptures in individual and group histories inescapable" (1). The group that is the
main focus of his work is gay men, a group whose identity, as he argues, reflects apocalyptic

ideas of ending, rupture, and renewal. He employs Derridean deconstruction in his analysis "as a site of apocalyptic theory" (5). According to Dellamore, Derridean deconstruction has two major phases, "the analytic and the affirmative," both of which "have important roles to play in relation to apocalypse" (26). These two phases of deconstruction are both necessary "to retain 'enough apocalyptic desire' to motivate both the pursuit of social renovation and the continuing critique of 'the apocalyptic discourse itself'" (26). Most apocalyptic criticism has used Derridean apocalypse in relation to atomic warfare and the Holocaust, drawing upon the possibility of universal nuclear destruction including the destruction of archives and, thus, the destruction of memory and meaningful symbolic expression. Dellamore focuses on Derrida's understanding of sexuality as an apocalyptic site, with a similar threat of destruction yet with a hope in social renovation. He writes, "AIDS has not destroyed the memory of gay existence, but it has made such destruction imaginable. Under the circumstances, gay writers have been pressed into service as angels of the millennium. Bearing messages to gays and to others, they remind us that an archive does exist and that it is our responsibility to carry its words" (28). While more significant in gender studies than in genre studies, Dellamore's work does demonstrate how apocalyptic thinking can provide hope in spite of the threat of impending endings. It also demonstrates the need to further examine the post-apocalyptic, which resides distinctly within the "gaps, losses, and ruptures."

In her study of race in postwar literature (both fiction and nonfiction), Jacqueline Foertsch examines where American persons of color are located in preparedness, survivalist, and civil defense materials as well as fictional narratives. Unlike Montgomery mentioned above, Foertsch does not study how the apocalyptic myth shapes African American literature; instead, she is interested in discussing the presence (or lack thereof) and position of marginalized

American ethnicities, particularly African Americans, in nuclear and post-nuclear texts. Although she writes about the "genres" of atomic and post-nuclear narratives, she does not elucidate generic characteristics but, rather, uses the term "genre" to refer to texts (both fiction and nonfiction) that offer scenarios related either to survival of an atomic threat or to survival in a post-nuclear setting. In the postwar period, African Americans were rarely discussed in these texts, including government preparedness documents, civil defense strategies, and novels. As Foertsch writes, "Despite the gains made by postwar-era African Americans to establish themselves as free and equal members of US society, the tendency persisted throughout this period to envision America 'in the aggregate' as it had always been: unthinkingly and overwhelmingly white, middle-class, religiously and politically homogeneous, affluent, and united in opposition to a common enemy" (10-1). As a result of this homogeneity, African Americans were rarely mentioned (located) in literature related to the atomic bomb. Additionally, in terms of physical location, they were generally located in marginalized places. Postwar America witnessed much of the white middle class moving away from urban centers to outlying suburban settings, leaving poor and ethnic groups to occupy urban spaces because "the suburbs were closed to them [and] rural ties had been severed generations earlier" (3). As she explains, "In America's 'burnt out,' 'bombed out' urban cores, locales we have tagged with post-nuclear adjectives since the postwar period, remained America's 'undesirables'—African, Asian, and Latino Americans and other ethnic persons or immigrants with low incomes; poor whites; the elderly; gays and lesbians; the mentally disturbed; the otherwise socially delinquent" (3). Since urban areas were more likely to be targets of nuclear attack, "the atomic threat found many of America's persons of color trapped at ground zero" (3). In response to such marginalization by white authors of survival fiction and nonfiction, during the postwar era African American

authors—journalists, intellectuals, artists, and novelists—located themselves firmly in opposition to nuclear power and wrote "protest literature" by depicting African Americans "as either victims of politicized spatial configuration (e.g., confined within substandard, endangered locations) or victorious claimants to their rightful turf in the atomic landscape (e.g., finding shelter where it is officially denied to them)" (22). As it explores the depiction of race, Foertsch's work *Reckoning Day: Race, Place, and the Atom Bomb in Postwar America* is a significant critical examination of hegemony in survival literature. Although not directly related to the current study, it does provide an important look at the changing characterization of race in nuclear-themed texts from the early postwar era to the civil rights era and beyond. Although she finds that marginalized groups were typically omitted, underrepresented, or positioned in undesirable locations in postwar survival literature, some works challenged such hegemony, and significantly, many of these works were produced around the time that the post-apocalyptic genre also emerged.

In addition to critical and cultural examinations of apocalyptic texts, rhetoricians have studied how the apocalyptic has been used towards rhetorical ends. In *Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric*, Barry Brummett acknowledges that "there are many studies of how apocalyptic ideas and argument influence contemporary culture, but only in terms of art and fictional literature" (13). He establishes that the term "apocalyptic" is used to denote eschatological end, impending doom, and transition from one world, era, or state of being to another. To clarify his position, he offers his definition, "Apocalyptic is that discourse that restores order through structures of time or history by revealing the present to be a pivotal moment in time, a moment in which history is reaching a state that will both reveal and fulfill the underlying order and purpose in history" (9-10). Accordingly, he focuses his attention on rhetors

who use such apocalyptic discourse to persuade individuals to believe that the present is "a pivotal moment in time" and, therefore, to change themselves "so as to take advantage of the unchangeable, impending culmination of history" (12). These rhetors are not confined to literature or history, which widens the range of possible apocalyptic texts. Further, contemporary apocalyptic rhetoric is a category of discourse, separate from prophecy and ahistorical apocalypse, that does "ideological business [and] uses ancient apocalyptic visions to make historically grounded, personally and politically relevant pronouncements to an audience in the present" (12). One reason that Brummett posits for the lack of scholarship in this area is the difficulty that liberal thinkers have with accepting the existence of individuals who believe in a literal apocalypse. However, such individuals comprise the audience that is addressed by contemporary apocalyptic rhetors. This audience "is given a rationale for linking their own bewilderments to a grand order underlying all of time and the cosmos. This order replaces that which has been lost, in the minds of the audience. Restoring that lost sense of order is a powerful rhetorical purpose in itself, and it also positions apocalyptic to urge other actions and attitudes upon an audience by linking those beliefs to that vision of order" (15). Rather than a genre, this study analyzes the apocalyptic as a rhetorical strategy which can be used by rhetors through a wide range of texts. As a genre of fiction, the post-apocalyptic is distinct from the three categories of discourse that Brummett discusses—prophecy, ahistorical apocalyptic, and contemporary apocalyptic rhetoric. Just as he seeks to bring light to an overlooked area of study, this dissertation seeks to better understand the post-apocalyptic as a distinct narrative construct. Although outside the range of his apocalyptic texts of interest, some post-apocalyptic texts do employ a similar rhetorical strategy that, by depicting potential loss in the future, urges individuals to make social, political, and personal changes in the present.

Paul Corcoran's *Awaiting Apocalypse* is the product of his reflection on his own fascination with endings as well as the prevalence of such a fascination throughout society and its texts. He argues that endings are political and that the apocalyptic is a way of establishing boundaries that shape identity and consciousness. Rather than tracing the history of the apocalyptic myth in literature, he finds that the apocalyptic is present across many cultural texts and practices in order to define limits and borders. He draws significantly on Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, a concept that understands identity formation and individual development to be a process of boundary delineation and alienation. The abject self is loathed and rejected, and in this expulsion the self transgresses its own borders. Through these experiences of self-abjection, identity is established and maintained. Relating abjection to the apocalyptic, Corcoran explains, "Kristeva does not extend the sensibility of abject loathing and horror, of fear and revulsion—nor their behavioural correlates, fascination and obsession—to apocalyptic disjunctures or disasters. Nevertheless the parallels are evident in artistic and literary portrayals of end-time horror" (40). He further explains that the parallels exist both abjection and apocalypse are concerned with borders and the threat of transgressing those borders. He writes that Kristeva's concept "suggests how endings—borders, boundaries, walls, the 'limits' of conscious bodily existence—represent our efforts and needs to locate, measure, contain, worship, and celebrate life and death" (41). Endings, therefore, are a means of understanding, establishing, and maintaining identity. "In Kristeva's terms, endings are the borders, the limits of consciousness and identity. Family trees, myths of origination, genealogies, biological classification, evolution, calendars, seasonal cycles, and astrology charts are all symbolic systems that embody not just concepts of completion but of one order superseding another, giving way to another" (118-9). Apocalyptic endings do not evoke finitude but a new, higher

order. Corcoran's ruminations on endings reach this conclusion: "Endings circumscribe our lives. They trace our mental, cultural, and moral boundaries. Far from being merely the phantoms of unreason, endings are the landmarks and milestones of human experience. In this sense the apocalypse we wait for is not singular and final, but as plural and persistent as history itself" (179). Thus, the continuous and continuing fascination with endings is far from meaningless. This fascination is perfectly reasonable because endings shape individual and cultural identities. However, such a conception of the apocalyptic ultimately reaffirms the faith-affirming nature of the apocalyptic myth. As discussed previously, the post-apocalypse is of an entirely different order because the post-apocalyptic world exists in an intermediate state between the old and the new. However, the notion of boundaries is certain relevant to any discussion of genre; therefore, this dissertation is itself an apocalyptic endeavor in the sense that it seeks to provide meaningful limits to establish the identity of the post-apocalyptic genre. Interestingly, although Corcoran uses Kristeva's concept of abjection to discuss the apocalyptic myth, abjection is an important characteristic of the post-apocalypse, for the post-apocalyptic world is abject.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the apocalyptic myth and notions of apocalypse are deeply rooted in religious beliefs, practices, and texts. Although the origin point for this discussion was the biblical apocalyptic visions in the Book of Revelation, many other religions and belief systems have been vitally concerned with the idea of apocalypse. Daniel Wojcik, in *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America*, examines the pervasiveness of apocalyptic thought in ancient and particularly in modern systems of belief both religious and secular. He argues that in the twentieth-century nuclear age, fatalism is a central concept in apocalyptic speculation. Fatalism, defined as "the belief that certain events and

experiences are inevitable, unalterable, and determined by external forces beyond human control," is a means by which experiences and the world are understood, and this idea "embodies the sense of inevitability, both pessimistic and optimistic, that is inherent to religious and secular apocalypticism in the United States today" (3-4). In addition to organized religions and folk traditions about doomsday and signs of the end times, Wojcik finds apocalyptic thought influencing other groups such as millennialists, the punk subculture, and those who believe in UFOs and extraterrestrial beings. Secular apocalyptic anxieties became the dominant form of apocalypticism in the latter half of the 20th century, directly linked to the atomic bomb and nuclear power. During this period, secular apocalyptic themes of fatalism proliferated in popular literature and film. Inevitability and helplessness in the face of impending cataclysm were common in nuclear-era novels. In his discussion of William S. Burroughs, Jr., Wojcik quotes a biographer who writes, "For Burroughs, the Bomb and not the birth of Christ was the dividing line of history. The Bomb stole the relevance from all that had preceded it, and from its ramifications Burroughs constructed a worldview . . . After the Bomb, Burroughs had a sense of everything going wrong. He had visions of world death and death-in-life" (107). Such fatalism was also present in nuclear-themed films of the era. He discusses the existence of an apocalyptic genre but classifies films set in a post-apocalyptic world as belonging to a subgenre. He mentions several post-apocalyptic films and explains that "in the majority of such films, the post-apocalyptic world is inhabited by degenerated barbarians and inhuman creatures, victims of forces beyond their control, battling for survival on a brutal and ruined planet" (112). In this characterization of the post-apocalyptic, he supports his argument for the centrality of fatalism in apocalyptic themes; however, he goes no further in distinguishing the unique characteristics of the post-apocalyptic.

While Wojcik considers the persistence of fatalism and apocalypticism in systems of belief, John Gray considers religion and apocalypse from an entirely different perspective. In *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, Gray explores how politics has been influenced by religious thinking with the idea of utopia being the sought-after end goal. He argues that apocalyptic religion also seeks utopia with apocalypse—the process by which the end of the present world gives rise to the new heaven and the new earth—being a means to that end. In his study, he traces these apocalyptic religious themes through political history. For example, he writes, "The belief in Manifest Destiny that was formulated in the mid-nineteenth century was part of this process [the Americanization of an apocalyptic myth]. The idea of a messianic saviour, which was at the core of early Christianity, became the idea of a Redeemer Nation—the belief in America as the land of a 'chosen people'" (112). Even when politics moves away from overt religiosity, religious concepts form secular political creeds (190). Thus, Gray argues that religion, particularly the apocalyptic, has shaped the political pursuit of utopia, which is, of course, universal democracy. Even though utopian ideals have always failed and continue to fail, wars are waged and blood is shed in the vain quest, and he traces this through political history to the early 21st century, including 9/11 and the war in Iraq. "The 'war on terror,'" he claims, "is a symptom of a mentality that anticipates an unprecedented change in human affairs—the end of history, the passing of the sovereign state, universal acceptance of democracy and the defeat of evil. This is the central myth of apocalyptic religion framed in political terms, and the common factor underlying the failed utopian projects of the past decade" (183). Gray's exploration of the apocalyptic in political history is an example of how pervasive notions of apocalypse are across disciplines. However, his work also reveals the limitation of such application. Rarely have

studies (and Gray's is no exception) considered how the post-apocalyptic distinctly differs from the apocalyptic.

In addition to the kinds of studies represented by Wojcik and Gray, the religious understanding of apocalyptic has also been directly applied to a study of the science fiction genre. In *Apocalypse and Science Fiction: A Dialectical of Religious and Secular Soteriologies*, Frederick A. Kreuziger examines both the apocalyptic and science fiction as they interact with one another in a dialectical process. He acknowledges that the apocalyptic has often been used as a helpful framework with which to understand science, which is clearly evident in this review of literature. He then states, "It is not quite so easy to proceed along the opposite path—to argue that science fiction sheds light on apocalyptic," and it is the objective of his work is to explicate both paths as they participate in a dialectic (1). As a study particularly interested in religion, Kreuziger employs the biblical understanding of apocalypse and argues that it is in itself a genre. Readings of science fiction as romance, utopia, fantasy, and philosophy "must give way finally to an appreciation of science fiction as apocalyptic. Apocalyptic, in turn, becomes the genre which opens both science fiction to a 'theological' reading, and intertestamental/biblical apocalyptic to a 'popular' reading" (1). The apocalyptic genre is most closely related to the genre of prophecy, yet a dialectical tension necessarily exists between the two. The prophetic genre is concerned with the vision, the promise of things to come, while the apocalyptic is concerned with the vision yet questions its fulfillment. "Apocalyptic is concerned above all with the promise; it maintains that through such a close association of vision and reality (promise and history) one has already compromised the vision" (153-4). Further, he explains, "Apocalyptic is not a genre standing alongside other literary genre such as romance, allegory, fantasy, or speculative fiction. All these genres, rather, are capable of being apocalyptic" (155). Although

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Kreuziger is focused entirely on the apocalyptic, which is distinctly different from the post-apocalyptic, such characteristics of the apocalyptic genre help to illuminate the post-apocalyptic genre. The post-apocalyptic is also concerned with both promise and history, for the post-apocalyptic world exists after the failure of both promise and history and is characterized by a lack of faith in these notions. Additionally, Kreuziger considers the apocalyptic "composite in nature" in that it is "capable of using many a different and varied literary form" (155). Such a composite genre is evidenced in the wide variety of apocalyptic texts that have been analyzed in the works discussed in this literature review. The post-apocalyptic genre is a postmodern permutation of this kind of composite genre. Certainly, the post-apocalyptic can use different and varied forms; however, rather than being "composite in nature," it is bricolage in nature.

Genre

The previous chapter introduces some common issues inherent in the study of genre, specifically the subjectivity of categorization. It is worth noting that there are two conceptions of genre at play in genre studies: (1) a general concept of taxonomy by which texts get grouped and (2) a more narrow concept associated with observed, formulaic patterns within and across texts. There have been periods in which the study of genre has been more accepted in the disciplines of literature, film, and religion studies, and during these periods certain scholars sought to analyze particular genres in order to offer detailed assessments of the formulas, component themes, iconography, and so on, which compose those genres. There were rebuttals to the narrowness of such studies and the exclusivity of the canons that they produced. However, it will be worthwhile to briefly discuss in this review of literature some significant works that have examined the notion of genre and that have posited theories about it.

In seeking to validate the merits of studying popular culture, Cawelti took up the task of studying popular literature and formulated an approach to its study that would be of benefit to understanding the use of popular literature by (and its utility to) a culture. In "The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Culture," he identifies three approaches to studying popular literature—cultural themes, medium, myth—and then offers a fourth approach—formula (116). He claims that the study of cultural themes is useful (the most useful up to that point in popular culture studies) but ultimately lacking because in extracting particular themes, it neglects the bigger picture of the culture in which those themes reside. Medium is another useful approach (as applied by McLuhan for instance), but Cawelti again finds it wanting because, according to him, at some point the analyst must look specifically at content. The universality of myth is important in looking at overarching beliefs and archetypes that are consistent among various cultures, but that approach is not as helpful in looking at a specific culture. Thus, Cawelti makes the move to study formula, which is a look at how specific cultures use archetypes to convey their own interests and attitudes by adding their own culturally specific elements to mythic/archetypal structures (120). He explains that, "formulas, because of their close connection to a particular culture and period of time, tend to have a much more limited repertory of plots, characters, and settings" than myths, which can be so universal that they ultimately fail to "differentiate one story from another" (121). Cawelti is most interested in formula because it is able to reveal the cultural preoccupations that create it. Also, he sees formula as changing and evolving over time as the culture changes and evolves. By studying formulas, "we can learn much about how a culture resolves its intrinsic conflicts of value and attitude, how it anneals psychic and social tensions which beset it and therefore something of how it achieves that sense of shared acceptance of life without which a culture cannot long endure" (123). At any given

moment, formula is able to shed light on a certain culture in relation to that moment in time and also, by looking at how a formula has evolved, how that culture has changed. This idea of formulas being more culturally specific than universal myths is a useful concept when considering genre. For Cawelti, broad genres tend to be characteristic of myths—thus, universal to such a degree that they lack utility for differentiation. However, formulas are akin to specific genres that arise in response to particular cultural factors. While science fiction has become a universal, mythic genre, the post-apocalyptic genre is a narrow, genre that seems to function in a similar way to Cawelti's concept of formula.

Changes in formula are expected and necessary because, according to Cawelti, formula is a mixture of convention and invention. Conventions provide familiarity, order, security, stability while inventions offer novelty, confront new ideas and meanings, and assimilate change. "Of course it is difficult to distinguish in every case between conventions and inventions because many elements lie somewhere along a continuum between the two poles. Nonetheless, familiarity with a group of literary works will usually soon reveal what the major convention are and therefore, what in the case of an individual work is unique to that creator" (118). In this statement, Cawelti offers an important contribution to any approach to genre: the notion that formulaic texts exist along a continuum. One of the problems with traditional genre studies that Altman identifies is the tendency to situate a text exclusively within a single genre (*Film/Genre* 18). This trend in genre studies may be a result of what Thomas Sobchack called the "primacy of the original," which necessitates that genre texts imitate an original, prototypical instance of the genre (105). However, Cawelti offers an important idea that different texts may all adhere to the same formula while also being placed at various points along the same continuum.

According to Cawelti, a formula reflects a culture but also influences that culture. In his

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book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, he

applied his concept of formula specifically to detective fiction. His study demonstrates how

formula can be used to identify common elements and structures within a formula and to connect

them with specific cultural interests and attitudes—such as the reconception of crime allowing

for the detective genre (59). By tracking the evolution of a formula, this approach can reveal how

a culture's preoccupations change over time and how new ideas and concerns get assimilated

into the culture and the formula. However, this approach is limited particularly in how one

actually defines the conventions and inventions of a formula, especially an evolving formula.

Cawelti claims that familiarity allows one to determine what is conventional and what is not.

This problem of subjectivity is present throughout genre studies, and it is a limitation in

Cawelti's approach to formula.

Cawelti's work highlights at least two ideas regarding genre studies that should receive

further attention here: (1) using genre as a means by which to claim popular culture as art and (2)

the problem of subjectivity in defining genres. First, it should be acknowledged that much work

in genre studies was conducted as academic scholars became more interested in the study of

popular culture and found in genre a popular cultural product which could be claimed to be an art

form. As noted above, this was one of Cawelti's main tasks in developing his concept of

formula. Leo Braudy also sought to rescue genre, particularly genre films, from the common

critical idea that it is merely a debased and degraded kind of art. He writes, "Genre films

especially are criticized because they seem to appeal to a preexisting audience, while the film

'classic' creates its own special audience through the unique power of the filmmaking artist's

personal creative sensibility" (663). Because it relies on conventions established and perpetuated

by numerous previous films, a genre film receives criticism for being one among many such

films rather than being a unique, individual work of art. Arguing against those who criticize genre films for their lack of serious contemplation of life's complexities, he claims, "Genre films, in fact, arouse and complicate feelings about the self and society that more serious films, because of their bias toward the unique, may rarely touch. Within film the pleasure of originality and the pleasures of familiarity are at least equally important" (664). Further, Braudy sees genre as capable of doing something uniquely artistic that cannot be done by those works of art praised by critics for being "unique": a connection is created between each new instance of a genre and the past tradition and past texts of that genre. In this way, genre films possess significant, artistic qualities and should be studied as works of art.

Particularly in film studies, many of the attempts to "rescue" genre films and to substantiate their artistic merits came in response to the popularity of the notion of the auteur—the film author or genius. The auteur theory has a strong place in film studies, as it claims that filmmakers are artists—they are creators of unique pieces of art. A criticism of genre is that it weakens or cheapens the film as a unique piece of art and the filmmaker as an artist. There are many genre-studies authors, including Braudy, who contest this view. For Braudy, genre actually allows filmmakers to have artistic freedom. He explains, "The frame of genre, the existence of expectations to be used in whatever way the intelligence of the filmmaker is capable, allows freedoms within the form that more original films cannot have because they are so committed to a parallel between form and content" (668). In addition to Braudy, Robin Wood argues that creativity is evidenced in genre films. Filmmakers may still exhibit their unique creativity in the way that they create new works by using motifs from previous films within a genre. As an example, he writes about Hitchcock who was able to use motifs from the horror genre to subvert dominant American ideology about family in his 1943 film *Shadow of a Doubt* (69). These

arguments in support of considering the artistic possibilities of genre, reclaiming it from a status as debased, inferior, and popular rather than unique art, were significant in prompting academic discussion about genre.

There are certainly scholars who took firm stances on different sides of the debate between film art being produced by auteurs and genre being worthy of consideration as an art form. However, there were others who argued for a middle ground. In an essay about the Western and gangster film genres, Robert Warshow argues that the violence depicted in the genres' texts serves a ritual function that unites cultures in a way that "serious art" does not. He writes, "Above all, the movies in which the Westerner plays out his role preserve for us the pleasures of a complete and self-contained drama—and one which still effortlessly crosses the boundaries which divide our culture—in a time when other, more consciously serious art forms are increasingly complex, uncertain, and ill-defined" (716). Genre is not an inferior art form nor does it threaten or cheapen art. However, Warshow does not agree with the degree to which Braudy reclaims genre as art. Additionally, Edward Buscombe views genre to be indispensable yet also does not want to swing the pendulum too far. He offers his conception of the idea of genre because "our present theories are so extreme" (20). He claims that the auteur theory is "overcompensation" for the time "when American cinema was dismissed as repetitive rubbish, mass-produced to a formula . . . in the factories of Hollywood" (20). According to Buscombe, while the auteur theory is too extreme, "the chief justification of the genre . . . is that it allows good directors to be better" (21). He continues, "Popular art does not condemn its creators to a subsidiary role. Instead it emphasizes the relationship between the artist and the material, on the one hand, and the material and the audience on the other" (22). He finds genre existing in a middle ground where it is not "highly original" art yet allows for directors to draw upon generic

conventions in unique, creative ways. For Buscombe, "a genre film depends on a combination of novelty and familiarity," and established generic conventions allow for directors, like Alfred Hitchcock and Sam Peckinpah, to make creative genre films by employing and working against those conventions (20-2). Thus, in addition to those who seek to redeem genre from the opponents who marginalize it, there are scholars, like Warshow and Buscombe, who find genre existing between the two extremes.

While Warshow and Buscombe, as well as other scholars, accept that genre serves as a cultural ritual and seek to elaborate theories that capture this dimension of genre, other writers about genre seek to delineate finite generic canons. This task raises the issue of subjectivity mentioned above. This issue is the source of much debate about genre, including the "empiricist dilemma," which Andrew Tudor describes as being "caught in a circle that first requires that the films be isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films" (5). Tudor offers two approaches to solving this dilemma: classification according to a priori criteria or analysis of generic characteristics that are agreed upon by common cultural consensus (5). He claims that the first approach is redundant because if the a priori criteria define the genre, there is no need to further explain the genre. Thus, he chooses the second option in his analysis of Western films. This idea of cultural consensus is the same as the notion of familiarity presented by Cawelti and Buscombe and is also problematic as such genre analysis still ultimately depends on the consensus being defined by the one performing the analysis. As Janet Staiger has explained, each of these three methods of working with genre—the empiricist method, the a priori method, and the social convention method—has its problems. She adds to the list the idealist method, which is also problematic as it defines a genre according to a single ideal text

(187). However, as mentioned above, in spite of these issues, genre studies continues by acknowledging the limitations of the various methods and by trying to gain new understandings of genres and genre texts through continued analysis. In this way, genre studies neither seeks to establish ultimate categories and definitive boundaries nor seeks to solve the problems inherent in working with genre. Instead, genre studies is an ongoing conversation through which the boundaries of genres continue to be negotiated, a genre's corpus of texts continues to evolve, and different analytical frameworks provide new understandings of genre texts. In this way, genre studies, like genre itself, is an ongoing process, not an unalterable absolute.

One dimension of genre that has received considerable attention more recently is how genre is used by various individuals and institutions. Definitive genre classifications and canons are, inherently, potentially contentious, depending on how different individuals and groups use genre and want to classify films to meet their own needs. This difference can be seen in the different ways film studios have classified films in order to make production more efficient and to make films more appealing to distributors. Distributors, then, had (and have) their own needs for a classificatory system as they depend on advertising to entice and encourage audiences to attend films. Then, of course, there are the audiences themselves who have inclinations towards and are entertained by certain themes and styles in films, and it is generally accepted that audiences like to attend films (and more often attend films) that are similar. Thus, genre (classification or taxonomy) is often seen as a way of organizing lists or groups of films according to similarity. When film scholars and critics approach the genre in order to study it, they often do so in an attempt to find greater, deeper meaning in film genres and in genre films, including the meanings associated with economic forces.

Due to its complexity and ongoing evolution, genre is described by a number of

approaches, none of which have proven to be definitive. In recent genre studies, the various uses of genre—by producers, distributors, exhibitors, audiences, critics, and scholars—has been featured more in discussions about genre. The variety of ways that genre is used has been discussed by a number of scholars. In his book *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, Barry Keith Grant finds the complexity of genre to be related to its multiplicity of uses. He writes, "The pervasive presence of genres in popular culture is clear when one considers that the word itself refers simultaneously to a particular mode of film production, often equated with the classic Hollywood studio system; a convenient consumer index, providing audiences with a sense of the kind of pleasures to be expected from a given film; and a critical concept, a tool for mapping out a taxonomy of popular film and for understanding the complex relationship between popular cinema and popular culture" (2). These various uses of genre have caused Rick Altman to reconsider his approach to genre. Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to film genre is regularly cited in genre studies as it provides a useful analytical tool for interpreting and grouping genre texts. In that approach and in his subsequent application of that approach to the Hollywood film musical, he draws on linguistics to describe the way in which genre films are composed of semantic elements and syntactic elements, and then laboriously applies this approach to the history of the Hollywood film musical. Semantic elements are the building blocks of genre—the iconography, the recurring objects, settings, props, and so on. Syntax is the structure which organizes the semantic elements within the genre film ("Semantic/Syntactic" 684). This approach has limitations, and even Altman ultimately recognized that his approach needed rethinking because it depended too much on assumed generic stability. In reconsidering his approach, he takes into account, in his own way, the above thoughts on industry, distributor, and audience approaches to genre, and he refigured his approach into a

semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach. The pragmatic component of the approach considers the various uses and users of genre (*Film/Genre* 208). His revised approach recognizes that genre is not the same thing to all people and that there may be important uses of genre that scholars cannot understand simply through an academic study of the film texts themselves. In discussing the various users of genre, Geraghty and Jancovich explain that a "text may even be classified differently in different institutional contexts. For example, a text may be defined in one way within the process of production, in which a particular cultural industry has its own generic understandings of texts, and yet be marketed or exhibited in relation to a different genre. It is not always the case that the contexts of production, marketing or exhibition fix how audiences will generically identify a text" (4). Because producers, marketers, audiences, and other individuals and institutions have different needs, they conceive of genre differently and use it in a multitude of ways in order to meet their disparate needs. Such disparity between users and uses is recognized as being a contributing factor to the complexity of genre.

Acknowledging the various conceptions of genre has led some scholars to attempt inclusive studies which, rather than defining genres as mutually exclusive, finite categories with specific meanings and canons, describe the many definitions and meanings of genres. Such inclusive studies seek to resolve the difficulties of genre by considering the multitude of possible approaches to and uses of genre. Steve Neale explains that resolving the difficult issues presented by genre complexity requires "thinking of genres as ubiquitous, multifaceted phenomena rather than as one-dimensional entities to be found only within the realms of Hollywood cinema or of commercial popular culture" (26). He further states that "the argument that genre is multidimensional means that attention now needs to be paid as much to the factors that impinge on audience expectations, the construction of generic corpuses, and the processes of

labelling and naming as to those that impinge on the films themselves" (27). The impinging

factors that he addresses are verisimilitude, institutional aspects of genre and Hollywood, and

labels and names. This approach attempts to consider the multiple factors that influence genre.

Altman's *Film/Genre*, in which he revisits the topic of genre, is also an attempt to inclusively

consider the many aspects of genre formation and evolution in response to a multitude of users

and influences. As mentioned above, he determines that genres are the "temporary byproduct of

an ongoing process" (54). By historically situating the emergence of genres, he seeks to

understand how various users understood and conceived of a genre at a particular time. While his

approach is ambitious, it is complicated and often unclear in its own right.

In addition to inclusive genre studies, some scholars have also sought to historically

situate genres to better understand specific time periods and specific genres. Wheeler Winston

Dixon also seeks to historically situate genre but specifically narrows the scope of his essay to

genre films of the 1990s. He finds that an historical analysis of genre films reveals that genres in

general in this period were typified by spectacle and excess (5). Rather than splitting hairs about

the problems with studying genre, he instead seeks to illuminate the characteristics of genre

during a specific time period. On the other hand, Barry Langford also considers history and users

to be important factors in the process of genre. In contrast to Altman and Neale, he does not seek

to resolve every issue with an inclusive study. Rather, he posits a "legacy theory" of genre which

largely draws upon the cultural consensus method of genre studies by focusing on the histories of

classical genres that are commonly recognized because they have endured over many decades.

Despite the problems with genre (definition, meaning, stability, and so on), he views classical

genre as a legacy which informs filmmakers and on which filmmakers draw, especially recent

filmmakers (27-8). Many recent studies of genre endeavor to locate genre within specific

historical time periods because they see the tradition of ahistorical genre studies as limiting the understanding of what genres mean to different groups at different times.

Despite the recent trend in historically situated genre studies, work with genre, including recent work, is still heavily indebted to the traditional approach to studying a genre's conventions and characteristic features. In a broad sense, genre is seen as the repetition of motifs, themes, iconography, plot structures, and so on from one film to another. This conception of genre is certainly fundamental to Altman's semantic/syntactic approach, and it is also the chief characteristic of genre studies that has influenced and that continues to influence genre-film authors. Although recent trends in genre work expand the notion of genre to include a variety of users, the role of the audience is an aspect of genre studies that has often come into the discussion (as it did in Altman's later work).

The presence of an audience is an essential element of genre for many genre scholars. While Barry Keith Grant echoes Cawelti's argument that texts within a genre are recognizable because of their commonalities and that the genre perpetuates and remains appealing due to each film's variation, Grant further claims that there are two main characteristics of film genre: myth and ritual. He accepts that genre is a form of "contemporary social myth" in that it is the way contemporary society shares common stories, beliefs, and language. However, film genre is not just myth, but it also represents a contract between the filmmaker and the film viewer. In his essay "Experience and Meaning in Genre Films," Barry Keith Grant explains, "Because a genre, as Andrew Tudor reminds us, is 'what we collectively believe it to be' and because what we believe a genre to be sets up expectations that condition our responses to a genre film from the very first shot—indeed, often even before the lights in the cinema are dimmed—an analysis of the generic contract in operation, its actual dynamics, becomes crucial" (116). For Grant, the

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"conventions, iconography, plots, themes, and characters . . . distinguish the various genres and carry their mythic meanings" (116). However, he finds that the real meaning of a genre film is not in the "mythic meanings"—the conventions and inventions; rather, it exists in the interaction of film viewer and filmmaker through the genre film text.

In some ways, this is similar to Edward Buscombe's idea of inner meaning. Buscombe's essay "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema" incorporates both the physical, visual, iconographic aspects of genre and the audience interaction with these elements. Buscombe draws on the work of Wellek and Warren to identify the existence of both an outer form and an inner form of genre (specifically the Western) (14). According to Buscombe, the outer form includes similar plot structures, setting, clothing, the "tools of the trade," and other recurring physical objects that come to have meaning through their repetition (like the railroad in the Western) (15-6). This outer form is similar to Altman's semantic elements. However, Buscombe goes further to argue for an inner structure which is audience-dependent. The way a film genre/genre film engages an audience is also essential to a genre and its films. He writes, "Constant exposure to a previous succession of films has led the audience to recognize certain formal elements as charged with an accretion of meaning" (22). Such an "accretion of meaning" allows audiences to have meaningful interactions with a genre, but it also allows directors to have artistic flexibility as they work with and/or against it. He takes as an example Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country* (1962). According to Buscombe, part of the film's effectiveness is in how Peckinpah works against genre conventions (23-5). Thus, the outer form exists, but in working against conventions, the audience is engaged by recognizing and interacting with this use of the conventions. Such engagement is the inner form, and Peckinpah's film remains consistent with the Western genre while also adding variation to it. "The cluster of images and conventions that

we call the western genre is used by Peckinpah to define and embody [a tragic and bitter heroism resulting from a failure to adapt to complications and developments], in such a way that we know what the West was and what it has become" (25). The meaning is not in the outer form itself (the conventions) nor in the inner form itself (the audience's engagement with the outer form). The importance of genre is that both outer form and inner form are present and that they interact with one another. According to Buscombe, genre can make good directors better by being able to have previously established conventions to draw upon, reconfigure, and work against.

Generally, these views that genre has audience-dependent meanings accept the ideas of convention and invention while expanding the understanding of genre to include the presence of an audience that interacts with the conventions and inventions presented through genre texts. Thomas Schatz, in "The Structural Influence: New Directions in Film Genre Study," further adds the business interests of film producers to the discussion. After summarizing many approaches to genre up to the point of his writing (in 1977), he ultimately considers genre to have a dual perspective. The first perspective sees genre as "a product of a commercial, highly conventionalized popular art form and subject to certain demands imposed by both the audience and the cinematic system itself" (100). Thus, it evolves in response to commercial demands imposed by industry decision-makers with financial concerns and by audiences who spend money at the box office on genre products. Simultaneously, the second perspective identified by Schatz views the genre film as a "distinct manifestation of contemporary society's basic mythic impulse, its desire to confront elemental conflicts inherent in modern culture while at the same time participating in the projection of an idealized collective self-image" (100). According to this perspective, the audience is also essential as audiences are those engaging in the "basic mythic

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impulse" by which they consume genre texts in order to confront and resolve anxieties and reaffirm an "idealized collective self-image." With these two perspectives, Schatz understands audiences to be an important element in both the economic and the mythic success of genre.

As discussed above, more recent genre studies have expanded views of genre even further to not only see it as an interaction between texts, audiences, and business interests but also to consider it an ongoing process that is continually evolving in response to a multitude of users and to cultural, technological, and aesthetic changes. Sobchack writes about the "primacy of the original" and sees other texts as imitations of that original (105). Yet, the question still remains: What is the original? For many genres, scholars see the original in pulp novels (not even film texts) or other works that pre-date film. Additionally, the inclusion of certain characteristics as outer form, semantic elements, conventions, and so on is still largely dependent on how the scholar defines it. The inability to settle on a single approach to genre has not stopped continuing study of and debate about genre. As some acknowledge, part of the importance of genre studies is the continuing debate. This idea is related to critical and cultural theories that are inclined toward dialogue and continued critical thought and discussion, and similar ongoing dialogue, debate, and discussion are part of genre studies. While it may not be possible to conclusively solve the "empiricist dilemma" or to resolve the other issues inherent in genre, it is certain that genre studies is continuing with an understanding that these issues still exist. However, rather than seeking to ultimately and definitively resolve these issues, genre scholars continue to find new insights and understandings about genres and genre films by revisiting them with perspectives informed by different theoretical approaches and by examining new and understudied texts, which is precisely how this dissertation seeks to contribute to the genre discussion.

Even the field of religion studies has had to address the issue of genre. In an essay on the genre of apocalypse, John J. Collins offers a definition of that genre which attempts to include its major, salient elements. He quickly follows this definition with a discussion of the views opposing the narrowness of the defintion, arguing that this opposition does not invalidate his approach to defining the genre. He writes, "To say that a text is an apocalypse is not to exclude the possibility that it may be simultaneously something else; or to put it another way, the fact that a text can be profitably grouped with apocalypses does not exclude the possibility that it may be also profitably grouped with other texts for different purposes. It is also true that every text has an individual character, and conveys its meaning in large part through the ways in which it modifies generic conventions" (Handbook 3). For Collins, genre and a text's placement within a genre does not require exclusivity nor does it preclude the text from inclusion in other genres. "The objection seems to me," he continues, "to apply, not to classification as such, which I think is simply unavoidable, but to rigidity in its application" (3). Collins' view of genre is very much influenced by Derrida who, in his "Law of Genre," wrote that every text participates in genre even if it is not prototypical of a particular genre and that a text may not exclusively reside within a single genre. This understanding of genre allows Collins to define the genre of apocalypse in such a way that a text may be profitably grouped with other apocalypses although it may also be classified in another genre. This conception of genre aligns with the aims and claims of this dissertation. I seek to propose defining characteristics of the post-apocalyptic genre that will group texts together to profitably explore their commonalities and their place in specific sociocultural moments.

The Use of Genre in This Study

The above section has highlighted some key theories and views of genre, and now I will focus more attention specifically on the present study. It is clear that there are many different approaches to genre, but a common element in many of them is the importance of making connections. Inherent in Derrida's "Law of Genre" is the notion that genre provides a way to think about texts that connect them to other texts. Additionally, Braudy sees this—making connections—has one of the strengths of genre. Thus, one of the main tasks of defining or describing the characteristics of a genre is to highlight the connections that are made between texts. This is particularly important for this examination of the post-apocalyptic genre because the act of making connections is essential to the genre. As mentioned before, one of the key themes of the post-apocalyptic genre is evoking an existence that is composed of disparate elements cobbled together from the world that existed prior to the life-altering catastrophic event. Additionally, there is an aspect of the genre that requires a connection between audiences and the text. The post-apocalyptic world bears hallmarks of the world in which audience members live yet with which they have difficulty identifying because the structures (narrative, social, etc.) that previously gave the world meaning have been subverted, inverted, or removed.

Since the post-apocalyptic genre plays with both textual and audience connections, I will draw largely upon Edward Buscombe's ideas of outer form and inner form. Buscombe provides a framework with which to think about the important connections to make. For Buscombe, the outer form includes plot structures, setting, clothing, "tools of the trade," and other recurring physical objects. Although not every post-apocalyptic text has the same plot structure, there are some recurring ones that are important to highlight. For example, many post-apocalyptic films are "road movies," meaning they are about journeying from one location to another with the

characters facing various obstacles along the way. A few examples include *The Road* (2009), *The Book of Eli* (2010), and *Zombieland* (2009). Certainly, this structure is not unique to the post-apocalyptic genre, and the road movie itself is often discussed as its own genre or form. However, the fact that there are common structures among post-apocalyptic films is important.

Next, the setting is greatly significant. The setting for the post-apocalyptic genre is a world which has been devastated by an acute, cataclysmic event. That event may have been a plague, nuclear warfare, or a natural disaster, but common throughout post-apocalyptic texts is that the event was catastrophic throughout the world of the narrative (which in some stories is the entire planet while in others the world of the narrative may be more localized). Although the nature of the apocalyptic event may be different among various texts, the setting in which characters are placed is a world that has yet to recover (economically, politically, socially) from the event. This setting distinguishes these films from dystopian and utopian futuristic settings which do have such structures in place (however dictatorial or democratic they may be). The setting of the post-apocalyptic genre is Bakhtin's carnival square in which hierarchical structures have been inverted, subverted, or suspended. However, once carnival ends and order is restored (again, whether dystopian or utopian), the post-apocalyptic world (and genre) reaches its limitation. Common visual cues in this setting include empty cities, abandoned highways that apparently come from nowhere and lead to nowhere, barren landscapes, and deserted buildings—briefly, once-inhabited spaces that are now conspicuously uninhabited.

Clothing is another aspect of the outer form. Post-apocalyptic clothes may not always be distinct, but there are some commonalities. Clothes may be faded, frayed, and worn-out because characters only have one change of clothes due to the losses they suffered as a result of the catastrophic event. The clothes of those who have assumed power in the stead of previously

ruling authority may wear the clothes worn by the elite of the pre-apocalyptic world. In a more Bakhtinian way, clothes may also be subversive, like the S&M-style leather outfits worn in *The Road Warrior* (1981) or the cross-dressing of the protagonist in the film adaptation of *The Quiet Earth* (1985). Generally, clothing is such that it would be out of place if worn by those characters in the pre-apocalyptic world.

"Tools of the trade" and other recurring physical objects may include guns and other weapons for survival (especially in untraditional hands (meaning, those who are not adult males, like the Uzi-toting young adult females in *Night of the Comet* (1984)) and artifacts from the pre-apocalyptic world (i.e., the Coke can in *The Road* and the comic book in *Glen and Randa* (1971)). Similar to clothing, these objects and the relationships between the characters and these objects (the degree to which those objects are reverenced, conserved, protected, etc.) would be unjustified in the pre-apocalyptic world. A typical attribute of these tools of the trade, which significantly distinguish them from those in the science-fiction genre, is that they are technologically regressive. While science fiction imagines advanced technologies and the apocalyptic myth finds hope in technological progress, the tools of the trade in the post-apocalyptic world are relics from before the previous world.

These physical elements of the outer form are visual cues of the post-apocalyptic genre, and they are employed in narratives to help develop, support, and at times couterpoint the stories' themes. Common themes in the genre include exploring value systems and morality, their purpose and role in the post-apocalyptic world. Related to this theme is arbitrariness—the idea that things that were previously meaningful and value-laden are now arbitrary. This theme of arbitrariness is evident in another recurring theme: survival. The theme of survival manifests itself in several ways including the obvious conflicts between protagonists and antagonists (other

humans fighting to survive, animals, nature), but the complexity of what it means to survive is also evident in conflicting ideas of what life and death mean and the value placed on them. Additionally, the struggle for survival is evident in the question of who is deemed fit to survive in this world and who is deemed unfit, and this theme of fitness is also played out in conflicts between the notions of leader and follower. Like other aspects of the genre, these themes are not exclusive to the post-apocalyptic genre, but they find a certain heightened prominence in this world that is no longer ordered by societal and moral structures.

In addition to outer form, there is an inner form in the post-apocalyptic genre, which is dependent on how audiences engage with the film. It should be noted that this engagement is not necessarily conscious although it may be at times. Audiences may engage with post-apocalyptic texts as carnivalesque moments that bring them a break from their everyday reality, that critique contemporary social and political power structures, or that reaffirm the status quo. Additionally and significantly, however, there is a kind of Lacanian engagement in the way audiences both recognize their world and also misrecognize it. I am not arguing that audiences are being pacified and indoctrinated with capitalist ideology in an Althusserian Marxist way. Rather, the Lacanian engagement occurs more like Jamesonian postmodernism in which meaning is created within the genre by audiences (who live in a pre-apocalyptic world full of real, tangible signifieds) witnessing the post-apocalyptic world of the film, which is full of images (signifiers) with no referents (signifieds) extant in that world. Another aspect of identification which helps shape the post-apocalyptic genre is tension between identification and resistance. Audiences identify with characters and reflect on what they would do in whichever situation the text presents while also resisting identification because the characters tend to commit acts contrary to acceptable

morality, yet that morality no longer has claim on the amoral (or morally ambiguous) post-apocalyptic world.

In addition to identification, the inner form is manifest in the coexistence within the viewer of diegetic meaning and real-world meaning. Post-apocalyptic texts present a duality of existence with which audiences engage. Such texts offer a world which, in the absence of the previous meaning-making orders, makes its own rules and redefine the world which still bears hallmarks and artifacts of the real world. The genre invites viewers to accept and buy into the diegetic meaning presented by texts, yet simultaneously, viewers continue to connect their own real-world meaning unless they can completely bracket their real-world experiences. Inherent in these engagements is a deeper level of meaning in the post-apocalyptic genre—the inner form. The elements of the genre are not necessarily exclusive to it, yet there is an overall tendency created by certain dominant elements, which allows it to be distinguished from others and identified as its own genre.

As evidenced by the various studies discussed in this chapter, most scholarly research has used apocalypticism in very specific ways to examine the influence and purpose of myths of ending and renewal, death and rebirth. However, little work has been done looking at texts that deviate from apocalyptic order, texts that imagine a world stuck in the interim between the end and the new beginning. Although discussion of the apocalyptic imagination helps to illuminate certain themes and anxieties in the post-apocalyptic imagination, the post-apocalyptic world exists as a separate entity and cannot be defined by the apocalyptic framework. Relatively few scholars, such as Berger, Heffernan, and Curtis, have examined post-apocalyptic thought as distinct from apocalyptic ideas, but there is still a significant lack of work on the subject, especially in genre studies. This dissertation aims to further discussion about post-apocalypse,

specifically as a narrative genre. By defining and bounding the genre as one with consistent inner and outer form (including themes, motifs, iconography, and audience engagement), this study will contribute to the body of literature regarding apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic ideas, genre theory, as well as the theories which shape the post-apocalyptic genre.

CHAPTER 3: A History of the Post-apocalyptic Genre

The post-apocalyptic genre was not a planned endeavor, nor was it deliberately fashioned to conform to specific guidelines, delimit itself to certain parameters, or confine itself to an exclusive corpus of texts. Rather, it emerged and evolved (and continues to do so) in response to a multiplicity of factors. As a retrospective examination of the genre, this study emphasizes identifiable generic elements (such as the empty city, the collapse of social hierarchies, carnivalesque grotesquerie, etc.), but the genre did not originate and was not implemented in a single instance with such elements already fully conceived. Therefore, this history of the genre seeks to give an overview of significant watershed moments and texts that helped shape the post-apocalyptic imagination and genre.

Drawing upon the work of James Berger and Teresa Heffernan, this dissertation uses "post-apocalyptic" to refer not only to a period of time following an apocalyptic event but also a cultural imagination that diverges from the apocalyptic imagination shaped by traditions and myths. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Berger observes, "The visions of the End that Frank Kermode analyzed in terms of a sense of an ending have increasingly given way to visions of after the end, and the apocalyptic sensibilities both of religion and of modernism have shifted toward a sense of post-apocalypse" (xiii). Historically, this post-apocalyptic imagination tends to emerge in times following crises (such as war or disease) which call into question the survival of humankind and the validity of accepted meaning-making structures (including governments and histories). For Heffernan, as mentioned previously, the post-apocalyptic culture is one which has

lost faith in the notions of Man, History, and the Nation. The traditional apocalyptic conceptions of these three major cultural notions have significantly shaped the way progress is understood and have instilled faith in positive future results of such progress; however, crises have occurred which have significantly shaken this foundation of faith, giving rise to the shift away from apocalyptic reassurance toward post-apocalyptic uncertainty. I hope to highlight how the cultivation of and shift toward the post-apocalyptic imagination helped to shape a genre that has sought to imagine a future world that has lost its conviction in a key, orienting social myth—the apocalyptic myth on which our notions of progress are founded.

It is important to note that the post-apocalyptic genre is not a closed system but rather an open system which interacts with many factors such as culture, history, and other genres—even the apocalyptic genre. Writing about history as an open system, Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery remark that "generative mechanisms in history do not operate in isolation from each other; they *interact* to produce 'the flux of phenomena that constitute the actual states and happenings of the world'" (16; emphasis in original). Similarly, both the post-apocalyptic and the apocalyptic genres have often been influenced by the same historical factors—factors which have also influenced other genres, art movements, and social changes. Allen and Gomery, in their seminal work *Film History: Theory and Practice*, describe four traditional approaches to film history: aesthetic, technological, economic, and social. "The artistic effects that can be achieved in the cinema at any given time are in part dependent on the state of film technology. Technological developments are conditioned in many instances by economic factors. Economic decision making occurs within a social context, and so forth" (17). Each of these interdependent aspects of history has relevance to the post-apocalyptic genre, which has evolved in response to aesthetic, technological, economic, and social factors. Like the broader history of film, the

history of the post-apocalyptic "can never be separated from other systems: the popular entertainment industry, other forms of mass communication, national economies, or other art forms" (17). Although this study focuses on post-apocalyptic literature and film, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of the post-apocalyptic imagination on other cultural products and systems as well as the influence of other systems on the genre.

Keeping this interconnected nature of the post-apocalyptic genre in mind, this history will identify and discuss important texts that diverge from apocalyptic thinking as well as contextualize them in the socio-politico-economic moments that contributed to a loss of faith in traditional apocalyptic thinking. Tracing the shifting importance, relevance, and power of the apocalyptic imagination in these texts illustrates how the post-apocalyptic genre emerged as one result of questioning values and rethinking expectations inherent in apocalyptic ideologies.

Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Imagination

As mentioned above, the post-apocalyptic genre, like other genres, is the byproduct of ongoing processes involving many factors, such as socio-politico-economic developments, technological achievements, and movements in popular culture and literature including narrative experimentation. It was not created *ex nihilo* but, rather, drew upon previously established generic precedents—including science fiction, horror, and apocalyptic precedents. Because the post-apocalyptic genre developed over time, there is no single text that serves as the original. In this way, it bears similarity with the science-fiction genre (with which it interacts and often shares commonalities). Noted science-fiction author Jack Williamson maintains, "The history of science fiction can begin anywhere" (Foreword xi). This statement alludes to the indefinite beginning of the genre. Likewise, the post-apocalyptic genre "can begin anywhere," but to

foreground the emergence of the genre, this history will begin with the genre of religious writing known as apocalypse, which was instrumental in shaping the apocalyptic imagination.

Apocalypse is a concept that has expanded over the millennia, from a specific genre of religious writings to social paradigms and secular ideologies that expand upon but are centrally concerned with apocalyptic ideas such as the end of the world, modes of that eschatology, and the state of existence afterwards. Many of the associations that are made with apocalypse in the cultural imagination were borne from the images presented in the apocalypses of religious literature, such as the Book of Revelation—the Apocalypse of John—in the Bible. Joseph Lumpkin explains, "Most writings of this kind took place between 200 [B.C.E.] and 200 [C.E.] . . . The common thread was the moral and spiritual decline of [humankind] leading to [its] destruction . . . however, it is the power unleashed by the wrath of God that gives way to the cleansing of the earth as all evil is destroyed and divine order is re-established" (380). These writings helped to establish a collective, cultural vision of the future destiny of the world—its destruction and rebirth.

Perhaps the most iconic vision of apocalypse, at least in the Western world, is the Book of Revelation. In his apocalypse, John the Revelator records events of great calamity and catastrophe that he sees in vision through the assistance of an oracle, foretelling the destruction of the earth and its future renewal. John envisions war, famine, and death; hail, fire, smoke, blood, brimstone, and locusts; a great star falling from heaven; the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars; and plagues that kill and torment humanity until "the mystery of God should be finished" (*Authorized King James Version*, Rev. 8.7-10.7). Thus, this great desolation is antecedent to the unveiling—the revelation—of God's greater work. After heaven and earth "pass away," John sees "a new heaven and a new earth . . . And I heard a great voice out of

heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people" (Rev. 21.1-3). In the framework of the genre of apocalypse, Revelation describes an *apokalupsis*, a revealing, that is not merely the destruction of the earth; rather, the many calamities are preparatory to the actual apocalypse—the revelatory apocalypse—when God unveils himself, dwells with his people, and establishes a new heaven and a new earth governed by a higher, divinely directed order.

Through oral and written traditions, these images of destruction—war, famine, plague, and so on—became the culturally shared images of apocalyptic cataclysm, and the occurrence of events such as wars, epidemics, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes in the real, observable world helped to reinforce to each successive generation the apocalyptic notion that the end is imminent. "Every society," Lumpkin writes, "possesses apocalyptic texts. Every race and every nation carries in its literature and religion the implicit reiterating and unrelenting question: is the end near? The answer . . . yes, it is and here are its signs" (380). These images of ultimate destruction manifest the fear of utter annihilation, but they can also help to alleviate fears of the end by promising that God will replace the old, imperfect world with a new, perfect one. This pattern orients the present within a larger paradigm and provides a sense of meaning to an unknown future.

The genre of apocalypse follows an archetypal framework through which humanity conceives of its own existence. This apocalyptic paradigm is a linear conception of time and progress—a distinct beginning and middle with an end that gives meaning to what has come before. Frank Kermode, author of the seminal study *The Sense of an Ending*, argues "that apocalyptic writings are always caught up with the idea of 'renovation,' of a 'better future'" (Heffernan 6). The hope associated with a "better future" alleviates the fear of the otherwise

unknown state of existence after the destruction of the earth. Thus, the apocalyptic imagination which was cultivated over the centuries (if not millennia) in many cultures is imbued not only with catastrophic images but also with reassurance that usher in positive progress.

The Secularization of Apocalypse

Beyond religious literature, the apocalyptic imagination has significantly shaped many secular narratives—literary as well as social. The apocalyptic pattern has continued to be the underlying framework of understanding the world even as modern schools of thought have moved away from belief in God. According to Kermode, "the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense of the world" (26). Although modernity (emphasizing science, sociology, psychoanalysis, etc.) has led away from religious beliefs in divine order, the "Enlightenment narratives that have given rise to certain versions of modernity—History, the Nation, and Man—continue to be secured by the spirit of the Christian apocalypse, a narrative that posits an origin and moves definitively, through a series of coherent and concordant events, towards an end that will make sense of all that has come before it" (Heffernan 4). The narratives of modernity are meaningful because they lead toward a concluding event—an apocalyptic end unveiling a higher order—which will orient the previous events within a larger, meaningful framework.

The apocalyptic imagination informs secular cultural narratives, for, as Heffernan explains, the modern narratives of "History, the Nation, [and] Man . . . satisfy the desire for continuity, truth, transcendence, and a sense of purpose, longings traditionally satisfied by the Genesis to Revelation story, and they rely on that positive understanding of the end and apocalypse as culmination and resolution" (5). The narrative of the Nation promises "purpose,

perfection, and permanence" as inferior regimes are defeated by progressive revolutions that culminate in the modern, superior nation (4). Immanuel Kant's writings about Man also follow this model of apocalyptic narrative, viewing rational Man as an absolute end in himself, "capable of 'unveiling' ultimate truths as he advances to a state of perfection" (4). Related to this idea of Man as apocalypse, Friedrich Hegel viewed History as an apocalyptic, progressive narrative "that would move toward an end . . . As the purpose or plot of Man came to fruition, so too would History, as process, terminate" (4-5). Although the modern narratives of Nation, Man, and History displace the religious conception of apocalypse as the divine revealing himself, they still point toward an ultimate end for humanity which adheres to the pattern that has established itself in the apocalyptic imagination.

According to Frank Kermode, the apocalyptic model is replicated in the structure of narrative fiction as stories are structured with a beginning, middle, and meaningful end. Hoping to understand the meaning of its own existence, humanity makes "considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns" (Kermode 17). Kermode argues that fictional narratives satisfy this desire for meaningful, coherent patterns, for their endings "are mini-expressions of a faith in a higher order or ultimate pattern that, though it will remain perhaps forever obscure, nevertheless lends a sense of purpose to our existence in the world" (Heffernan 4). By following the traditional apocalyptic paradigm—beginning, middle, end, and renewal—narrative fiction can offer hope that our own existence is similarly coherent and meaningful.

Kermode's approach, the "ultimate extension to the positive implications of the term 'apocalypse,'" provides a baseline formulation of the apocalyptic imagination from which we can then contrast the divergence of the post-apocalyptic imagination (Ketterer 43). First, Kermode's work runs throughout the scholarship relating to apocalypse and post-apocalypse.

Second, as David Ketterer remarks, "the fulfillment of the apocalyptic imagination demands that the destructive chaos give way finally to a new order" (44). Although the apocalyptic imagination elicits both negative (i.e., destruction) and positive (i.e., hope) connotations, the notion of a new social order is a necessary component of the apocalyptic imagination, which is one point on which the post-apocalyptic imagination deviates. Third, apocalyptic popular fiction emerged during the Romantic period in English literary history when apocalypse was predominantly viewed in a positive light. "The American and French Revolutions were interpreted as the pre-millennial upheavals prophesied in the Apocalypse" (42). Literary critic R. W. B. Lewis elaborates, "For the English imagination of the [1790s], in short, the word 'apocalypse' meant not a vision of horror but of dazzling splendor, not of catastrophe but of the epochal and triumphant social transformation that catastrophe led to" (qtd. in Ketterer 42). Ketterer adds that even in the "subsequent period of disillusionment . . . 'apocalypses of imagination' . . . celebrate a compensatory grand new world" (42). It was in this post-revolution period when the dominant ideology of apocalypse emphasized a future, renewed world, that the first significant apocalyptic novel emerged. Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's *Le denier homme* (translated, *The Last Man*) offers a fictionalized take on the genre of apocalypse.

Grainville's *The Last Man*, "the first tale of the Last Man," was published posthumously in 1805 (Clarke and Clarke xi). In 1806, it was translated (poorly) into English and published as *The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia, a Romance in Futurity*. Although it was not the first novel set in the future, previous novels, such as Samuel Madden's *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* (1733) and Louis-Sébastian Mercier's *L'An 2440* (1770), "do not . . . dwell seriously on apocalyptic themes. Mercier provides no apocalyptic model of transition to the better world of 2440. Nor . . . does he adopt a prophetic vision as the framework for his account of a utopian

Paris" (Alkon 162). Grainville's novel, on the other hand, "begins and ends in a way that makes it an unmistakable analogue to the Book of Revelation" (163). However, *The Last Man* is not simply a gloss nor an "action replay of the episodes in Revelation" but is, in effect, a "sequel to Genesis" (Clarke xxix-xxx). In Genesis, Adam and Eve, the First Man and the First Woman, are confronted with conflicting commandments: to not partake of the forbidden fruit and to propagate the human species. *The Last Man* depicts Omegarus and Syderia, the Last Man and the Last Woman, who are confronted with conflicting desires: either to solemnize their love for one another by perpetuating the species, thus delaying the end, or to deny themselves sexual union and procreation to allow the human race to die off, ushering in the fulfillment of apocalypse and the divine renewal of the earth.

Similar to Revelation and other apocalypses, Grainville's *The Last Man* presents its vision of the future as a revelation through a medium. For readers in the early 19th century, this was a common and comfortable narrative device, which kept a potentially off-putting tale of death and woe from being alienating. The beginning of the novel is narrated by a young traveler, who discovers the personification of Time among the ruins of Palmyra in Syria.[1] The "Celestial Spirit to whom the entire future is known" addresses the traveler and prefaces his story of Omegarus and Syderia by stating, "The Last Man will have no descendants who can know and admire him. My desire is that before he is born, he will be known in memory" (Grainville 3-5). The Spirit recounts to the young man the story of Omegarus, the last child to be born in a future Europe when the inhabitants of the world have become sterile.[2] Omegarus is shown a vision in which he sees Syderia, the last fertile woman on earth, so he travels to her. They fall in love and eventually marry against the backdrop of a world in upheaval—earthquakes, darkness, and other apocalyptic imagery.

During their adventures, Omegarus and Syderia have additional visions and meet other oracles including Adam, the First Man and Father of Mankind, who pleads for Omegarus and Syderia to bring an end to humankind. Omegarus chooses to obey Adam, a decision which puts into motion the fulfillment of God's plan. He leaves Syderia, and although she longs for him, she is comforted by dreams of the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment—the "conventional apocalyptic scene"—which will come as a result of his decision (Alkon 179). The story of Omegarus and Syderia concludes with their deaths, ushering in the apocalyptic renewal. When Syderia falls dead at the feet of Death "there came an instant, universal cry of joy," for "[a]ll Heaven [had] waited on this great event with impatience . . . The reign of time had ended, and a vista of eternity opened up" (Grainville 132). Returning to the framing narrative, the narrating Spirit tells the young traveler, "I wished only to let you witness the triumph of Omegarus, and to show you that, by obeying the commands of Heaven, he will one day cut short the reign of time and hasten the coming of eternity" (135). The novel ends reasserting the power, majesty, and hope of apocalypse—that death and destruction are not to be feared but that the end will be joyous because it is part of the grand, divine design.

Grainville's *The Last Man* is an important text in the history of the apocalyptic genre because he translates apocalypse into popular fiction, and in so doing he offers a novel that will serve as a transition between the genre of religious apocalypse and later apocalyptic fiction. "He secularizes the Apocalypse *without* discarding its theological framework," and he embeds a "diversity of ideas" and offers an "uneasy but stimulating amalgamation of disparate genres in quest of the right form for a tale of the future" (Alkon 183). The future earth that he depicts is suffering from soil exhaustion, and the sun is dying. The apocalyptic trajectory of the narrative is seen as part of God's ultimate plan; however, it is significant that the end is not the result of

divine intervention but of natural, physical processes. Later texts will start to imagine apocalypse beyond the theological framework to which Grainville limits himself, but his innovation in the apocalyptic genre was an important early entry that helps to highlight the secularization, reimagining, diversity, and "amalgamation of disparate genres" that would continue to influence the apocalyptic genre. However, even in Grainville's fictional apocalypse, the apocalyptic imagination looks to the ultimate future of establishing a new order.

Grainville inspired other 19th-century French authors to write about the Last Man while across the English Channel, authors in England were creating their own tales of the end of the world and the Last Man. In 18th-century England, a certain kind of writing about the future emerged that focused on demonstrating the concept of "declension of empires" by contrasting imagined future empires with the present Empire of the 18th century, linking future decline with present failures (Clarke xxxii-xxxiii). In the early 19th century, the Last Man became a popular subject for English writers, and the last days and the end of empires became popular subjects for English painters. Clarke marks the beginning of this popularity with Lord Byron's 1818 poem "Darkness," "which records the end of humankind, the moon gone, and the world on the point of dissolution" (xxxvi). For several years following Byron's poem, other poets and playwrights offered their own takes on the Last Man theme, and the paintings of John Martin—depicting the last days of humanity and the end of empires—saw their heyday (xxxvi-xxxviii). Although Clarke declares that the English interest in these themes was not directly influenced by the similarly themed works in France, he does recognize a similarity "insofar as they were part of a general European interest in, almost cult of, fallen empires and the end of civilization" (xxvii). The different nations produced cultural products with differing origins and traditions, but there

was a certain amount of shared fascination and anxiety about last things in post-Revolution Europe.

It was within this setting that Mary Shelley produced her novel *The Last Man* (1826), which is an essential milestone in the history of the post-apocalyptic genre. Certain aspects of the apocalyptic imagination are inevitably present in the work, but Shelley distances her tale from the traditional notion of apocalypse in several ways. First, unlike Grainville, Shelley makes no attempt to situate her story within the theological framework of apocalypse. Additionally, although Shelley offers an "Author's Introduction" to frame the origin of the text, she does not return to the framing narrative, so the reader is left with the lone inhabitant of the world lamenting his loss and declaring his lack of hope. Related to the previous two points, Shelley's *The Last Man* ultimately ends with no promise of renewal, no apocalyptic unveiling of a new order. Shelley alludes to several theories and practices in politics and literature, judges them as ineffective, but offers nothing better. Her novel presents a series of ends with no new beginning, diverging from the apocalyptic notions that had been previously reinforced. Similar to the way her novel *Frankenstein* (1818) is a predecessor of science fiction, *The Last Man* is an important prototype for the post-apocalyptic genre.

Shelley's *The Last Man* was published in 1826 and was received quite negatively. In the latter half of the 20th century, its critical reputation improved as it received scholarly reappraisal, particularly in the 1960s and 1990s. Clarke associates the beginning of its reversal of reputation with "the post-Hiroshima flood of tales about annihilated cities and the end of all life on earth" (xxxviii). The revaluation of *The Last Man* in a period during which the post-apocalyptic genre proliferated makes sense considering its post-apocalyptic bent. Shelley's story is principally concerned with Lionel Verney—the narrator and titular last man—and his small group of friends.

It is widely recognized that there is an autobiographical component to these principle characters, with Lionel and his friends representing Mary Shelley herself, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron. As Morton D. Paley writes, "Thus Mary Shelley in *The Last Man* reconstituted in an idealized form her little band of the Elect and killed them off again except for her narrating self" (110). Shelley does not immediately situate her tale in a post-apocalyptic setting. *The Last Man* leisurely details the friendships and romantic relationships between Lionel and his friends. It depicts the political atmosphere of a future England and the strife between nations that leads to war. When the devastating plague is unleashed on the world, Shelley devotes a section to describing the spread of the plague as it kills off the inhabitants of the earth, including Lionel's loved ones. When the plague ceases its carnage, only four survivors remain, and after the other three also die, Lionel is left the last man.

As mentioned above, one of the post-apocalyptic aspects of Shelley's *The Last Man* is its rejection of the apocalyptic framework which structured Grainville's story. Unlike Grainville's tale in which apocalypse runs its full course, in Shelley's story "signs of a millennium appear only to be dissipated" (110). The "Author's Introduction" contains a supernatural element in that Shelley explains that the book was translated from prophetic writings found upon leaves discovered in the Cumaean Sibyl's cave near Naples. This introduction bears a similarity with the framing narrative of the young traveler in Grainville's *The Last Man*, and Paley remarks that Shelley's introduction "displays that 'buffering' that the subject seems to demand . . . We are to be told the history of the Last Man before he exists, and we are therefore relieved of the anxiety of imagining a world in which there are no readers" (110-1). Whereas Grainville returns to the framing story after the arrival of eternity in order to bear a concluding testimony about the works of God, Shelley does not. H. Bruce Franklin's summary of the end of the story emphasizes its

post-apocalyptic aspects: "[T]he last survivor, in a scene that will become commonplace in post-atomic fiction, travels the desolate planet in his futile quest for another human being while contemplating the bitter ironies of material human achievements" (118). Among his concluding thoughts, Lionel remarks, "I also will write a book, I cried—for whom to read?" (Shelley 364). His question "for whom to read?" recalls the author's introduction and our role as readers of his future tale; however, it also reemphasizes the point that no one will be around after Lionel to read it. Shelley leaves Lionel, the Last Man, wandering the earth alone in the future and denies the reader any concluding, reorienting remarks from the author in the present. Thus, the introduction initially appears as a familiar structuring device only to be dissipated.

The plague in Shelley's *The Last Man* ravages the earth, and no force—political, religious, etc.—can stop it. Only four survivors survive the plague, of which three die of other causes, leaving Lionel alone with no sign of apocalyptic renewal. Among his final recorded thoughts, he muses, "I have no expectation of alteration for the better . . . Neither hope nor joy are my pilots" (367). Despair and absence of hope for improvement resound in his remarks. The end has come unimpeded, and after the end, there is no new order, only "the monotonous present" (367). For Lionel Verney, the myth of apocalypse has proven to be false. A common reading of *The Last Man* contends that this pessimistic view of the end was shaped by Shelley's own mourning for the deaths of her husband, three of her four children, and Byron. Barbara Johnson writes, "At the age of twenty-six, she considered herself the last relic of an extinct race [and] takes over a typically Romantic style in order to say what she sees as the end of Romanticism" (263). This sense of the end finds its expression in the Plague. "The Plague is at once that which stops all systems of meaning from functioning and that against which those systems are necessarily erected" (264). Included in this critique of "all systems of meaning" is

the ineffectiveness of all political ideas. Kari E. Lokke argues, "*The Last Man* attacks Enlightenment faith in the inevitability of progress through collective efforts . . . Shelley thus obliterates the keystone of Enlightenment ideology in her symbolic annihilation of the human race" (128-9). As discussed above, this notion of progress is a part of the apocalyptic imagination. Shelley not only "obliterates" Enlightenment ideology, but she is also upending apocalyptic ideology. Despite all of the recent critical praise which it has received, Shelley's entry in the post-apocalyptic genre did not resonate with her contemporary audiences, but it set the stage for later post-apocalyptic fiction.

The *Fin-de-siècle* Apocalyptic Imagination

The early 19th century had witnessed a fascination with tales of the Last Man, the last days, and the end of empires, but the general lack of cultural concern for apocalyptic and future scenarios during the mid-1800s is reflected in the relatively small output of future fiction for almost fifty years following the publication of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* in 1826. The end of the century, however, was suddenly flooded with stories about time traveling, future wars, utopias, imagined and predicted uses of and advancements in technological and scientific knowledge. This period of proliferation of these stories of science and technology was vital for the evolution of the science fiction genre. The end of the 19th century is often identified by the term '*fin de siècle*' and characterized as a period of degeneration, "aestheticism, decadence, ennui and apocalyptic gloom" (Mousoutzanis 19). The term was popularized by the journalist Max Nordau who "envisioned an impending 'Dusk of the Nations, in which all suns and all starts are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is perishing in the midst of a dying world'" (19). *Fin de siècle* is associated with the period of transition from the late

1800s to the First World War. This period is also associated with the accelerated technological progress that is often described as the "Second Industrial Revolution," from roughly 1870 to 1914, which is exemplified by an increase in invention including "the first modern media technologies: the typewriter (1867), the telephone (1876), the phonograph (1877), cinema (1895), wireless telegraphy (1895), and radio (1906), among others" (5). "All these new technologies transformed everyday life in drastic ways," but the period was also being changed by "tremendous advances in areas of scientific inquiry such as uniformitarianism in geology, thermodynamics in physics, and evolutionism in biology [as] the 'scientific nineteenth century' radically challenged established assumptions about nature, humanity and the universe itself" (5). These *fin-de-siècle* notions of social degeneration and decadence, technological advancement, and scientific revolution were profoundly influential on the apocalyptic imagination.

These advances produced in the cultural consciousness both anxiety and wonder, conflicting feelings which prepared readers for the reemergence of future fiction and the apocalyptic imagination. Clarke identifies George Chesney's 1871 novel *The Battle of Dorking* as the text which opened the flood gates to the surge of future fiction during this period. The novel tells of a future German conquest of the United Kingdom by the use of a super-weapon, an image that resonated in a time following the Franco-German War of 1870, "the first of the modern European wars" (xl). During this war, the use of new technologies—such as telegraph, railway transportation, and breech-loading artillery—helped to reinforce the destructive capabilities of technological progress, and the German victory altered the relationships between European nations. Following *The Battle of Dorking*, imagined wars and invasion became recurring themes in future fiction, including aerial warfare, a relatively new idea at the time (such as H.G. Wells' 1908 *War in the Air*).[3] These images of war resonated with the apocalyptic

imagination: "The flying machines and airships in the tales by Griffith, Fawcett, Ellis and Wells were only one example of a series of inventions, real or imaginary, that were employed in the battle for Armageddon" (Mousoutzanis 5). Also during this period, "a number of late-Victorian popular fictions . . . involved anarchists threatening to overthrow civilisation," and in 1894 this threat was no longer merely fiction when an anarchist was killed by the detonation of his own bomb in London's Greenwich Park (which, as the location of the prime meridian where the reckoning of time begins and ends, is itself an apocalyptic symbol) (2).[4] These themes of war, terrorism, and violence had been present in the apocalyptic imagination, but in this period they took a modern form in light of innovations in weapons technology, developments in international politics, and advances in communications technology that connected the world.

Another trend in popular fiction of this time was time travel. Occasionally, most notably in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), time travel was associated with technology, but more often it involved the protagonist, often the narrator, falling asleep and waking up in a future time that he would then describe. Examples of the latter include W.H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1887), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891), and Wells' *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910; this novel was based on a serialized version written by Wells and published between 1898 and 1899). In the case of Hudson, Bellamy, and Morris these visions of the future tend to depict utopian societies and devote themselves to describing those societies. In *The Time Machine* and *The Sleeper Awakes*, Wells presents dystopian visions of the future in which lower, labor classes are oppressed by the wealthy elite. As with other works from Wells, like *The World Set Free* (1914), these images of a dystopian future are intended as a call to socialism in the present. Although these time travelers—those in both the utopian and the dystopian tales—do not witness apocalyptic destruction, these novels help to illuminate the general apocalyptic concern about

potential future world orders that would replace the decadent, degenerating society of the *fin de siècle*.[5]

Significantly, the utopian futures that were depicted in this time tended to be agrarian societies, reminding readers that despite technological and scientific progress, apocalypse may ultimately lead them right back to the past. In Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885), an unknown calamity destroys modern civilization, "leaving the metropolis a filthy bog exuding poisonous vapors. The new wild England is not a utopia, as in *A Crystal Age* or *News from Nowhere*. Life is harsh, and thoughts of the endtime trouble the narrator" (Wagar 21). The few who survive the catastrophe regress to a barbaric state, a neo-medieval existence. In the wake of the end of modern civilization, nature reasserts itself with trees overrunning fields, plant life overgrowing roads and towns, and domesticated animals reverting to a wild state. However, *After London* is essentially a Romance, recalling the romanticism of an earlier age, such as the poems of Shelley. W. Warren Wagar explains, "Neo-romantic values pervaded many of the finest terminal fictions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," and the neo-medieval setting of Jefferies' story provides "a stage on which his autobiographical protagonist . . . could prove his valor and win the fair heroine" (141-2). These visions of the future tend to be visions of the past.

Imagined futures such as these helped to further shape the apocalyptic imagination (which had already expanded to consider that the new order would be secular, not divine) to conceive of a future order which looked very much like one from the past. *After London* is significant in the history of the evolution of the post-apocalyptic genre because it presents a vision of a world caught between overarching social orders. In contrast to both Grainville's *The Last Man* and Shelley's *The Last Man*, it is not introduced as originating from an explanatory

supernatural source. Rather, Jefferies' narrator simply begins recounting the fate of humanity in a future London. The novel concludes with no hint that a new, structured social order will be instituted. The narrator has been recognized for his superior intelligence, so he begins to attract followers; however, having no desire to be their leader, he sneaks away to travel through the untamed forest in the direction of his heroine. Ending on an ambiguous note, it is not certain whether or not he will survive the journey. Such concluding ambiguity will become a recurring element in post-apocalyptic works as will neo-medieval settings similar to the one Jefferies depicts.

After London and other texts of the period were influenced by elements in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, such as plague and the Last Man. Further, *The Last Man* served as a model for the secular approach to apocalypse during the *fin de siècle*. "One distinctive feature of these turn-of-the-century fictions," Mousoutzanis observes, "is that the apocalypse envisioned was less divine and more secular," a feature which distinguishes these texts as a "departure from earlier similar fantasies in the case of late-Victorian fictions. The End would not be brought about anymore by God but by humanity itself, armed with either cutting-edge or imaginary futuristic technologies," a characteristic which makes these stories "quintessentially modern," "even if apocalyptic speculation dates from ancient times" (5). Another aspect of *The Last Man* which gets echoed in these tales is the notion that the imagined futures are not inevitable. Lokke explains that although a purely nihilistic reading of *The Last Man* may be tempting, the "social criticism that underscores nearly every central crisis depicted in the novel . . . holds out the possibility that things could be otherwise, if human beings would only will them so" (126). Similarly, underlying *fin-de-siècle* tales of declining empires, technologically advanced weapons of war, and dystopian and neo-primitive futures is the possibility that they do not have to become reality.

M.P. Shiel's Last Man novel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901), highlights another important aspect of the post-apocalyptic imagination that was beginning to diverge from the apocalyptic imagination, specifically humanity's relationship with time. In the religious conception of apocalypse, the end of the world also heralds the end of terrestrial time and the beginning of eternity (referenced in Grainville's *The Last Man*). Implicit in this concept is that humankind's reckoning of time is a construct, and the *fin de siècle* heightened apocalyptic anxiety because modernity imbued this constructed temporality with meaning. Mousoutzanis explains that "what generates fears of an impending apocalypse at the end of a century is the 'sense of an ending' determined by what Frank Kermode has termed '*saecula*', temporal constructs such as that of the 'decade', the 'century' and the 'millennium' whose impact on the human imagination responds to 'a permanent need to live by the pattern rather than the fact'" (20). The turn of a century increases apocalyptic anxiety because the "influence of *saecula* is stronger as a century reaches its end" (20). *The Purple Cloud*, published at the beginning of the 20th century, comments on time in such a way that not only critiques temporal constructs but also gives a significant example of the issue of temporality in the post-apocalyptic world.

In Shiel's novel, the apocalyptic disaster comes in the form of a poisonous cyanide cloud which is spewed from volcanic eruption and covers the entire globe, killing the world's population (the impact of volcanic eruption was still in the public consciousness following the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883). The cloud spares the protagonist, Adam Jeffson (yes, the new Adam—his name is intentional) while he is on an exploratory expedition at the north pole. Over the years, his mood often swings between maniacally constructive—during which times he considers himself a god-like king and builds an ornate palace for himself—and maniacally destructive—when he travels the world burning the great cities. He eventually discovers a young

female survivor who desires to be the Eve to his Adam. He rejects this scenario however, refusing to repopulate the earth because he predicts that the new race will be as cruel as the previous one. He describes the two competing impulses as White Power and Black Power—the former enticing him to be constructive and to accept Leda as his Eve while the latter entices him to be destructive and to vow to be the end of the human race. While visiting London, he breaks into a fit of existential rage when he sees that Big Ben (which was still relatively new; it had been completed in 1859) has stopped at ten minutes past three, as have all other clocks, for Jeffson remains devoted to the construct of global standardized time—he keeps his own chronometer wound and keeps track of how many days have passed since the poison-cloud—even though time has become irrelevant in this post-apocalyptic world.

Jeffson's struggle between opposing enticements is an early example of a theme that recurs in various forms throughout post-apocalyptic fiction. Another recurring post-apocalyptic theme is Shiel's treatment of time. Ailise Bulfin remarks, "Shiel problematizes conventional understandings of the absolute nature of time by showing its meaninglessness in the post-human world" (169). Jeffson, a devotee of constructed temporality, is juxtaposed against Leda who has no concept of structured time, and he is mocked by all the clocks that have stopped at the exact time that the world ended. Whereas time is subsumed into eternity in religious apocalypse and is progressing toward the new order in secular apocalypse, time is rendered meaningless in the post-apocalypse. Rather than the "sense of an ending" being determined by standardized *saecula*, the post-apocalyptic imagination evokes the sense of being perpetually stuck in a single, meaningless moment of time.

The Turn of the Twentieth Century

From the turn of the century until the First World War, speculative tales of plague, natural disaster, future war, utopia, etc., were common, repeating the patterns that had already been established by other fantasies of "scientific possibility" and "utopian romance." The threats to humankind which recur in these fantasies of the future were borne from the apocalyptic imagination of modern, industrial society—the divine was no longer the sole possessor of the power to destroy or preserve human life. Human intelligence had devised scientific and technological powers that could directly result in death on a massive scale, particularly through international military conflict. The progress of humanity had created industrial societies that changed the way people lived, including a large, literate middle class, who were typically the ones reading these novels. Despite the modern threats, apocalyptic ideology still predominated in these texts, offering hope that humanity's virtues would preserve them, either by averting these possible futures or by creating (or returning to) a better order.

During this period, writers working in a variety of traditions turned out novels incorporating apocalyptic themes. French sociologist Gabriel Tarde's *Fragment d'histoire future*, translated into English and published as *Underground Man* in 1905, imagines the surface of the earth becoming covered with ice, prompting the creation of a grand utopia underground, founded on the arts and intellectual genius. William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land* (1912) blends the apocalyptic imagination with supernatural horror. Not unlike other "buffered" narratives, it begins with a 17th century gentleman receiving a revelation of the distant future when the sun is dying. Survivors have taken refuge in a giant pyramid, and the narrator embarks alone into the darkness on a quest to find the reincarnation of his past love. Also in 1912, Jack London, whom Wagar calls the "most original figure in American speculative fiction," published *The Scarlet*

Plague (23). In London's novella, an old man recounts to a group of wild, savage, disbelieving children the story of the plague that destroyed the previous civilization and brought an end to their technology, lifestyle, and social classes. He laments that civilization follows a cyclical pattern—once all of the knowledge that has been lost is relearned, it will inevitably be lost again—which gives the work a tone of lament and a sense of perpetual loss. Similar to Jeffson in *The Purple Cloud*, who is stuck perpetually in a single moment, London's Professor Smith laments that in the future, civilization will progress only to again come to an end. The concept of the circularity of time diverges from the progressive linearity of the apocalyptic imagination and is often a theme in post-apocalyptic fiction.[6]

Beyond the realm of future fiction, the turn of the century was also experiencing seismic shifts in other literary traditions and the cultural products that they produced. By the time the new century dawned, Impressionism—which, in painting, advanced a style of depicting the artist's own perception, impression, of light and movement—had disrupted the accepted traditions in French painting. It had also impacted other artistic traditions and literature. Ford Madox Ford "gave wide currency to the view that he and [Joseph] Conrad, like Flaubert and Maupassant, had been writers of impressionist fiction" (Watt 315). At the turn of the century, Conrad published *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which demonstrates a "narrative technique which was the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly" (317). The plot centers around Marlow's journey up the Congo River in search of the enigmatic Kurtz. However, Conrad's story is not simply about Marlow's journey into the heart of Africa, it is also a journey into the dark heart of humanity.[7] Marlow describes part of the journey as "a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire" (Conrad 242). Thus, while Tarde was imagining a descent into the heart of the earth to create a future

utopia, Conrad was examining "the changes [which] take place inside" the heart of Marlow (148). Although not a vision of a post-apocalyptic future, the novella reflects a post-apocalyptic sensibility which would also be evoked by the film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which is based on Conrad's story. *Heart of Darkness* questions humankind's apocalyptic, progressive image of itself and offers a look into a dark, savage world which exists in the present—a world bereft of hope in which there is diminishing distinction between the civilized and the primitive.

During the transition between centuries, there was growing dissatisfaction with the apocalyptic narratives of Man, History, and Nation, and apocalyptic imagery was being invoked to inspire and motivate change. As it progressed during the 19th century, modernism was instrumental in preparing the way for radical new ways of thinking that would begin to emerge at the turn of the century, including ideas that pushed against the linear conception of apocalypse and faith in a meaningful, ordered end. Modernism functioned both as a post-apocalyptic force to criticize apocalyptic notions of progress and as an apocalyptic force, destroying old traditions and institutional order and revealing new styles and forms.

The turn of the century witnessed a number of revolutionary art movements, in the modernist vein, which imagined and vied for a virtual apocalyptic change and revelation—challenging and destroying established traditions of representation while also unveiling new styles. Impressionism had inspired a rising generation of artists who wanted to experiment further with form and style. In the early years of the 20th century, the avant-garde movements of Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism burst into the art world, departing from the old ways and reimagining how the world could be rendered through art. The Cubists were interested in deconstructing three-dimensional objects and abstractly reassembling them such that the multiple dimensions are simultaneously represented. The Futurists were devoted to the new—youth,

speed, technology, modernity. In his manifesto of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti declared, "Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed" (Marinetti -- "Joy" and "Manifesto"). Expressionism sought to express the reality of inner, emotional experience rather than outer, representational reality. There was an energy in these movements and a hope in new modes of representation, new ways of seeing, and new ways of constructing meaning. Film historian Ulrich Gregor remarks, "There was annihilation and destruction, but not as a kind of doomsday fantasy . . . It was, rather, a revolutionary gesture with the expectation that you can replace the old with something new" (*Caligari: The Birth of Horror in the First World War*). These movements were apocalyptic in the sense that they were destructive but with the intent of also being revelatory.

In contrast to the apocalyptic aspect of these movements, there was also an underlying post-apocalyptic solipsism running through them. Impressionism and the avant-garde movements which followed are largely concerned with individual perception and experience, undercutting belief in universal narratives. These movements helped to further develop a post-apocalyptic imagination which deviated from the grand narrative of apocalypse—both religious and secular apocalypse. "By the end of the nineteenth century," Heffernan writes, "the faith in the secular version of this apocalypse-influenced narrative is already diminishing and in many modernist works there is a sense that the end can no longer offer up or secure meaning . . . The world cannot be righted because there is no right" (29). Whereas the secular apocalyptic pattern imagined social progress leading to the ultimate end (for example, the Nation progressing until it became the best form of government), modernism called into question the ability of an end to offer an ultimate resolution.

After the Great War

Between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War, modernist art movements were changing the way reality was represented in high culture while novelists imagined future cataclysms time and again in popular fiction. However, the coming of World War I, the Great War, impacted the apocalyptic imagination in both high art and popular culture. Among the prolific prewar popular fiction envisioning apocalypse, human-made disaster was a frequent theme, particularly future war involving superweapons, aerial attack, and foreign (often Oriental) enemies (Wagar 24). The general tone of these visions of war was a voice of warning, depicting the calamity that would befall nations and empires if they were overconfident and unprepared. "War was seen by the writers of these stories as 'normal and romantic'" (23). These stories left readers unprepared for the true devastation of the First World War. "Novelists had foreseen a major European war many times in the decades just before [World War I], but few had anticipated its length, world-wide scale, or costliness in lives and wealth" (23). After the War, apocalyptic fiction continued to be popular, as it resonated with postwar readers, and Clarke notes that "these tales became lamentations for the sudden end of nations or of all mankind" (xl). The devastation of the War had a powerful impact on the apocalyptic imagination.

The number of apocalyptic texts increased between the two World Wars, but they returned to the established themes and scenarios. Stories of natural disaster such as floods and comets continued, generally with humankind devising a means to escape the catastrophe (as in Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie's very successful 1933 novel *When Worlds Collide*). One novel that deserves mentioning for its cyclical depiction of apocalypse and ultimate annihilation is Olaf

Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930), which "ends the world more than twenty times, in every imaginable way, over a period of two billion years" (Wagar 26). When future wars were depicted, "most are world wars fought with the doomsday weapons of modern science," yet "[i]n other respects, [these] visions of the world's end . . . resemble their counterparts of the generation of 1890" (24). Aerial bombardment is an ever-present feature of the next world war, including at times atomic weapons (like in H.G. Wells' *The World Set Free*); poison gas is the preferred superweapon; death tolls are on the apocalyptic scale; and the enemy tends to be an armed nation-state (124). Story after story, these tales repeat the same formula, which hearkens back to the future war stories from before the War, even continuing the trend of Oriental villains, such as in the first Buck Rogers story *Armageddon 2419 A.D.*, a novella written by Philip Francis Nowlan and published in the pulp fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* in August 1928. These stories, influenced by postwar concerns, helped to perpetuate cultural images of future apocalypse.

Many such stories were published in the pulp magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, like *Amazing Stories.* These magazines helped to establish the genre of science fiction by collecting and popularizing fiction that involved space travel, time travel, mad scientists, inventions gone awry, tales of the supernatural, and fantasies of the future—including future war and apocalypse. Popular science fiction, like that published in the pulp magazines, was a significant source from which filmmakers drew for stories that could be adapted into cinematic spectacles. Cinema has been vital in shaping the images associated with apocalypse and post-apocalypse. During the period following the First World War, the apocalyptic scenarios depicted in film drew from popular literature and were, thus, rooted in the same tradition of apocalyptic fiction. For example, Abel Gance's film *La fin du monde* (1931) was an adaptation of Camille Flammarion's

1894 novel. A scientist discovers a comet on a collision course with the earth, threatening utter destruction. As the comet approaches, the world's nations agree to join as a single world government, ushering in peaceful world relations and finding salvation through international unity. Five years later, Alexander Korda produced *Things to Come* (1936), directed by William Cameron Menzies and written by H.G. Wells based on his 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come*. An extended period of war devastates the earth and a widespread "wandering sickness" plunge the world into another Dark Age. A group of survivors form a civilization that has renounced war and promotes unity, ushering in decades of technological progress. Modern Luddites oppose the continued progress of technology and threaten to thwart the launch of a space capsule to the Moon. The capsule is launched before it can be destroyed, and the film ends with a passionate monologue about humanity's continuing quest for knowledge. "*Things to Come* extrapolates from the very real international tensions of its day (1936), looming threats of another world war, and popular antimachine sentiments in British culture" to be a voice of warning and to envision humanity employing its own abilities to construct utopia (Telotte 126). Perhaps most notable is the contribution of these films to the visual imagery of apocalypse—a hurtling comet, panic in the streets, war, survivors living among ruins, a now-obsolete motor car being pulled by a horse, and especially Menzies' stunning design of the futuristic city (which would be evoked in later films such as *Logan's Run* [1976]). These cinematic images would become part of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic imaginations.

From the perspective of economic history, there is little to distinguish apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. They share the same points of origin—pulp magazines of the 1920s and '30s, fantasies of the future, scientific romances, and Mary Shelley—and they share the same outlets of production and distribution—pulp fiction publishers and film companies seeking to

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produce commercially viable films by following previously successful patterns. Their common elements help keep them connected in the minds of consumers, producers, and distributors. However, the two diverge when considering aesthetic history and social history, for in these areas the two genres have evolved differently as the post-apocalyptic imagination has deviated from the apocalyptic imagination. Above, some 19th-century and *fin-de-siècle* texts have been highlighted which demonstrate early examples of such divergence. The apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic imaginations further diverged early in the 20th century as both were influenced by modernist movements and the First World War. The loss of faith in universal, apocalyptic narratives that Heffernan associates with modernism is characteristic of the post-apocalyptic imagination—a cultural imagination that is no longer structured by apocalyptic ideology.

Modernist movements emerged during the 19th and early 20th centuries, reacting against traditions which had established "proper" forms of representation, and the War raised further questions about the traditional narratives of progress. In an apocalyptic sense, war is a means by which progress is achieved, but the brutal reality of World War I challenged such an apocalyptic view. Rüdiger Suchsland explains, "Across Europe the war led to a shaking-up of world views. All moral concepts collapsed. The world was no longer whole" (*Caligari: The Birth of Horror in the First World War*). The impact of the War increased disillusionment toward dominant ideologies and disconnection between universal narratives and individual experience. Modernist ideas and innovations resonated in the postwar period and were increasingly influential on mainstream culture during the period between the world wars. For example, the cinema of Weimar Germany experienced remarkable international success, and many of its practitioners would later emigrate to Hollywood and significantly influence the visual style of American film. German cinema during the Weimar Republic is associated with German Expressionism, a style

noted for "self-conscious stylization of décor, gesture, and lighting," employed as a means to reflect inner torment and moral dilemma (Elsaesser 137). This style is seen across genres in the German films of the era, but one is particularly worth mentioning here: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), whose dystopian vision of oppressed laborers and oppressive elite "offers a thoroughly worked out critique of futuristic life, one that reflects the economic and cultural chaos that was post-World War I Germany" (Telotte 126). The story draws upon many tropes of futuristic fiction—the oppressed workers are stirred into rebellion by a mischievous robot that was created by a mad scientist—and, like the futuristic tales that predominated during this period, it is allegorical and ultimately redemptive when Freder, the son of the city's highest elite, acts as a mediator between the elite and the working classes. The film has "a starkly expressionist scheme: with heavy shadows, angular compositions, stylized character motions, a symbolic dominance of things over people" (126). Although the overall narrative reaffirms the apocalyptic narrative of humanity's progression toward unity and equality, there are strongly expressionistic moments which reflect the interest of German Expressionism in seeking to capture individual, inner turmoil in a world whose universal, grand narratives were crumbling. This visual expression would become incorporated into the cultural imagination, influencing a number of genres including horror and the post-apocalyptic genre.

In addition to expressionism, another development of modernism which impacted the post-apocalyptic imagination was modernist literature of the post-World War I period. Modernist movements are full of complexity beyond the scope of this dissertation, but one salient aspect of modernist literature that helped to shape the post-apocalyptic imagination is rupture, such as disconnecting present crisis from future resolution. "The post-apocalyptic mood that infects the modern period," Heffernan writes, is evident in "resistance to conclusions, to life as a journey

towards some final revelation, and to human identity as intimately bound up with a progression to 'somewhere'" (120-1). While apocalyptic patterns progress toward meaningful ends, modernist literature resists such conclusions. "The diminished sense of the end that haunts modernist works . . . threaten[s] the very possibility of arriving at some stable point, of producing meaning in the world, of restoring the social order" (30). Definitive resolution is impossible because the very notion of the end no longer carries the weight of certitude that it did in previous eras.

Modernist literature also disconnects the present from the past. Referencing T.S. Eliot, Heffernan explains, "Disconnected from the great tradition of the past, the present is empty, nothing more than a 'wasteland,' populated with 'hollow men' and 'heaps of broken images'" (60). The traditional conceptions of apocalypse are fundamentally about connection—unifying past, present, and future and the individual being connected to the collective, universal experience of progress. Implicit in the apocalyptic model is a sense of homogeneity and shared experience, but the coming of modernism revealed the tenuousness of this concept of community. "In the solipsistic, fragmented modern world the individual loses faith in his or her ability to partake in [grand apocalyptic narratives] as a shared event" (69-70). When individual experience diverges from collective experience, it destroys the sense of commonality and threatens the grand narrative that progress is leading to oneness. Reflecting the faltering of these apocalyptic traditions, modernist literature offers ruptured, inconclusive endings, individuals disconnected from the past, and the loss of cohesive imagined communities.

While the popular literature of the day was repeating formulaic patterns of future war, natural disasters, and so on, modernist literature was helping to shape the post-apocalyptic imagination by tapping into cultural concerns of losing faith in the apocalyptic narratives that

had imbued the end with meaning. The formal experimentation of the modernists, many of whom employed apocalyptic terminology, helped to reinvent narratives and to reconceive the meaning of the end. One example of such reinvention is T.S. Eliot, whose poems *The Waste Land* and "The Hollow Men" are noteworthy in discussion of the post-apocalyptic imagination. "The Hollow Men," specifically the final couplet "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper," is perhaps the most common intertextual reference in the post-apocalyptic genre (80).[8] In *The Waste Land*, Eliot juxtaposes a number of symbols and quotations from various sources to create a poem that has received an incredible amount of critical attention. According to Cleanth Brooks, Jr., "*The Waste Land* is built on a major contrast . . . between two kinds of life and two kinds of death. Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life-giving, an awaking to life," and the poem is centrally concerned with this paradox (186). Brooks further claims that Eliot intentionally uses contradictory symbols in order to reveal similarities between apparent dissimilarities and vice versa, to the end that stale symbols will be revitalized. "In this way the statement of beliefs emerges *through* confusion and cynicism—not in spite of them" (210; emphasis in original). *The Waste Land* employs apocalyptic images in order to reveal new ways of making meaning. The concepts and forms explored by modernist writers helped to further establish a foundation on which postmodernism and popular post-apocalyptic fiction would later build.

The Second World War and After

In *The World Set Free* (1914), H.G. Wells imagined harnessing atomic power to propel vehicles and to produce atomic bombs. Although Wells' atomic bombs were no more powerful than ordinary high explosives, he imagined each bomb producing multiple explosions which then

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produced more explosions, a chain reaction. This vision inspired Leo Szilard, a Hungarian physicist, who would eventually realize the real-life possibility of nuclear chain reaction (Kelly 17). In the 1930s, while apocalyptic fiction was imagining future cataclysm from superweapons and natural disasters that would ultimately bring about new worlds founded on humanity's beneficence and intelligence, scientists were at work creating the real-life atomic bomb. The resulting creation would forever change the world.

By the late 1930s, the stirrings of war were beginning to be felt. In 1939, MGM produced *Peace on Earth*, a one-reel cartoon that depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which humans have been utterly annihilated in a catastrophic world war. On Christmas Eve, after hearing the lyrics "good will to men" being sung in a Christmas carol, two young squirrels ask their grandfather about "men." As he recounts the story of the final war of humanity, depictions of the war evoke images of the First World War. The short film is a vision of the horrors of war and was a call for peace at a time when war had again erupted in Europe. As the conflict escalated, more nations joined in the fighting. The Second World War would be even more destructive than the Great War. The death toll resulting from military battles surpassed those of World War I; in addition to the fighting, the Nazis massacred millions in the Jewish Holocaust, and over 100,000 were killed when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

During the war, fewer novels were published, for as Wagar explains, "Writers were too busy surviving the horrors of the historical apocalypse to have much time left over for inventing terminal fictions" (26). After the war, however, publication of imagined apocalypse resurged in greater numbers. The number of stories with apocalyptic themes published in the aftermath of both World Wars is an indicator that when war is fresh in the collective cultural memory, tales of the end of the world abound (110). The postwar period also witnessed the emergence of a truly

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post-apocalyptic genre. The atrocities of the Second World War had pushed the post-apocalyptic imagination to a critical point, for the world had witnessed apocalypse. Berger describes the Holocaust as "the paradigmatic instance of an apocalypse in history" (59). Additionally, the devastation of the nuclear bombs proved that humankind had developed the ability to annihilate itself in an instant.

As explained above, stories about apocalypse existed long before World War II; however, this war profoundly altered the public consciousness in relation to the very real possibility of worldwide cataclysm. The fiction of apocalypse became a reality in Nazi death camps and in Japan with the detonation of nuclear bombs. Because of these devastating atrocities, the threat of the apocalypse has taken on a new meaning since the Second World War. In his essay "The White Negro," Norman Mailer describes the impact of these events as psychic havoc caused by a realization that regardless of one's personality and ideas "we might still be doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation in which our teeth would be counted, and our hair would be saved, but our death itself would be unknown, unhonored, and unremarked" (338). Psychic havoc is not merely the startling revelation of the possibility of dying as a valueless entity—a cipher—but it is also the fear that life has no value. "[O]ur psyche was subjected itself to the intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well" (338). If there is no meaning in death, there is no meaning in life. If one is doomed to die as a cipher, then one's life is also valueless. These fears and anxieties had a significant influence on texts immediately following the War and during the Cold War. Thus, many postwar texts, particularly post-apocalyptic texts, deal with existential and ontological uncertainties with a gravity that prewar texts cannot.

Mailer's discussion of the psychic havoc following World War II in response to genocide

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and the atomic bomb helps to put into perspective much postwar fiction, postwar post-apocalyptic fiction in particular. Daniel Grausam links the emergence of postmodern literature with postwar anxiety about the possibility of nuclear annihilation. "What does narrative look like," he asks, "when the possibility of an expansive future has been called into question?" (5). As discussed above, modernist movements had already questioned the linear, apocalyptic conception of ending, but the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki generated fundamental concerns about the immediacy and finality of the end. Whereas T.S. Eliot finds a way to discover new meanings in worn-out symbols by contrasting life and death, the postwar psychic havoc called into question the very possibility of meaningful life and death. Eliot challenges realist narrative structure by juxtaposing fragments of narration and intertextual quotation and "points to the need to find new forms of continuity in the absence of old linear plots" while postmodern fiction employs fragmentation to create openness and inconclusiveness (Lewis 127-8). In contrast to the modernists who experimented with new forms of creating meaning, postmodernism emerged in a post-Hiroshima period disillusioned of the prospect of finding meaning. While modernism was concerned with epistemology, postmodernism was concerned with ontology.

The Second World War, its large-scale impact on the world, the Holocaust, and the atomic bombs demonstrated the ultimate self-destructive potential of humankind. The Bomb—and the image of a mushroom cloud—profoundly and fundamentally impacted the post-apocalyptic imagination. After the War, as expected, there was a resurgence of stories envisioning the end of the world as "memory and fear worked on the imagination to generate a heightened sense of the imminence of Last Things" (Wagar 26). I.F. Clarke describes this period in these words: "After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, fantasy had little to contribute to tales of the

flash in the sky and the annihilation that would follow. The terror of nuclear warfare found

expression in the greatest outpouring of these catastrophic stories in the history of future fiction"

(xl-xli). Many of these texts are decidedly apocalyptic, recycling old threats (future war, plague,

natural disaster, science and technology gone awry, etc.) and following previous narrative

patterns (such as imagining futuristic utopias or dystopias, averting the ultimate end through

scientific achievement or human ingenuity, and so on). However, this period also witnessed the

various threads of post-apocalyptic thought finally coming together as a genre of popular fiction.

Before the end of the 1940s, novels were beginning to be published which were

envisioning the fate of the world after being devastated by cataclysm. Although these stories

often returned to visions of catastrophe that had been seen before (such as plague), they were

also shifting significantly away from the apocalyptic fantasies of the decades before the Second

World War. This shift included imagining a much more immediate future; the end of the world

was now at the gate, a very real and immediate threat. The shift in immediacy reflected the

heightened anxieties about the annihilation of humankind, which appeared much closer in the

wake of the War, particularly in the shadow of the Bomb. In 1945 after the bombings of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, former Manhattan Project scientists founded *The Bulletin of the Atomic

Scientists* as a means of apprising interested readers of the dangers of nuclear war, and two years

later, *The Bulletin* created the Doomsday Clock, which used "the imagery of apocalypse

(midnight) and the contemporary idiom of nuclear explosion (countdown to zero) to convey

threats to humanity and the planet" (Mecklin 2).[9] The Doomsday Clock provided a visual

representation of humankind's proximity to its end, conveying not the sense of *an* ending but the

sense of *the* End, not of revelation but expiration. The novels of post-apocalypse that began to

emerge in this period depict a world that exists outside of the apocalyptic trajectory—the end has

come but there is no new overarching world order imposed. These stories also shifted toward an interest in realistically depicting survival in a devastated world—exploring what existence might be like after the collapse of the ordered structures of religion, government, law and justice, industry and commerce, time and space, progress, and so on.

A seminal post-apocalyptic text from this period is George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides*, published in 1949, the same year that the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the Doomsday Clock from seven minutes to three minutes until midnight, stating, "We do not advise Americans that doomsday is near and that they can expect atomic bombs to start falling on their heads a month or year from now . . . But we think they have reason to be deeply alarmed and to be prepared for grave decisions" (Mecklin 17). In *Earth Abides*, a plague wipes out human civilization, returning the small number of immune survivors to a savage existence. The novel's epigraph and concluding statement are a quotation from the biblical book Ecclesiastes: "Men go and come, but earth abides" (Stewart vii, 337). In its biblical context, the quotation is a poetic utterance of humility recognizing the inferiority of humankind's temporary achievements in contrast to the superiority of eternal, divinely ordered things (the earth, sun, rivers, etc.). In the context of the novel, it mocks humanity's conceit that it has any power to subdue nature. Stewart imagines the realization of Nobel Prize-winning virologist Wendell Meredith Stanley's hypothesis that advanced modes of transportation could disseminate a suddenly emergent "killing type of virus strain . . . to the far corners of the earth and cause the deaths of millions of people" (Stewart 1). Thousands of years of human progress are decimated by a plague of unknown origin.

The protagonist, Ish, searches for survivors and finds the company of a dog. He becomes "completely lost as to the passage of weeks and months" because the destruction of modern

civilization has also brought the cessation of constructed temporality (93). His thoughts wander to religion, and he determines that the Bible has become anachronistic in the post-civilized world. "'Render unto Caesar . . .' was a strangely unprofitable text when there was no more Caesar, and not even a Collector of Internal Revenue" (95). He eventually meets a woman, and they have a family. He attempts to impart to his children and grandchildren his accumulated knowledge of the modern world, but they reject it, finding it incompatible with the world that they know (similar to *The Scarlet Plague*). Rather, they embrace superstition and remain illiterate. He finally accepts that in this post-apocalyptic world, his hope in progress has been vain. In its secular forms, the myth of apocalypse characterizes progress as a linear process by which the present human condition transitions into a better future, but this pattern has no place in Ish's post-apocalyptic world.

Stewart's *Earth Abides* highlights the emergence of the post-apocalyptic imagination into popular literature, reflecting postwar attitudes such as psychic havoc and ontological concerns. Ish desires to inaugurate a new order through his posterity, but when they reject his teaching, he is forced to reassess his ontological assumptions about his existence, concluding that there is no more purpose in his life or in his death than to return to the earth. Writing about *Earth Abides* and related texts, Lionel Shriver comments, "Prospective human extinction has inspired a raft of commercial fiction [which] gleefully smites millions of walk-ons with no guarantee of a happy ending" (38). In post-apocalyptic fiction there is no *guarantee* of a particular ending, creating a tension between expectation (a principle upon which genres rely) and unpredictability, reflecting a postwar tension between trying to return to normal, predictable life while the threat of the Bomb remains an ever-present unpredictability.

The Second World War and the postwar period also profoundly impacted filmmaking.

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The film industries of the nations in which the War was fought were severely impacted, as resources were redirected toward supporting the war effort. In Hollywood, during the War, commercial film production continued while studios also produced war-related films, and although the number of commercial films produced by Hollywood decreased overall, there were significant changes which helped prepare the way for the emergence of post-apocalyptic films, particularly a shift toward darker themes. "Throughout the 1940s, an increasing number of Hollywood films displayed an incipient darkness in tone, technique, theme, and narrative form, a style that came to be termed *film noir* by postwar French critics" (Schatz, *Boom and Bust* 232). The term *film noir* is most often associated with crime thrillers and hard-boiled detective films, but the turn toward darker films was not exclusive to these genres. This darkness was reflected through innovations in visual styles influenced by filmmakers who had emigrated from Europe, including many seeking to escape the rising antisemitism of the Nazi regime in the 1930s. Through the influence of these European filmmakers, Hollywood films began to incorporate this darker style, particularly visual techniques influenced by German expressionism. In addition to formal techniques, *film noir* also impacted "basic narrative conventions as well—notably in its ambivalent treatment of good and evil and the heroic and the villainous, especially as embodied in the protagonists and antagonists" (235). *Film noir* has been described as a "cinema of moral anxiety" that "first emerged during the war but reached full maturity only with the paranoia, pessimism, and social angst of the postwar era" (235). Like the post-apocalyptic genre, this "incipient darkness" in films of the 1940s depicting moral ambivalence and anxiety, was a response to the paranoia, pessimism, and angst produced during and after World War II, and it helped prepare the way for the expansion of the post-apocalyptic genre from literature to motion pictures in the 1950s.

The first post-apocalyptic film produced was *Five* (1951), a low-budget, independent production from writer-director-producer Arch Oboler. *Five* begins with footage of an atomic bomb explosion with the subsequent mushroom cloud billowing into the air, an image which still haunted the cultural imagination of the time. A title card indicates that this is "a story about the day after tomorrow,"[10] a phrase connoting the immediacy of nuclear cataclysm. "Rather than talk about the destruction, the characters debate about humanity regenerating itself in a community where all people can live together in peace and harmony" (Lev 191). Illness and conflict lead to the deaths of three of the five survivors and a newborn. In his study, *Atomic Bomb Cinema*, Jerome F. Shapiro argues, "At first the film seems to forward a progressive view of the modern agrarian utopia. But the narrative demands that only two survive, and the film regresses to xenophobia, racism, and a hostility toward modernity" (75). Even the final moment of implied renewal becomes uncertain in light of this regression. As Michael and Roseanne stand together in a field, a verse from the Book of Revelation declares, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . And there shall be no more death . . . no more sorrow . . . no more tears . . . Behold! I make all things new!" The implication is that they are the new Adam and Eve who will create this new earth, but this apocalyptic notion is undercut by all of the loss which preceded it. The prospect of a hopeful future is uncertain when burdened by humanity's self-destruction.

Despite the release of *Five* in 1951, there were few post-apocalyptic films distributed during the 1950s. However, it was an important and productive decade for post-apocalyptic literature. In 1953, the Doomsday Clock was advanced to two minutes until midnight (the closest it has ever been to midnight) following hydrogen bomb tests by both the United States and the Soviet Union, with the U.S. test "obliterating a Pacific Ocean islet in the process." Upon advancing the Clock, the *Bulletin* announced, "The hands of the Clock of Doom have moved

again . . . Only a few more swings of the pendulum, and, from Moscow to Chicago, atomic explosions will strike midnight for Western civilization" (Mecklin 17). With the advancing of the Clock and the *Bulletin*'s statement, the specter of the Bomb loomed in the cultural imagination, and annihilation drew more imminent. Annihilation was imagined to be effected in several ways—purposeful, accidental, explosion, radiation, starvation, climate change—yet the "single, familiar image of the mushroom cloud subsumes particular details" (Comens 7). Anxieties related to the presence of this possibility of the end were reflected throughout the 1950s in both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios.

In both literature and film, apocalyptic science fiction was profoundly affected by the nuclear threat. Science fiction of this period imagined threats from creatures borne from nuclear radiation (such as *Them!* [1954], *It Came from Beneath the Sea* [1955], and *Gojira* [1954]/*Godzilla, King of the Monsters*[1956]). Science fiction also explored how radiation might create mutations in humans (for example, Richard Matheson's novel *The Shrinking Man* [1956], its film adaptation *The Incredible Shrinking Man* [1957], and the film *The Amazing Colossal Man* [1957]). Additionally, these anxieties influenced the social commentary offered by alien invasion films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and George Pal's film version of *The War of the Worlds* (1953). These apocalyptic texts tend to follow the apocalyptic paradigm wherein by confronting the threat humankind finds a higher meaning in its existence—often by discovering in death a greater meaning of one's life or by demonstrating national or international ability to avert the threat through cooperation, intelligence, or might. In addition to these more fantastical apocalyptic visions in science fiction, the decade also offered more realistic apocalyptic scenarios. Philip Wylie, who had co-authored *When Worlds Collide* two decades

previously, published *Tomorrow!* in 1954, in which he depicts civilization surviving thermonuclear war as a result of a strong, effective Civil Defense program.

In contrast to the proliferation of these texts in which the apocalyptic imagination is fulfilled, it was also a fertile time for capturing the post-apocalyptic imagination. As Shapiro remarks "ideology was relatively uneasy ground on which to stand during the 1950s" (95). In 1954, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* was released, imagining the end of humanity in the form of a disease which turned humans into vampires. The novel emphasizes the daily survival routines of Robert Neville as he kills vampires during the daylight hours and prepares his home defenses for each night when the vampires prowl. Infected individuals—not fully vampires but also no longer purely human—hate and fear Neville and imprison him, intent on executing him. Ultimately, any hope of the survival of the human race is dashed when Neville faces certain death. "I'm the abnormal one now," he narrates. "Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man" (159). As he waits for his execution, he recognizes that the human race has ended, replaced by the new race that will remember him (and humans) merely as mythology, "a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend" (159). The fate of humanity is equally doomed in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) but as a direct result of nuclear fallout, not vampirism. In the wake of nuclear war, lethal radioactive fallout spreads across the globe. The crew of a U.S. submarine and the inhabitants of an Australian port must decide how to live their final days. While some opt for suicide, the captain and crew of the submarine head out to sea into the mist and toward certain death.

The post-apocalyptic imagination is also evoked in novels about survival during periods of uncertainty between nuclear attack and news of the fate of the world, such as John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956) and Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959). In *The Death of*

Grass, John Custance is warned of impending hydrogen bomb attacks on major cities, so he journeys with his family into the country to seek refuge in a valley. His journey is fraught with dangers (including death and rape) as civilization begins to devolve into anarchy. Along the way, John is faced with moral dilemmas and must choose whether to maintain certain moral positions or to abandon them for the sake of survival. By the conclusion of the novel, John has taken possession of the valley refuge but at the expense of his morals. *Alas, Babylon* presents the post-apocalyptic turmoil of a small Florida town following a Soviet hydrogen bomb attack. The town must organize a survivalist response when communications and utilities services fail, including law enforcement, and outside resources have been cut off. The United States wins the war, but the victory is undercut by "the thousand-year night" which lay ahead (Frank 279). These post-apocalyptic novels helped to establish a formula for post-apocalyptic fiction with significant emphasis on survivalism amidst anarchy.

The middle of the 1950s brought low-budget pictures that combined the mutants of more pulp-influenced science fiction and a post-nuclear setting, including Roger Corman's *Day the World Ended* (1955) and *World Without End* (1956). Although these films tend to evoke an aesthetic more closely related to apocalyptic science-fiction films involving mutant bug-eyed monsters, it is worth noting the conflict between humans and monsters relates to concerns about the future existence of the human race. At the close of the decade, two post-apocalyptic films were released, which were significant entries in the post-apocalyptic genre. In 1959, both *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* and *On the Beach* were released. *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* was a low-budget production starring Harry Belafonte and produced by his own production company. It is credited as an adaptation of M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud*, but it diverges from Shiel's original, most significantly by adding a third character to the story. The resulting love

triangle highlights racial issues of the time—Belafonte's character Ralph refuses to get involved with the female survivor Sarah because he is black and she is white. However, she refuses the white male survivor Benson, which leads him to confront Ralph. While the men are fighting, she stops them, and the movie ends on an optimistic note with the three of them walking down an empty street in Manhattan holding hands, Sarah between the two men, which can be read as hinting at a possible polygamous relationship.

Aside from the sexual aspects of the film, it also is a significant entry in the post-apocalyptic genre for its depiction of the empty city, an image which would recur in later post-apocalyptic films and television programs. In contrast to Belafonte's low-budget film, the film adaptation of *On the Beach* was a highly anticipated studio production, directed by Stanley Kramer with a cast of notable stars including Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, and Anthony Perkins. Peter Lev writes, "Direct, prophetic, technically outstanding, the film was unsettling and controversial . . . *On the Beach* was a more direct and serious treatment of the perils of the Atomic Age than anything that Hollywood had done before" (194). Such serious treatment continued a couple of years later with *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961), a British film that provided another look at the dangers of nuclear weapons. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union test atomic bombs at exactly the same time, and the simultaneous detonations alter the earth's axis causing a dramatic increase in temperature due to polar and equatorial shift. The film taps into the post-apocalyptic imagination with images of the dissolution of civil order and powerful images of a lone man stumbling through the deserted streets of London. Describing the power evoked by the post-apocalyptic imagination, Susan Sontag, writes, "The trump card of the end-of-the-world movies—like *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1962)—is that great scene with New York or London or Tokyo discovered, its entire population annihilated. Or, as in *The*

World, the Flesh, and the Devil (1957), the whole movie can be devoted to the fantasy of

occupying the deserted metropolis and starting all over again, a world Robinson Crusoe" (218).

Although there were relatively few post-apocalyptic films made during the 1950s, they reflected

the post-apocalyptic imagination of the time and established important precedents—such as the

empty city—for later post-apocalyptic films.

The darker themes of the 1940s, reflecting wartime realities, postwar disillusionment, and

the onus of the Bomb, had prepared readers and moviegoers for the post-apocalyptic imagination

to emerge in force in print and on the screen. The post-apocalyptic novels and films of the period

helped to establish themes of survivalism, the empty city, and moral ambiguity. They imagined

worlds in which death failed to reify the meaning of one's life. In the coming decades, the

themes established during this period would continue to inform the post-apocalyptic genre as it

sought to imagine a world devastated by cataclysm and disconnected from meaning-making

ideologies.

Proliferation, Hybridization, and New Directions

As the Cold War endured into the 1960s, the post-apocalyptic imagination continued to

be reflected in literature and film. The genre proliferated with authors continuing to depict the

struggles of survivors living in inhospitable post-apocalyptic worlds in which law and order

crumble, civilization returns to barbarism, and the fate of humanity is uncertain. Much of the

post-apocalyptic literature during this time of proliferation repeated themes that have been

addressed above. For example, John Christopher, the author of *The Death of Grass*, returned to

similar survivalist themes in *A Wrinkle in the Skin* (1965) in which a series of earthquakes

completely upturns western Europe, and the protagonist must journey through the chaotic,

barbaric aftermath, including contending with scavengers, as he seeks to find out the fate of his daughter. Brian Aldiss' *Greybeard* (1964) depicts the decline of the human race as everyone ages and dies childless because nuclear bomb tests have left the world's population sterile (sterility was also depicted in Grainville's *The Last Man* [1805], see note 2). Interesting for its commentary on nationalism is *Dark December* (1960), by Alfred Coppel, which presents the story of Kenneth Gavin, who must travel through a lawless post-apocalyptic world after being discharged by the U.S. Army at the end of a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. No organized government exists to enforce the Geneva Convention, so a group of boys has free rein to brutalize a Soviet pilot. Gavin is motivated to save the pilot, which brings him into conflict with another U.S. military officer who roams the post-apocalyptic world carrying out a fanatical nationalist agenda.

By the 1960s, these post-apocalyptic images were being used to support and provide a background for texts that do not fit firmly in the narrow definition of the genre, and the post-apocalyptic genre inevitably hybridized as generic elements were used in new ways and combined with other genres. For example, Edgar Pangborn set several of his stories in a world which evokes certain aspects of the post-apocalyptic imagination. Pangborn's *Davy* is a bildungsroman which recounts the adventures of the eponymous protagonist in a post-nuclear, neo-medieval civilization. John Christopher's *The World in Winter* (1962) deals with similar survivalist themes as *The Death of Grass* and *A Wrinkle in the Skin* but allows escape from the new ice age into a different part of the world that is not particularly post-apocalyptic. Although the post-apocalyptic imagination originated as a divergence from traditional notions of apocalypse, periods during which the post-apocalyptic genre proliferated led to the incorporation

of generic elements into hybrid texts that were not exclusively concerned with deviating from or denying apocalyptic ideology.

During this period most stories involving post-apocalyptic themes and settings were written by authors who worked in various science fiction traditions, including speculative fiction; thus, much of the hybridization that occurred again entwined the post-apocalyptic genre with science fiction, which can make it difficult to discretely categorize many texts as ideally post-apocalyptic. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, written by Walter M. Miller, Jr., was published in 1960 and serves as an interesting transition of post-apocalyptic literature into the new decade. Considered in its broad scope, Miller's novel is, arguably, not distinctly post-apocalyptic, but it contains many post-apocalyptic aspects melded with elements of futuristic science fiction. The first section of the novel is set six centuries after nuclear holocaust, and the Roman Catholic Church has been reestablished (an element which pushes the story toward being futuristic rather than post-apocalyptic). A monk finds hidden 20th-century documents in a fallout shelter, revealing a pre-nuclear time before illiteracy became the norm. In the monk's era, illiteracy continues, and nuclear radiation has created mutants with subhuman intellect and reasoning. In the novel's second section, set another five centuries in the future, a new Renaissance is beginning, and studying Leibowitz's documents leads to technological advancements amidst political machinations. The third section is set an additional six centuries in the future, and civilization has achieved space travel and has created nuclear weapons. However, "it was inevitable that the race succumb again to the old maladies on new worlds, even as on Earth before" (Miller 224). It is a time of war, and the hostility escalates until nuclear annihilation. Even though the novel is distinctly post-apocalyptic only intermittently, as a whole its

circularity, which inescapably comes full circle back to annihilation, emphasizes a post-apocalyptic ambiguity of ending.

During the 1960s and 1970s, as in previous decades, the post-apocalyptic genre was influenced by movements and New Waves that impacted other genres and forms in literature and film. In addition to the stories that perpetuated previous patterns and those that hybridized post-apocalyptic elements with other trends in speculative and science fiction, a more ideologically post-apocalyptic literature emerged during this period, influenced by the Beat Generation and postmodernism. Among the authors whose post-apocalyptic work reflects this impact are J.G. Ballard, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and Harlan Ellison. The Beat Generation is most closely associated with poets and writers (such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs) who were writing after the Second World War, expressing postwar disillusionment about American politics and ideology, espousing "mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions," and influencing culture through their works which experimented with language and form as a reaction against accepted conventions (Charters xxxiv). The Beat Generation and the Beat literary group became a national phenomenon after the publication in 1957 of both Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* and Kerouac's *On the Road* (xxi). Famously, *Howl* went to trial for obscenity, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who published it, said in defense of the book that "it is not the poet but what he observes which is revealed as obscene. The great obscene wastes of *Howl* are the sad wastes of the mechanized world, lost among atom bombs and insane nationalisms" (xxviii). Ferlinghetti's defense reflects the Beat Generation's feelings toward American society and politics during the Cold War. The Beat movement influenced the Beatniks and the later general counterculture of the 1960s, and it is sometimes associated with the shift toward postmodernism.

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The Beat Generation and the Beat movement had a significant impact on culture and literature. Among those who were influenced by the Beat Generation—whether directly or indirectly—were writers of science fiction and post-apocalyptic fiction in the 1960s and 1970s. While there were certainly writers after the Beat movement whose post-apocalyptic work is realistic in style, there were others who brought to the genre stylistic experimentation borne from literary movements and innovations influenced by the Beats. J.G. Ballad published four post-apocalyptic novels in the '60s, each presenting a different catastrophic threat in the form of one of the four classical elements of air, water, fire, and earth—*The Wind from Nowhere* (1961), *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Burning World* (1964), and *The Crystal World* (1966). In these novels "realism yields to a bleak surrealist irrationalism, an exploration of private hells in the vein of William S. Burroughs" (Wagar 28). Along with presenting images of annihilation—a windstorm that steadily accelerates to cataclysmic speeds, an increase in the earth's temperature, a devastating drought, and a cosmic phenomenon that is progressively crystallizing all matter— Ballard also creates characters who "act out their own self-annihilating destinies" (83). For example, in *The Drowned World*, climate, topography, and biology revert back to that of prehistoric times, and the minds of many survivors are "reverting to the unconscious floating existence of the fetus" (84). The protagonist himself treks into inhospitable territory, determined to fulfill his suicidal, self-annihilation. The irrationality and destined self-destruction in these stories reflects the post-apocalyptic sensibility of the time which viewed Cold War antagonism and nuclear proliferation as irrational and destined for self-annihilation.

In addition to continued Cold War tension, the 1960s was also fraught with social tension from the Civil Rights movement as well as the Vietnam conflict. During this period, these tensions were reflected in post-apocalyptic texts like Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth, and I

Must Scream" (1967). Ellison's protagonist in the story is an intelligent computer, Allied

Mastercomputer ("AM"). Having intelligence and consciousness but only an immobile body is

torment, so AM metes out recrimination and revenge upon the the race which created him,

destroying all of humankind except five, whom AM tortures for eternity. This scenario evokes

the theme of cyclicism that exists within the post-apocalyptic genre, especially as the cycle of

torture is the result of humanity's own creation, but there is also a corollary with the common

Christian perception of Hell—the interminable torture which awaits after the end for the wicked,

presenting another deviation from the apocalyptic ideology of progress and redemption. The

tensions and anxieties of the period found expression in post-apocalyptic literature with

irrational, absurdist, and postmodern representations of devastated worlds in which life and death

are meaningless.

The influence of literary innovation during this period allowed for the coexistence of

stories that used post-apocalyptic themes and images in a variety of ways. Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's

Cradle* (1963) takes an absurdist perspective to critique both religion and reason as absurd,

illusory, and indifferent. In his treatment of the post-apocalyptic imagination, Vonnegut presents

a world which is meaningless and in which humankind must accept the fate of annihilation.

Harlan Ellison, in "A Boy and His Dog" (1969), a parody of Albert Payson Terhune's stories

about a collie named Lad, depicts the devotion between Vic (the boy) and Blood (his dog) as

they wander a post-apocalyptic wasteland and an underground facsimile of pristine, mythic

middle America. Reflecting the social unrest caused by the Cold War, the Civil Rights

movement, and protests against the war in Vietnam, "A Boy and His Dog" satirically criticizes

violence and American culture. These works also set the stage for further innovation and

hybridization in the 1970s, such as Michael Moorcock's *The Dancers at the End of Time* series

(1972, 1974, and 1976) which abandons realism for fantasy, blending apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, fantastical, and science-fiction elements into a melange that depicts the End of Time as a time loop in which the earth's inhabitants enjoy endless revelry and rebirth until the main protagonist decides to leave the time loop to begin a new civilization. The 1960s and '70s were decades of proliferation for post-apocalyptic literature as it experienced innovation and hybridization.

However, texts which pushed the post-apocalyptic genre toward innovation and hybridization coexisted with realistic depictions of cataclysm and post-apocalyptic worlds, continuing this strain of post-apocalyptic fiction into the 1970s. For example, Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley* (1969) offers a post-apocalyptic take on a road movie, in which the protagonist must drive across the United States—which has become a wasteland due to catastrophic winds—in order to deliver a vital plague vaccine. In 1972, Robert Merle published *Malevil*, another entry in the many novels depicting the world following nuclear war, depicting threats not only from violent gangs but also from a village of survivors that has established a theocratic dictatorship.[11] Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977) imagines the end coming by way of comet and is centrally concerned with the efforts of survivors to maintain and rebuild some form of civilization amidst the chaos of the post-apocalyptic world—severe weather, disease, and famine as well as threats from scavengers and cannibals. It is important to note that cannibalism is a recurring threat in the post-apocalyptic genre—as seen in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and the comic book series *The Walking Dead* (2003-present)—as an example of transgressive behavior that emerges as moral absolutes are abandoned in order to survive in the post-apocalyptic world.

In the 1970s, in addition to continuing the trend of nuclear apocalypse and natural

catastrophe, the post-apocalyptic genre also witnessed a surge of interest in ecological disaster scenarios, reflecting the increased interest in environmental activism during the late '60s and into the '70s (notably, Greenpeace was officially founded in 1971). D. Keith Mano's *The Bridge* (1973) depicts a future Age of Ecology during which humankind is sacrificed in order to save the other biological life on earth. One man and ten women escape the mass suicide and become the new first parents—Adam, with multiple Eves—of the human race. In *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976), Kate Wilhelm imagines a world in which pollution has caused environmental changes and disease, resulting in the collapse of civilization. During the 1970s, the Cold War still threatened to bring the end the world by nuclear holocaust, but environmental activism was bringing to the cultural consciousness the threat of ecological disaster, again forecasting humankind as the cause of its own destruction. Particularly in America, with protests against involvement in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, it was an era of social unrest and loss of faith in government leaders. Changing times brought new possible causes of the end, and there remained a sense that the end was still near. The post-apocalyptic texts of this period reflect the continued attempts to realistically capture the struggles of life on the other side of the apocalypse which continued to loom on the horizon.

While post-apocalyptic literature proliferated during the 1960s and '70s, reflecting the anxieties of the period, post-apocalyptic films were also beginning to be produced in greater numbers and were being influenced by several sources. After World War II (particularly after the 1948 ruling against vertical integration of film production and exhibition) and into the 1950s, the Hollywood studio system began slowly breaking down. Aside from the legal mandate that studios could no longer be their own exhibitors, audience sizes had been decreasing. After the war, many families moved to suburbs, which limited how often they could travel into town and

go to the movies. By bringing movies closer to audiences, drive-in theaters became one solution to counteract the decline in attendance. The rapid success of television, which brought entertainment directly into families' homes, also negatively affected movie attendance. During the '50s, widescreen and cheaper color film processes were developed, which allowed more films to be shot in color and projected in wide aspect ratios, providing a viewing experience that television could not. However, Hollywood studios continued to decline, which allowed more independent production companies to compete in the film marketplace. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith writes, "While the studios floundered, new companies such as American International Pictures stepped in, making low-budget movies for the new youth and drive-in markets" (463). It was in this setting that American International (AIP) released two significant post-apocalyptic films in the '60s—*Panic in Year Zero* (1962) and *The Last Man on Earth* (1964).

Both *Panic in Year Zero* and *The Last Man on Earth* were inspired by post-apocalyptic literature of the 1950s. Although not a direct adaptation, *Panic in Year Zero* draws upon John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* to depict post-apocalyptic descent into anarchy. After seeing bright flashes in the sky and a mushroom cloud looming ominously over Los Angeles—the haunting image of nuclear attack—there is a mass exodus from the suburbs, causing a breakdown of the highway system. Harry Baldwin and his family take refuge in the mountains and live a survivalist existence. It is not long before Harry must compromise his morals. When a hardware store owner will not accept a check, he takes the supplies by force, and later he kills the young men who rape his daughter. As they drive out of the area, soldiers are finally arriving to restore peace. The soldiers let them pass, calling them "good ones" since they aren't suffering from radiation sickness, but their goodness is undercut by what they have done to survive. The film ends with the title card: "There must be no end – only a new beginning." *The Last Man on*

Earth is an adaptation of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*. Although it changes Neville's name to Robert Morgan, the plot of the film follows that of the novel rather closely, but the end is altered a bit—instead of being imprisoned awaiting execution, Morgan is chased by those infected, they exchange volleys of tear gas and gunfire, and Morgan retreats into a church where they impale him with a spear on the altar of the church. As he dies he cries out, "You're freaks. I am a man. The last man," and the human race ends with his death. These films tend not to be as bleak as the novels, but they still capture the post-apocalyptic dread of civilization's collapse, an uncertain future, and the loss of meaning in one's own life and death.

Low-budget post-apocalyptic films were finding an outlet through independent studios and finding variable success, but mainstream Hollywood studios were not faring well. "By the early 1960s," as Nowell-Smith describes, "the Hollywood system was in severe disarray. Declining audiences and a series of costly flops left the major studios on the verge of bankruptcy or open to hostile take-over" (463). One strategy Hollywood studios used to reduce production costs was by financing films which were largely produced oversees. This strategy, known as runaway production, allowed studios to take advantage of governmental subsidies available in Europe, especially in Great Britain, Italy, and France (Monaco 12). Of the many films which were produced this way, one to highlight here in connection with the post-apocalyptic genre is Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). Certainly, this film is not *post*-apocalyptic—it never depicts after the end—however, it concludes with the ultimate end without offering escape or revelation after the end. Further, *Dr. Strangelove* satirizes the apocalyptic myth itself "and our proclivity for looking to the future for solutions to our problems" (Shapiro 149). Its dark comedy reflects a cynicism regarding self-annihilation that was beginning to be overtly expressed in fiction (for instance, Vonnegut's *Cat's*

Cradle). As Jerome Shapiro explains in his analysis of the film, "Stanley Kubrick put into words and images the country's not-so-latent fears. In so doing, his film worked further to dispel (or perhaps supersede) the myth that 'the system,' or 'the establishment,' was rational and working for everyone's benefit. More importantly, *Dr. Strangelove* worked strongly to evaporate the naive and romantic notions Americans had about the bomb" (150-1). While the film is not categorically post-apocalyptic, it effectively and unrelentingly subverts apocalyptic ideology. In contrast to the relatively limited appeal of post-apocalyptic texts, *Dr. Strangelove* was a popular success, commercially and critically. In the wake of recent crises—including civil unrest, atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons, the Berlin Blockade, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and John F. Kennedy's assassination—the film resonated with many Americans who were experiencing "deflated optimism," and "it was a lightning rod for the disaffected" (150). The cynicism expressed in *Dr. Strangelove* reflected a loss of faith in social institutions, and as the '60s continued and into the '70s, with further civil unrest over Vietnam and civil rights and other disaffecting events like Watergate, this loss of faith deepened.

    Dr. Strangelove was a significant film in this period and is recognized as a defining point for a new phase in the apocalyptic genre (149). The loss of faith that it reflects is also evident in other films that emerged in this period, and many of these films became possible because of the changes occurring in Hollywood in the 1960s. Remarking on the decline of Hollywood studios during this time, Nowell-Smith writes, "The mainstream itself was forced to innovate, drawing inspiration both from the down-market [low-budget, independent] competition and from the new cinemas emerging in Europe" (463). As Nowell-Smith notes, cinema was innovating in many nations during the 1960s, and in the U.S., many of these films influenced the work of emerging

young filmmakers who were given more opportunities during this time of innovation in Hollywood.

Of particular influence were the films of the French New Wave, led by a group of French film critics writing for *Cahiers du cinéma*—François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, and others. They opposed the formulaic, studio-bound mainstream films of French cinema which adhered to the "tradition of quality" of the 1950s. Their early films "had in common a casual approach to the 'rules' of mainstream cinema, a freer editing style, and loosely constructed scenarios" (Graham 577). This style had a significant influence on Hollywood, but the French New Wave included other filmmakers whose styles were also influential. Among these, both Alain Resnais and Chris Marker directed films which are worth discussing in connection with the post-apocalyptic genre. Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) uses the love affair between a French woman and a Japanese man to meditate on time, memory, and the impossibility of the film medium to truly capture the reality of the effects of the bombing of Hiroshima. While not ostensibly post-apocalyptic, Resnais's circular, contradictory, multi-layered meditation on love, memory, time, and the atomic bomb raises questions that have no simple answers, reflecting ambiguity and uncertainty that resonates with the post-apocalyptic sensibility. Resnais followed *Hiroshima mon amour* with *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), an even more enigmatic exploration of time and memory with repetitive and ambiguous relationships, interactions, voiceovers, flashbacks, and movements. In this world, borne from the post-apocalyptic imagination, time, space, and memory are indefinite. These films seek to capture the enduring effects, the psychic havoc, of the traumatic experiences of the 20th century. Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), which would later inspire the film *12 Monkeys* (1995), is centrally concerned with memory and circularity but presents a less enigmatic narrative set in a

post-apocalyptic future. After World War III, Paris has been destroyed by nuclear weapons, and the survivors live underground. The protagonist is a prisoner who is being used as the subject in time-travel experiments. His access point into the past is a particularly strong memory of a woman whom he saw on the observation platform at Orly Airport when he was a child before the war. He escapes into the past, but his captors pursue him and kill him as he runs toward the woman. In that moment, he realizes that the haunting memory, with which he has been obsessed his entire life, was the moment of his own death. Marker depicts a destroyed, post-apocalyptic Paris using images that recall the aftermath of World War II, and the image of a crumbling Arc de Triomphe evokes a sense of loss and defeat. By centering the narrative on the man's inescapably circular life and death, it further emphasizes a solipsistic sense of futility and meaninglessness in grand apocalyptic narratives.

The French New Wave was only one of many New Waves of the period, which were largely targeted at youth who were experiencing their own cultural revolutions. British cinema experienced its own New Wave at the beginning of the 1960s with a "focus on contemporary working-class experience," which was "an extremely dynamic, but short-lived, period of film-making" (Petrie 604-5). Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* (1963) utilized innovative formal techniques including "varying speeds, jump cutting, and direct address to camera, inspired by the early work of Godard" (605). *Tom Jones* appealed to the new youth culture emerging in London, as did Richard Lester's film *A Hard Day's Night* (1963), starring the Beatles. The changing British culture responded favorably to the absurd, satirical comedy of the period. An expanded version of the play *The Bedsitting Room* premiered in 1963, and in 1969 it was adapted into a movie, *The Bed Sitting Room*, also directed by Lester. *The Bed Sitting Room* is set after World War III in post-apocalyptic London, and nuclear fallout is causing bizarre mutations, including

the transformation of one character into the titular bed-sitting room. Despite living in a nuclear wasteland, the characters carry on as if nothing has changed—a television news presenter reads reports through hollow television sets, a policeman directs non-existent traffic, and so on. Its surrealist, cynical humor captures a post-apocalyptic sense of absurdity in apocalyptic notions like war.

The various New Waves influenced Hollywood to allow aesthetic innovations and to make films that would particularly appeal to youth audiences. As the studios declined, they were more willing to take risks on young filmmakers who did not have years of experience coming up through the ranks of the Hollywood studio system. These changes opened the way for revolutionary films like *Easy Rider* (1969) and *The Godfather* (1972) and for the incorporation of European art film sensibilities into films that were otherwise mainstream films. During this period, as younger audiences had different expectations about acceptable content, also influenced, at least in part, by more exposure to European films, the Hollywood industry relaxed its censorship standards and replaced the Production Code with the MPAA ratings system which went into effect in 1968. This system made permissible content such as sex and violence that would previously have been censored. Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) is notable for its depiction of sex and violence and for its European (particularly French New Wave) influence, especially in its editing. This period of change in Hollywood revolutionized the industry and produced many landmark films. These changes also provided for a significant change in the post-apocalyptic film genre, allowing the inclusion of more sexual themes and greater levels of violence. Additionally, it was a prolific time for independent producers, and as mentioned above, the social tensions were ripe for post-apocalyptic fiction.

In addition to the influences on and changes in the Hollywood industry during the

decade, the 1960s had been a period marked by cultural change, social turmoil, and political

activism, which reflected the loss of faith in social institutions that many felt. The combination

of these changes prepared the cultural landscape for the proliferation of post-apocalyptic films, a

genre which at its most ideological questions the certainty of universal, apocalyptic social

narratives. A landmark film at the close of the decade which allegorically represented the racial

strife of the '60s was *Planet of the Apes* (1968), based on the novel by Pierre Boulle. Although

Boulle's story is set entirely in a fantastical setting—a world in which apes live like modern,

civilized humans while humans live like primitive animals—the film adaptation makes several

changes that fundamentally alter the premise, most notably by revealing at the end of the film

that the apes' planet is actually Earth. This twist was the creation of Rod Serling, whose

television program *The Twilight Zone* regularly featured stories with similar narrative twists.

This surprise undermines audience assumptions about the film's fantastical setting and

effectively imbues it with a post-apocalyptic tone. The first sequel to *Planet of the Apes*, *Beneath*

the Planet of the Apes (1970), is the only film in the series (so far, at least) to be placed fully

within the post-apocalyptic genre. *Beneath* begins by repeating the last moments of the first film,

including the post-apocalyptic turn, and then, having established the post-apocalyptic setting,

introduces the new protagonist, another American astronaut named Brent. Aside from the

expected run-ins with apes, Brent discovers the remnants of a subway tunnel, an image which

renders unfamiliar the world with which Brent and the audience are familiar. Additionally, Brent

meets a group of mutated humans who live underground and worship an undetonated nuclear

warhead. The veneration of the Bomb Almighty is simultaneously a critique of nuclear weapons

and religion—post-apocalyptic ideology finding both to be false and destructive promises of a

better future. Like *Dr. Strangelove*, *Beneath* expresses the inability to escape from nuclear

annihilation as the film concludes with the detonation of the nuclear bomb, thus destroying the planet.

Beneath was a commercial success at the box office for 20th Century Fox, but Fox and other major studios had little interest in pursuing big-budget post-apocalyptic films. Therefore, the majority of the post-apocalyptic films made in the 1970s were independent, low-budget productions. Notable independent post-apocalyptic films released in the '70s include Gas-s-s-s (1970), Glen and Randa (1971), Idaho Transfer (1973), The Ultimate Warrior (1975), and Dawn of the Dead (1978). Roger Corman's Gas-s-s-s is a dark, surrealist comedy in which a deadly gas kills everyone over the age of 25. Glen and Randa tells the story of two young people who have grown up in a world destroyed by nuclear war with no knowledge of the pre-apocalyptic world except for what Glen has read in old comic books. The film begins with Glen and Randa completely naked, evoking the counterculture of its time but also a sense of Edenic innocence, in a scene that helped earn the film an X rating. While in search of the city of Metropolis, Randa dies in childbirth, an event which contributes to a somber, open-ended conclusion as Glen sails to an unknown destination with the baby. In Idaho Transfer, a group of young people time-travel into the near post-apocalyptic future to research the cause of ecological catastrophe, but when they get stuck there, they are forced into a post-apocalyptic existence. Robert Clouse's The Ultimate Warrior imagines tribalism reemerging in the ruins of post-apocalyptic New York. George A. Romero's Dawn of the Dead follows up his highly successful and landmark zombie film Night of the Living Dead (1968). Although Night of the Living Dead depicts the outbreak of a zombie phenomenon and ends on a relatively apocalyptic note with order being restored, Dawn of the Dead is situated three weeks into a zombie event, and during the intervening time civilization, law, and order have begun to collapse. The protagonists barricade themselves inside

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a shopping mall and fight to defend their sanctuary against a gang of bikers and, of course, against zombies. As the mall gets overrun, the remaining survivors escape in a helicopter, and the film ends with a distinct feeling that their future (and the future of the rest of humanity) is uncertain. These independent films were received with varying degrees of success and failure; however, even the flops could not prevent the proliferation of post-apocalyptic films during the decade.

In addition to these original stories, many film adaptations of post-apocalyptic stories were released in the 1970s. Some of these stories have been mentioned above, such as John Christopher's *The Death of Grass*, reworked as *No Blade of Grass* and released in 1970; Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, adapted as *The Omega Man* in 1971; Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog," adapted in 1975; and Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley*, adapted in 1977. Most of these film adaptations capture the post-apocalyptic sensibility of the original source material. For example, *Ravagers* (1979), based on *Path to Savagery* (1966) by Robert Edmond Alter, which depicts the survivors of nuclear holocaust dividing into three groups: Ravagers, humans who have mutated into strong savages who prey on other humans; Flockers, who group together as defense against the Ravagers; and those who go it alone. After the Ravagers destroy the Flockers' ship, the film concludes with the group stretched out in a long line walking on the beach, heading toward an uncertain future. The proliferation of original as well as adapted post-apocalyptic films during the '70s reflects an ongoing interest in post-apocalyptic themes throughout the decade.

Hybridization, Parody, and Stagnation

The latter half of the 1970s and the early 1980s were a period of transition that brought

many changes to the post-apocalyptic genre. The success of blockbuster films like *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977) motivated Hollywood studios to reassert traditional modes of filmmaking and storytelling, leading to a decline in the reactionary and independent temperament which had allowed for the proliferation of post-apocalyptic films in the '70s. It was a time of decline for fiction which sought to express the post-apocalyptic ideology of exhaustion of apocalyptic narratives and concerns about self-annihilation. Despite this decline, however, texts emerged that incorporated nuclear war and post-cataclysmic settings into a variety of other genres, such as techno-thrillers, science fiction, and action-adventure. While the post-apocalyptic genre had been particularly interested in ecological disasters in the 1970s, the early '80s brought a renewed focus on nuclear war. Since 1953 when they advanced the Doomsday Clock to two minutes until midnight, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the Clock a number of times in accordance with the threat level of world self-destruction as they perceived it—for example, moving it from twelve minutes to seven minutes in 1968 as the Vietnam conflict intensified and then from seven to ten minutes the following year with the signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In both 1980 and 1981, the *Bulletin* advanced the Clock—to seven minutes and then four minutes until midnight, respectively. In the 1980 statement, the *Bulletin* declared, "[The Soviet Union and United States] have been behaving like what may best be described as 'nucleoholics'-- drunks who continue to insist that the drink being consumed is positively 'the last one,' but who can always find a good excuse for 'just one more round.'" During the year following this statement, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, making the U.S. stance on maintaining a nuclear arsenal more resolute, and U.S. rhetoric concerning nuclear war intensified with the election of President Ronald Reagan who "scraps any talk of arms control and proposes that the best way to end the Cold War is for the United States to win it" (Mecklin 16). This trend of

worsening U.S.-Soviet relations prompted a moving of the Clock to three minutes until midnight in 1984, the closest it had been to midnight since 1953. This renewed interest in nuclear war manifested itself in popular culture in many ways, including depictions of the realistic effects of nuclear war and in a surge of texts set in a future post-nuclear wasteland.

During this period of transition, several post-apocalyptic texts of a more serious nature were produced for television. In the mid-1970s, the British television program *Survivors* (1975-77), depicting the struggles of a small group of survivors when a deadly virus spreads throughout the world. Over the course of its 38-episode run, the survivors are forced to scavenge for food, defend themselves and their goods from violent groups, and so on, as they attempt to establish a self-sustaining community and to rebuild civilization. It is quite an effective program and is an important entry in the post-apocalyptic genre, especially for providing a model for the long-running post-apocalyptic series that can address various threats, continually evolve the group as new folks join the community and others die, and strike a variety of tonal notes, some light and some dark, during its run. After the turn of the decade, there were several made-for-television movies that dealt specifically with the threat of nuclear war. *The Day After* (1983) was produced for American television and depicts the events before, during, and after a nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is notable for its realism in depicting the chaos and collapse of civilization in the wake of a nuclear attack as well as the effects of fallout. The next year in 1984, *Threads*, a similarly themed film portraying the events before, during, and after the U.S. and the USSR begin a nuclear war, was produced in the United Kingdom. Presented as a docudrama, *Threads* is particularly well regarded for its realistic portrayal of nuclear winter and the struggle to survive during the immediate aftermath of nuclear war and in subsequent years, including scarcity of food, neo-primitive existence, breakdown of education,

and physical effects on the body like blindness, premature aging, and complications of pregnancy. Since serious treatments of the post-apocalyptic genre had largely declined in film and literature, these television programs are especially notable for their realism in a time of increased anxiety about nuclear war.

In addition to these television programs, there were other texts, although relatively few in comparison to the previous decade, that were firmly situated within the post-apocalyptic genre. Craig Harrison's novel *The Quiet Earth* (1981) was published in New Zealand and focuses on the tensions that develop between two survivors of a mysterious event which caused all human and animal life to disappear. The film *Testament* (1983), released theatrically although originally produced for television, depicts the collapse of a suburban town in the wake of nuclear war. David Brin's novel *The Postman* (1985) is set in a cold, bleak post-apocalyptic United States, following biological warfare. The protagonist, who dons a postal worker's jacket for warmth, unites survivors against a mutual enemy, becoming a symbol of hope that victory is possible and that the nation may recover. *When the Wind Blows* (1986), a British animated film adaptation of the 1982 graphic novel, depicts an elderly couple who believe they will survive a Soviet nuclear attack like they survived World War II, but they progressively sicken and die from radiation sickness despite the husband's assurance that emergency services will save them. Although relatively few during this period, these sorts of post-apocalyptic texts evoke serious post-apocalyptic themes.

Such post-apocalyptic texts further declined as the period witnessed the integration of the post-apocalyptic genre into other forms that had little interest in post-apocalyptic ideology or ontological questions. In the 1980s, several series of male adventure novels emerged which feature strong, rugged, gun-toting warriors who wander desolate, post-holocaust wastelands

saving (and sexually gratifying) women and fighting biker gangs, mutants, cannibals, rapists, pedophiles (and other sexual deviants), and especially Communists. These series are in the vein of Don Pendleton's *The Executioner* and Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir's *The Destroyer*, but the pattern of these action-adventure series is applied to a world devastated by (usually nuclear) cataclysm. *The Survivalist* series, written by Jerry Ahern, debuted in 1981. Ahern's wandering hero of the wasteland is an expert in weapons and survival, and a recurring feature of the novels is detailed descriptions of his survival equipment and weapons. The hyper-masculine tales forgo strict realism to create a world that borrows from the post-apocalyptic imagination without being encumbered by its nihilistic ideology, ontological uncertainty, or anti-heroic moral ambiguity. Rather, a creatively rendered post-holocaust setting serves as a backdrop for reasserting nationalistic machismo and hyper-violent heroism. *The Survivalist* series became the model for a number of similar series which followed, including William W. Johnstone's *The Ashes* series, James Axler's (a house name) *Deathlands* series, and David L. Robbins' *Endworld* series. The various series, heavy on violence and sex and light on post-apocalyptic dread, produced scores of novels throughout the decade, and a few continued through the 1990s and even into the 2000s.

These male adventure series were also influenced by the success of the *Mad Max* films directed by George Miller, particularly *The Road Warrior* (1981). An Australian production, *Mad Max* (1979) is a revenge picture set in a near-future dystopian society. Although not post-apocalyptic, its setting in the Australian outback imbues it with a post-apocalyptic aesthetic. Following the success of *Mad Max*, a sequel was released in 1981. Unlike the first film, *The Road Warrior* positions itself within the post-apocalyptic genre with a prologue that not only summarizes key plot points from the first film but also establishes that the story takes place after a global nuclear war. Max roams the wasteland, scavenging for food, water, and fuel for his

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supercharged pursuit vehicle. In this world, power is held by those who have fuel, and a malicious gang with a penchant for S&M attire is threatening those defending an oil refinery. Max comes to the aid of the defenders and drives their gasoline tanker truck into the desert while pursued by the gang, allowing for spectacular chase sequences and action stunts, hallmarks of the *Mad Max* series. The defenders escape to the coast, and Max heads off into the desert to be remembered only as a myth among the survivors he helped.

Elements popularized by *Mad Max* and especially *The Road Warrior*—such as supercharged vehicles, villainous biker gangs, bizarre costuming (notably chains and leather), car chases and other action stunts, and a barren wasteland—were a significant influence on the prolific post-nuclear holocaust male adventure novels. They were also a major influence on the direction of the post-apocalyptic film genre during the 1980s, which (aside from the relative few serious treatments of the genre as discussed above) was dominated by Mad Max-type warriors roaming wastelands and battling bizarrely attired gangs of bikers, mutants, warlords, and other baddies. A few examples include *Warriors of the Wasteland* (1982), *2019: After the Fall of New York* (1983), *America 3000* (1986), and *Empire of Ash* (1988). Such films were rampant during the decade, but although they have become synonymous with the post-apocalyptic genre, they have little interest in post-apocalyptic concerns. Much like the male adventure novels, they employ post-catastrophe settings for action films that blend together various genres (fantasy, horror, science fiction, and action-adventure) as well as various influences (*The Road Warrior*, of course, plus other dystopian futuristic films that are not strictly post-apocalyptic such as Walter Hill's *The Warriors* [1979] and John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* [1981]). These are not realistic post-apocalyptic worlds of psychic havoc but of heroes driving supercharged vehicles while dispatching baddies with extreme prejudice. The proliferation of hybrid films may

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not have altered realistic images of an actual, potential post-apocalyptic future, but it certainly reshaped cultural expectations of the post-apocalyptic genre.

Even though these Mad Max-inspired wasteland warriors dominated the landscape of post-apocalypse-related literature and film throughout the 1980s, other texts also contributed to the evolution of the post-apocalyptic genre, including zombie films. Thom Eberhardt's *Night of the Comet* (1984) is a comedic twist on the post-apocalyptic genre. In parody of the post-apocalyptic empty city, two valley girls take advantage of the empty malls and the end of civilization to do some shopping while taking a break from fighting zombies and musing on post-apocalyptic loss. A blend of various genres, *Night of the Comet* reflects the hybridization of the post-apocalyptic genre. In 1985, George A. Romero released a third film in his zombie series, *Day of the Dead*. This time, tensions escalate between scientists and soldiers until it erupts in violence, demonstrating a recurring theme in Romero's zombie films: in this post-apocalyptic world zombies are not the only threat to human survival. Also, the zombie Bub introduces the idea that the zombies may actually be able to feel emotion. Romero's first three films in the *Dead* series established themes that provided a foundation on which subsequent zombie films have built.

Along with zombie films, there was also continuing evolution of other post-apocalyptic stories. In 1985, a film adaptation of Craig Harrison's *The Quiet Earth* was released that maintains some basic elements of the plot while combining them with other influences like Mad Max-style costuming and actions and a love triangle similar to *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*. Despite these changes, the film still evokes post-apocalyptic ideology and explores psychological struggles of post-apocalyptic existence. William Brinkley's novel *The Last Ship* (1988), like *On the Beach*, is a story about the crew of a submarine, but unlike Nevil Shute's

story, *The Last Ship* offers hope in the cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union. A U.S. military submarine survives nuclear war, and when they come across the crew of a Soviet ship, both crews agree to a truce. The remaining survivors—both American and Soviet—take refuge in the last ship, with the Soviets making room for the Americans by jettisoning their nuclear missiles. This allegory and the triumph of a hopeful apocalyptic narrative over post-apocalyptic inescapable annihilation is fitting for its time at the end of the '80s when Cold War hostilities and the anxiety of mutually assured destruction were beginning to lessen. During the 1980s, in both literature and film, post-apocalyptic ideas were incorporated into and attenuated by other forms, and its evolution during the decade reflected changes in culture—including nationalistic assertiveness, embracing blockbuster entertainment, and at the end of the decade, the beginning of an easing of political tensions.

The transition into the 1990s was a time of dramatic political change. In the fall of 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolically represented the fall of the Soviet Union, and as the '90s began, Eastern European nations, one after another, were separating themselves from Soviet control. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War was officially over. With its end, came dramatic relief from the onus of nuclear self-annihilation. This transition also brought a decline in the number of post-apocalyptic texts, and those that were produced continued the trends of hybridization and decreased focus on ontological crisis.

Similar to the comedic takes on the post-apocalyptic genre which arose in the 1960s and '70s (such as *The Bed Sitting Room* and *Gas-s-s*), several post-apocalyptic comedies were produced (or attempted) in the 1990s. Among the most successful of these was Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's 1991 dark comedy *Delicatessen*, which focuses on the plight of the residents of an apartment building in post-apocalyptic France and their landlord who concocts a

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scheme to feed his tenants by luring people to the building and killing them. Another comedic direction for the post-apocalyptic genre during this period was blending post-apocalyptic elements with surrealist comedy. In 1995, a film adaptation was made of the comic book series *Tank Girl*, an absurdist and anarchic comic featuring the misadventures of a character who lives in a tank in post-apocalyptic Australia. Late in the decade, another surrealist comedy was the low-budget, independent film *Six-String Samurai* (1998), an action-comedy-musical, in which a late-1950s Soviet nuclear attack has destroyed the United States. Forty years later, the protagonist (who looks like Buddy Holly) journeys through the post-apocalyptic wasteland to Lost Vegas, battling the Red Army, which has dwindled to a gang of thugs, a suburban family of cannibals, and Death (who looks and plays guitar like Slash). A combination of wasteland warrior films, samurai films, and rock 'n' roll musicals (and chock full of cultural allusions), *Six-String Samurai* represents a post-apocalyptic take on the postmodernist trend in independent films of the '90s. The relatively few post-apocalyptic films of the decade are extremely varied and demonstrate an exploration of hybridizing post-apocalyptic themes with a diversity of other genres.

Of particular note regarding post-apocalyptic comedy was the (failed) attempt to create post-apocalyptic television sitcoms. The British television series *Not With a Bang* (the title is a reference to T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men") premiered in 1990. When the presenter of the BBC science program *Tomorrow's World* accidentally drops a laboratory flask, a chemical is released that causes everyone in the world to turn into ash, except four survivors who search for other survivors and discuss repopulating the world, scenarios not altogether different from the program *Survivors* but given a comedic turn. The show was unsuccessful and only ran for seven episodes. An American comedy of the same variety, *Woops!* (1992) focuses on six survivors of nuclear

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holocaust—broadly comedic stereotypes, including a progressive feminist, a greedy businessman, and a ditzy woman—who are ill-suited for life in this post-apocalyptic setting. Again, the attempt at a post-apocalyptic sitcom failed, and only ten episodes of the show were aired. These comedies lack the satirical edge of the post-apocalyptic comedies of earlier decades, and the light sitcom format, combined with largely stale comedy, did not appeal to viewers. However, they do demonstrate the degree to which cultural anxiety had relaxed regarding the end of the world.

In addition to these attempted post-apocalyptic sitcoms, there were a few serious post-apocalyptic productions during the decade, including made-for-television miniseries, which are perhaps the most serious post-apocalyptic texts from the period. The miniseries *The Fire Next Time* (1993) imagines the possible effects of global warming. Climate change has brought catastrophic destruction by causing intense fires, floods, droughts, and hurricanes, and a family struggles to survive in the chaos of a collapsing world. The next year in 1994, a television miniseries adapted Stephen King's 1978 novel *The Stand*. In this story, a weaponized flu virus kills almost the entire population of the world. In a supernatural development which pushes the story more towards fantasy and horror, the survivors divide into two groups—good and evil. In an apocalyptic climax (in the traditional sense of apocalypse), a supernatural hand denotes a nuclear weapon that destroys the source of evil, and a baby is born resistant to the superflu virus, a sign affirming that future generations will live.

Of the period's few attempts at serious post-apocalyptic films, two are worth noting: *Waterworld* (1995), which is particularly reminiscent of wasteland warrior films, and *The Postman* (1997), based on David Brin's novel. Neither of these films reinvigorated the post-apocalyptic genre or pushed it in a new direction. In fact, they tend to feel nostalgic for the post-

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apocalyptic films of the previous decade, rather than reflecting their contemporary culture. As the decade was transitioning into the next, a television adaptation of Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* was produced in 2000, and although this version alters a few things from the original, it maintains a post-apocalyptic sense of self-annihilation, suggesting the beginnings of renewed interest in serious post-apocalypticism at the turn of the millennium. During the 1980s and 1990s, the post-apocalyptic genre mixed with other genres, and cultural expectations about the genre changed. In the post-Cold War '90s, the genre stagnated and often failed to resonate with audiences. However, the new millennium would bring new threats and cultural anxieties which would help the post-apocalyptic genre—in all of its forms—to reemerge.

Reemergence

The last fifteen years have seen a resurgence of the post-apocalyptic genre in a variety of forms from survivalist literature and wasteland warriors to parody and a glut of zombie fiction. This period also witnessed the reemergence of ideal post-apocalyptic texts of ontological crisis which diverge ideologically from the traditional apocalyptic narratives which had reasserted themselves by the end of the 20th century. Several events of the past twenty years or so have rekindled cultural interest in End Time, Last Things, apocalypse, and post-apocalypse. Although there were relatively few post-apocalyptic texts produced during the 1990s, it was a decade during which interest in apocalypticism increased dramatically. As the final decade of the century and the millennium, the '90s brought a revival of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety and millenarian anticipation. The apocalyptic tenor of the time was reflected throughout the decade in several ways, including religious movements and popular film and literature. Two millenarian religious groups in particular became part of the cultural zeitgeist due to significant media coverage: the

Branch Davidians led by David Koresh (a name that is itself a messianic allusion) and the Heaven's Gate group. In 1993, the Federal raid on Koresh's compound near Waco, Texas, was a featured news item for almost two months, and Heaven's Gate received media attention in 1997 following their mass suicide. The media sensation around these tragic events helped to keep apocalypticism in the cultural consciousness. Additionally, popular film and literature also reflected the apocalyptic moment in disaster movies, such as *Armageddon* (1998) and *Deep Impact* (1998), and in the *Left Behind* book series, which takes the Book of Revelation as its guide to depict apocalypse in its fullness from Rapture through Second Coming. As the decade neared its end, speculations about the Y2K computer bug further accentuated apocalyptic concerns. The apocalyptic tone of the decade reinforced the hopeful optimism of the apocalyptic imagination that, whether a religious or secular apocalypse, humanity will be saved by its merits.

Events early in the new millennium, however, reinvigorated the post-apocalyptic imagination, and the post-apocalyptic genre reemerged, again proliferating simultaneously with the apocalyptic genre. When the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked on September 11, 2001, the attacks stirred a sense of vulnerability, and the image of smoke billowing from the Twin Towers was seared into the American collective memory. For many Americans, especially the younger generation, the end of the Cold War had allowed such images of cataclysm to reside largely in the realm of disaster fiction, but the footage of the Twin Towers burning and collapsing became a definitive part of the early 21st-century post-apocalyptic imagination. Soon after 9/11, President George W. Bush declared a "War on Terror," and the U.S. entered the war in Afghanistan and then, in 2003, the Iraq war. Both wars were protracted affairs and a significant part of the cultural conversation during the first decade (and longer) of the century. In addition to 9/11 and war, the post-apocalyptic imagination was stirred by

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continuing climate change as well as concerns about flu pandemics, spurred by outbreaks of avian flu in 2003 and swine flu in 2009. As highlighted in this chapter, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction tends to proliferate in response to such events—war, disease, and ecological decline—and the 21st century has been no different than previous eras.

In the new century, the increased interest in religious apocalypse is perhaps typified most notably by the *Left Behind* series, which first appeared in 1995 and continued into the 2000s. The series is incredibly prolific, with sixteen novels in LaHaye and Jenkins' original series (published between 1995 and 2007), multiple spin-off series, a film trilogy (2000, 2002, and 2005), and a recent film reboot in 2014. In his study examining why the *Left Behind* series and other eschatological fictions gained traction at the beginning of this century, Nicholas Guyatt argues that this brand of apocalyptic fiction offers stability at a time of instability by reasserting grand apocalyptic narratives. "Critics abroad and at home have vilified the Bush administration for its actions after 9/11, and especially for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In such a hostile climate, the apocalyptic perspective provides conservatives with a powerful and endless reminder of the existence of evil in the world. Saddam [Hussein] may not have had nukes, but he was *evil* and the United States should be in the business of opposing evil" (263; emphasis in original). Amidst turmoil and unrest concerning the U.S. involvement in war, the *Left Behind* series offers a reminder that religious apocalypse transcends politics and national boundaries. "[T]he *Left Behind* books suggest that the current world order is on the verge of collapse, and that the 'war on terror' is about to be overshadowed by a much grander conflict [good against evil] in which America plays no role" (3). With the onus of war, terrorism, disease, and other threats stirring societal anxiety, the reassurance of apocalyptic narratives looks beyond the contentious present to a future victory.

The proliferation of religiously oriented apocalyptic fiction reflects a new fascination with religious apocalypse and grand apocalyptic narratives, but this period has also seen increased interest in secular apocalypse. There has been a surge in movies depicting great apocalyptic destruction, including big-budget spectacles like *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), *2012* (2009), and Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005). There has also been a proliferation of low-budget disaster films such as *Post Impact* (2004), *10.5: Apocalypse* (2006), and *Category 7: The End of the World* (2005). In these films, the threat of disaster comes in the form of new ice ages, earthquakes, meteors, and more. They have even been parodied in the popular sharks-in-a-tornado disaster comedy *Sharknado* (2013). In addition to tapping into a cultural zeitgeist, these films offer plenty of visual disaster spectacle as increasingly affordable CGI effects have allowed low-budget markets to be inundated with visions of apocalyptic destruction. This renaissance of disaster films appeals to the apocalyptic imagination not only by providing escapist fantasy but also by reassuring humanity of the apocalyptic narrative of human triumph over catastrophe.

The early part of the century has also witnessed a rise in texts which evoke the post-apocalyptic imagination. The evolution of the post-apocalyptic genre over time has led to many variations on the themes of post-apocalypse, so when the genre again emerged in the 21st century, it did so in this multiplicity of forms. Some texts reflect a post-apocalyptic loss of faith in universal apocalyptic narratives while others borrow images from the post-apocalyptic imagination but not ideology or ontological crisis. The source of cataclysm is just as varied, including astronomical phenomena, disease, ecological disaster, nuclear devastation, unknown catastrophe, and zombies. Some are concerned with realistically depicting societal collapse and survivalism, and others are more focused on escapist fantasy and action. And of course, there are

comedies that turn the post-apocalyptic imagination on its ear. These incarnations of and variations on the genre have been produced concurrently, providing a flood of works related to post-apocalyptic themes.

As with the proliferation of the genre during the Cold War years, there are so many texts that it is beyond the scope of this history to fully discuss each one, but representative examples will be highlighted from the different styles of post-apocalyptic fiction that have been prominent. Given the general loss of purity within the genre due to hybridization and parody that occurred particularly during the 1980s and '90s, it is significant that one style of post-apocalyptic fiction which has reemerged is a more purely post-apocalyptic narrative, with realistic depictions of social collapse and highlighting a post-apocalyptic ontological crisis. Among the notable texts of this variety that emerged during this period are Michael Haneke's film *Time of the Wolf* (2003); Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006); and Jose Saramago's novel *Blindness* (originally published in Portuguese in 1995). *Time of the Wolf* depicts the chaos following an unexplained disaster that has left water contaminated, animals diseased, and humans competing for shelter and supplies. A family journeys to a train station where survivors wait for a train with no guarantee of its arrival or its destination. The ambiguities and harshness of post-apocalyptic existence is also central to *The Road* in which a father and son confront a series of threats as they travel along a road toward the coast and toward uncertainty. In *Blindness*, the inhabitants of an unnamed city are inexplicably afflicted with blindness. The inadequate infrastructure of a quarantine facility leads to chaos, disease, and hunger while outside the facility, society also collapses into a struggle for survival. The scenario emphasizes humanity's dependence on social structures, order, and our senses. As these crumble, it raises questions about the meaning of life, death, and existence in a world stripped of meaning-making structures which orient and define

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us. When sight returns, the protagonists face an uncertain future—not only rebuilding society but also reconciling how the crisis changed them. These post-apocalyptic texts were produced by authors and filmmakers who are not known for formulaic or genre work, reflecting the impact of the period's cultural anxieties concerning civilization's collapse and post-apocalyptic uncertainty.

In addition to this strain of post-apocalyptic fiction, there are other works—both speculative fiction and speculative nonfiction—which have sought to realistically depict the collapse of society without fully embracing a tone of ontological crisis. Among these speculative works are the novels *World Made by Hand* (2008) by James Howard Kunstler, *One Second After* (2009) by William R. Forstchen, and *Life as We Knew It* (2006) by Susan Beth Pfeffer. *World Made by Hand* is the first novel in a series which imagines the future fate of a town after the world has been devastated by disease, terrorist attacks, nuclear explosions, economic upheaval, and climate change. The series explores the potential for sustainable living and illuminates the inability of suburban communities to be self-sufficient after the collapse of the current infrastructure upon which they depend for energy and resources. *One Second After* depicts the effects of a sudden loss of all electronics following an electromagnetic pulse attack by hostile forces who detonate nuclear devices in the upper atmosphere. A town is threatened by scarcity of food and other supplies, lack of sanitation, hunger and disease, deteriorating social relations, and a group of cannibals who vie for power. A similar scenario is depicted in the first season of the short-lived American television program *Jericho* (2006-2008). In *Life as We Knew It*, the first novel in a series for young adults,[12] an asteroid strikes the moon, knocking it out of orbit, which causes the earth to be devastated by numerous natural disasters—earthquakes volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and so on—resulting in famine and the disintegration of civilization. Despite the social

collapse in these texts, they do not completely abandon apocalyptic renewal as they hold out hope for rebuilding the world.

In addition to these fictional speculations about the loss of civilized society, there have also been nonfiction speculations about the state of the world in the absence of humankind. These speculations draw on scientific observations and hypotheses to imagine the future reclamation of the earth by nature once the human race has ended. Notably, these include Alan Weisman's book *The World Without Us* (2007) and the History Channel program *Life After People* (2008-2010). These studies anticipate what would happen to the works of humans— buildings, dams, bridges, skyscrapers, artwork, religious iconography, etc.—after there are no humans to maintain them or revere them. They explore the fate of the animal population that will continue to be affected by the remnants of human civilization even after humans no longer displace and kill them. Although these are not post-apocalyptic fiction focused on the struggle of humankind to survive, it is worth noting them as evidence of the period's increased interest in speculation about the future fate of humanity.

Related to this interest in both fictional and nonfictional speculation about the collapse of society, there have been several texts produced which have a particular focus on survivalism and the utility of survivalist methods in post-apocalyptic scenarios. James Wesley, Rawles (who places a comma between his given and family names) is the author of a series of novels, including *Survivors: A Novel of the Coming Collapse* (2011), that uses a speculative socioeconomic collapse as the setting in which to place characters who demonstrate survivalist techniques. Overall, the series reinforces apocalyptic ideology and has been quite successful among a certain niche audience. Rawles also published the nonfiction survivalist guide *How to Survive the End of the World as We Know It: Tactics, Techniques, and Technologies for*

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Uncertain Times (2009). In addition to these serious survivalist guides, MMA fighter Forrest Griffin published a parodic survivalist guide, *Be Ready When the Sh*t Goes Down: A Survival Guide to the Apocalypse* (2010). Several television programs have also focused on survivalism. The docudrama *After Armageddon* (2010) chronicles the survival of a family following a global flu pandemic with interviews from experts intercut with the fictional narrative. In the reality television show *The Colony* (2009-2010), participants are placed in a simulated post-apocalyptic environment to test their survival skills against challenges such as scavenging, acquisition of clean water, confronting a gang of marauders, and making decisions about whether or not to allow strangers into their sanctuary. Another television series, *Doomsday Preppers* (2012-2014) profiles survivalists and their preparations for socioeconomic collapse and other catastrophic disasters. These survivalist-oriented texts reflect the cultural zeitgeist of envisioning survival in a post-apocalyptic world and serve as examples of the cultural interest in post-apocalypse during the early part of this century.

Television has been an important medium for the post-apocalyptic genre—the television program *Survivors*, *The Day After*, *Threads*, and others have been mentioned above—but it has been a particularly vital outlet for long-form post-apocalyptic texts in the 21st century. Since long-form television does not resolve story arcs within a single episode, it is able to create a sense of uncertainty from episode to episode. In his book *Television: A Biography*, David Thomson writes that with a long-form show, "uncertainty is never far from the creators' feelings" because while "'story' does presume some closure or resolution . . . Why not go on forever and ignore closure?" (321). This absence of closure resonates with the post-apocalyptic sensibility, and several post-apocalyptic shows have taken the long-form approach, including

Jericho, *Survivors* (and the remake [2008-2010]), and perhaps most notably *The Walking Dead* (2010-present).

Particularly with *The Walking Dead*, the nature of the long form allows for a great degree of uncertainty: characters can evolve over the course of several seasons, shifting their attitudes toward violence, community, and even hope. Story arcs told in eight or sixteen episodes (or more) provide various tonal shifts within a single story arc from lighter and more hopeful to a darker tone that undercuts such hope. A significant feature of the series is the ever-present possibility of death for the main characters who live in a world of graphic violence and carnivalesque grotesquerie. The show regularly surprises viewers with the sudden deaths of major characters and the sudden endings of story arcs. The continual uncertainty promulgated by the series helps to reinforce its post-apocalyptic nature. Much of its constant change, evolution, and uncertainty is inspired by Robert Kirkman's comic book series (2003-present), which itself is a long-running series that continues to delay and suspend closure and resolution.

Another current post-apocalyptic series worth noting is the television comedy *The Last Man on Earth* (2015-present). Unlike *The Walking Dead* and other recent post-apocalyptic texts, *The Last Man on Earth* does not imagine a bleak post-apocalyptic future fraught with an endless series of threats from marauders, would-be dictators, and scarcity of resources. Rather, it offers a future that has been inherited by a group of narcissistic survivors whose conflicting egos may still bring about the end of the human race. Subversive, witty, and entrenched in popular culture references, it envisions a post-apocalyptic existence that is neither entirely hopeless nor altogether hopeful. Although its humor is playful, it is not necessarily benign, in contrast to the previous efforts to make a post-apocalyptic sitcom (*Not With a Bang* and *Woops!*). It intimates that the real post-apocalyptic threat to humanity is not a cataclysmic pandemic but humanity's

own inability to escape a culture of narcissism, wit, and popular culture that we have constructed for ourselves. Thus, underlying its wealth of light verbal and physical comedy, there is a post-apocalyptic subversiveness that makes it a unique entry in the genre.

The Walking Dead and *The Last Man on Earth* demonstrate recent trends in the genre such as the threat of disease and the mixing of genres. Although the apocalyptic event is still precipitated by numerous causes—pandemic disease, ecological decline, natural disasters, socioeconomic collapse, climate change, and nuclear attack—there has been a significant surge in depicting the origin of apocalypse as widespread plague. In addition to *The Walking Dead* and *The Last Man on Earth*, disease features in the 2007 film adaptation of *I Am Legend*, *The Last Man* (2008), which claims to be an adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel but takes so many liberties that Shelley's work becomes unrecognizable, and a host of texts featuring zombies. Plagues have a long history in the post-apocalyptic genre (e.g., Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides*, the television program *Survivors*), and they often reflect societal concerns about recent and/or historical epidemics and the potential for worldwide transmission (such as epidemic-themed films, like *Outbreak* [1995], produced in the wake of the AIDS and Ebola epidemics of the 1980s and '90s). The recent trend seems particularly resonant with the flu pandemics that occurred early in the century—bird flu, swine flu, West Nile virus—and the continuing threat that such pandemics pose.

In addition to reflecting contemporary concerns about global spread of disease, the plague apocalypse has also proliferated due to a dramatic glut in zombie fiction, which has largely discarded supernatural origins for zombie-producing plagues. Much zombie fiction is set during the spread of a zombie plague, but there are many post-apocalyptic zombie texts. Danny Boyle's 2002 film *28 Days Later* helped to reinvigorate zombie films for the 21st century and

reimagined zombies, not as slow and lumbering but as quick and hyperviolent. More zombie films followed, including a remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004); George A. Romero's fourth, fifth, and sixth *Dead* films *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009); and zombie comedies *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Zombieland* (2009). In addition to films, zombies have been a popular subject in literature (e.g., Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* [2003] and his *World War Z* [2006]) and in television (including *Z Nation* [2014-present] and of course *The Walking Dead*). The topic of zombie fiction could warrant a dissertation of its own, and it includes a wide range of styles in numerous media. The examples listed here are intended to provide a glimpse of the recent proliferation of zombie texts that relate more directly to the post-apocalyptic genre.

The resurgence of post-apocalyptic fiction has also brought parodying of the genre. In addition to zombie parodies like *Shaun of the Dead* and *Zombieland*, *The World's End* (2013), a science-fiction, alien invasion film ends with the destruction of the world and offers a coda set in a neo-medieval, post-apocalyptic world. Apocalypticism has also recently been given comedic treatment, such as in *This Is the End* (2013), an apocalyptic disaster comedy that parodies Rapture fiction such as the *Left Behind* series. These parodies coexist alongside serious approaches to the genre and texts that blend and hybridize the post-apocalyptic with other genres. The renewed interest in post-apocalypse has been encouraged by socioeconomic changes and concerns, technological advancements in visual effects, and the anxieties elicited by wars and diseases witnessed at the beginning of the century.

Notably, the 21st century has seen the continuation of another strain of post-apocalyptic fiction: the wasteland warrior. *Deathlands: Homeward Bound* (2003), a low-budget, made-for-cable adaptation of one of the *Deathlands* books, features the series' hero journeying through a

mutant-inhabited wasteland on a quest to avenge his father's death. *The Book of Eli* (2010) tasks its wasteland warrior with delivering the only surviving copy of the Bible to the American west coast, fighting baddies along the way. An especially important film of this type is George Miller's fourth *Mad Max* film, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). The return of Max Rockatansky was greeted with popular and critical acclaim. When Imperator Furiosa takes Immortan Joe's five wives, Max gets embroiled in a high-tempo, visually compelling chase through the blasted wasteland. After assisting Furiosa to end Joe's oppression, Max disappears into the crowd and, again, into myth. Significantly, these wasteland warrior films revive the style that dominated the post-apocalyptic genre in the 1980s, emblematic of the renewed interest in the post-apocalyptic genre and in every previous form of the genre—from Last Man to ecological disaster, from zombie plague to nuclear wasteland, and everything in between, including serious and comedic approaches and the mixing of the post-apocalyptic with a variety of other genres and forms. The post-9/11 cultural climate has been and continues to be fertile ground for the genre.

From the Past to the Future

The post-apocalyptic genre has had a long history as its depictions of imagined futures have responded to social, political, and economic crises throughout the years. For centuries, the tradition of apocalyptic myth established hope in progress as part of the cultural imagination and relied on an expectation that endings make way for new beginnings. In religious literature, the genre of apocalypse prophesies of the world's end coming in the form of fire, plagues, natural disasters, and astronomical cataclysm to cleanse the earth of the wicked preparatory to its rebirth and God's apocalyptic unveiling to the righteous. This apocalyptic model would become the framework through which secular social narratives would characterize the progress of humanity,

nations, and history as a linear trajectory by which the imperfect present would be replaced by a brighter, better future. In moments of crisis, the security and stability of this hopeful pattern is weakened, and the post-apocalyptic imagination conceives of the possible state of humankind if the end brings no new apocalyptic order.

Fiction has reflected this post-apocalyptic imagination in many ways. Responding to revolution and plague, an initial foray into depicting post-apocalypse was the Last Man literature of the early 19th century. Later, the *fin de siècle* deepened post-apocalyptic concerns as the end of the century heightened anxieties about the end of the world, causing recent wars and natural catastrophes, including the eruption of Krakatoa, to be perceived as signs of the End Time. The First World War dramatically devastated cultural assurance in apocalyptic ideology, which was reflected not only in eschatological fiction but also in artistic movements that sought to capture meaning in new forms. Impressionism, cubism, expressionism, futurism, and modernism all attempted to capture reality in innovative ways. Witnessing the Second World War, the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Nazi atrocities against the Jews caused many to experience disillusionment, psychic havoc, and ontological uncertainty—a cultural sensibility from which the post-apocalyptic genre further distinguished itself from apocalyptic fiction. The Cold War era witnessed the proliferation of the post-apocalyptic genre in literature and film as the shadow of the Bomb remained an ever-present omen of self-annihilation. During the postwar period, additional reactionary movements took form, including the Beats and postmodernism, which further influenced the post-apocalyptic genre to adopt new forms that questioned the adequacy of traditional narratives to reflect the reality of individual experience. As the Cold War intensified with the testing of hydrogen bombs and the Cuban missile crisis and as social unrest over race relations and the Vietnam conflict rose, production of post-apocalyptic

texts continued to increase. The genre also became more interested in ecological disaster as environmental concerns became part of the cultural conversation. In the 1980s, the relative political stability and nationalistic retrenchment led to a significant proliferation of wasteland warriors. The end of the Cold War brought a relaxation of post-apocalyptic anxiety and a decline in the genre. As the end of the millennium approached, there was increased interest in apocalyptic ideology, but post-apocalyptic interest remained relatively low.

This was short-lived, however, for with the new millennium and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the post-apocalyptic genre reemerged in a remarkable resurgence. The 21st century has witnessed a proliferation of post-apocalyptic texts that cover the entire range of the genre from the Last Man to the wasteland warrior. There has also been a notable fascination with zombies. The various post-apocalyptic texts continue to respond to a market demand that reflects a cultural interest in the genre, and it does not appear that interest will be lost in the near future. In fact, the threat of global disaster has only been increasing, which historically has coincided with a proliferation of the genre. In 2015, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved the Doomsday Clock to three minutes until midnight, stating that "international leaders are failing to perform their most important duty—ensuring and preserving the health and vitality of human civilization" (Mecklin 14). Far from reducing the number of nuclear weapons, the United States and Russia maintain large nuclear arsenals, and previously non-nuclear nations, particularly North Korea, are currently developing nuclear weapons capability. Further, climate change is an increasing issue, and measures that scientists deem necessary to reduce global warming are not being undertaken. Drawing attention to these concerns, in this year's (2017) statement, the *Bulletin* advanced the Clock to two and a half minutes to midnight, stating, "This already-threatening world situation was the backdrop for a rise in strident nationalism worldwide in 2016, including

in a US presidential campaign during which the eventual victor, Donald Trump, made disturbing comments about the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons and expressed disbelief in the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change" (2). Since the *Bulletin* voiced these concerns, President Donald Trump's "disturbing" actions have continued: he has withdrawn the U.S. from the Paris climate accord and has threatened to attack North Korea. If climate change goes unchecked and if national and international tensions continue to escalate (and de-escalation does not appear likely in the near future), then the post-apocalyptic imagination should continue to be a strong presence in the cultural consciousness, providing fertile ground for the continued proliferation of the post-apocalyptic genre.

CHAPTER 4: Postmodernism and the Post-apocalyptic Genre

As discussed in previous chapters, the post-apocalyptic ideology that informs the post-apocalyptic genre in its strictest form diverges from traditional apocalyptic narratives, in which the end is a symbol of progress as it welcomes a revelatory new beginning. For Frank Kermode, the sense of an ending provides a structure by which the present is imbued with meaning, and Teresa Heffernan recognizes this apocalyptic pattern in the grand narratives of History, Nation, and Man. Central to the notion of post-apocalypse is the loss of faith in the apocalyptic myth, particularly when the surety of progress and an after-the-end is shaken by real crises. The history presented above highlights the significant impact of the Second World War and its associated atrocities—the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the genocide perpetrated during the Holocaust—crises which shook the foundation of positive, beneficent cultural narratives about humanity, life, and death. In the shadow of the Bomb and the Holocaust, the post-apocalyptic genre proliferated during the Cold War, reflecting cultural anxieties about the immediacy of the end—humankind's self-annihilation—as well as the possibility of finding meaning in death. These anxieties found expression through the post-apocalyptic imagination which had been influenced by shared images of catastrophe that had called into question grand, apocalyptic narratives.

Discussed previously, Daniel Grausam argues for a direct connection between the emergence of postmodernism in the post-World War II era and the cultural impact of the atomic bomb, the effects of which destabilized the definition of ending and the surety of Kermode's

sense of an ending. Grausam also sees a relationship between the war and the shift from modernism to postmodernism: "a modernist concern with epistemological questions morphs into a postmodernist concern with ontology, but the shift has a complex history, and understanding the dialogue these novels enact with the nuclear age and the Cold War historicizes changes in representations of reality and history" (5). This shift from a concern with epistemology to a concern with ontology is especially significant in relation to post-apocalyptic fiction. After the apocalypse destroys the world as it is known and understood, one is left to ponder the meaning of one's own existence—one's own being. Whether the pondering is done by the characters in the texts or by readers and viewers, post-apocalyptic fiction is necessarily and centrally concerned with ontology. Such ontological reflection produced the postwar psychic havoc that Mailer describes, for facing the end and the imminence of death causes one to consider not only the value of one's death but also the value of one's life. As both Mailer and Grausam claim, pondering, redefining, and revaluing the meaning of life and death, being and ending—serious ontological examination—was the reality of the post-World War II climate in America. The postmodern fiction of the era, according to Grausam, reflects this reality. "Perverse as it initially sounds," he writes, "we might even designate postmodern fiction a form of realism, insofar as it tries to find models of representation adequate to the Cold War's changed understanding of historical time" (5-6). Since the atomic bomb changed the relationship to futurity, postmodern fiction adopted a structure that would reflect the changed reality of the postwar world. In a similar way, post-apocalyptic fiction is a kind of realism that reflects society's concerns with futurity, ontology, belonging, and the dissolution of stable apocalyptic narratives and conceptions of identity, community, and history.

In his examination of the "postmodern condition," Jean-François Lyotard considered the

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world to have no grand, universal narratives, no overarching meta-discourse. Lyotard, in his study *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, describes "*postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives" and argues that the lost functionality of grand narratives gives rise to "heterogeneity" and "institutions in patches—local determinism" (xxiv). In his view, this was especially true in teleological views of history, man's existence, etc. For Lyotard, "the postmodern was a period where the emphasis on 'operationality', 'performativity', and 'efficiency' in the increasingly militarised areas of science and technology of the postwar period had brought about a general distrust to the 'grand narratives' of modernity: the belief in the emancipation of humanity from slavery and class oppression heralded by the French Revolution; and the aspiration towards the speculative unity of all knowledge into absolute Spirit deriving from German idealism" (Mousoutzanis 26). Rather than grand narratives, he argued that the postmodern world "was characterised by an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives' at the multiplication of fragmented, localised and heterogeneous 'micro-narratives'. Lyotard diagnosed in the postmodern a 'break' with the modern narrative of progress" (26). This postmodern break from the modern narrative of progress in response to postwar distrust of grand narratives is similar to the post-apocalyptic break from the apocalyptic idea of progress through meaningful endings.

This conception of postmodernism as a break is echoed in the work of Fredric Jameson, who identified the postmodern as "some radical break or *coupure*, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s" (188). Jameson dates the emergence of the postmodern to the late 1950s, claiming that it was a period during which modernism became canonized and institutionalized in academia. "This is indeed surely one of the most plausible explanations for the emergence of postmodernism itself, since the younger generation of the 1960s will now

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confront the formerly oppositional modern movement as a set of dead classics" (191). He notes

that there is a danger in periodizing postmodernism, which would simply mark it as the next

stage or style of modernism in a linear progression. However, for Jameson, postmodernism is not

a style but "a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a

range of very different, yet subordinate features" (191). As a style, postmodernism features

elements that may also be found in modernism, but as a cultural dominant, it serves as a "force

field" through which a variety of cultural impulses pass (193). It can also utilize many different

features while imbuing them with a postmodern sense of depthlessness, weakening of historicity,

and decentering of meaning.

According to Jameson, postmodernism is particularly concerned with heterogeneity and

the loss of connection, manifested through fragmentation; lack of depth, emotion, and affect;

disruption of the link between signifier and signified; and disconnection between images of the

past and the reality of the past. The heterogeneity, disconnection, and depthlessness of

postmodernism identified by Jameson reflected a cultural shift away from universal grand

narratives. Writing in the early 1980s, he remarks, "The last few years have been marked by an

inverted millenarianism, in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have

been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the

'crisis' of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc...)" (188). As discussed in

previous chapters, the cultural narratives of Nation, History, and Man are examples of the

influence of the apocalyptic myth that imagines progress toward a future that will put the present

into a meaningful context. The apocalyptic imagination includes visions of catastrophe and

redemption as the end transitions into a revelatory beginning. However, the postmodern

condition that Jameson describes is a post-apocalyptic present which has broken from the linear notions of progress and now exists after the end.

Rather than looking forward to an apocalyptic future, the postmodern has a post-apocalyptic sensibility, "an inverted millenarianism," marked by a sense that the end has already come. Despite this post-apocalyptic sensibility, not all postmodern texts exhibit the other components of the post-apocalyptic genre, but particularly after World War II, postmodernism and post-apocalypticism were both influenced by the waning faith in apocalyptic ideology. Postmodernism as a cultural dominant has had a significant impact on post-apocalyptic texts—both on the outer form of the genre (the setting, clothing, iconography, and "tools of the trade") as well as the inner form (audience engagement and interaction with the text). As discussed previously, certain elements of the post-apocalyptic genre—such as images of the Last Man—existed before the emergence of the "postmodern condition," but the postmodern helped to further shape the post-apocalyptic imagination in ways that accentuated its deviation from apocalyptic narratives.

The postmodern turn in American culture—seen in postwar literature and the post-apocalyptic genre—was certainly a response to a multiplicity of factors, but perhaps the most important, as Grausam argues, was the shadow of Hiroshima and concerns of a final, total nuclear war that permeated the Cold War climate. In linking the emergence of postmodernism with Cold War nuclear anxiety, Grausam echoes Jameson's view that postmodernism was a post-apocalyptic break from traditional apocalyptic grand narratives, describing postmodern fiction as "a reflection of a culture that saw itself not as the prehistory of another age, but as contemporaneous with new technologies that might have made it a *last* age" (17; emphasis in original). He continues, "The frequently remarked upon awkwardness of the term 'postmodern'

might not be so awkward after all, naming as it does an age that introduced the possibility of there being no future from which it might be reassessed" (17). In contrast to Frank Kermode's "sense of an ending," which views traditional narrative form as apocalyptic, postmodernism often problematizes or denies resolution, breaking from the apocalyptic notion that the end brings revelation.

Grausam sees the postmodern denial of Kermode's "sense of an ending" evidenced in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). He states, "Published contemporaneously, Pynchon's novel might ultimately be said to play Hyde to Kermode's Jekyll . . . given its denial of any form of revelatory ending for the reader" (58). In the novel, Oedipa Maas gets pulled into a mystery involving a secret underground organization, which leads her to the California city of San Narciso. The novel ends with Oedipa Maas suddenly losing her bearings when the city of San Narciso instantaneously disappears. Noting that the novel was published only a few years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Grausam directly connects Pynchon's description of a pure and spherical loss to nuclear anxiety: "A hydrogen bomb has not actually been dropped at this point in the novel, obviously, but the language describing the loss of the city is strikingly suggestive of one. The 'spherical' vision only underscores this suggestion, recalling as it does the blast in its pre-mushroom-cloud shape" (54). Although the plot of the novel is not overtly about World War Three or nuclear cataclysm, Grausam sees San Narciso as emblematic of the concerns of uncertain futurity during the Cold War; with the instantaneous disappearance of the city, which at one point promises to be unique and a source of revelation for Oedipa's investigation, San Narciso ultimately is shown to suffer the common fate of all in the face of nuclear cataclysm and denies Oedipa any revelatory conclusion. Further, the novel reflects the postmodern departure from Kermode's apocalyptic view of literature as it leaves the reader in a similar position as

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Oedipa: disoriented and denied revelation (55). Although *The Crying of Lot 49* does not fit within the post-apocalyptic genre, it helps to illustrate the postmodern turn in response to nuclear anxiety during the Cold War, a turn which was significant for the post-apocalyptic genre with its interest in disorientation and denial of revelation.

For Grausam, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is representative of Cold War-era nuclear-themed texts, such as *On the Beach* and *Dr. Strangelove* as well as post-apocalyptic texts including *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *Alas, Babylon*, *The Day After*, *Threads*, and *The Postman*. While survivors in post-apocalyptic stories attempt to "reassemble civil society out of its ruins, Pynchon reveals that the novel of World War Three can never offer revelation" (58). Thus, one element of postmodernism often employed by the post-apocalyptic genre is ambiguous, unresolved, or even cyclical conclusions. For example, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the cycle of nuclear war repeats until the ultimate annihilation of humankind. The final few paragraphs of Craig Harrison's *The Quiet Earth* reiterate verbatim the novel's opening paragraphs, trapping the protagonist in a recursive loop and denying the reader a revelatory ending. Although problematic endings are not exclusive to postmodern or post-apocalyptic fiction, it is significant that the postmodern and post-apocalyptic breaks from traditional, apocalyptic grand narratives include the denial of revelatory endings.

In addition to endings that deny revelation and/or resist satisfactory conclusion, other elements of postmodernism are frequently used in the post-apocalyptic genre as it diverges from the apocalyptic narrative. A significant aspect of postmodernism that is also frequently present in the post-apocalyptic genre is self-reflexivity. Grausam connects the self-reflexive interest of postmodernism with the difficulty of representing a post-apocalyptic future. He remarks that "any fiction that tries to think seriously about the possibility of narrative in the thermonuclear

age *must* be a form of metanarrative that reflects on the very possibility of narrating an event that would leave no narrator" (16; emphasis in original). Although admitting that not all experimental, metafictional texts are about World War Three, he suggests "that a sustained attempt to answer the representational challenges posed by thermonuclear war, especially in the missile age, would have to take a metafictional form, and that this point goes some way toward explaining the increasing self-reflexivity of narrative in the period" (16-7). Such self-reflexivity is a significant aspect of the post-apocalyptic genre in which there is an implicit irony in creating popular fiction that imagines existence after the end of the audience's own world and culture. Rather than imagining a future world that is an extrapolation of the contemporary one or imagining a fantastical setting that is completely separate from the audience's known world, the post-apocalyptic genre is centrally concerned with imagining a world that bears the signifiers of the known world but has sheered their signifying connections. The post-apocalyptic world is filled with artifacts of the past but has largely elided the meaning of those artifacts, creating a relationship between the text and the audience that simultaneously invites association and disassociation. The nature of post-apocalyptic fiction keeps the text's constructedness an ever-present element of the text itself. As Grausam discusses, the challenges posed by the contradiction and impossibility of representing a post-apocalyptic existence require such texts to employ, at least to some degree, a form of metanarrative and self-reflexivity.

Long before the postmodern turn, the post-apocalyptic genre sought ways to narrate tales of humanity's future end for audiences in the present. Early texts, such as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, drew upon the tradition of apocalyptic literature to circumnavigate the issue by presenting their stories as prophetic visions of the future. As the post-apocalyptic imagination diverged from apocalyptic ideology during the twentieth century and especially as the post-

apocalyptic genre came into its own during the Cold War, the overt need to explain away or work around the problem dwindled, and the genre embraced the opportunity to play with the ambiguities and impossibilities of post-apocalyptic narration. Such play ranges from John Hobson's first-person narration in Harrison's *The Quiet Earth*, which concludes with a recursive loop that takes Hobson and the reader back to the beginning of the novel, to the wandering final inhabitant of the world in Shelley's *The Last Man*, to the narrative turn at the end of the film *Planet of the Apes*, which recasts the presumably foreign planet as the future fate of Earth following nuclear war, and to tales that culminate in the ultimate end of the world such as *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. A key aspect of self-reflexivity, according to Thomas Schatz, is the (often ironic and ambiguous) interrelationship among author, narrator, and character and the reader/viewer ("*Annie Hall*" 182). Although these interrelationships are manifested in post-apocalyptic texts in various ways and to differing degrees of irony and ambiguity, inherent in the genre is a persistent, self-reflexive acknowledgment that the post-apocalyptic world exists in a gap between the end of the world and its rebirth, a liminal space disconnected from yet bearing artifacts of the audience's world.

In addition to the interrelationship of author, narrator, character, and audience, self-reflexivity can be exhibited through other means such as convoluted plot and temporal structures, the problematic status of "reality," and authorial intervention. The self-reflexive nature of postmodern texts highlights the movement's interest in subverting conventions and inviting the audience to participate with the text (Schatz, "*Annie Hall*" 182-3). With postmodernism, "the artist in effect is challenging the audience to reject the necessary passivity of classicism (wherein the conventions are mutually understood and deemed inviolate) and to become actively involved in the text" (182). Postmodern texts encourage this activity through self-reflexive techniques that

parody, deconstruct, subvert, and otherwise break from conventions. Inviting the audience to

actively engage with texts is an important part of the post-apocalyptic genre, for it is in this

relationship—the audience witnessing the remains of their familiar world, signifiers

disconnected from their referents in the present—that the genre takes an inner form which

challenges the audience's identification with their own world and cultural expectations about

their future existence.

In addition to self-reflexivity, other common postmodernist strategies include

fragmentation, intertextuality and allusion, parody and pastiche, and bricolage. These elements

reflect the interest of postmodernism in deconstruction and reconstruction that subverts

traditional narrative conventions, appropriating and repurposing other texts, and playing within

the gap between signifier and signified. Jameson argues that fragmentation is a dominant

condition in the postmodern world, resulting from the division of labor in late capitalism (194).

According to Jameson, fragmentation has led to a decentering of meaning. The world is

composed of many fragmented images, but there is no real meaning connected to them. Thus, the

signifier-signified relationship is frustrated. Now, signification only exists as a signifying

chain—the relationship among a multitude of signifiers—which creates what Jameson calls a

"meaning-effect." There is no one-to-one relationship between signifier and referent, and

postmodern fragmentation further frustrates meaning-making by breaking the signifying chain

(209). The separation between signifiers and their signified meanings and referents is, on one

extreme, a source of nihilism and, on the other, a source of opportunity. While the postmodern

decentering of meaning has allowed for texts that offer little meaning, other postmodernist works

have embraced the possibility of plurality of meaning.

Jameson also claims that "historicism" has effaced history—a fascination with styles of

the past that has eclipsed historical reality. The postmodern world abounds in using styles and images from the past, but they are no longer connected to the actual history—the past as referent "finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (202-3). Whereas the traditional apocalyptic view of history is diachronic (the present is the successor to a meaningful past and the forerunner of a meaningful future), the postmodern break from this framework makes history and present existence synchronic, not diachronic, as in premodern epochs. We are only living in the present time, separated from history that would bind us to other periods in history and give us a larger view of our existence, a meaningful understanding of our place in history. However, since that meaning is gone, history has no meaning. Our place is only in this time, this synchronic world.

Despite this synchronic existence, there is a persistent fascination with and nostalgia for the past. The images and styles of the past are used in art, architecture, and other modes of representation. Signifiers of the past abound, but the signifieds are no longer affixed to them. Jameson sees this in cultural products such as Andy Warhol's artworks, postmodern architecture, and nostalgia films. Cultural products are "heaps of fragments" that reproduce images of the past, but they are empty of the depth and meaning of the real history (209). The loss of meaningful connection to the past has created a condition in which "the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (201). This has led to pastiche eclipsing parody, since there is no longer a norm to parody. Pastiche is "blank parody"; it is mimicry that lacks the meaning and motive of parody. Additionally, the postmodern condition is marked by "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the 'neo'" (202). The postmodern has modified the past because the past is now "a

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vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (203). The fascination with the styles and images of the past is evident in nostalgia for the past that is gone. Jameson argues that nostalgia films, especially of the 1970s and '80s, demonstrate "the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience" (205). The difficulty of representing the present leads to appropriating and repurposing the styles and images of the past, but nostalgia cannot ultimately find meaning because the present postmodern world is divorced from the meaningful reality of the past. We are seeking the past through nostalgia, yet we are only cannibalizing the images and styles of the past. Inherent in this difficulty are questions such as: How do we live in a world where there is no past? Can we look to a future when we have no past? These questions also seem to be essential in the post-apocalyptic genre, which imagines a synchronic condition in a future world that has lost its apocalyptic connections to our present known world.

Post-apocalyptic texts situate characters in a world of decentered meaning. The apocalyptic cataclysm has destroyed their connection to the past. Thus, it is a world much like the postmodern world that Jameson describes. The characters want to reconnect with the past, but their existence has become synchronic. The images of the past are like images reflected in a mirror but the actual object of reference no longer exists, like the nostalgia that Jameson describes. The post-apocalyptic genre cannibalizes the styles of the past, separating them from their original meaning. The referent is bracketed and effaced—the signified is separated from the signifier. Even memories have no meaning. Jameson speaks of the postmodern world as an elegy of memory; not only is the past absent, but now the meaning that was once connected to the memory is absent. Individuals in such a post-apocalyptic existence are left in an ontological crisis because the past is no longer meaningfully connected to the symbols that remain in the

present. There is a breakdown between signifier and signified, yet the past is an essential element in the post-apocalyptic world and manifests itself in a number of ways including flashbacks and intrusions of memory, artifacts from the past such as objects and landmarks, and intertextual references and allusions. Although the referent is gone, those living in the post-apocalyptic world cling to the objects of the past, are burdened by memory, and are unable to escape references to the cultural artifacts of the past. Not only are they "incapable of fashioning representations" of their current experience, but they are also incapable of comprehending the meaning of their current experience and existence. The norms that gave meaning to life, the universe, and everything before the apocalypse are gone.

Like postmodernism, which reassesses the meaning inherent in traditional conventions, the post-apocalyptic imagination revaluates the apocalyptic framework which reflects Kermode's sense that future endings provide meaning for present uncertainty. Additionally, the postmodern break from universal cultural narratives arose from a multitude of factors which called into question the efficacy of those narratives. Although postmodernism at its extreme claims that there is no center of meaning, the postmodern condition posits that there are multiple shifting centers of meaning. Signifiers are no longer singularly affixed to their referents, which allows for play and plurality. The world is only a "heap of fragments." The post-apocalyptic genre imagines futures that are largely structured by the same principles underlying postmodernism. Post-apocalyptic uncertainty breaks from apocalyptic reassurance. Fragments of the previous world litter the post-apocalyptic world, and by removing them from their context, their meaning becomes fluid. Post-apocalyptic texts are patchworks made up of other genres and conventions, including those from science fiction, horror, drama, action, and comedy. The self-reflexivity of the post-apocalyptic genre invites audiences to actively engage with texts that challenge notions

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of authorship, representation, and the impossibility of post-apocalyptic existence. The genre creates a gap between the end of the world and any future renewal and plays within that gap, inviting readers and viewers to consider the possibility of a future not predicated upon traditional cultural narratives.

Much has been written about postmodernism, and there are many aspects of postmodernism that are worthy of examination. For the purpose of this study, I will focus my analysis of the interaction of postmodernism and the post-apocalyptic genre to the elements introduced above: self-reflexivity, intertextuality and allusion, the gap between signifier and signified and the absent referent, problematic endings, and the difficult relationship between author, narrator, character, and reader/viewer. These elements of postmodernism particularly highlight the influence of the postmodern turn on the post-apocalyptic imagination. To more closely examine these elements in the post-apocalyptic genre, the next section of this chapter will present case studies of two post-apocalyptic texts—the novel *The Road* (2006) and the film *Night of the Comet* (1984).

Case Study: *The Road*

Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2006 novel *The Road* envisions a post-apocalyptic American landscape traversed by a father and a son as they make their way toward the coast. Their journey along the road is one of survival as they scavenge for food, seek shelter, and encounter other survivors, both benign and malignant. Among the most memorable occurrences in the novel is their encounter with a group of cannibals. Through it all, the father seeks to instill in his son a certain kind of morality that distinguishes the two of them as "good guys" who carry "the fire" in contrast to "bad guys" such as the cannibals. The father, along the

journey, gets shot with an arrow, an injury which will ultimately lead to his death. Before he dies, the father and son reach the coast but find that it offers no sanctuary, so the father entrusts his son to a group of survivors who similarly carry "the fire." The father dies, and the son continues traveling the road with the group.

The Road is a key text in the resurgence of the post-apocalyptic genre that has occurred in the twenty-first century. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the conflict in Iraq in the early years of the century, the number of post-apocalyptic texts increased with a renewed interest in visions of post-apocalyptic scenarios. However, this interest was not simply the proliferation of the kinds of post-apocalyptic texts that dominated the 1980s and '90s (largely parodic or action-oriented stories which often contain little post-apocalypticism besides being set against a barren, devastated landscape), but there was also a renewed interest in the post-apocalyptic break from traditional, apocalyptic cultural narratives. *The Road* is this kind of "pure" post-apocalyptic text, now standing as a seminal entry in the genre, and represents well the interaction between the post-apocalyptic genre and postmodernism.

Notably, *The Road* denies the expectation that the titular road will lead to a final destination wherein the narrative (and the journey) will resolve. Journeys and roads have a long, broad tradition in cultural myths. In his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes one such myth in his analysis of the adventure of the hero. The hero's journey begins with a call to adventure that requires departing home to embark on a (figurative) road on which the hero "must survive a succession of trials" (97). The hero-quest culminates with the hero's triumph over those trials—on a microcosmic scale (as in fairy tales) the hero "prevails over his personal oppressors" and on a macrocosmic scale (as in religious or world-historical myths) the hero "brings from his adventure the means for the regeneration of his

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society as a whole" (38). *The Road* denies such a journey; there is no call to adventure and no triumphal destination at the end of the road. Rather, the father and son are already on the road when the story begins, and the end of the road does not resolve the narrative. The road (both figurative and literal) has no beginning and no end, neither for the characters nor for readers. *The Road* breaks from the tradition of the journey myth and defeats expectations of a meaningful destination.

Deservedly, *The Road* has received a lot of critical attention. Much of this attention has focused on McCarthy's formal style—succinct descriptions, sparse dialogue, and a lack of adherence to rules of punctuation. Reviewers of *The Road* described its style in a variety of ways: "terse dialogue and spartan narrative," "stripped-down," "sparse descriptions," "pared down, elemental," and "desolate lyricism" (Banco 278). Also frequently mentioned are McCarthy's use of short paragraphs, the absence of quotation marks to bound dialogue, and the omission of apostrophes in many of the contractions. Additionally, there are no chapter breaks, and the characters in the novel are almost entirely nameless. Lindsey Banco remarks that "the minimalist structure and style McCarthy uses in this novel" are coincident with the story's "negation of the modern world . . . and thus help underscore a broken, fragmented, and ultimately empty world" (276). By employing this unique style, *The Road* breaks from traditional conventions of narrative to reflect the post-apocalyptic world not only in its content but also in its form. The novel's deviation from traditional structure and punctuation calls attention to its own constructedness. Specifically writing about the variable use of apostrophes, Banco contends that "the play between apostrophized and unapostrophized contractions cannot help but be an act of textual self-reflexivity, a calling attention to itself as artifice" (278). By employing this unique formal style, *The Road* is at once postmodern and post-apocalyptic.

McCarthy's style can also create disorientation and ambiguity. Throughout the novel, the father has flashbacks of various events that occurred prior to the cataclysmic event. He is particularly burdened by memories and dreams of his wife who committed suicide rather than live a post-apocalyptic existence. However, the style of the novel gives no clear indication of the transitions between the narrative in the "present" and the flashbacks, which can be disorienting for the reader. In addition to causing disorientation for the reader, the lack of clear delineation between past and present disrupts notions of ordered time. Temporal ambiguity is also exhibited in the novel by a blurring of night and day. The narrator describes this: "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before" (McCarthy 3). "The quest that McCarthy sends us on in *The Road*," Shelly L. Rambo writes, "is one in which temporal markers of past, present, and future no longer hold . . . All, it seems, is an eternal middle; there is nothing to anticipate, and the past is what haunts the father, reminding him of a world he can never get back" (101). This temporal ambiguity—accentuated by the fluidity of narrative between descriptions of the present, the past, and dreams—helps to establish the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* as synchronic. "In the aftermath of the collapse of the world, there is no end in sight, no destination, and no promise of life ahead" (115). Further, the cataclysmic event has brought an end to running time, recorded temporal progression. In a description that evokes similar moments in novels such as M.P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* and Craig Harrison's *The Quiet Earth*, the father recalls, in a flashback, "The clocks stopped at 1:17" (McCarthy 52). By employing temporal disorientation and ambiguity, McCarthy is able to fashion a novel that envisions a world which is incompatible with the traditional, apocalyptic sense of an ending. The postmodern elements present in the structure and style help to establish *The Road* as a text set in a post-apocalyptic landscape but also as one that challenges the efficacy of apocalyptic ideology.

Temporal ambiguity in McCarthy's novel disconnects the past from its meaning—the past has become an absent referent—and the synchronic world of *The Road* offers only offers uncertainty in the future. In addition to such disruption of the meaningful connections between past, present, and future, the postmodern interest in questioning, undercutting, and eliding referents from their signifiers is manifested in other ways in the novel—including ambiguity of space, character identification, and artifacts of the lost world. While time has lost its markers, spatial demarcation has also become meaningless. As the father and the son are looking at a map, the father points to black lines that he indicates are "state roads." The son inquires, "Why are they the state roads?" "Because they used to belong to the states," the father answers, "What used to be called the states" (42-3). The labels and governmental entities that once organized and ordered the nation have been lost to the past—the past which has itself been lost. Also, the map previously served as an iconic sign, according to Charles Peirce's categorization, because the lines on the map represented the structures, curvatures, and lengths of actual roads (Burks 673). However, due to the dissolution of infrastructure, the connection between signifier (the map) and referent (the road) is no longer certain, rendering the lines on the map of little (or no) meaning.

Additional referential ambiguity is created through the language which identifies the father and the son. By remaining nameless, the characters, like the states, lack unique identification. The lack of unique identifiers also means that they are both inevitably referred to by masculine pronouns, and by nature of McCarthy's style, the narrative does not clearly demarcate shifts of focus between the father and the son from paragraph to paragraph. It is by no means impossible to follow the story, but an unclear shift can cause some initial disorientation. Since the father tends to be the main character of interest, he is typically the one indicated when a paragraph first uses the pronoun "he," so exceptions to particularly highlight the disorientation

that can occur. Such a shift early in the novel demonstrates this. The novel begins, "When he woke in the woods," and soon it becomes clear that "he" is the father (3). After several pages of following the pattern of paragraphs initially referring to the father, the pattern is broken. One paragraph ends, "He'd brought the boy's book but the boy was too tired for reading. Can we leave the lamp on till I'm asleep? he said. Yes. Of course we can." Then, a new paragraph begins, "He was a long time going to sleep." Initially, there are no indicators that this paragraph deviates from the pattern until the next sentence: "After a while he turned and looked at the man." This paragraph concludes with an exchange of dialogue between the man and the boy, and the following paragraph again returns its focus to the father: "He lay listening to the water drip in the woods" (10-1). As with the fluid temporality of the novel, antecedent ambiguity is a reminder to the reader of the constructedness of the novel and keeps the unique style and structure of the novel part of the reading experience. Such self-reflexivity is a reminder that language, identity, time, and space in this post-apocalyptic world are fluid and ambiguous and differ from the styles and structures of the world familiar to readers.

The disconnect between the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* and the world known and experienced by readers is also emphasized by the loss of connection between objects found in the world of the novel and their referents in our real world. Borrowing the words of the novel's narrator, everything has become "uncoupled from its shoring" (11). One artifact that illustrates this is the can of Coca Cola that the father and son find. While scavenging, the father finds two overturned soft drink machines. "He sat and ran his hand around in the works of the gutted machines and in the second one it closed over a cold metal cylinder. He withdrew his hand slowly and sat looking at a Coca Cola." The son asks, "What is it, Papa?" The response: "It's a treat for you" (23). The boy has no idea what a Coke is, much less what one tastes like,

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and the man does not identify it by name—a name that would be meaningless to his son, indeed meaningless in the post-apocalyptic world. After drinking it, the boy remarks that it tastes bubbly. Then, when the drink has been consumed, it is gone; the experience was situated in that moment and only in that moment. It has no enduring existence and viewed from the perspective of the boy, it has no meaningful connection to the past. Such artifacts, objects with absent referents, join the other postmodern elements of the novel that challenge time, space, and identity, using a self-reflexive style and structure to break from and subvert traditional narratives. Interestingly, many post-apocalyptic texts are tales about the road. Like many road movies, post-apocalyptic stories of the road often posit "a hopeless and lamentable mobility" and "focus on the consequences of a culture moving, often quite rapidly, away from the stabilizing structures of community and communication" (Orgeron 2). The post-apocalyptic road envisions the ultimate loss of these structures, and in post-apocalyptic road texts, the nostalgia that so often permeates road movies is reimagined as the remnants of the old world whose referents are now absent.

In the extensive critical discussion of the *The Road*, a point that is often debated is the meaning of the end. The end of the novel—the father dying but leaving the son in the care of others who carry "the fire"—has been argued to be redemptive (for example, Lindsey Banco) and has been argued to offer no redemption (Shelly Rambo, among others). The end is ambiguous and can be read either way, depending upon the individual reader. Rambo writes, "McCarthy catches the reader in a schizophrenic, and distinctively American, post-apocalyptic crisis of meaning: between the craving for a happy ending (for resolution, for redemption) and the recognition of its impossibility (there is, in Christian terms, no resurrection ahead)" (101). The end of the novel does not resolve the thread of ambiguity that runs throughout it. The possible meaning(s) of "the fire" that the man and boy carry is never explicitly explained. It is

certainly reasonable that it has several possible meanings, subverting the one-to-one signifier-signified relationship of Enlightenment and structuralist thinking and embracing the plurality of postmodernism. When they reach their destination, the coast, the father dies, and the boy joins his new guardian to continue traveling the road. The destination is not the end, for the road is symbolic of the synchronic, post-apocalyptic world, existing perpetually in the present disconnected from the past and the future. By putting the apocalyptic framework aside in favor of post-apocalypticism, *The Road* (and the post-apocalyptic genre) plays with the ideological crisis that results from readers confronting a future world from which their own, personal existence and their present, known world have been disconnected and elided. To depict such a world, McCarthy employs postmodern elements—such as self-reflexivity, ambiguity, and absent referents—that require the reader to engage with the text and its departure from traditional styles and structures. Thus, the post-apocalyptic and the postmodern work together to reflect the inadequacy of traditional cultural narratives and concerns about the uncertainty of the future.

Case Study: *Night of the Comet*

The 1984 film *Night of the Comet*, written and directed by Thom Eberhardt, depicts empty, post-apocalyptic Los Angeles after a comet passes near the Earth. Those who are fully exposed to the comet are reduced to red dust while those only partially exposed are turned into zombies. There are very few survivors who are completely unaffected, and among them are two valley girls, the sisters Reggie and Sam. A red haze lingers over the city. After they come to the realization of their situation—being survivors of a cataclysmic event—they hear the voice of a disc jockey on a radio broadcast, which leads them to the radio station in search of another human being. At the radio station, they discover that the voice was only a recording. However,

the broadcast brings another survivor to the station, Hector, presumably the last man on earth. When Hector decides to leave town to check on his family, Reggie and Sam, in stereotypical valley girl fashion, decide to go shopping at the mall where they are attacked and held captive by machine gun-wielding stock boys who are changing into zombies as a result of comet exposure. The girls are rescued by a team sent by a group of scientists, who have secluded themselves in an underground facility while they work to find a cure for the zombification. Reggie is transported to the scientists' facility, but it is revealed that the scientists have actually been exposed and have their own nefarious agenda to harvest the blood of the unaffected survivors in order to save themselves. Sam's life is spared by a scientist who has become disillusioned about their scheme, and Sam and Hector rescue Reggie and two children who had also been kidnapped by the scientists. Ending on an optimistic note, rain comes and washes away the red haze, and Hector and Reggie assume the roles of parents to the two children, forming a family unit in order to perpetuate civilization. And finally, Sam, who is bummed that Reggie ended up with the last man, is saved from her loneliness when another survivor, a teenage boy, shows up.

Night of the Comet was an independent film from the producers of the well-received 1983 teen comedy *Valley Girl*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the time of its release was a period of transition for the post-apocalyptic genre. Cold War nuclear tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union had increased, being reflected at its most serious in the post-apocalyptic television movies *The Day After* (1983) and *Threads* (1984). However, aside from the relatively few dire, realistic portrayals of post-nuclear existence, the post-apocalyptic genre was beginning to move toward more fantastical visions of post-apocalyptic worlds dominated by wasteland warriors and zombies, influenced particularly by the success of *Mad Max* (1979), *The Road Warrior* (1981), and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). During this period, the increasing number

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of multiplexes, often built in or near shopping malls, had a significant impact on the film industry in general as filmmakers sought to appeal to the rising generation of younger audiences. In response to the changing times, the post-apocalyptic genre overall was becoming more interested in action-laden visual spectacles. With its focus on strong, machine gun-toting young women battling zombies, *Night of the Comet* is certainly a product of its time. Additionally, it is very much a product of the postmodern condition discussed by Jameson.

Significantly, *Night of the Comet* was produced during the same period in which Jameson published his essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," and the film reflects many of the aspects of postmodernism presented in that essay, including self-reflexivity, depthlessness, pastiche, intertextuality, spatial logic, and fragmentation. In contrast to McCarthy's *The Road* whose self-reflexivity is convey in part through its sparse style, the self-reflexivity of *Night of the Comet* is exhibited through an excessive style. Colors—of costumes and sets—are bright and exaggerated. The characters are also exaggerated, and the girls' (especially Sam's) style of speech intentionally adopts the stereotypical bright and bubbly affectation of the valley girl. The plot involves many episodic scenarios juxtaposing emotional extremes—the celebration of the comet's passing followed by the discovery of the empty city, the tragedy of apocalyptic extinction followed by a frivolous shopping spree, and so on. In the plotting and characterization, the film embraces the tradition of B-movie "schlock" in which it is steeped. Vivian Sobchack argues that *Night of the Comet* and other early 1980s hybrid science-fiction films are representative of Jameson's idea of "aesthetic populism" which sees postmodernism as effacing the distinction between high culture and mass culture (246). She writes, "Predominantly independent productions, locating themselves self-consciously and precariously on the boundaries of the genre (and thus suspect as SF [science fiction]), [these

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films] not only announce and celebrate their own existence as the simulacra of grade-B 'schlock' movies . . . [but] also foreground and locate themselves in a culture that is 'schlock'" (249-50). By self-consciously embracing the B-movie aesthetic, exaggeration, and excess, *Night of the Comet* acknowledges its own postmodern playfulness.

Part of the film's playfulness and self-reflexivity is in being a pastiche of various films, including post-apocalyptic films. The review of the film in *Variety* declares, "*Night of the Comet* is a successful pastiche of numerous science fiction films, executed with an entertaining, tongue-in-cheek flair that compensates for its absence of originality" (*Variety* Staff). The review highlights the similarities between its premise (only a few who were protected by steel walls escaped exposure to the comet) and those of Arch Oboler's film *Five* (1951) and John Wyndham's novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951; adapted into a film, 1963). The film also references *The Omega Man* (1971) in depicting the desolate streets of Los Angeles and the similarity between the zombies in *Night of the Comet* and the infected mutants in *The Omega Man*. There is certainly a resonance with *Dawn of the Dead*, not only considering the zombies but also the setting in a shopping mall and the satirizing of consumerism. Additionally, the article states, "While SF fans are busy sorting out the influences, filmmaker Thom Eberhardt . . . creates a visually arresting B-picture in the neon-primary colors of the cult hit *Liquid Sky* [1982]." It is also important to note the influence of MTV, which was still in its early years, having debuted in August 1981. The scene of Reggie and Sam's shopping spree (read: looting spree) is accompanied by a version of the song "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" and essentially serves as a music video for the song. (Incidentally, Cyndi Lauper's version of the song with its accompanying music video had premiered in 1983). Vivian Sobchack connects music videos and MTV to films like *Night of the Comet*, explaining that postmodernist, marginal science-fiction

films were able to gain popularity due, in part, to "a general MTV-induced willingness to embrace nonlinearity, visual decentering and dispersal, and generic pastiche" (253). Such pastiche exhibits the depthlessness that Jameson identifies with postmodernism. *Night of the Comet* appropriates fragments from various other texts, disconnecting them from their original context and meaning. The film pieces them together to create a unique post-apocalyptic bricolage.

For Jameson, the breaking of the signifying chain and the disconnection of temporal signification between past and future result in cultural texts becoming "heaps of fragments" in the synchronic present. As Sobchack writes, "The 'heaps of fragments' that constitute the intense and spatialized present tense of postmodern culture, the exhilaration of heterogeneous collections and collage, and the sense that 'difference relates' . . . all constitute a euphoric and (according to Jameson) a 'hysterically sublime' encounter with materiality and surface" (292). *Night of the Comet*'s pastiche is one way in which the film offers such an encounter with materiality and surface. In addition to pastiche, intertextuality and allusion allow for play and collage with fragments of other texts. One intertextual reference is the song "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." In the movie theater at the beginning of the film, there is a poster for the 1932 film *Red Dust*, which is a humorous gag winking at the premise that exposure to the comet turns people into red dust. While at the radio station, Sam stops the recorded message and plays disc jockey herself. While addressing any "teenage comet zombies" who may be listening, she picks through a stack of LP albums and tosses the *Valley Girl* soundtrack over her shoulder. Although subtle, it is simultaneously a reference to the producers' previous film, a reference to *Night of the Comet*'s premise—valley girls at the end of the world—and, within the narrative of the film, a statement that popular culture is now worthless. The play with intertextual references contributes to the

comedy and lightheartedness of the film, but it is also an example of the post-apocalyptic representation of the postmodern view that artifacts from the old world have become decentered fragments, contributing to an "encounter with materiality and surface" in the post-apocalyptic world.

In addition to self-reflexivity, pastiche, and intertextuality, *Night of the Comet* also reflects the postmodern shift from temporal logic to spatial logic. As evidenced in *The Road*, *The Purple Cloud*, *The Quiet Earth*, and other texts, time tends to no longer structure the post-apocalyptic world, in which only the present has any sense of meaning. Like the postmodern, it is more concerned with spaces. *Night of the Comet* reflects this shift in its narrative structure. Certainly, the film has not abandoned temporal sequence entirely, but it is largely structured as several discrete events, each occurring in a different space with only minimal temporal relation. Sobchack writes about the spatial logic of postmodern marginal science-fiction films, "The films' vision and ours tend to become fascinated, transfixed, and absorbed by the *present* space . . . They are 'picaresque' tales—episodic, fragmented, serial rather than sequential, and little concerned with the temporal consequences of 'cause and effect'" (279). *Night of the Comet* tends to follow this episodic, spatial logic rather than sequential, temporal logic in its series of spaces: the movie theater, Reggie and Sam's house, the empty city streets, the radio station, the shopping mall, and the scientists' research facility. Each episode tends to focus on what is happening at that time generally independent of preceding and subsequent events, and movement from one space to the next is seldom the result of cause-and-effect relationships. This structure allows for filling scenes with images and events to satisfy the fascination with the space rather than essentializing the scenes to push the plot forward. The memorable scene of Sam, dressed in a bright cheerleader costume, standing in the middle of an empty Los Angeles street shooting a car

full of holes with a MAC-10 machine gun is an image which transfixes us in the moment even though it has no temporal consequence on the plot. Similarly, the other episodes tend to focus on the space in which they occur rather than their impact on the sequence of events, which tends to lead to the excessive quality of the film—the exaggeration fills these spaces with images and events. However, the film's spatially oriented structure and its excess is a means of subverting plot, sequence, and consequence (280). This subversion is yet another way in which the postmodern and the post-apocalyptic break from apocalyptic, cultural narratives. Whereas the traditional, temporally oriented structures imbue the present with meaning by situating coherently between the past and the future, postmodern and post-apocalyptic texts, in breaking from that framework, emphasize the present, synchronic moment.

Although the two are quite different from one another, *The Road* and *Night of the Comet* both employ postmodern elements toward the same end: to envision a post-apocalyptic world and create a post-apocalyptic text that breaks from traditional, meaning-making structures. Disconnecting the post-apocalyptic world—and the artifacts which remain in it—from the past and the future positions it in a synchronic space in which ultimate meaning is non-existent, illusory, or plural. Through postmodern strategies such as self-reflexivity, fragmentation, pastiche, intertextuality, ambiguity, and problematic closure, post-apocalyptic texts invite readers and viewers to actively engage with the text. The post-apocalyptic genre presents audiences with images of their known world that possess artifacts, landmarks, and iconography that are familiar but recontextualize them such that they are disconnected from their real-world referents. Thus, the experience with post-apocalyptic texts is one of simultaneous recognition and misrecognition, identification and resistance, and conflict between diegetic (lack of) meaning and real-world meaning. The continued proliferation of the genre indicates that the cultural

anxieties and uncertainties upon which they draw continue to concern us and that these imagined

futures continue to compel us.

CHAPTER 5: The Carnivalesque and the Post-apocalyptic World as the Carnival Square

Throughout this study, an important defining attribute of the post-apocalyptic genre is its divergence from the traditional apocalyptic structure which informs grand cultural narratives that shape cultural expectations about the progress of history and humankind. Whereas the apocalyptic framework helps to assuage anxieties about present uncertainties by placing the present within a larger context of past and future, the post-apocalyptic imagination has little faith in such a structure, focusing instead on a synchronic world disconnected from the past and uncertain about the inevitability of a future. This is related to postmodernism's break from universal narratives, and the previous chapter discusses how the post-apocalyptic genre echoes certain postmodernist ideas such as the decentering of meaning, the breakdown of the relationships between signifiers and referents, and the need for audiences to actively engage with texts. The synchronic, post-apocalyptic world is also characterized by another attribute of the post-apocalyptic genre which invites audience engagement: the carnivalesque.

The concept of the carnivalesque originated with Mikhail Bakhtin, primarily in three major works—*The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), and *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Bakhtin's study of Rabelais most fully elaborates his concepts of carnival and the carnivalesque as an extension of medieval festive life into popular culture (Janack 200; Dentith 63). The work of Bakhtin found popularity in Western thought beginning in the 1960s and influenced a variety of fields—including literary, cultural, and rhetorical criticism—as many have used his ideas as a means to analyze the critical and rhetorical

dimensions of a myriad of texts (Achter 278-9). As an analytical tool, the carnivalesque identifies how cultural products incorporate aspects of medieval carnival in order to comment on and/or dialogue with dominant cultural practices and hegemonic forces.

Bakhtin's concept of carnival draws upon historical festive practices during which rulers would allow their subjects a limited period of time in which they had freedom to revel without social restrictions imposed by normative morality (Bakhtin, *Problems* 122-3). Festivals such as Mardi Gras continue the heritage of carnival and continue to practice a form of its liberated revelry. Carnival was a time when the masses were allowed temporarily to usurp power in comedic, parodic ways. The traditional social hierarchies were suspended, conventions of language were subverted/played with, and "grotesque realism" was enacted. The inversion of hierarchy witnessed the fool becoming king. During carnival, all that was high, sacred, and noble was brought down to earth and mingled with the base and profane. Vertical hierarchy was made horizontal as all individuals were treated equally regardless of social standing; social classes were subverted in the carnival square. The roles of actor/audience and ruler/subject were suspended. Everyone participated equally. Bakhtin saw it as a performance not just for the people but by the people. Further, he saw it less as a "performance" and more as something people "lived." When carnival was over, order was restored, everyone went back to life as usual, and the conventional social hierarchy was reestablished.

Bakhtin argues that carnival can influence works of popular culture, extending beyond simply being a few days of festivity. The carnivalesque uses tropes from the historical periods of carnival and extends them into cultural products such as literature and art. In his overview of Bakhtin's carnival, Simon Dentith explains that "carnivalized writing . . . has taken the carnival spirit into itself and thus reproduces, within its own structures and by its own practice, the

characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper" (63). The "carnival

spirit" reproduced by carnivalesque popular culture offers social commentary on class hierarchy

by celebrating, in particular, the corporeal aspects of human existence which are shared

universally such as the sexual, the digestive, and the excretory. Further, the playful and parodic

subversion of hierarchy allows for "the symbolic destruction of authority and official culture,"

and Bakhtin "describes carnival as a liberating escape from official institutions" (Janack 200).

This escape was reflected, accentuated, and exaggerated in performative practices that mocked

and subverted acceptable (as prescribed and proscribed by the state and the church) behavior,

language, and subject matter.

Bakhtin identifies three main categories of carnivalesque behavior: "ritual spectacles,"

"comic verbal compositions," and "various genres of billingsgate" (*Rabelais* 5). The ritual

spectacles to which he refers are carnival pageants and comic shows while the comic verbal

compositions, both oral and written, include "inversions, parodies, profanations, and comic

crownings and uncrownings" in Latin as well as the vernacular, and billingsgate is language such

as profanity, "curses, oaths, [and] popular blazons" (Janack 201; Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 5). The

course, ribald language and comic verbal compositions of carnival were employed to parody

religious rites and political ceremony through carnival rituals such as the crowning of the fool as

king of the carnival world. By crowning the fool as king, carnival established itself as a "second

world" with its own social order which inverted that of the first, noncarnival world. Significantly

in this second world, clowns and fools, who held marginal positions in daily life, were

symbolically exalted to positions of power. Bakhtin explains, "Clowns and fools . . . were the

constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season .

. . As such they represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time.

They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were . . . Thus carnival is the people's second life, . . . a festive life" (*Rabelais* 8). This second world had its own rules, language, and religion. In contrast to the first world, it was not ordered according to a vertical hierarchy but rather sought to bring that which was exalted in everyday life down to a common level.

In this second world, the ritual spectacles reverse or suspend hierarchies and play with language conventions, and they also have an interest in degrading privileged subjects while also publicly discussing taboo subjects. Paul Achter writes, "One way in which the 'first world' is suspended in the 'second world' of carnival, for example, is by setting aside the usual etiquette surrounding discussions of sex and defecation. In carnival culture, bodies and their orifices are emphasized and amplified through the employment of grotesque imagery and language" (279). Such grotesquerie also provides a means for the degradation that Bakhtin describes as "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in the indissoluble unity" (*Rabelais* 19-20). Achter connects these notions of degradation and grotesque realism: "By degrading a privileged subject, grotesque realism brings it 'down to earth,' turning the subject into flesh . . . and uniting all people, no matter their power and privilege, as bodies with inescapable human functions" (279). Grotesque realism has a fascination with the human body, particularly the baseness of the body and its functions. Bakhtin particularly notes the carnivalesque interest in the ways the body transgresses itself. "The body," he writes, "discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation" (*Rabelais* 26). These acts of transgression emphasize the parts of the body that interact with the world—"the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it,

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or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on .

. . the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (26). The

carnivalesque accentuates these body parts and the "gross" bodily functions by which they

transgress their own bounds—functions that are universal to all humankind. As the famous

children's book teaches, "Everyone poops" (Gomi 27). By focusing on such universal functions,

carnival subverts class distinction, making vertical hierarchy horizontal.

The carnivalesque emphasis on universal functions of the human body ("in all its messy

glory," as Janack writes) contributes to the commingling of privileged and taboo subjects as

carnival breaks from and protests against accepted, authoritative culture. "Emphasis on the

corporeal, often in excessive and exaggerated forms and functions, symbolizes defiance of the

dominant culture. Carnival celebrates those bodily activities that must remain hidden in official

culture" (Janack 202). Grotesque realism, universal corporeality, and bodily transgression are

fundamental themes of the interrelated series that Bakhtin identifies in the work of Rabelais

which he reduces to seven basic groups: "(1) series of the human body in its anatomical and

physiological aspects; (2) human clothing series; (3) food series; (4) drink and drunkenness

series; (5) sexual series (copulation); (6) death series; (7) defecation series" (*Dialogic* 170).

These series offer outlets for the major forms of carnivalesque behavior mentioned above:

grotesque realism, comic verbal compositions, and genres of billingsgate.

Throughout these themes, series, and behaviors of carnival run dual modes of

participation: on one level, the revelers enjoy freedom from the strictures of social norms, and on

another level, carnival serves as a means to question those institutionalized norms. As Janack

writes, "Anti-institutionalism is at the essence of carnival. It is a form of criticism aimed at the

existing dominant system" (200). Thus, more than merely indulging in anarchy, profanity, and

grotesquerie, carnival is a form of protest against and criticism of dominant sociopolitical systems. For Bakhtin, incorporating carnivalesque tropes and political criticism into popular culture allowed texts to engage in dialogic discourse with the dominant system—juxtaposing the freedom and equality of a carnivalesque second world with the oppression and inequality experienced by lower classes in their first world. His study of Rabelais "articulates an aesthetic which celebrates the anarchic, body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture, and seeks to mobilise them against the humourless seriousness of official culture" (Dentith 64). Like the dual modes of carnival, the carnivalesque aesthetic functions on at least two levels: the entertainment provided by depictions of deviation from social norms and the dialogic criticism of the institutionalized status quo.

Bakhtin's articulation of the carnivalesque aesthetic has been used in many ways to analyze a variety of texts. Although Rabelais is considered to be Bakhtin's supreme example of this aesthetic, he also finds it present in the works of Cervantes and Shakespeare (Dentith 64). Building on the work of Bakhtin, studies have examined the carnivalesque in a wide range of media. It has been used to analyze political rhetoric, ranging from Jesse "The Body" Ventura's gubernatorial campaign to the satirical news and commentary of *The Onion*, *The Daily Show* (1996-present), and *The Colbert Report* (2005-2015). It has also been utilized as the theoretical approach for studying numerous film texts, including *Super Size Me* (2004), with its interest in the grotesque body; *The Big Lebowski* (1998), arguing that the Dude is a fool-king; and British comedies of the 1950s, which displayed disagreement with the dominant structures of propriety. In his *Keywords in Subversive Film/Media Aesthetics*, Robert Stam describes the presence of the carnivalesque in media texts including those that overtly depict carnival like Pier Paolo Pasolini's "Trilogy of Life"—*The Decameron* (1971), *Canterbury Tales* (1972), and *The*

Arabian Nights (1974)—as well as those which employ the carnivalesque to serve a variety of functions—he offers as examples comedies which employ transvestitism, like *Tootsie* (1982) and *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993); texts which parody the sacred, such as *The Life of Brian* (1979); and feminist critiques of male hegemony, including *The Vagina Monologues*. The variety of texts that have been examined through the lens of the carnivalesque highlights an interest in making and consuming media which depicts socially transgressive behavior, often with underlying implications of dissatisfaction and opposition in regard to dominant sociopolitical norms.

The prolific use of the carnivalesque as an analytical tool in critical, cultural, and rhetorical studies demonstrates its versatility and applicability in a varied media landscape. However, there are criticisms of its widespread use, particularly when employing the aesthetic beyond its limitations. The chief argument for limiting the power of carnival to elicit change is the role that many carnival festivities played in reaffirming and reinforcing hierarchical norms (Dentith 72). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, although sympathetic to Bakhtin, find his account of the populist potential of the carnivalesque to be excessively positive, considering that "carnival sometimes reinforces social hierarchy and demonizes weaker members of society" (Dentith 73; Singer 138). In the words of Mikita Hoy, "it would be unwise to forget that the potential of carnival for radical rebellion is in the end politically limited, since it is, after all, licensed misrule, a contained and officially sanctioned rebellion, after which everybody gets back to work" (291). In their own studies, Umberto Eco and Tom Sobchack also "describe the carnivalesque critique as licensed by the powerful, ubiquitous in mass mediated culture, and thus innocuous" (Singer 138). Thus, because carnival is limited in duration and performed under the approval and control of the dominant authority, it is considered by some to be ultimately harmless, lacking real power to enact change.

However, despite its limitations, the carnivalesque aesthetic continues to be regarded as a useful analytical tool, especially as it is adapted to respond to shifting sociopolitical circumstances. Dentith suggests that the carnivalesque does not have "one univocal social or political meaning, but that it provides a malleable space, in which activities and symbols can be inflected in different directions" (73). Although Sobchack is among those mentioned above who acknowledge the limitations of carnival, he also posits that its political dimension in popular culture is largely dependent on the individual who engages with carnivalesque texts. Drawing upon Robert Stam's work on the subject, he writes that Stam "takes the position that the carnivalesque is inherently neither radical nor conservative. Individuals' responses depend on how the viewer dialogues with the material. Thus it is up to the respondent of a text to make a commitment to engagement with the text in an effort to fully understand its implications and perhaps act on them in some way" (T. Sobchack 184). The utilization of the carnivalesque aesthetic in numerous, varied texts and in studies across many disciplines supports the idea that, regardless of the limitations of a narrow concept of carnival, there is merit in the broader understanding and application of the carnivalesque. Stam has recently written, "Bakhtin's notion of the *carnivalesque* opens up a rich repertoire of concepts and strategies for analyzing and even creating art" (69). It is in this vein of accepting the "rich repertoire of concepts and strategies" of the carnivalesque and its multivocal, multidirectional malleability and applicability that this chapter explores the presence and function of the carnivalesque in the post-apocalyptic genre.

As mentioned above, although carnivalesque texts may employ the aesthetic to differing degrees, there are generally at least two modes in which works of popular culture mobilize the carnivalesque: first, the content and formal elements of the text and second, the active audience engagement which it encourages. These two modes resonate generally with the outer and inner

forms of the post-apocalyptic genre. At the first level of engagement, carnivalesque texts depict various features of the aesthetic such as grotesque realism—including emphasis on the body and its areas of transgressive behavior like eating and drinking, defecation and urination, clothing and language, and sex and death—as well as the crude language of billingsgate and comic, ironic, and subversive parodies and profanations of social rituals, hierarchies, and norms. Similarly, the outer form of the post-apocalyptic genre includes elements of narrative, style, setting, characterization, costuming, and iconography which construct the post-apocalyptic world, a second world which has diverged from our present order. Then, at the second level of engagement, carnivalesque texts invite the participation of audiences to draw connections and comparisons between the socially equal, hierarchically horizontal carnivalesque world depicted (the second world) and the inequality of their real world (the first world). For Bakhtin, this participation would ideally result in a dialogic process that would elicit sociopolitical change. The inner form of the post-apocalyptic genre resides in the engagement of readers and viewers. As post-apocalyptic texts break from traditional, apocalyptic narratives, they invite complex audience engagement, a kind of schizophrenic engagement—simultaneous recognition and misrecognition, identification and distanciation—as they depict the remnants of the present world disconnected from their present meanings. Like the carnivalesque, many post-apocalyptic texts invite further sociopolitical engagement as depictions of a synchronic, post-apocalyptic future dissociated from our present existence warn against the potential consequences of unchecked nuclear proliferation, climate change, and social inequality.

The outer form of the post-apocalyptic genre mobilizes the carnivalesque aesthetic in significant ways to create worlds which resemble our present world although unmoored from meaningful connections to the past (our present) and the future (the hoped-for progress of

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apocalypticism). Such a synchronic existence resonates with the notion that carnival is "a time

outside time" (Dentith 73). Although the post-apocalyptic worlds imagined by different texts

have their own unique characteristics, they tend generally to reflect the categories and series of

carnivalesque behavior. However, in contrast to the indulgent fun and frivolous excess of

carnival, post-apocalyptic worlds are often sparse, survivalist, and very serious in nature. Thus,

the post-apocalyptic genre adapts carnivalesque behavior to a range of scenarios, sometimes

frivolous (e.g., *Night of the Comet* and the television series *The Last Man on Earth*), at other

times serious (e.g., *Threads* and *The Road*), and at times both (e.g., "A Boy and His Dog,"

Beneath the Planet of the Apes, and *The Road Warrior*).

Whether comedic or dramatic, grotesque realism is a prevalent feature of the post-

apocalyptic genre. Grotesque realism emphasizes the transgressive acts of the human body and

the body's lower stratum where fluids enter and leave, and this grotesquerie is a key aspect of the

carnivalesque series identified by Bakhtin. The post-apocalyptic genre has such a fascination

with the grotesque body and the subjects of these several series: death, food, defecation, sex, and

clothing. By nature of the setting, death is a constant presence in the post-apocalyptic world.

Death is frequently depicted, even graphically, and those who survive struggle to reconcile their

continued existence amidst widespread (and frequently arbitrary) death. Often, survival is the

main objective of existence, even though defeating death has little meaning in this world where

there seems to be no reason to go on living. Survival leads characters to redefine their morality in

regard to taking life when another's death is necessary for oneself to live. The theme of death is

particularly apparent in *The Walking Dead*, which features zombies (reanimated corpses), killing

as a means of survival, and the deaths of major characters. In one issue of the comic book series,

Rick even calls the survivors "the walking dead" because death is always a looming threat.

Related to the constant struggle for survival, food and drink also tend to be recurring features of the post-apocalyptic genre, sometimes as an absent presence. Like carnival, food is an important element in the post-apocalyptic world. As a biological need, food is a means of pulling down social hierarchy and putting all survivors on the same level. Food is highly valued in a world devoid of supermarkets and other readily accessible food supplies, and the genre often pushes the theme of food (and eating) to carnivalesque extremes. Threats of starvation and the exhaustion of finite stores of food imbue the consumption of food with the weight of a salvific act, and meager meals are transformed into indulgent feasts. Further, desperation drives some to the transgressive act of cannibalism, like in *The Road* and *The Walking Dead*. A particularly grotesque example is *Threads* (1984) in which a starving woman is driven by extreme hunger to eat her stillborn baby. Related to food, the drink series also recurs in the post-apocalyptic genre but usually without as much emphasis. In settings in which survival is the order of the day, the scarcity of clean water tends to be the focus which occasionally produces moments of especial grotesquerie—for example, when the hero in *Waterworld* (1995) drinks the filtered byproduct of his own urine. On the other extreme, the drink series is also manifest in particularly carnivalesque excess on the television program *The Last Man on Earth* (created by Will Forte), which features a group of survivors who are all fools. In addition to the main character of Phil (Tandy) Miller who lies in and drinks from a giant margarita that fills a kiddie pool, the character Gail is constantly imbibing wine, and her idea of scavenging for food is clearing out the inventory of a liquor store. In the carnivalesque spirit, there is no moderation of food or drink in the post-apocalyptic world—the genre pushes them to the extremes.

With the end of the world comes an end of civilized decorum. Among the private bodily transgressions that the post-apocalyptic genre makes public are excretory functions, including

urination (like *Waterworld*) but especially defecation. The scatological interest of carnival

provided a means to reinforce the common experience of being human. Post-apocalyptic texts

project the collapse of civilization, and in doing so, many mobilize the carnivalesque to highlight

the scatological nature of human corporeality, a universal reality that must be confronted in the

absence of orderly, institutionalized waste management. In *Blindness* (novel, 1995; film, 2008),

as society crumbles, so does the ability to manage waste in the quarantine facility, and soon the

quarantined are living in their own filth. In contrast to this serious treatment, Will Forte's *The*

Last Man on Earth embraces the carnivalesque for comedic purposes. The show regularly

employs jokes with scatological themes, and Phil's go-to expletive is "Oh, farts." Yet one of the

most striking carnivalesque moments from the show is Phil cutting a hole in a diving board and

using a swimming pool as a giant toilet. In our civilized society, we keep our waste hidden and

our excretory functions private, but in carnivalesque fashion, the post-apocalyptic genre brings

the scatological into the open, confronting a common human experience and reflecting the break

from order and propriety.

The collapse of civilization in the post-apocalyptic world also tends to elicit

carnivalesque behavior of a sexual variety. Successful sexual union, often the ultimate goal of

many traditional narratives, is apocalyptic in nature, giving rise to the next generation. Although

coupling occurs in the post-apocalyptic genre, the reproductive, beneficent notion of sex is often

problematized in scenarios with little evidence that there will be renewal. Some texts,

particularly those concerned with nuclear effects, feature the threat of infertility, and others

include characters who are unwilling to bring children into such a world. Additionally, the post-

apocalyptic divergence from our present, socially acceptable sexual morality is often depicted

through deviant sexual behavior. The genre is replete with threats from roving gangs and bandits

that have formed in response to dissolution of legal authority. One threat that these bandits commonly pose is sexual assault, as is evidenced in *Panic in Year Zero* (1962). In the otherwise unremarkable *Warriors of the Wasteland* (1983), one of the many *Mad Max* ripoffs, the hero himself is captured and raped by the villain. The loss of firm moral boundaries also gives rise to sexual promiscuity and polygamy in the genre. The wasteland warriors of novel series such as *Deathlands* tend to be particularly virile and have sexual relations with different partners in each novel. Negan, a significant villain in *The Walking Dead*, has established himself as the head of a community and uses his power to claim multiple women (some other men's wives) as his own "wives." This is another point of contention between Negan and Rick, who still regards it as unacceptable behavior. Sexual deviance also manifests itself, at times, through clothing. The film adaptation of *The Quiet Earth* (1985) depicts Hobson wearing women's clothing as his solitary existence takes its toll on his mental stability, and the Humungus and his gang in *The Road Warrior* (1981) are clad in the chains and leather of S&M attire. By incorporating carnivalesque transgressions related to sexual behavior and clothing, the post-apocalyptic genre depicts a world that imagines not only the collapse of what we deem to be civilized society but also the loss of what we perceive to be appropriate, moral behavior, allowing for dialogic engagement regarding social norms and innate human sexuality.

In addition to depictions of grotesque realism, the post-apocalyptic genre mobilizes the carnivalesque through language and subversion of social rituals and hierarchies. Bakhtin, in his articulation of the carnivalesque, emphasizes the crude and profane nature of the language of billingsgate, and such language appears in some post-apocalyptic texts such as *The Walking Dead* (the comic regularly uses strong language and expletives whereas the television program tends to lessen the strength of the language but does occasionally incorporate stronger

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expletives). However, the language of billingsgate tends not to be as pervasive in the genre as depictions of grotesque realism. Yet, the subversion of language—an alteration or distortion of our present use of language—is a common feature. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, the language of *The Road* is sparse and minimalist, in dialogue as well as narration, with short paragraphs and minimal punctuation. The loss or corruption of language is frequently a feature of the post-apocalyptic world—for example, the children in *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) whose language has become ineloquent and primitive having "gone through a bath of corrupt usage" (London 22), the Feral Kid in *The Road Warrior* who only communicates through grunts, and the language inversion in *Planet of the Apes* (1968) in which humans have lost the ability to speak and apes have gained it. At times, language (d)evolves, incorporating new words or slang terms into the corrupted vocabulary, such as the children calling their grandfather "Granser" in *The Scarlet Plague* (London 17) and roving groups of scavengers receiving the moniker "roverpaks" in "A Boy and His Dog" (Ellison 952).

There is recurring interest in subverting other social aspects in addition to language, including hierarchy (and the source of power) and religion. Class distinction and social hierarchy in the post-apocalyptic world are generally different from our present social structures in a number of ways. One which has been discussed previously is the interest in creating a horizontal hierarchy in which cataclysm and the collapse of civilization has put everyone on equal footing. As survivors vie for resources, the survivors who distinguish themselves not only have physical survival skills but tend to be willing to renegotiate moral convictions. Thus, one source of power is the willingness to abandon the social norms—especially in regard to killing—of our present world. This is a theme running throughout *The Walking Dead*, which continually explores the renegotiation of morality. In many texts, communities and tribes form, but they are based on

unique power structures. The source of power in *The Road Warrior* is fuel, and conflict arises between rival tribes for control of an oil refinery. The inverted hierarchy of *Planet of the Apes*, in which primates rule over humans, is signaled by which species has the ability of speech. *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* introduces a mutant race of humans who can speak as well as communicate telepathically. However, the language of these humans is heightened in imitation of priestly affectation and religious ritual, and further embracing the carnivalesque, their ritual is worshiping an undetonated nuclear warhead, the Bomb Almighty. Venerating the relics of the past is also at the center of extreme religious devotion in *A Canticle for Liebowitz*. Belief in God as an organizing, meaning-making social structure has largely been abandoned in post-apocalyptic texts, but when religion is present it tends to be represented by fanaticism—as in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* and *A Canticle for Liebowitz*, as mentioned, but also in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* and the television program *Survivors* (1975-77) in which religious fanatics and their followers threaten the survival of the protagonists. The carnivalesque quality of language, social hierarchy, and religion in the post-apocalyptic genre allows texts to present distorted and subverted images of our present society, offering enjoyment of vicarious nonconformity while also calling into question the validity of social norms and cultural narratives.

Carnivalesque behavior, grotesque realism, and a second world which skews social conventions and hierarchies are captured in the outer form of the post-apocalyptic genre—including the setting, characters, costuming, iconography, and themes. The inner form of the genre—the audience engagement with the texts—also mobilizes the carnivalesque in interesting ways. Bakhtin writes about the nature of carnival when it is perceived from a distance, "The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical

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positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life, and thus from the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate" (*Problems* 123). The post-apocalyptic world certainly evokes this eccentricity. In doing so, it invites readers and viewers to actively engage with a carnivalesque permutation of their own world.

As with other carnivalesque texts, engaging with post-apocalyptic texts may result in a variety of individual responses. Given the limitations of carnival, the post-apocalyptic may simply function as a brief, entertaining escape for audiences who return to everyday life willing to accept the status quo. However, mobilizing the carnivalesque may help provide a way for readers and viewers to cope with tragedy. In his essay about *The Onion*, Achter argues that the satirical news source helped assuage Americans' grief following the 9/11 attacks by making laughter acceptable again in a tragic, unfunny time through its carnivalesque depictions not of the attacks themselves but of the media's coverage of the attacks and their aftermath. Stam writes that the carnivalesque satire of *Dr. Strangelove* broke through a collective mental block created by the Cold War threat of mutually assured destruction. "At the time, the subject of nuclear warfare seemed somehow at once real and unreal, impossible and inevitable, leading to a general anaesthetization in the face of a horror that had become anodyne" (87). However, by employing dark comedy and correlating apocalypse with a preoccupation with sex, Kubrick's film "gives artistic shape to a shared nightmare, telling us that we are not alone in being afraid, or in thinking that our 'leaders' are crazy. At the same time, the film conjures away existential panic by turning powerful villains into objects of derision" (89). Stam reminds us that the amelioration of cultural anxieties had always been a dimension of carnival. "Bakhtin's Carnival, we recall, took place against the backdrop of real plague and eschatological anxiety, forming a symbolic victory over cosmic terror and pious paranoia" (89). Since post-apocalyptic texts tend to proliferate during

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periods of heightened cultural anxiety concerning self-annihilation, the carnivalesque aspect of the genre may be a means by which we enact victory over such collective terrors. The post-apocalyptic genre may additionally inspire political action. Visions of the end and of an eccentric, synchronic existence following the collapse of society can be perceived as indictments against nuclear proliferation, the atrocities of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, and unchecked climate change as well as warnings against continuing behaviors and decisions that threaten to be self-destructive. Although Bakhtin argues for a political dimension of the carnivalesque, such an outcome is dependent upon a reader's or viewer's individual response. This caveat applies to the post-apocalyptic genre, which may elicit various responses as audience members engage differently with texts.

This variability of response may limit the mobilization of the full carnivalesque aesthetic in the post-apocalyptic genre. Additional limitations include the comedic and utopian aspects of carnival. In his articulation of the carnivalesque, Bakhtin identifies parody and comedy as essential aspects of the aesthetic. Further, he sees the freedom and abundance granted by carnival to be symbolic or prototypical of a utopian society (*Rabelais* 9). However, additional articulations, such as Stam's, emphasize the subversive and grotesque dimensions of the carnivalesque, elements which resonate significantly with the post-apocalyptic imagination. Although post-apocalyptic comedies have been made, many texts are certainly serious, nihilistic, and sparse, yet a dominant feature of the genre generally is its depiction of an imagined future which has necessarily become focused on corporeal and grotesque aspects of survival and in which elevated, privileged notions of hierarchy, power, decorum, and morality have fallen. These carnivalesque themes recur throughout the genre, and the next section of this chapter

specifically examines how the carnivalesque aesthetic has been mobilized in Harlan Ellison's 1969 novella "A Boy and His Dog" and in George Miller's 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Case Study: "A Boy and His Dog"

Harlan Ellison's Nebula Award-winning novella, "A Boy and His Dog," published in 1969, is among his best-known stories, its popularity aided by a 1975 film adaptation directed by L.Q. Jones, that, although not commercially successful upon release, has gained a cult following. The story is set in 2024 A.D., years after World War III turned the world into a nuclear-devastated wasteland. The human inhabitants of the wasteland are predominantly male, and they scour the barren land in search of food and women, both of which are scarce in this world. The competition between gangs, called roverpaks, and solos, those surviving on their own, is fierce and violent. Roverpaks and solos, alike, use dogs to help them stiff out women and dangerous threats. Prior to the "Third War," cross-breeding and experimentation had produced "skirmisher dogs": "Telepathic over short distances, easily trained, able to track gasoline or troops or poison gas or radiation when linked with their human controllers, they had become the shock commandos of a new kind of war. The selective traits had bred true" (Ellison 955). However, dogs have also become incapable of acquiring their own food, so dogs and humans have become interdependent. In addition to this violent existence in the wasteland above ground, middle-class communities have built cities, called downunders, below ground. These downunders are constructed to replicate cities of the bygone, pre-World War I era, and their societies follow a strict morality, creating a false sense of peace in imitation of their halcyon perception of that prewar time.

The main characters in the story are Vic and Blood, "a boy and his dog," dependent on

one another. As the story opens, Vic and Blood are an established pair. Vic finds food for Blood, and Blood helps Vic find women with whom he can have sex, warns him of nearby roverpaks, and teaches him history, math, and other subjects. One of the regular pastimes in this world is watching old movies, and while attending a triple feature (one of which is a pornographic, "beaver flick"), Blood smells a woman. They track the woman, Quilla June, to a YMCA and defend themselves against a roverpak who also want her, and Blood gets injured in the process. While Quilla June is asleep, Vic forces himself on her, but waking up, despite being raped, she indicates her willingness to repeatedly have sex with him. Vic recognizes that he feels differently about her than he has other women, and she suggests that it is love. She runs away, baiting Vic to follow her to the downunder of Topeka, where the community's leaders want him to impregnate their women because the men have become impotent. Although Vic is initially delighted by the prospect of stud service, the stifling authoritarianism and underground enclosure of Topeka eventually become too claustrophobic, so he escapes, taking Quilla June with him. When they return to the surface, Vic finds Blood in bad shape, still injured and also starving since he is unable to acquire his own food. With Blood in desperate need and no food readily available, Vic, moved by his love for Blood, kills and cooks Quilla June. After eating, they continue their wandering in wasteland. Vic narrates, "It took a long time before I stopped hearing her calling in my head. Asking me, asking me: *do you know what love is?*" Finally answering this question to himself, he continues, "Sure I know," and then concludes the story, "A boy loves his dog" (983).

"A Boy and His Dog" employs the carnivalesque in several key ways, particularly in its satire, its interest in social inversion, and its grotesque realism. Ellison's story is darkly comedic in its treatment of nuclear holocaust, idyllic peace, and love. Discussing the satire of "A Boy and His Dog," Peter C. Hall and Richard D. Erlich remark that it "in many respects begins where *Dr*

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Strangelove ends. The orgasmic series of mushroom clouds that concludes Kubrick's film creates the world of Vic and Blood" (318). They continue, "Topeka and other downunders are clearly related to the mineshaft survival enclaves envisioned by the enthusiastic Dr Strangelove; and Vic's delight in Topeka's need for 'a new man' for stud service continues Kubrick's satiric undercutting of the stallion-like responses of General Turgidson and President Muffley to Strangelove's suggestion of 10-1 female-to-male ratio in the mineshaft population" (318). In addition to satirizing nuclear survival strategies, the story also takes satiric jabs at impotent authority figures and ridiculous notions of morality, reflecting the social unrest of the period in which it was written, a period marked by a significant countercultural movement, contentious race relations, and protests against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The satire of "A Boy and His Dog" evokes a carnivalesque upending of cultural idealization of the past and of romantic love.

Ellison's novella also mobilizes the carnivalesque by inverting social hierarchies. One inversion is seen in the relationship between Vic and Blood. Tales of boys and their dogs have a long tradition, especially for young audiences (e.g., stories featuring the character Lassie and the adventure stories of the boy Tintin and his dog Snowy, originally Milou in French publication). In a satiric, darkly comedic manner, "A Boy and His Dog" reinforces the loyalty between masters and their canine companions, but it also inverts that relationship in certain ways. As Peter Malekin writes, "The normal boy-dog relation is virtually stood on its head. Blood teaches and admonishes Vic, laughs at his lechery, and seeks out suitable objects for his sexual satisfaction, while Vic hunts for Blood's food" (23). Vic is led by his animalistic desire for sex while Blood is the intelligent one who reproves Vic for poor grammar and poor decisions. The tradition is further twisted when Vic chooses his love for Blood over romantically coupling with

Quilla June, an act which rejects the typical adolescent process of emotional maturation by more highly valuing the boy-dog relationship promulgated by children's literature.

The Topeka downunder also embodies a literal carnivalesque social inversion. Malekin continues, "The upside-down relationship [of Vic and Blood] leads via the beaver flick with its masturbating audience of solos, and the pursuit of Quilla June, to the full surface-versus-downunder contrast" (23). The physical and sexual violence that we presently cast as socially unacceptable behavior of the underworld or underbelly of society dominates life on the surface. The middle-class idealism of our present world has literally been moved underground and pushed to parodic extremes in politeness, sexual repression, and rejection of change. Vic describes Topeka:

> It was nice, real nice. They rocked in rockers on the front porches, they rakes their lawns, they hung around the gas station, they stuck pennies in gumball machines, they painted white stripes down the middle of the road, the sold newspapers on the corners, they listened to oompah bands on a shell in the park, they played hopscotch and pussy-in-the-corner, they polished fire engines, they sat on benches reading, they washed windows and pruned bushes, they tipped their hats to ladies, they collected milk bottles in wire carrying racks, they groomed horses and threw sticks for their dogs to retrieve, they dove in to the communal swimming pool, they chalked vegetable prices on a slate outside the grocery, they walked hand-in-hand. (Ellison 976-7)

This picture presents an idealized middle-class, small town; however, it is a "tin can" enclosed beneath the earth, not the social utopia of Gabriel Tarde's *Underground Man* (1905) but "a frightening mockery of River City (ca. 1910) from *The Music Man*" (Hall and Erlich 320). In this post-apocalyptic world, the Topeka downunder is a sinister simulacrum of ideal middle America.

Topeka is claustrophobic, repressive, and opposed to progress, which certainly offers cutting, satiric commentary on the ideal notion of middle America. After giving his description of the town, Vic remarks that "*they bored the ass offa me*" (Ellison 977; emphasis in original). The incongruity of life in Topeka with life in the post-apocalyptic world drives Vic back to the

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surface wasteland. Describing these two settings, Joe Patrouch writes, "The choice the story gives us is between the violence of the roverpaks on the surface and the artificial peace and quiet of downunder. Of course, the story is slanted in favor of Vic . . . and when he escapes middle America to become a murdering rapist once again, we cheer" (45). As Patrouch claims, the symbolic settings of "A Boy and His Dog" are not simply a vision of the future but are commenting on our present (45). As with other post-apocalyptic texts, it employs carnivalesque social inversion to criticize current sociopolitical norms and to encourage reconsideration of utopian and progressive ideologies.

Running throughout "A Boy and His Dog," its satire, and its social inversion is a carnivalesque grotesque realism with particular interest in sexual and food series. Sex is a major theme in the story and a defining attribute of the two worlds it depicts. The surface wasteland is populated primarily by men who are constantly seeking to gratify sexual urges by masturbating while watching pornography and raping the few remaining women "accompanied by mutual loathing" (Malekin 23). "Here sex is a male physical need, but sexual loyalty to women is virtually nonexistent." In contrast, "[s]ex in the underworld is ceasing because of male impotence" (23). The downunder community wants to imitate the ideal American society of peaceful tranquility, harmonious community, and nuclear families, but it is repressive and socially stagnant. "Physical violence and physical sexuality are unwanted and unrecognized" (23). Vic reasons that this is Quilla June's motivation to come to the surface to explore sexual things—pornographic films, masturbation, intercourse—that are denied in Topeka (Ellison 957). The focus on sexuality emphasizes how unfruitful both extremes are. Malekin argues, "Neither the surface world, surviving on the detritus of civilization, the canned foodstuffs left in ruined supermarkets, nor the middle-class downunder is ultimately viable. Both are sterile" (23).

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Sexuality is a means by which the carnivalesque is mobilized to critique both ultraconservative, repressive morality and noncommittal, loveless sexuality.

The interest in sexuality is manifested in the elements of impotence, stud service, rape, masturbation, and a mention of homosexuality even though Vic "can't cut the jockey-and-boxer scene" (954). There is also a hint at bestiality when Vic chooses his love for Blood over his desire for Quilla June. Aside from the possible sexual subtext in the relationship between Vic and Blood, the socially transgressive acts of killing and eating a human being brings together the carnivalesque themes of sex, death, and food. Cannibalism is a recurring carnivalesque element in the post-apocalyptic genre, and in "A Boy and His Dog" it is connected with the denial of heterosexual coupling. Vic's final comment that his understanding of love is realized in his relationship with Blood is darkly funny and satirical, and it concludes the story on a final carnivalesque note. The twist on the boy-dog relationship, the inversion of social class, and the emphasis on grotesque realism enact carnivalesque revelry while also inviting readers to critically consider the ultimate impotence of extremes in normative and transgressive behavior.

Case Study: *Mad Max: Fury Road*

Directed by George Miller and released in 2015, *Mad Max: Fury Road* is the fourth installment in Miller's *Mad Max* film series. Although its box office performance was only regarded as average, it was received with great acclaim by critics. It was nominated for multiple Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director, and although it failed to win those awards, it won several others, making it the first Oscar-winning *Mad Max* film. Despite the numerous reviews from critics, it has received, at the time of this writing, relatively little scholarly attention. The academic work in which it figures has largely focused on its ecofeminist

perspective (Clavin 58). Over the past couple of decades, several attempts were made to produce *Fury Road*, but it finally became a reality, significantly, at a time when interest in the post-apocalyptic genre has surged.

With thirty years having elapsed since the release of *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), the previous film in the franchise, and with a different actor playing Max Rockatansky than in the previous three films, *Fury Road* reintroduces the world of *Mad Max* through voiceover narration. "My name is Max. My world is fire and blood," he begins. Connecting this film to the others, he continues, "Once, I was a cop. A road warrior searching for a righteous cause." During this prologue, other voices are heard describing a series of events—including an oil war and then a water war—which have created the barren wasteland that Max traverses. "As the world fell," he says, "each of us, in our own way, was broken. It was hard to know who was more crazy: me or everyone else." He steps on a lizard and eats it. Then, voices call out to Max, voices of the dead who Max failed to save. "I am the one who runs from both the living and the dead. Hunted by scavengers. Haunted by those I could not protect. So I exist in this wasteland. A man reduced to a single instinct: survive." With this narration, he establishes that in this post-apocalyptic world society has collapsed; resources, specifically oil and water, are scarce; and survival is the order of the day.

Like the other films in the franchise, *Fury Road* is not a continuation of a previous storyline but another story about the mythic figure of Max whose path leads him into the lives of a community in need. After the voiceover prologue, Max, being chased by Immortan Joe's War Boys, flees in a V8 Interceptor (the same car model featured in the first two *Mad Max* films). He is captured and imprisoned at The Citadel, where Joe and followers reside. Meanwhile, Imperator Furiosa takes the War Rig to presumably procure gasoline from Gas Town and

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ammunition from the Bullet Farm. She is actually smuggling Immortan Joe's wives out of The Citadel, one of whom is pregnant. When Furiosa deviates from the prescribed course, Joe sends his War Boys after her, including Nux who takes Max with him as a human blood bag. After they catch up to her, Nux attempts to kill Furiosa, Max attempts to steal the War Rig, but both fail. Max is convinced to join her in her quest to take the wives to the "Green Place of Many Mothers," a place with water and plant life that she remembers from her childhood, and they leave Nux behind. While they are traveling through the barren wasteland, Immortan Joe leads a convoy of his followers in pursuit, and Nux rejoins them. Later, a biker gang joins the chase when they pass through a canyon controlled by the gang. During an attack on the War Rig, Nux is able to board, but as they are escaping the pregnant wife falls from the truck and is run over by Joe's car. These events and the comfort of one of the wives help Nux eventually come around to side with Furiosa. They find older women who are the "mothers" of what used to be the Green Place, but it has become desolate like the rest of the land. Max convinces her that there is nothing for them further out, so they decide to try to beat Joe and his convoy back to The Citadel and claim possession of it while it is undefended. Thus, the remainder of the film is a chase back to their starting point. During the return chase, Furiosa manages to kill Joe, and Nux intentionally wrecks the War Rig, sacrificing himself to allow Furiosa, Max, the wives, and the mothers to escape in Joe's car. Returning to The Citadel, Furiosa is welcomed and hailed, and she opens the water reservoir, allowing the oppressed to enjoy the resource that Joe had been hoarding for himself. Having helped Furiosa to dethrone Joe and protect the wives, Max disappears into the crowd and resumes his wandering in the wasteland.

Feminist and ecological themes certainly run through *Fury Road* with its emphasis on the strong, determined, powerful character of Furiosa and the value placed on water and greenery.

However, the cyclical nature of the plot—a chase that ultimately returns to The Citadel—also conveys a theme of changing the present world rather than escaping to a distant utopia where one imagines the grass to be greener (the film offers a literal rendering of this colloquialism). When the matriarchs of the society of Furiosa's childhood explain that the Green Place has itself become wasteland, Furiosa contemplates venturing further into the desert, but Max responds, "Hope is a mistake." However, unwilling to accept this statement, Furiosa redefines her notion of hope. Hope is not absent in this world, but expectations of ideal outcomes must be malleable. This notion of qualified hope is not unique to *Fury Road* but is a part of the larger *Mad Max* franchise. Contrasting *Beyond Thunderdome* with other post-apocalyptic films like *Testament* (1983), *The Day After* (1983), and *Threads* (1984) wherein "the true horror of the nuclear aftermath is recognized, but where the recognition leads only to despair," Hall and Erlich claim, "*Beyond Thunderdome* transcends (without repudiation) such recognition and despair through a re-creation of mythology, a transformation of the myth of regeneration into a self-consistent statement of a highly qualified hope within the Mad Max trilogy" (322). *Fury Road* extends this "self-consistent statement of a highly qualified hope," offering the possibility of redeeming the present world—The Citadel—in the face of losing utopia—the Green Place.

This redemption comes through usurping power from the oppressors in order to equitably distribute resources. The theme of redeeming the present, rather than looking elsewhere for salvation, resonates with the political dimension of carnival. Bakhtin's description of carnival sees it as a means to elicit change by confronting the present sociopolitical world with the performance of carnival, a constructed world free from the strictures of normative behavior imposed by the privileged, hegemonic ruling order. Carnival offered a qualified hope—not a hope that resided elsewhere but one that sought dialogue with the present status quo. *Fury Road*

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is replete with carnivalesque elements—death, mingling the sacred and the profane, grotesque realism, and a particular emphasis on the human body, especially the female body—locating redemption in the feminine.

With his opening lines, "My name is Max. My world is fire and blood," Max establishes that this setting is defined by desolation and death. Max is haunted by the dead he could not save. Continuing themes established in previous *Mad Max* films, survival—Max's "single instinct"— necessitates killing violent, crazed marauders who take life and who threaten to take, by force, the scant resources of the dead wasteland. The extreme willingness of the War Boys to embrace death with gusto and lack of caution is at times humorous, adding an additional carnivalesque element to the treatment of death. However, there is an aspect of death in the film that can be perceived as having a political dimension. Discussing one role of death in the film, Keith Clavin writes, "Death, specifically through self-sacrifice, serves as humanism's metonym. When these characters die, they are acknowledged as contributors to future human life" (62). The representation of death—one of carnival's series identified by Bakhtin—ranges from comedic to dramatic to redemptive. This post-apocalyptic world of which death is an essential element engages the carnivalesque to laugh at death in the unhesitating, ideology- and hallucinogen- induced self-sacrifice of the War Boys but also to question and criticize the aims and authority which that sacrifice serves, redirecting Nux's sacrificial eagerness into a meaningful death which aids Furiosa and her salvific agenda.

The authority that the War Boys serve is itself carnivalesque, and their master, Immortan Joe, is a grotesque, exaggerated figure. Joe exerts his power over his followers through a mixture of religious superstition and authoritarianism. He has created a society which blends together Scandinavian myths, militarism, and messianic redemption theology. He declares himself

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redeemer of his followers and promises his War Boys, the warrior class, that their deaths will grant them a place riding "the highways of Valhalla." Integrated into this militant theology is carnivalesque grotesque realism. Joe's body is a site of grotesquerie—his mouth is covered by a respirator mask emblazoned with a vicious grin and his body is covered with pustulant lesions. When gearing up for battle, the shirtless (further emphasis on the body) War Boys huff an invigorating and intoxicating hallucinogen. This silver metallic aerosol is sprayed into and around their mouths, a site of bodily transgression. In addition to this commingling of the sacred and the profane, the society which Joe has constructed (and the world of the *Mad Max* franchise generally) inseparably links together the human and the automotive/mechanical. "The War Boys . . . spit gasoline into the engines to propel them, sacrificing their bodies and lives in order to protect the machines. The machines become the 'organic' or 'natural' entities within this world, and the humans are a means to those ends" (Clavin 62). Exemplifying this union of the human, automotive, and mechanical is the symbol of Immortan Joe's domain: a skull imposed on a steering wheel or gear. Blending together the sacred and the profane, the human and the mechanical, and grotesque realism, *Fury Road* fashions Joe and his kingdom as a carnivalesque subversion of sociopolitical norms, offering a critique of religious, militaristic, and authoritarian rule. Further, this carnivalesque society serves as a foil against the redemptive feminine of Furiosa and the matriarchs of the Green Place.

In addition to its theme of the redemptive feminine, *Fury Road* also has a carnivalesque interest in the female body. As mentioned above, the inciting incident in the story is the discovery that Furiosa has smuggled Immortan Joe's wives out of The Citadel. The wives are one of two groups of women that are kept separate from the rest of the population. "Joe's wives, reserved for his sexual pleasure, portray many stereotypical characteristics of mainstream,

Western female beauty" (Clavin 58). These young, beautiful women are described as "breeding stock"—kept for sexual pleasure but also to provide the optimum genetic pool for producing offspring to maintain Joe's civilization. Within the society, the wives are considered Immortan Joe's property, a designation that Furiosa and the wives are rebelling against. The other isolated group of women is kept as a supply of milk, again emphasizing the female body. "The physical appearance of the milk-producing women tend towards an almost grotesquely maternal shape, with extremely large breasts and plump physiques" (58). The carnivalesque fascination with the human body is employed here with a specific focus on the female body. These two special groups of women "are the biologically fertile embodiment of the woman/mother" (58). Aside from the bodily functions common to all humans, the mother figure is especially and inevitably associated with grotesque realism as it is a site for uniquely maternal transgressive interactions between the inside of the body and the outer world: pregnancy/birth (which of course is also associated with sexual intercourse) and lactation. Since milk is another scarce resource, along with water and oil, the mother's milk serves as a delicacy for the society's elite, and The Citadel uses it to barter for gasoline and ammunition from Gas Town and the Bullet Farm. There is a certain perversity in commodifying mother's milk, which contributes to the carnivalesque quality of *Fury Road*. In opposition to Joe who keeps women to serve as manufacturers of babies and milk, Furiosa and the matriarchs represent independence and subversion of the dominant class. They seek to redeem The Citadel and distribute Joe's cache of water not only to the oppressed lower classes but also to Mother Earth, so the ground can be renewed and become productive and life-sustaining. Again, carnivalesque exaggeration provides an opportunity to engage with the text and transport its critique to present sociopolitical situations.

Mad Max: Fury Road mobilizes the carnivalesque to depict a post-apocalyptic world

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defined by death, governed by a grotesque dictator who has created his own society based on superstition, militarism, and oppression and who has commodified the maternal. The society Immortan Joe has constructed may be seen as the legacy of our reliance on fossil fuels, class hierarchy, and religious traditions whereas the society represented by Furiosa is one of equity, ecology, and humanism. Mobilizing the carnivalesque helps to heighten this dichotomy and engage dialogic discourse. Like the other *Mad Max* films, *Fury Road* certainly provides an entertaining experience full of visual spectacle, delightfully bizarre characters, and subversive fun. However, its utilization of the carnivalesque also allows for sociopolitical engagement as audiences find within the post-apocalyptic carnival square criticisms of dominant ideology and normativity, which can then inspire action beyond the text in the real world.

"A Boy and His Dog" and *Mad Max: Fury Road* represent how the post-apocalyptic genre employs the carnivalesque to create worlds in which social hierarchies are made horizontal, rules of acceptable and normative behavior are suspended, and grotesque realism is a dominant feature. Post-apocalyptic texts tend to describe an existence in which the human body and its transgressive behaviors—including death, food, defecation, and sex—are an inescapable part of everyday life. Rituals and institutions, especially religion and government, are subverted and critiqued. In a world separated from the norms and structures of our present society, base and carnal behaviors become standard. Witnessing this break from our so-called enlightened perspective provides an opportunity for vicarious indulgence and reveling; however, it also allows for deeper engagement with texts. The carnivalesque nature of the post-apocalyptic genre may offer a means by which audiences work through recent traumatic events, such as World War II, Vietnam War, and the 9/11 attacks—and significantly the genre seems to have proliferated after such crises. Additionally, as carnivalesque critiques of hegemonic forces may inspire

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political response in the audience's own real world, visions of post-apocalyptic futures may warn about potential threats if certain sociopolitical directions are not altered and may inspire action that will benefit our communities.

CHAPTER 6: Survivorship and Community in the Post-apocalyptic Genre

One of the key features of post-apocalyptic texts is their interest in telling stories about survivors. Certainly, there are other prominent features which are discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation—barren landscapes, the empty city, the road; cyclical, unresolved, or otherwise problematic endings; pastiche; grotesque realism; subversion of social hierarchy and norms. The post-apocalyptic world is imagined as a carnivalesque second world which has broken from the first world which we know, recognize, and experience. Post-apocalyptic thinking breaks from the traditional apocalyptic narratives which generally structure our cultural expectations about the progress of History, Nation, and Man toward a meaningful future. Such a rupture imagines a future, synchronic world disconnected from our present. These recurring elements are important in establishing an identifiable outer form of the genre while also reflecting a cultural post-apocalyptic imagination with which audiences may engage—the genre's inner form—and may produce a variety of responses from readers and viewers. The central figures in these stories which envision such a post-apocalyptic world are those who continue to live after the end of the world—the survivors. By thrusting survivors into a disconnected, synchronic existence, the genre explores interesting variations on the themes of survivorship and community.

An important aspect of the post-apocalyptic genre which has been touched upon in preceding chapters is the relationship of the audience to the world presented in these texts. These postmodern and carnivalesque worlds invite critical engagement by creating distance between the text and the audience through means such as disrupting the signifying chain of familiar

objects and subverting social norms and hegemonic forces. Integral to these representations are the characterizations of the survivors themselves, for the survivors are the access point for readers and viewers. Witnessing the characters' interactions with the post-apocalyptic world provides an opportunity to consider how we might respond in such a situation.

In addition to seeing the enactment of various what-ifs, we also see reflections of how we may already be responding to our own real-life traumatic events. Survivors in the post-apocalyptic world are often represented at various stages in the grief process—such as those of the Kübler-Ross model which identifies denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—as well as suffering from survivor's guilt and posttraumatic stress disorder. With its large cast of characters, the television program *The Walking Dead* has, at times during its run, depicted each of these. Such representations reflect the grief, loss, guilt, and suffering experienced by many individuals and permeating the collective cultural sensibility following catastrophes such as the Holocaust and the 9/11 attacks. As discussed in the history chapter, the post-apocalyptic genre tends to proliferate in periods after these kinds of events, which have a great traumatic impact culturally. James Berger makes the same connection, claiming, "Post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them" (19). Engaging with characters as they experience and work through their traumas allows readers and viewers to have their own feelings of grief, depression, and loss validated and then to work through those feelings as the characters do.

This ritual aspect of film and literature has been associated with Freud's concept of the repetition compulsion. Aris Mousoutzanis explains, "The repetition compulsion, a symptom whereby victims restage the traumatic incident in nightmares or hallucinations, is an attempt to master an incident too overwhelming to be processed at the moment of its occurrence" (14). He

then connects this notion to mediated images, citing Slavoj Žižek's reading of the repeated broadcast of the planes flying into the Twin Towers as an instance of the repetition compulsion (14). Similarly, post-apocalyptic texts serve as instances of the repetition compulsion as they repeatedly depict survivors living through cataclysmic events, experiencing trauma, and working through it. Through the genre and its repetitive nature, "we insistently re-create in every conceivable cultural form the catastrophes that inhabit us. We are therefore familiar with, or at home with, catastrophe, even as catastrophe is denied, externalized, and enjoyed as an aesthetic event. The pervasiveness of disaster 'out there' is both a threat and a comfort" (Berger 49). Fictional representations of the complexities of survivorship in the post-apocalyptic world help externalize the trauma of our shared catastrophes and the cultural anxieties concerning future threats, and by externalizing these feelings we may confront them and find a measure of comfort.

Another aspect of trauma that recurs in tales of post-apocalyptic survivors is the importance of memory. A danger of post-catastrophe trauma, like post-apocalyptic existence, is the effacement of memory because if knowledge of the event which caused such great loss is forgotten, then the loss becomes meaningless. Berger writes, "Apocalypse and trauma are congruent ideas, for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts: their symptoms" (19). Thus, repetition—through both nonfictional and fictional narratives—helps us remember. In his essay "Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, and Dissociation," Laurence Kirmayer describes the Holocaust as an acute trauma that produces victims who need to always remember their memories and who construct narratives (that continually discuss the trauma and their memories) in order to never forget.

He argues that different trauma narratives are influenced by the differences in the

culturally constructed "landscape of memory" that produce them. He defines "landscape of memory" as "the metaphoric terrain that shapes the distance and effort required to remember affectively charged and socially defined events that initially may be vague, impressionistic, or simply absent from memory" (175). He continues, "Landscapes of memory are given shape by the personal and social significance of specific memories but also draw from *meta-memory*—implicit models of memory which influence what can be recalled and cited as veridical." Connecting landscapes of memory and meta-memory to trauma narratives, he writes, "Narratives of trauma may be understood then as cultural constructions of personal and historical memory" (175). Post-apocalyptic texts are cultural constructions of fictional memory which rely greatly on the collective, historical memory of real-world catastrophes.

In his book *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War*, Daniel Grausam discusses the paradoxical position that authors must take to write a post-apocalyptic novel: they position themselves as writing in a time that exists *after* the end of time. As mentioned previously, Grausam finds a significant shift in narrative structure after World War II because the war introduced the world to a power (nuclear weapons) that could bring about an immediate and instantaneous end. He sees this question about the end reflected in postmodern fiction, particularly in a shift from interest in epistemological questions (questions about making meaning) to ontological questions (questions about existence). After the apocalypse destroys the world as it is known and understood, one is left to ponder the meaning of one's own existence—one's own being. The survivors depicted in the post-apocalyptic genre serve as externalized representations of our own ontological pondering.

Kirmayer explains that as trauma survivors recount events that they are powerless to correct, they are burdened by memory—an "excess of memory" that intrudes upon the narrative.

The theme of memory is reflected in post-apocalyptic films through various means such as flashbacks, dialogue, objects (such as the can of Coca-Cola in *The Road*), locations (such as the New York subway in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* or the malls in *Night of the Comet* and *Dawn of the Dead*). Post-apocalyptic texts, like their characters, are burdened with an "excess of memory." The post-apocalyptic (post-traumatic), ontologically unstable world in which the characters live is so different (perverted, inverted, etc.) from the pre-apocalyptic world that memory permeates their current lives. They cannot escape from their memories. Kirmayer writes that Holocaust narratives are concerned with recollection, and similarly, post-apocalyptic texts are also concerned with recollection (however difficult that recollection may be). The "excess of memory" may be exhibited through "intrusions" of memory—an inrush of memory which, according to Kirmayer, can break down the narrative (186). Related to the discussion about postmodernism and the post-apocalyptic genre in an earlier chapter, this breakdown of narrative due to memory is evidenced in the flashbacks in *The Road*, which interrupt the narrative, or the shopping scene in *Night of the Comet*, which serves as a kind of musical (or music video) interlude. Thus, post-apocalyptic films offer narratives that may struggle to unfold because they are threatened by potential breakdown. Kirmayer explains that in the narratives of Holocaust survivors there is a "copresence of ongoing death and ongoing life" (186). Although Kirmayer is discussing more than literal life and death, post-apocalyptic films often depict the literal copresence of ongoing death and ongoing life. In *The Walking Dead*—the comic and the television show—characters are regularly killed off and new characters are routinely introduced, and on the topic of ongoing life and death, there is even a pregnancy storyline which culminates, in the television series, with the birth of a baby and the death of the mother. However, more in line with what Kirmayer writes, post-apocalyptic narratives are continually conflicted between

memory (ongoing death because characters continue to remember the death associated with the past—including people—that has ceased to exist) and the present (ongoing life—the need, will, and struggle to survive). Post-apocalyptic life is an existence of ongoing construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

Trauma victims, as Kirmayer discusses, although plagued by memory and potential narrative breakdown, seek to construct ontological meaning by creating cultural meta-memory. The survivors' narratives are authoritative, for as Berger writes, "The survivor was *there*, was present at the event, went through the event. The survivor was present, and his testimony seems to make us present, and thereby gives to us, the listeners and readers, something of his epistemological, ethical, and spiritual authority" (48; emphasis in original). Post-apocalyptic texts evoke such authoritative trauma narratives by creating fictional survivors who were "there," who were "present," whose stories construct a kind of "meta-memory" of possible future events. These texts often suffer the same intrusion of excess memory and breakdown, but they may help us process our own trauma. Significantly, they also serve as encouragement to make decisions in the present that could avert the imagined cataclysm.

Although trauma narratives may help survivors connect their experiences to a meaningful, communal meta-memory, trauma can also create fragmentation and disconnection. Kirmayer writes that Holocaust victims experience derealization, depersonalization, duality of consciousness, and disturbed memory (184). There is often a disjunction between the trauma-time self and the present self, and related to this, individuals may experience a fragmented identity (185). This can impact groups of individuals in which feelings of disunity may become more common than feelings of community. Fragmentation and disjunction are reflected in post-apocalyptic films through characters and through groups. Many post-apocalyptic texts (like

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Zombieland, *Blindness*, and *The Walking Dead*) may focus on communities, but those communities result from certain post-apocalyptic necessities—in other words, they form in order to facilitate survival. However, these communities are made up of fragments of other communities. Additionally, other post-apocalyptic texts (like *The Book of Eli*, *Mad Max*, *A Boy and His Dog*, *Glen and Randa*, and *The Road*) focus on individuals or couples who separate themselves from other groups of survivors, eschewing community.

An important claim in studies of community, such as David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis' "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory" and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, is that community and identity are interrelated. This interrelation can be seen in the connection between identity and community in post-apocalyptic texts. In "A Boy and His Dog," Vic is a "solo," who wanders the wasteland, competing with the roverpaks for scarce resources. Ultimately, as a solo, human companionship is incompatible. The father in *The Road* reinforces to his son that they are the "good guys." The group led by Rick in *The Walking Dead* is bestowed a heroic, positive communal identity by virtue of being the protagonists of the text but also because they stand in opposition to authoritarian communities such as those led by The Governor in Woodbury and Negan who, ironically, call themselves The Saviors. The connection between community and identity—and the redefinition of both—is further exhibited in *Zombieland* in which survivors from disparate parts of the country coalesce into an ad hoc community (for the purpose of defending themselves against zombies) and refer to one another simply by cities from which they are dislocated—Columbus, Tallahassee, Wichita, and Little Rock. The communities with which characters are associated shape their identities—whether good, bad, isolated, or dislocated.

Whether small or large, communities are an important component of the post-apocalyptic

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genre, yet they are tenuous and unstable. Communities tend to be formed for reasons of survival, which leads to groups forming around individuals who possess strength, decisiveness, and leadership capabilities. There is often a dichotomy between rival groups based on a certain moral limits. Although, as discussed before, the genre is very much interested in questioning and renegotiating these limits, there still tend to be lines that separate what individuals find acceptable and unacceptable—cannibalism, for example. The formation and evolution of communities particularly emphasize the negotiation and renegotiation of morality and trust in the post-apocalyptic world. Leaders, such as Rick in *The Walking Dead*, gain trust from followers when they demonstrate the fortitude and willingness to make weighty decisions (about where to go for food and safety, what to do in order to survive, and how to interact with other groups who may potentially threaten them). Maintaining trust, however, can be problematic, especially since leaders themselves often struggle with renegotiating the boundaries of a post-apocalyptic existence. Conflict arises when leaders make decisions that are challenged as crossing the line of acceptability and morality or as being careless, dangerous, inappropriate, or wrong. Communities in these texts are tenuous and fluid, critiquing the fragility of our real-world communities and social structures.

The apocalypse certainly poses a significant threat to the physical existence of the world's inhabitants, and cataclysmic events have the power to destroy the world's physical structures, such as houses, office buildings, and national landmarks. However, the apocalypse also poses a threat to the ideological and social structures of the world, such as family, work, and nation. Like the destruction of physical structures, apocalyptic cataclysm also has the power to destroy these meaning-making structures. Thus, the apocalypse has the potential not only to

wreak physical catastrophe but to alter the meaning of one's life through the collapse (or, at least, redefinition) of community and identity.

Although it is possible to view community as a group of individuals who are united by virtue of where they live, community is more than merely geographical boundaries. Sociologist Joseph R. Gusfield applies the term "relational communities" to those based on the "quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location" (McMillan and Chavis 8). McMillan and Chavis identify four elements that define a sense of community: a feeling of belonging and membership, feeling like one has influence within a group, a sense that the group provides a fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection (9). Benedict Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community" that exists in the imagination and is defined by images of belonging (6). "It is *imagined* ," he explains, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6; emphasis in original). In imagined communities, individuals are not connected through proximity or other physical factors but are, instead, connected through imagination and images of others in the community. This is particularly significant for diaspora populations, who seek to maintain a sense of belonging and connectedness through shared culture despite being separated from their homeland and scattered throughout other lands. A community exists in the minds of its constituents who imagine it.

In their explication of the sense of community, McMillan and Chavis describe a number of characteristics that help support the four defining elements mentioned above, including boundaries, shared values, common symbol systems, and other "reinforcements that bind people together into a close community" (12). Boundaries determine who gets included and who gets excluded from a group, and social psychologists recognize the importance of social boundaries

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for protecting "personal space" and "intimate social connections" (9). The authors explain, "Groups often use language, dress, and ritual to create boundaries" (9). Community rituals include songs, oral histories, dancing, rites of passage, holiday celebrations, and other religious and nonreligious rituals. Physical boundaries help to provide physical safety, and social boundaries help to provide emotional security. Apocalyptic cataclysm and post-apocalyptic existence threaten to negate this safety and security as threats of disease, violence, lawlessness, and social collapse invade these boundaries, rendering them inadequate and ineffective. When groups are cobbled together from the remnants of various communities, survivors often do not share the same traditions, values, and rituals of the past (such as religion, singing, and dancing). Many times these components of community are not only incompatible with one another in a small group, but they also seem out of place in the post-apocalyptic world.

Survivors in the post-apocalyptic world often form ad hoc communities as a means of survival, challenging the notion that community helps to satisfy "a need beyond that of basic survival" (13). On one hand, post-apocalyptic communities epitomize McMullin and Chavis' statement: "People are attracted to others whose skills or competence can benefit them in some way. People seem to gravitate toward people and groups that offer the most rewards" (13). On the other hand, as mentioned above, post-apocalyptic existence is often fraught with renegotiation (of power, boundaries, values, and competence), which destabilizes post-apocalyptic communities and leads to their frequent reformation. Renegotiation and reformation also fail to provide closure, challenging communities. "If the interaction is ambiguous and the community's tasks are left unresolved, group cohesiveness will be inhibited" (14). Thus, the cohesiveness of post-apocalyptic communities is threatened by ambiguity and lack of resolution.

By sharing common symbols and practices, groups cultivate social and emotional

connections that link individuals together. Anderson identifies two "obliquely related sources" of connection in imagined communities—time and media (texts that are mass-produced, mass-distributed, and mass-consumed). He calls time "calendrical coincidence" and, focusing his discussion of media on newspapers, explains, "The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection—the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time" (33). Time links a community because every individual is subject to and a participant in time's "steady onward clocking." In Anderson's words, "Within that time [homogeneous, empty time], 'the world' ambles sturdily ahead" (33). As time steadily pushes onward, communities are united in pushing onward with it. Further, individuals are also linked together through mass-produced texts which offer simultaneous consumption in a kind of mass ceremony. As an example, Anderson explains how reading a newspaper "is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35). Thus, community members commune together through ideas and acts of imagining rather than through direct contact with one another.

Imagined communities, united through symbols like time and texts, are threatened by apocalyptic catastrophe which has the power to disrupt and destroy these concepts. As an end-times cataclysmic event, the apocalypse challenges the view that time is a "steady onward clocking" that "ambles sturdily ahead." In texts such as *On the Beach*, instead of ambling ahead simply marking time as it moves into the future, time is marching toward a definite end. It is a countdown to the end of Earth's existence. In other texts such as *The Purple Cloud*, *The Road*, and *Zombieland*, time loses its meaning as a tool of measurement. Although Earth has not ceased

to exist in these texts, the post-apocalyptic world has no need for measured time. There is no need for punctuality as defined by a clock, for there are no jobs, no schools, and no obligations to time. Survival is the only order of the day. In some cases, such as *I Am Legend*, the distinction between night and day may be important for survival, yet it has no benefit for counting the progression of time because each day is the same as the last. Every new day has the same objective: to stay alive. Time is insignificant in a post-apocalyptic existence such as this. The steady, sturdy force of time which unifies imagined communities is destabilized and redefined by the apocalypse.

In addition to the destabilization of time in apocalyptic fiction, texts themselves must also be reconsidered. For Anderson, mass-produced texts are a key tool in linking individuals in imagined communities. However, the apocalypse has the potential to seriously disrupt this process. Apocalyptic disaster can destroy the production, distribution, and even consumption of texts. This disruption can be caused by physical means. Widespread devastation can eliminate the means of production and the necessary resources—the mass-production of texts would be drastically inhibited by the destruction of printing presses, by limited quantities of paper and ink, and by the loss of other vital resources. The modern printing industry is dependent upon computers and other electronic devices to create texts, so losing the use of these devices (and even more simply, losing electrical power) would cripple production of texts. Additionally, physical distribution is threatened by a cataclysmic event. If the apocalypse destroys the means of distribution—from vehicles (including a limited supply of fuel for the vehicles) to adequate roads—then even if texts could be produced they would not be available for consumption. In our present day, texts and all forms of media are incredibly dependent on electronic distribution, and any disruption of electronic capabilities, especially the Internet, would prevent access on a large

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scale to media sources and texts. At the level of consumption, the apocalypse may physically

prevent the reading and understanding of texts. Often post-apocalyptic fiction depicts a future in

which language has been affected (like the primitive language in *The Scarlet Plague*, the

illiteracy in *Earth Abides*, the creation of new vocabulary in "A Boy and His Dog," and the Feral

Kid's loss of speech in *The Road Warrior*). Also, when survival becomes the immediate order of

the day, then creating and engaging with texts can potentially become frivolous and unnecessary

tasks. If individuals are not able to produce, distribute, or consume texts, then the process of

linking imagined communities through texts breaks down.

The theme of preserving texts recurs in post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, yet such

preservation tends to empower and strengthen communities in dystopian works while it tends to

be a fruitless endeavor in the post-apocalyptic genre. For example, Ray Bradbury's dystopian

novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) builds a community specifically around remembering books as a

form of communal resistance against the oppressive government. In contrast, such text-centric

communities are denied in post-apocalyptic stories. In *Earth Abides* (1949), Ish desires to

preserve texts and knowledge, but his posterity rejects them. The preservation of texts in *A

Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) leads to the perpetuation of nuclear conflict. The film *The Book of

Eli* (2010) is centrally concerned with the preservation of texts. The hero, Eli, traverses an

American post-apocalyptic wasteland to deliver the only surviving copy of the Bible to a

repository of historical texts, but the text is denied its role as a meaningful, community-building

symbol. Ostensibly, the repository is for the preservation of important texts from the past;

however, locking them away does little to cultivate community among the survivors living in the

post-apocalyptic moment. Additionally, the villain seeks to take the Bible from the hero in order

to possess its power to influence people, but this notion of social influence is also undercut by

hiding the text away. Further, Eli's Bible is in braille, which prevents the antagonist from reading it but also denies access to virtually all survivors except the hero. Although this story focuses on the preservation of important texts and hints at their potential meaning for future generations, those texts do not have the ability to unite large communities in the film's present world.

If shared boundaries, values, symbols, and rituals, including time and texts, lose their meaning and must be redefined as a result of the apocalypse, then communities are also seriously threatened. The destruction of meaning-making structures demands the redefinition of one's ontology. The interrelatedness of community and identity is highlighted in the post-apocalyptic genre as the concepts of community, nation, and national identity collapse and ad hoc communities are cobbled together that also reconstruct individuals' identities. The instability and vulnerability of imagined communities call into question the stability of our own imagined communities and national identities.

The post-apocalyptic break from traditional, apocalyptic narratives, which has been a focus of this dissertation, is demonstrated in the representations of survivorship and community in post-apocalyptic texts. The post-catastrophe scenarios which these texts envision tend to depict characters as trauma survivors who are burdened with the grief and guilt, and they often take the form of trauma narratives and meta-memory which become the means to process catastrophic events and find identity among a larger community of survivors. Such narratives are noted for intrusions of memory that burden survivors and that can disrupt the narrative. Despite the attempt to find ontological meaning in traumatic experiences and situate them within a communal meta-memory, the post-apocalyptic world challenges the possibility of such endeavors. The genre destroys imagined communities and the identities we associate with them, demanding renegotiation and redefinition of community and identity. Thus, readers' and

viewers' engagement with texts offers a means for confronting and working through present trauma while also raising a warning voice against the fragility and vulnerability of our present sociopolitical structures. In the following case studies, I explore ways in which the post-apocalyptic genre represents these notions of survivorship, trauma, memory, community, and identity in the 1981 novel *The Quiet Earth* and the 1973 film *Idaho Transfer*.

Case Study: *The Quiet Earth*

The emergence of speculative fiction in New Zealand was still in its early stages when Craig Harrison's novel *The Quiet Earth* was published in 1981. Prior to the 1970s, New Zealand literature mostly participated in what has been called the "Settler Fiction tradition," texts which reflect, either directly or indirectly, the Pakeha (non-Maori, or European) settlement of New Zealand. Beginning in the 1970s, speculative fiction began to be published which stood apart from that tradition (Ross 61-2). A film loosely adapted from the novel (the film often bears more resemblance to the 1959 film *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* than to Harrison's source material) was released a few years later in 1985. The attention that *The Quiet Earth* receives tends to be directed toward the film, which has gained a level of cult status but which also received a positive critical response upon its release. Although recognized as a significant work of speculative fiction from New Zealand, the novel has received little scholarly attention. This is likely due, in part, to the limited impact of New Zealand genre fiction in general. Ross notes, "Genre fiction has never really flourished in New Zealand: mainly, one has to admit, for economic reasons. Our writing has tended to be 'literary' because we lack a mass audience of consumers" (78). Despite the relative lack of scholarship devoted to *The Quiet Earth*, it is a fascinating contribution to post-apocalyptic fiction.

The story is narrated by John Hobson, a research scientist, who wakes from a dream in a hotel room in Thames, presumably the only human survivor of an apocalyptic event of unknown causality. Dubbing the event "the Effect," he begins a search for life and finds no living organisms above ground—the Effect has caused humans and animals to vanish—although there are insects still living in the soil and fish swimming underwater. In his search, he finds no one in Auckland or Wellington and, at his research facility, only the dead body of his boss, Perrin. Hobson reasons that since the body is there, Perrin must have died before the event, in keeping with his deduction that organisms that had died before the Effect did not vanish. On his way to Rotorua, he sees a monstrous creature—a cross between a dog and a calf—run past his headlights, but he cannot verify that the beast actually exists. Near Turangi, he comes across a truck blocking his path, which turns out to be a trap placed by another survivor Api, who is Maori and a Vietnam veteran. The relationship between Api and Hobson is contentious— Hobson, a Pakeha, harbors racist feelings toward the Maori and determines Api is violent and bloodthirsty by nature since he volunteered to fight in Vietnam. Api distrusts Hobson and suspects that he is losing his mind. Despite their animosity, the two remain together and settle in a hotel where Hobson conducts research to learn more about the Effect. Their search for survivors is fruitless until one day, while they are on a joyride in a sports car, they strike a woman who runs in front of the car. They take her to the hotel where contention increases between the men as Api becomes protective of the woman, seeing Hobson as a danger to her. Hobson further concludes that Api is a psychopath. The woman eventually dies, and their mutual hostility escalates into a battle with guns and explosives during which Hobson kills Api. Through flashbacks, he comes to realize that he caused the Effect by sabotaging the sound wave machine at the research facility in an attempt to kill Perrin. He decides to commit suicide and jumps from

the roof of the hotel, but as he is falling, he wakes from a dream in a hotel room in Thames, returning cyclically to the beginning of the story.

At the time of its publication, the post-apocalyptic genre was largely shifting away from ecological themes toward formulaic tales of wasteland warriors, but Harrison's entry stands distinct from both of these trends and captures the psychological instability of post-apocalyptic loss and disconnection. The setting of *The Quiet Earth* is a synchronic world, disconnected from the past and the future. Hobson describes this post-apocalyptic existence: "We're in limbo, stuck between a gone world which presses threats and memories in on us, vividly, one moment, then falls away into a sullen gulf of ages ago; and a future which is nothing. Which we must not think about. Or speak about. We make each day out of nothing. It is like leaning into space, blindfolded. We are powerless to do anything else" (Harrison 184). In this disconnected state, each day seems to exist only in itself, breaking from notions of temporal and social progress. Yet, reflecting trauma narratives, he describes the past world inescapably asserting itself into this world despite the gulf which separates them. The novel's representation of post-catastrophe trauma is particularly burdened by intrusions of memory, problems of community, and rupture of time.

While Hobson is searching houses in hopes of finding other survivors, the artifacts of the pre-apocalyptic world appear as testaments to the finality imposed by the Effect and rift between past and present. He narrates, "The arrangement of objects in the bedrooms seemed to be hard evidence of something irrevocable, of an event that was irreversible as well as mysterious, just as all photographs show an unreachable past" (16). This unreachable past now only exists in memory: "The images of people from my own life who might have vanished held me fixed there for a while. I wondered if they now only existed in my mind" (16). However, Hobson's memory

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proves to be faulty. Flashbacks recur throughout the narrative, slowly revealing two events from Hobson's past—the death of his son and his dealings with his boss Perrin—the truth of which he had been subconsciously altering. It is revealed early in the novel that his autistic son drowned, and Hobson is burdened by his inability to save him. As more memories surface, casting additional light on the event, it is revealed that Hobson himself held his son's head under the water. Although his act was motivated out of mercy to spare his son from suffering, the memory continues to haunt him. Flashbacks also reveal that Hobson and Perrin distrusted one another and their research motives, resulting in Hobson sabotaging the sound wave machine which killed Perrin. He had only intended to kill his boss but realizes that his actions caused the Effect—thus, killing the world. Likewise, Api is unable to escape his past. While in Vietnam, he and his fellow soldiers violently murdered Viet Cong and mutilated their bodies. Hobson finds photographs that Api keeps showing him and other soldiers posing with the gruesome evidence of their deeds. Api struggles to resolve the guilt he feels for transgressions committed in a past that has been elided.

These memories irrupt into the post-apocalyptic world, burdening both Hobson and Api with guilt and powerlessness to atone for his misdeeds. They also destabilize and undercut the possibility of forming a community. In one instance, Api pretends to have drowned, which Hobson takes as mockery of his son's death, and in retribution Hobson holds Api's head under the water. Even though Api does not drown, it contributes to their lack of trust in one another. That evening Hobson tries to explain that he was trying to push down the memory, "a nightmare coming up from the past" (188). Nightmares from the past and intrusions of memory prevent trust and destabilize community. Hobson's discovery of Api's photographs validates his assumption that Api is violent and untrustworthy by nature and concludes that he is a psychopath. With no other survivors, the two men remain together, but as both men unravel, it

becomes clear that stable, functional community is an impossibility. This impossibility of community is further reinforced with the introduction of the woman. In another context, her presence may hint at reconciliation and perpetuation of the species, but in this world, she appears only to suffer fatal injuries as a result of the recklessness of the men. Api's vigilance to care for her—to atone for his past—is futile, and the men's mutual animosity is finally self-destructive. And ultimately, Hobson is incapable of escaping his burden, for his act of suicide is relegated, perpetually, to a dream.

Remembering is essential to Hobson solving the mystery of the Effect. As he is piecing together bits of memory, he remarks to readers that "within minutes I must understand my life, I must force my memory to the very centre, the holding power of every defence. I must remember" (245). However, there is an underlying unreliability in his memory, for this entire world exists in a space detached from the past—it is a kind of dream space, separate from time. Describing this world, he narrates, "There's an interval of half-waking on the border between consciousness and sleep when it's hard to remember where you are; when dreams increase in power and clarity and what you know to be the real world seems to present itself as an unbelievable absurdity. Since this real world has become just that, these moments have increased, elongated, blurred the boundaries" (193). This post-apocalyptic world exists in an interval "between consciousness and sleep," a dilation in which time has become meaningless. Reminiscent of *The Purple Cloud*, all the clocks in *The Quiet Earth* have stopped at 6:12. Time has ceased to be a measurable and shared experience.

As discussed above, one idea that contributes to the construction of imagined communities is the shared experience of time—the ability of disparate individuals to collectively share common experiences simultaneously. In addition to the memories and distrust which

destabilize community as discussed above, this perpetual, half-waking interval and the cessation of time deny the possibility of shared, simultaneous experiences, thus denying the formation of an imagined community. "At one level we still seem to want to behave like stranded travellers [*sic*] waiting for normal services to resume" (183). But there is no hope of resumption, for "normal services" no longer exist. The normal services and artifacts of the previous world which, at one time, contributed to imagined communities now present themselves "as an unbelievable absurdity." For example, while at a television center in Avalon, Api takes a videotape playback machine and tapes to watch at the hotel, but mass media which used to connect communities through shared cultural images have now become absurd. "The programmes in the canisters," Hobson remarks, "seem to be capsules of the most mind-corroding Californian serials. Large cars pursue each other and explode in colour. Guns are fired, biro-red blood squirts from white shirts. Comedies erupt with pre-recorded howls of laughter every eight seconds" (183). Ironically, the relationship between Hobson and Api will devolve into gunfire and explosions, but these programs no longer provide a shared cultural experience. They have become "capsules" and are a "disturbing . . . reminder of the old world" (184). They can no longer effect imagined communities when the only survivors imaginable are Hobson and Api, and the images no longer reflect the world that they are experiencing.

For readers, the impossibility of community and the posttraumatic intrusion of memory in *The Quiet Earth* allows for engagement which may elicit a variety of responses, such as evaluating our personal and community relationships and taking steps to improve those relationships. Of particularly interest in *The Quiet Earth* is the theme of racial animosity between Pakeha and Maori. Ross writes, "The strength of the idea behind Harrison's novel . . . is not so much in the use of Nietzsche's 'eternal return' as a plot-structuring device, as the facility with

which it enables him to discuss the racial, post-colonial themes . . . Harrison's novel is not solely about New Zealand and its discontents . . . but the precision of its local setting *does* play a part in lending it an almost mythopoeic force" (74; emphasis in original). Thus, New Zealanders should necessarily be struck by the specificity of the themes reflecting their own culture; however, as Ross notes, the range of these themes is wider than just New Zealand, which makes the text accessible to other cultures. Therefore, it serves as a general admonition against racism and cultural division, which are represented as traits that weaken and destabilize community. Prejudice and hubris are presented as threats to a progressive and meaningful future.

Case Study: *Idaho Transfer*

Idaho Transfer, directed by Peter Fonda (and produced by his Pando Co. production company) and released in 1973, reflects several trends of the post-apocalyptic genre of that period, including strong ecological interest, independent production, and exploitation of the teen market. It stands out among the other case studies particularly for its premise as a time-travel film and for delaying the characters' entrance into a synchronic, post-apocalyptic world. *Idaho Transfer* remains relatively unknown, occasionally appearing on lists or surveys of ecologically themed films or time-travel films (such as Fraser A. Sherman's recent survey *Now and Then We Time Travel: Visiting Pasts and Futures in Film and Television*). Reviews and synopses (of which there are comparatively few) usually mention its use of nonprofessional actors (excepting a young Keith Carradine) as one of the areas in which the film fails; however, in his review for *Time*, Jay Cocks remarks that despite the clumsiness of the acting, the film still "stands as an ambitious experiment, and a worthy one" (95). In contrast to other reviews which are often decidedly negative, Cocks finds areas in which to praise the film. He calls it "a very deliberate

and closely controlled film graced with a slow, severe beauty that makes its quiet edge of panic all the more chilling," and he appreciates that it avoids becoming "shrill and preachy in its ecological warning" (95). Despite this reception, it has not stood the test of time and has fallen into obscurity, and academic scholarship specifically focused on the film is virtually non-existent. *Idaho Transfer* certainly has its faults, but it offers an interesting vision of the post-apocalyptic experience of its main protagonist. Consistent with the themes of the genre, concerns of trauma, memory, and community are integral features of that experience.

The story centers on Karen, the daughter of a research scientist George Braden, who received government-funding to study matter transference. His research has led to two significant discoveries: the Earth is heading toward a near-future ecological disaster and the ability to transport people through time. Braden and a colleague have begun a project, kept hidden from the government, in which they recruit teenagers (whose bodies can still handle the physical rigors of time-travel) to travel fifty-six years into the future to study the biological life extant after the ecological decline. The film opens with scenes of Isa, Braden's other daughter, and another teen tagging a snake and making observations of the barren, post-apocalyptic wasteland. Isa returns to the present to find that her sister, Karen, has joined the project and explains the aim of the project, "Dad and Lewis are trying to get it together to secretly transfer a lot of young people into the future. Bypass the eco-crisis or whatever it is. Start a new civilization." While walking among the lava fields (filmed at Craters of the Moon in Idaho) on a trip into the future, Isa falls and hits her head. Karen transfers back to the present with her to get help, but despite her efforts, Isa dies. Following this traumatic experience, Karen withdraws and secludes herself in the future. Meanwhile, the government threatens to take over the project, so Braden sends the group of teens into the future before the government shuts him down. The

transfer device loses power (apparently shut off in the present by the government), trapping the group in the future. The group divides up and heads toward Portland, discovering along the way third-generation survivors who have devolved into a regressive state, having no language, no ability to speak, and mental and physical impairments. Karen is paired with Ronald, who remains distant to her interest in having children to propagate the species. Karen's hopes of getting pregnant are dashed when she is told that time travel has made them sterile. Shaken by this news, she goes back to the transfer site in Idaho where she finds that a project member has gone mad and killed two others. Karen hides in a transfer machine and discovers that it has regained power. Traveling back to the past, she discovers that her father has been removed from the research facility, which has been taken over by a government security force. In an effort to go further back in time, she recalibrates the time machine but escapes into an even more distant future. While wandering in the cold desolation, she is bombarded with flashes of memory of the preceding events and collapses. At the end, she is picked up by a family and put into the trunk of their car, and the film concludes with a conversation between the parents and their daughter which alludes to Karen being used as a fuel source.

The event propelling the post-apocalyptic nature of *Idaho Transfer* is of particular note. Although the ecological crisis (which is impending and which has past, depending on the point in time) is ostensibly the cataclysmic event, the catastrophe which propels the post-apocalyptic dimension of the story—the survival, the trauma, etc.—is getting trapped in the future when the transfer device becomes inoperative. It is this lost connection with the present which forces the group of project members into an existence removed from their known world and community and separated from the progress of time. Prior to getting stranded in the barren wasteland of the future, the group had developed a dual existence—living in both the present and the future. This

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is exemplified by Isa and Karen whose family unit (consisting at least of them and their father) exists in the present. The present is the site of family, home, and stability—it is the origin point for journeys into the unknown future. Simultaneously, the meaning and permanence of the present are fading in Isa's mind as she begins to prepare for life in the future. After meeting a couple of hitchhikers, Isa and Karen discuss the fate of the hitchhikers in the coming crisis, leading Isa to remark, "Try not to think of them. They don't matter anymore." Since present humanity is doomed, she has begun to revalue which lives matter. To Karen, the future offers the promise of peace, a place in which "[n]obody [is] trying to wreck anybody else," for the present has brought her (a rape victim) fear and pain. However, despite preparing to transition to live in the future, the present is still a centering location, so the post-apocalyptic turn comes with forced exile to the future.

The trauma that Karen experiences is particularly related to the loss of her family. When Isa dies, she retreats into the future, where she can be alone to grieve, but a line of communication with her father still exists. The loss of the transfer machine disconnects her from him, and survival in the post-apocalyptic future with the other researchers prevents this world from being the peaceful refuge she desires. As Cocks writes, "They wander the blasted landscapes of the American future, bickering among themselves, sifting through the ashes of a vanished civilization for some ember to kindle a new world. They do not find one, but instead end up bitter, divided and confused" (95). Karen transfers the pain of her loss into an obsession with getting pregnant and having children. Procreating would fulfill her father's plan of starting a new civilization, but for Karen, it would also reconnect her to family—she would become a meaningful link between generations and reestablish familial connection in the absence of her father and her sister. Her desire is denied in this post-apocalyptic world because time-travel has

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made her sterile. She and the others are the "failed ancestors of a race that will remain unborn" (Cocks 95). In the cold, inhospitable distant future, she experiences a posttraumatic break in which a series of memories irrupts into the narrative—her sister's death, being told that she is infertile, and other moments from the narrative flash in rapid succession. Sherman, with a note of derision, describes this montage as "confusing" (43). However, this breakdown of narrative may be explained as an evocation of the intrusion of excess memory that Kirmayer discusses in conjunction with trauma. In this post-apocalyptic scenario, Karen's breaking point is signaled by this inrush of images, replaying the traumatic events that have led to this bleak existence and overwhelming her to the point of collapse.

In addition to disconnection from community, intrusion of memory, and posttraumatic breakdown of narrative, *Idaho Transfer* also depicts the rupture of time. Like in other post-apocalyptic texts, the world conceived in this film is synchronic, disconnected from a meaningful, related past and future. It is temporally set apart from the progress of time. Certainly, this is reflected in events such as the breakdown of the time machine, but it is also exhibited in themes of inescapable circularity. During her obsession with getting pregnant, Karen talks to Ronald about possible baby names and remarks that gender-specific names are now flexible since they are no longer bound to previous cultural norms. She says, "I suppose it doesn't matter since we have a fresh start now. We could call the boys girls' names and the girls boys' names, and nobody will know the difference." Ronald responds by questioning the very notion of "a fresh start," remarking, "It's a beginning, right? And the beginning is as much a part of the end as the middle . . . A different kind of beginning. A different kind of middle. And a shiny new end." His statement reinforces the post-apocalyptic theme that ordered time has been lost, replaced by circular time and a perpetual present. He asks rhetorically, "So where have you

been?" Her response is hopeful: "Someplace," but in the end, Ronald's pessimism is substantiated when Karen is picked up by the future family for fuel. This family is higher functioning than the regressed survivors from earlier, and they assume Karen to be one of the lower-class humans. The little girl asks her parents, "[W]hat if we run out of all of them, and we can't even find any?" The father answers, "They'll figure out another way for us," and the mother adds, "We can use something else." But the child utters the film's critique of our own self-destructive society, "But what if that's too hard? Or expensive? And what if they decide they can't change? We'll use each other then, won't we?" She does not yell, "Soylent green is people," but the sentiment is the same—our wasteful use of natural resources will lead to our own demise. Reflecting the ecological tenor of the time, *Idaho Transfer* calls us to repentance for our mistreatment of the environment and encourages us to take immediate, corrective action.

As with *The Quiet Earth* and other post-apocalyptic texts, the representation of trauma, memory, and lost community in *Idaho Transfer* invites audiences to reconsider the direction of their own sociopolitical systems and the potential consequences of self-destructive behavior. Especially, the tone of *Idaho Transfer* conveys an urgency specifically in regard to checking ecologically deleterious consumption of natural resources. In his review, Cocks describes the future family depicted in the film as survivors who "share with their progenitors a blind, suicidal faith not only in science, but also in the righteousness of anything that is called progress" (95). The urgency of the film's message is encouraged by the theme of ruptured time. The time for action is now—before time loses its meaning. The final statement of the film is the last line of text following the end credits: "Esto perpetua." This Latin phrase is the state motto of Idaho and translates to mean "It is forever" or "Let it be perpetuated." In relation to the film, this phrase has

a dual connotation: it is a final critique of how human nature never changes, but it is also a call for us to care for the Earth that it may be perpetuated.

Among the various themes that permeate the post-apocalyptic genre, survivorship and community are significant reminders about the difficulty of maintaining strong interpersonal relationships. Trauma narratives are burdened with painful and difficult memories, but they also encourage healing through shared experiences by remembering and forming communal identities. Concepts like nation and national identity are imagined communities constructed through various means including networked road systems, mass media, and time—simultaneous participation of disparate individuals offers a sense of community. Although the post-apocalyptic world makes such imagined communities untenable, the genre invites us to consider different notions of community. The genre depicts community as a means of survival but also a means of self-destruction without unified efforts toward positive change. The genre tends to proliferate following times of crisis and in times of escalated concern about impending disaster. Witnessing society repeatedly collapse in the post-apocalyptic genre offers a means for us to work through our own trauma but also serves as a warning against potential self-annihilation. Texts in the genre range from light comedy to dark nihilism, but the audience engagement which they invite encourages contemplation, reflection, and reconsideration in regard to our present state of both preparedness and prevention. Although these tales envision future worlds, their messages are intended for the present.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

From biblical prophecy and ancient myths to contemporary novels, films, and television shows, the end of the world has fascinated humankind. Throughout history, each generation has perceived the end to be looming on the horizon. The prospect of the end can be both compelling and terrifying because it is unknown and because it represents the termination of life and the universe as we know them. Culturally, our anxieties about the end are often assuaged by apocalyptic traditions of renewal and rebirth. These traditions relieve the end of its finality and imbue it with a redemptive impermanence by situating it within a larger continuous framework.

During the twentieth century, however, a post-apocalyptic sensibility emerged, diverging from the traditional apocalyptic structure. This post-apocalyptic cultural imagination challenges the certainty of apocalyptic notions of renewal and rebirth. It imagines a future existence after the end but devoid of the promises of the apocalyptic framework. Cultural post-apocalyptic thought has been shaped by historical events that inspired reconsideration of previously stable apocalyptic ideologies. The emergence of this post-apocalyptic sensibility has been reflected in fictional narratives in literature and film. These texts are products of the culture that produces them, and their recurrent themes demonstrate an identifiable genre of fiction that has proliferated at different times historically, typically in response to culturally shared crises.

Although previous studies of post-apocalyptic texts have done some interesting and fruitful work, there has been little scholarship that has sought to define generic boundaries that distinguish it from apocalyptic fiction. Reading, viewing, and researching dozens of texts for this

dissertation highlighted recurring patterns within them that set them apart from other genres (although they do borrow elements from other genres). The post-apocalyptic genre that emerged in my study contains a distinct outer form and an inner form. The outer form includes the components of the narratives themselves, such as setting, iconography, props and the "tools of the trade" (the trade in this world is survival), and recurrent themes. The inner form refers to how audiences engage with the text, and the post-apocalyptic genre invites readers and viewers to participate in significant ways.

One of the essential elements of the outer form is the setting. The post-apocalyptic genre is set in a world that exists after civilization has collapsed as the result of an acute, traumatic catastrophe that destroys the infrastructure of the characters' entire world and before new overarching social and governmental orders are established. This environment distinguishes post-apocalyptic stories from disaster movies that are focused on images of destruction and salvation from complete annihilation; from shipwreck scenarios in which a limited number of characters are knowingly cut off from a larger world that continues to function; and from futuristic tales of either utopian or dystopian societies in which authoritative structures are in place. Certainly, there are, at times, hybridization and mixing of these different ideas, but the post-apocalyptic setting is primarily focused on characters struggling to survive and renegotiating life in a post-cataclysmic world that exists in a dilation between civilizations, a gap in which governing order is absent.

Within this setting, familiar objects become unfamiliar and otherworldly. The post-apocalyptic genre has established iconographic images of lone survivors, empty cities, crumbling roads, and barren wastelands. The loss of infrastructure is reflected through props such as tattered clothing and repurposed artifacts of the old world. The tools of the trade of survival often

include primitive technology and weapons for defense and offense against marauders and other groups of survivors. Recurrent themes in the genre include reassessing how power and value are determined, ambiguous morality, the arbitrariness of life and death, and the fitness or unfitness of characters to live a post-apocalyptic existence. The outer form of the post-apocalyptic genre creates a world that is set apart from our present world yet bears the remnants of the world that we know and are now experiencing.

The inner form of the genre invites audiences to engage in a number of ways. By confronting audiences with a fallen, subverted image of their world, these texts allow simultaneous recognition and misrecognition of the world and both identification with and distance from that image. Through this kind of engagement, readers and viewers perceive the present world through the lens of the post-apocalyptic world, which can create a level of psychological disconnection with the world. They are confronted with coexistent diegetic and real-world meanings of what they witness in the texts. Such an engagement can question and challenge culturally ingrained apocalyptic notions. Through the inner form, post-apocalyptic texts function to help us work through recent cultural traumas and also encourage us to take immediate action in our real world to make changes to prevent future self-annihilation of our world and collapse of our communities.

The post-apocalyptic genre did not emerge fully formed in a single instance; rather, it evolved over time. The history of the genre has its roots in ancient apocalyptic myths, such as apocalyptic religious literature and celebrations of seasonal renewal, that view the end as a means for progress or purification as it inaugurates the coming of a better world. Such apocalyptic ideology is especially prominent in religious apocalyptic literature in which prophetic visions describe the destruction attending the end of the world followed by God

revealing himself and replacing the old world with a new, perfect one. The cultural imagination of apocalypse has evolved as modern society has put increasing value on scientific and Enlightenment thought. Secular apocalypticism emphasizes humankind as the destructive force and as the revelatory force. The apocalyptic framework imagines the end (of an era, a regime, or a narrative) not merely as cessation or termination but as a necessary process of human progress—the end of one civilization gives rise to the next and individuals become links between generations. Situating the end within such a context reinforces meaningful connections between past, present, and future. From our limited perspective in the present, the future is inevitably uncertain, yet apocalyptic narratives mitigate anxieties about the unknowable future by offering the promise of meaningful resolution.

The apocalyptic framework has significantly influenced fictional narratives that speculate about the end of the world and about its future after the end. Early in the nineteenth century, initial forays into secular speculative fiction about the end times responded directly to religious articulations of apocalypse. Mary Shelley deviated from the apocalyptic myth of a new beginning when she imbued *The Last Man* (1826) with a secular end of the world and an elegiac sense of irrecoverable loss. Her work helped set the groundwork for later post-apocalyptic texts that would envision future cataclysm and imagine future worlds disconnected from traditional apocalyptic thinking. As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close and the twentieth century was approaching, *fin-de-siècle* anxieties were reflected through increased interest in speculative futures. Generally, these texts promulgated apocalyptic notions that civilization would continue to progress and evolve into the future. These included both utopian and dystopian visions of future society, but these stories were often told through narrators in the present day, which reinforced reading these imagined futures as merely possibilities, not eventualities, and

considering the fate of humanity as not yet determined. However, although still rooted in the speculative, fantasy tradition of their time, these stories contributed to a burgeoning post-apocalyptic imagination. Artistic movements occurring late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century questioned traditional views and fostered divergent thinking. Art movements such as impressionism, expressionism, cubism, and futurism challenged the traditional model of realism and emphasized individual rather than universal experience of the world. In literature, modernist writers experimented with form as they questioned how narratives construct meaning, and their formal innovation deviated from traditional apocalyptic meaning-making structures. These movements reflect a desire to reassess the ways in which we understand the world and our experience of it, and this desire helped to further shape cultural thinking that deviated from apocalyptic ideology.

Despite these challenges to traditional apocalyptic notions, post-apocalyptic thinking was not very prevalent in popular fiction until after the Second World War. The war had a tremendous cultural impact, and the atrocities witnessed during the war traumatized many and made the possibility of humankind's self-annihilation more real than ever before. During the Cold War, nuclear proliferation and the possibility of mutually assured destruction threatened to bring about an immediate end from which there would be no renewal. Although these threats elicited differing degrees of anxiety in individuals, they influenced the cultural post-apocalyptic imagination as a shadow was cast over the promise of a meaningful ending. In the postwar period, a dissatisfaction with dominant social and narrative structures led to further literary movements, such as the Beat movement and postmodernism. The Beat poets and writers, disaffected with the dominant culture, sought enlightenment through culturally alternative practices (such as experimentation with drugs and liberated sexual encounters), and their writing

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styles were liberated from the norms of traditionally accepted forms. Also during this period, postmodernist writers experimented with formal conventions and even employed elements of modernist innovation to question the certainty of fixed meanings. Postmodernism views meaning as decentered and shifting, draws attention to the constructedness of the text, problematizes the role of the author, and allows unresolved endings—all of which suit post-apocalyptic fictions and diverge from the apocalyptic framework.

Cold War anxieties about nuclear power were manifested in 1950s science fiction largely through stories of mutation and monsters, but destabilization and reconsideration of apocalyptic views of the end of the world began to be exhibited more frequently in popular fiction. In literature, significant numbers of post-cataclysm stories began to emerge, envisioning a world in which national and municipal infrastructure have collapsed and civilization has disintegrated. These texts challenged the apocalyptic expectation of progress that the end will be accompanied by a higher, more evolved social order. By the late '50s, films (often based on these novels) began to emerge which took up the same task of envisioning future states of existence in worlds reflecting this post-apocalyptic break from apocalyptic certainty. Although speculative by nature of envisioning possible futures, authors from various traditions contributed post-apocalyptic texts, which helped to highlight the versatility and far-reaching applicability of the genre. The post-apocalyptic world deconstructs the known world and cobbles together a bricolage from its remnants. Similarly, the post-apocalyptic genre brings together pieces from a variety of genres. In the late '60s and into the '70s, the emergence of postmodern and new wave science fiction writers helped to bring new forms of experimentation to the post-apocalyptic genre. The rise of independent film production companies and exploitation films allowed for the proliferation of low-budget post-apocalyptic films. At this time, the genre in both literature and film often

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reflected countercultural attitudes, distrust of authority, and the increased cultural interest in environmental concerns. Television became an important outlet for serious depictions of the aftermath of nuclear war, and programs in the early 1980s captured the anxieties of elevated nuclear tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Throughout the '80s, post-apocalyptic film and literature were largely dominated by tales of wasteland warriors, but by the 1990s, production of post-apocalyptic texts had significantly waned. As a new millennium approached, there was a surge of cultural interest in apocalyptic ideology.

Early in the twenty-first century, violent and traumatic events stirred the cultural post-apocalyptic imagination. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, had a deep impact on the collective psyche, exacerbated by a lengthy "war on terror." Similar to the trauma and disillusionment felt following previous crises, the profound effect of these events influenced cultural expression generally—in media, the arts, literature, and film—and also created a sociopolitical environment ripe for a resurgence of post-apocalyptic texts. Over the past fifteen years, the genre has proliferated in comic books, novels, film, and television. Looking to the near future, the cultural tenor of our time seems to indicate that present threats will perpetuate post-apocalyptic thinking. Among other factors, President Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric to again stockpile nuclear weapons, escalating tensions with North Korea, and his administration's disavowal of human contributions to climate change have heightened anxieties about global, nuclear war and the future of the Earth's ecosystem. Based on historical precedent, the continued stirring of the post-apocalyptic imagination is likely to perpetuate the production of post-apocalyptic texts.

There are many themes that run concurrently through the post-apocalyptic genre, and the genre utilizes elements from various narrative and artistic forms and aesthetics to define the post-

apocalyptic world and to invite engagement with the text on multiple levels. Aspects of postmodernism demonstrate how the genre desires to break from traditional, apocalyptic narratives. The carnivalesque indulges in grotesque realism and subversion of sociopolitical hierarchy and cultural norms, allowing for rebellious fun and also for dialogic discourse to bring about greater equity and understanding. The posttraumatic intrusion of memory can interrupt and break down narrative, but doing so encourages the act of remembering. The collapse of imagined communities reflects the fragility of our cultural structures and reminds us of the virtues of strong, interpersonal connections.

Postmodernism desires to break from the modern metanarratives of progress, decentering meaning by disconnecting present images from their past meanings, allowing for unresolved conclusions, and highlighting texts' constructedness through self-reflexivity. Whereas the familiarity of traditional, universal metanarratives can foster passive engagement, postmodernist texts employ various techniques of narrative experimentation that invite audiences to participate actively in questioning and creating possible meanings of those texts. The post-apocalyptic genre embraces many of the ideas underlying postmodernism. The genre envisions a post-apocalyptic world which has been disconnected from its past and removed from a larger context of progress. In this synchronic world, artifacts from the past have been disconnected from their referents in the past, losing their previous meanings due to a postmodernist disruption of the signifying chain. The reassurance traditionally conveyed by apocalyptic resolution is often problematized, as in the circularity of texts like *The Quiet Earth* (1981), as the genre creates a gap between the post-apocalyptic world and the possibility of future existence beyond it. The genre's texts are inevitably self-reflexive because they self-consciously present subverted versions of the known world and are narrated for audiences who no longer exist in the narrator's world.

The postmodernist nature of the post-apocalyptic genre is reflected in *The Road* (2006) and *Night of the Comet* (1984). Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* employs a sparse, fragmented style of language that reflects the bleakness of the setting. It accepts ambiguity in the actions of its characters and in the ending, and images of remnants of our world have lost their meaningful referents. *Night of the Comet* is a pastiche, pulling together pieces from and allusions to other texts—such as *Valley Girl* (1983), *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and *The Omega Man* (1971)—to create a humorous parody of the genre as two valley girls romp through empty Los Angeles in a series of episodic fragments of narrative, toting automatic machine guns and killing zombies. Whereas *The Road* employs postmodernism to convey a bleak post-apocalyptic future, *Night of the Comet* has fun playing with intertextuality and the gaps created by the postmodernist break from apocalyptic tradition. Further, the postmodernist aspect of the genre invites active engagement from readers and viewers to reconsider their own world and to help construct possible meanings from these texts.

In addition to postmodernism, the post-apocalyptic genre also mobilizes the carnivalesque to create a world separate from the social rules and norms that govern our current world. The carnivalesque is interested in pulling down the privileged and exalted classes to mingle with the lower stratum of society by reinforcing the common experiences of all human bodies. The carnivalesque emphasizes bodily transgressions—behaviors through which the body interacts with the outside world—to highlight that everyone, regardless of status engages in behaviors that are unacceptable in public, such as eating, defecation, sex, and death. In the carnival square, the fool is crowned as king, subverting culturally significant rituals. The post-apocalyptic world serves as a kind of carnival square in which the order of today's world has crumbled. The cataclysmic event has made vertical hierarchies horizontal by tasking all people

with the singular objective of survival. The post-apocalyptic world revalues social rituals, redefines power structures, and brings into the open transgressive bodily behaviors that our modern infrastructure helps us to currently hide. Historically, however, carnival was itself sanctioned by authority as a means of maintaining the status quo. Post-apocalyptic texts may serve similarly as a temporary break for audiences who then return to their normal lives accepting sociopolitical normativity. Yet, as Bakhtin argues, the carnivalesque can be a means of inspiring dialogic discourse that can reform inequities, and the post-apocalyptic genre, by inviting audiences to engage with redefined versions of their world, may be able to inspire similar dialogue.

The mobilization of the carnivalesque in the post-apocalyptic genre can be seen in the novella "A Boy and His Dog" (1969) and the film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). In "A Boy and His Dog," Harlan Ellison creates a barren, aboveground wasteland that is governed by violence and sex, juxtaposed against an underground world that exaggerates the repressive norms of middle-class society. Those who live in the blasted wasteland freely indulge in carnivalesque transgressions, but the underground community has perverted normative behaviors to the opposite extreme. In an ultimate carnivalesque act, the boy chooses his love for his dog over human companionship and heterosexual copulation, and they kill and eat their female companion. *Mad Max: Fury Road* is full of carnivalesque grotesquerie and bodily transgression. The grotesque figure of Immortan Joe has created a society that mingles the sacred and the profane and that is defined by grotesque realism. Women are constantly milked to produce a resource that is then used to barter for other limited resources. Joe keeps multiple wives to continually provide him offspring to maintain his kingdom, and Max is used as a blood bag for Joe's War Boys who huff a hallucinogen for greater resolve to serve their leader. The

carnivalesque aspect of these texts certainly offers a fun break from the moral norms of our society, but there is also an undercurrent that encourages reconsideration of our sociopolitical norms and action to reform social divisions and promote greater equity.

The post-apocalyptic genre also emphasizes the fragility of survival and community in contrast to apocalyptic notions of certainty and permanence. Of course, a key plot element of post-apocalyptic narratives is the quest of characters to survive amidst scant resources, harsh conditions, and competition from rivals. Additionally, the theme of survivorship is explored through the psychological hardship of enduring trauma, including grief, survivor's guilt, and processing the trauma. By sharing their stories with other survivors, trauma victims can build a community of support to help process their shared experience. However, trauma narratives are always threatening to break down under the burden of an excess of memory that intrudes on the narrative, challenging the possibility of incorporating trauma into the apocalyptic framework. Communities are built on various cultural experiences shared across time and space, including shared narratives and other cultural practices. Within the post-apocalyptic world, the outer form of the genre, stable communities tend to be impossible. This impossibility is due to several factors, such as the constant renegotiation of power and the notable loss of the shared culture which creates imagined communities. The themes of survivorship and community also influence the genre's inner form. Similar to trauma narratives which help survivors work through the trauma by contextualizing it and empowering themselves, post-apocalyptic texts depict scenarios through which audiences may vicariously work through trauma as they identify with the struggles of the characters. A major underlying aspect of the genre is the importance of readers and viewers to act within our own societies to prevent the recurrence of self-destructive events which elicit trauma and to strengthen the connections within our own communities.

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These themes are present in Craig Harrison's novel *The Quiet Earth* (1981) and the film *Idaho Transfer* (1973). In *The Quiet Earth*, memories from the narrator's past intrude upon the narrative, threatening to drive him mad. In the end, he wakes from a dream, but this just returns him to the beginning of the novel, blurring the line between memory, reality, and dream. He forms a partnership with the only other man alive, but their mutual distrust of one another makes their two-person community untenable. In *Idaho Transfer*, the protagonist gets trapped in a future wasteland, creating a post-apocalyptic disconnection from the past, her home, and her family. She is unable to form a sustainable community with the other researchers who are stranded along with her. She displaces her grief into an obsession with getting pregnant and finding community in the perpetuation of humanity, but the discovery that she is sterile destroys this hope. Her brief return to the past confirms that she no longer has a place in the past, but the fate awaiting her in the distant future is to be consumed as fuel. Representative of the post-apocalyptic genre, these texts present the struggles of posttraumatic survival and the instability of community in the post-apocalyptic world in which culturally shared experiences have been lost. However, underlying these stories is the possibility for audiences to be inspired to work through our own struggles and make immediate changes in our own lives and communities.

Limitations and Utility of This Formulation

As I set out to write this conclusion, I was struck with the irony that this dissertation, which is so interested in endings and their function in structuring narratives, must itself end. The goal of the conclusion is to meaningfully summarize the previous chapters. Further, by offering ideas for future study, this dissertation gets situated within a larger context of research—drawing

upon research of the past and looking towards research of the future. Thus, this dissertation about the post-apocalyptic genre cannot escape being apocalyptic.

The aim of this dissertation has been to consider a specific, delimiting conception of the post-apocalyptic genre: particularly, *post*-apocalyptic themes and elements that diverge from apocalyptic ones. The benefit of this approach has been to offer a look at how the governing principles of the post-apocalyptic world stand separate from those of worlds rooted in apocalyptic ideology that look forward to redemptive new beginnings. Defining the genre by this conception of the post-apocalyptic is useful for distinguishing between various depictions of end-times scenarios. Disaster films, like *2012* (2009), although they imagine catastrophic destruction, are not concerned with the world after that destruction. Dystopian futuristic texts, like *The Hunger Games* (novel, 2008; film, 2012), are concerned with worlds in which overarching power structures are again in place. Carving out a post-apocalyptic genre between these others concentrates the attention on the themes of a world in which survival amidst nonexistent infrastructure is the order of the day with no promise of a future renewal. Narrowing the scope of the genre reveals particular recurrent themes within the texts that reflect post-apocalyptic concepts. A limitation of this approach, however, is that although the outer form of the genre is post-apocalyptic, the inner form which invites audience participation and offers hope to change our actual future is quite apocalyptic in nature. Thus, the post-apocalypticism of the genre remains limited.

Additionally, this approach to genre theory is restricted to my own study and explication of the genre. As discussed previously in the section about genre theory, it has been argued that such a singular perspective often fails to address the various entities involved in producing, distributing, and reading/watching genre texts. I offer supporting comments from scholars and

reviewers and culturally and historically situate the evolution of the genre, but the voices of such entities as film studios, publishing houses, and audience members are absent from the discussion. Upon reflection, this seems to be most limiting when trying to elucidate the inner form of the genre. Without gathering input from a range of audience members, my analysis of the participation that the genre demands of readers and viewers is based on my synthesis of the texts and the scholarship that I studied. This limitation of my theoretical approach to the genre is also related to the limitations of my method of analysis. Close readings of texts are common in qualitative literary and film studies, and they are beneficial for identifying and elaborating on important characteristics and themes. However, my readings and evaluation of the recurring elements, the themes, and their importance could potentially be limited by preconceived expectations. For the purpose of this study, I think this method was appropriate and useful. My close readings provided insights into the texts that supported the overall aim of the study, but they also illuminated aspects of the texts that I had not previously considered. In future studies, different and/or additional methods of analysis would be helpful in order to consider alternate perspectives.

Another limitation of this study is that it restricts description and classification of post-apocalyptic texts to that single genre although individual texts often participate in multiple genres. The formulation of the post-apocalyptic genre presented here is useful for identifying specific themes within these texts but spends little time considering how other themes within the texts contribute to their participation in other genres. A related limitation of this dissertation is the relative lack of specific focus on zombie texts. I did not spend much room discussing zombie literature and film specifically because not all of them are post-apocalyptic. Many zombie stories fit more closely with the disaster genre, so my study limited discussion to select zombie

scenarios that represent the post-apocalyptic genre. The wider range of zombie texts is also a good example of the tendency for apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic distinctions to be blurred and fluid. This is another limitation of this study, for while I seek to delimit the genre for the purposes of this study, it does not exist in isolation from other genres or from the influence of apocalypticism. Especially given the nature of genres to hybridize and evolve, the post-apocalyptic genre often cannot be separated completely from apocalyptic themes. Additionally, due to the limited scope of this study, there are other recurring themes in the genre that are not discussed. Regardless, with the work presented here, I hope to offer a specific conception of the genre that will allow for a different perspective of the genre, one that provides a way for post-apocalyptic texts to be discussed in their own unique context.

Ideas for Further Study

As mentioned above, the scope of this dissertation is narrow, limiting deeper study of zombie texts and other subgenres within the post-apocalyptic genre. In addition to zombie stories, other subgenres include those specifically focused on the empty city, plague, ecological cataclysm, nuclear crisis, and more. There is a wealth of scholarship examining the representation of nuclear and ecological crises from a broader perspective, and the recent increased interest in zombies has led to study of that subject in a larger context. However, there is relatively little scholarship specifically devoted to looking at these subjects as they intersect with the post-apocalyptic imagination. It may provide for interesting analysis to explore these topics in such a narrower context, and expanding from my work here, it may be enlightening to study the intersection between these topics and the post-apocalyptic genre.

Additionally, it would be worth extending the initial thoughts presented here to include

study of other themes which recur in the genre, such as themes that also appear repeatedly in the Western genre—the wandering hero, tribalism, notions of the frontier and the unknown territories, and rule by force. Although such themes are discussed in a Western context, there is again little work looking at the intersection between the Western and the post-apocalyptic genres or between other genres and themes and the post-apocalyptic genre. These and other specific aspects of the genre could be explored in greater detail, using the present study as a model for how the genre applies various themes and formal practices to the specific context of the post-apocalyptic world.

Also, in relation to the limitations of theory and method, it could be useful to conduct additional studies that consider how other entities view the post-apocalyptic genre. Other qualitative studies could include interviews with authors, producers, or audiences. Quantitative studies could possibly be operationalized that allow individuals to identify, order, and rank attributes that they associate with the post-apocalyptic genre. Studies that invite different voices and different methods may help cast additional light on our cultural fascination with post-apocalypse. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to examine how the post-apocalyptic genre is manifested in forms of media beyond literature and film. For example, post-apocalyptic worlds have been depicted in comic book series such as *Kamandi* (1972-1978) and *Y: The Last Man* (2002-2008), in addition to *The Walking Dead*, as well as in video games like *DayZ* (2013) and *The Last of Us* (2013). Thus, it would be illuminating to study how the genre is implemented in these media in ways both similar to and different from its presence in film and literature.

Final Thoughts

Despite the limitations of generic categorization and definition, continued study of the

post-apocalyptic genre as a collection of texts which specifically envision a future world separate from our present apocalyptic ideologies is worthwhile. As long as threats of self-annihilation exist, the post-apocalyptic imagination will continue to influence our cultural products, reflecting the tenor of our times in regard to anxieties about the end and after. Apocalyptic narratives are ingrained in our cultural thinking, histories, and expectations. However, the promise of these narratives continues to be challenged in response to decisions made by the hegemonic forces in power, and challenging apocalypticism inspires the post-apocalyptic imagination, which gets reflected in our communally shared stories, art, film, and literature. While the future remains uncertain, post-apocalyptic texts will envision the possibilities and the impossibilities which await us. These visions reveal aspects of the cultural attitudes and anxieties which produce them, and studying these texts will continue to be beneficial to understanding how our collective experiences shape our stories and, reciprocally, how our stories assess and influence our cultural imagination. Our future—whatever it may hold—is always on the horizon. On one hand, it invokes concerns that, like Roy Batty's lament in *Blade Runner* (1982), all our memories and experiences "will be lost in time, like tears in rain." On the other hand, however, the prospective future also empowers us to make changes now that will prevent future catastrophe. From nihilistic to parodic and in between, the post-apocalyptic genre reflects our attempt to navigate this journey into an uncertain future.

NOTES

1. By the end of the 18th century, expeditions had been conducted to the ruins of Palmyra, and at the turn of the 19th century, images of Palmyra would have been in the French consciousness with the publication of Louis-François Cassas's numerous illustrations of Palmyra.

2. The theme of a sterile future occasionally reappears in post-apocalyptic fiction and other futuristic fiction, perhaps most significantly in the Cold War period when sterility was linked, either overtly or subtextually, to atomic radiation following nuclear war. Texts worth mentioning here include Harlan Ellison's novella "A Boy and His Dog" (1969), Brian Aldiss' *Greybeard* (1964), and P.D. James' *The Children of Men* (1992).

3. "One of the most representative examples of this genre, H.G. Wells's *War in the Air* (1908), is a novel whose description of an aerial bombing of New York by the Kaiser's Germany was referenced in discussions of 9/11 by critics, journalists and readers of Wells's fiction" (Mousoutzanis 2-3).

4. Although this chapter tends to focus on European *fin-de-siècle* texts, H. Bruce Franklin makes a statement about American novels during this time which resonates: "Between 1880 and 1917, dozens of American novels projected imaginary wars . . . that certainly expressed and very likely helped to shape the apocalyptic ideology prominent in America's wars from 1898 on. The emerging faith in American technological genius wedded the older faith in America's messianic destiny" (119).

5. It is also worth noting that the experiential effect for the one-way time travelers (which

excludes *The Time Machine*) is essentially apocalyptic because with their sudden transition into the future, their known world ends and is replaced by a new world. Although not all time-travel stories highlight the traumatic and apocalyptic aspects of time travel, there are some in which it plays a significant role, such as Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* (1974), *La Jetée* (1962), *12 Monkeys* (1995), and *Idaho Transfer* (1973).

6. Although cyclicism is a theme of many post-apocalyptic texts, it is worth noting its significance in Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and Craig Harrison's *The Quiet Earth* (1981). Also, employed in a different way by the long-format nature of *The Walking Dead* (both the comic and the television program), the characters experience a certain kind of recurring narrative cycle: they start in a hostile, dangerous, unpredictable setting; then, they find relative safety and stability and begin to feel settled; as they regain a sense of normalcy a new threat is introduced; their safety and security are eventually compromised; and they again return to a hostile, dangerous, unpredictable setting.

7. The title "Heart of Darkness" is ambiguous and has multiple meanings, possibly referring to the "Dark Continent" of Africa; London, which Marlow characterizes as dark and gloomy; Kurtz, who is mysterious and sinister and "hollow at the core;" and also Marlow himself, whose journey is also a self-examination of his own heart (Conrad 221, 262-3).

8. To give a few examples: it is quoted in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), as the epigraph; S.A. Bodeen's *The Compound* (2008), again as the epigraph; and Robert Kirkman and Jay Bonansinga's *The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor* (2011), in dialogue from one character to another. It provides the title for the short-lived *Not with a Bang* (1990). It is also referenced in an episode of *Survivors* (1975-1977) as well as by Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), in the film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Interestingly, in addition to quoting "The Hollow Men," Kurtz has

copies of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* and James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the two books Eliot cites as sources for much of the symbolism in *The Waste Land*.

9. The Doomsday Clock itself is used as a structuring device in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' twelve-issue comic *Watchmen* (1985), with the clock getting a minute closer to midnight on the title page of each chapter.

10. The phrase "the day after tomorrow" has been used on several occasions as a title in film, television, and print. It is an alternate title of Robert Heinlein's 1949 novel *Sixth Column*, a pulp, futuristic science-fiction tale; the title of Allan Folsom's 1994 thriller about a plot to create a new Third Reich; the title of a 1975 science-fiction edutainment program from Gerry Anderson; and more recently, the title of Roland Emmerich's 2004 disaster spectacle. In each case, the phrase connotes a nearness of the future event.

11. Religious fanaticism is a recurring element in the post-apocalyptic genre. As early as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), religious zealotry and individuals asserting theocratic authority over others began to reflect one of the dangers of the post-apocalyptic world. Additional examples include Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960), *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), and *Survivors* (1975-77).

12. There has also been a surge of young adult novels which often get associated with the post-apocalyptic genre but are more correctly dystopian fiction. These include Jeanne DuPrau's series which began with *The City of Ember* (2003-2008), Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), and S.A. Bodeen's *The Compound* and its sequel (2008, 2013).

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APPENDIX

The texts listed in the following timeline (see table 1) have been selected from those

mentioned in chapter 3 of this dissertation, with particular emphasis on post-apocalyptic texts

and relevant apocalyptic texts to serve as a guide to the history of the post-apocalyptic genre.

Table 1

Timeline of Post-apocalyptic Texts and Turning Points of the Post-apocalyptic Genre

Description of Turning Point	Year	Title	Medium
Secularization of apocalypse and interest in the Last Man			
	1805	*Le denier homme* (*The Last Man*)	novel
	1818	"Darkness"	poem
Early divergence from apocalyptic ideology			
	1826	*The Last Man*	novel
Fin-de-siècle interest in future war and future civilizations			
	1871	*The Battle of Dorking*	novel
	1885	*After London*	novel
	1887	*A Crystal Age*	novel
	1891	*News from Nowhere*	novel
	1894	*La fin du monde*	novel
	1895	*The Time Machine*	novel
	1901	*The Purple Cloud*	novel
	1905	*Fragment d'histoire future* (*Underground Man*)	novel

1908	*War in the Air*	novel
1910	*The Sleeper Awakes*	novel
1912	*The Night Land*	novel
1912	*The Scarlet Plague*	novel
1914	*The World Set Free*	novel

Post-World War I
disillusionment

1922	*The Waste Land*	poem
1925	"The Hollow Men"	poem
1930	*Last and First Men*	novel
1931	*La fin du monde*	film
1933	*When Worlds Collide*	film
1936	*Things to Come*	film

Post-World War II
"psychic havoc" and
Cold War anxieties

1949	*Earth Abides*	novel
1951	*Five*	film
1954	*I Am Legend*	novel
1954	*Tomorrow!*	novel
1955	*Day the World Ended*	film
1956	*The Death of Grass*	novel
1956	*World Without End*	film
1957	*On the Beach*	novel
1959	*Alas, Babylon*	novel
1959	*Hiroshima mon amour*	film
1959	*On the Beach*	film
1959	*The World, the Flesh and the Devil*	film
1960	*A Canticle for Leibowitz*	novel
1960	*Dark December*	novel

Influence from
New Waves and
postmodernism as
the genre proliferates

1961	*The Day the Earth Caught Fire*	film
1961	*Last Year at Marienbad*	film
1961	*The Wind from Nowhere*	novel
1962	*The Drowned World*	novel
1962	*Panic in Year Zero*	film
1962	*La Jetée*	film
1962	*The World in Winter*	novel
1963	*Cat's Cradle*	novel
1964	*The Burning World*	novel
1964	*Davy*	novel
1964	*Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*	film

1964	*Greybeard*	novel
1964	*The Last Man on Earth*	film
1965	*A Wrinkle in the Skin*	novel
1966	*The Crystal World*	novel
1966	*Path to Savagery*	novel
1967	"I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream"	short story
1968	*Night of the Living Dead*	film
1968	*Planet of the Apes*	film
1969	*The Bed Sitting Room*	film
1969	"A Boy and His Dog"	novella
1969	*Damnation Alley*	novel
1970	*Beneath the Planet of the Apes*	film
1970	*Gas-s-s-s*	film
1970	*No Blade of Grass*	film
1971	*Glen and Randa*	film
1971	*The Omega Man*	film
1972-1976	*The Dancers at the End of Time* series	novels
1972	*Malevil*	novel
1973	*The Bridge*	novel
1973	*Idaho Transfer*	film
1975	*A Boy and His Dog*	film
1975-1977	*Survivors*	TV series
1975	*The Ultimate Warrior*	film
1976	*Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*	novel
1977	*Damnation Alley*	film
1977	*Lucifer's Hammer*	novel
1978	*Dawn of the Dead*	film
1978	*The Stand*	novel

Wasteland warrior
tales begin to
dominate the genre

1979	*Mad Max*	film
1979	*Ravagers*	film
1979	*The Warriors*	film
1981	*Escape from New York*	film
1981	*The Quiet Earth*	novel
1981	*The Road Warrior*	film
1981-1993	*The Survivalist* series	novels
1982	*Warriors of the Wasteland*	film
1982	*When the Wind Blows*	graphic novel
1983	*2019: After the Fall of New York*	film
1983-2003	*The Ashes* series	novels
1983	*The Day After*	TV movie
1983	*Testament*	film
1984	*Night of the Comet*	film
1984	*Threads*	TV movie

1985	*Day of the Dead*	film
1985	*The Postman*	novel
1986	*America 3000*	film
1986-2015	*Deathlands* series	novels
1986-2015	*Endworld* series	novels
1986	*When the Wind Blows*	film
1988	*Empire of Ash*	film
1988	*The Last Ship*	novel

Final years of the
Cold War and
stagnation of the genre

1990	*Not With a Bang*	TV series
1991	*Delicatessen*	film
1992	*Woops!*	TV series
1993	*The Fire Next Time*	TV miniseries
1994	*The Stand*	TV miniseries
1995	*12 Monkeys*	film
1995	*Blindness*	novel
1995-2007	*Left Behind* series	novels
1995	*Tank Girl*	film
1995	*Waterworld*	film
1997	*The Postman*	film
1998	*Six-String Samurai*	film
2000	*On the Beach*	TV movie

Resurgence of interest
in post-apocalypticism,
particularly zombies

2002	*28 Days Later*	film
2003	*Deathlands: Homeward Bound*	TV movie
2003	*Time of the Wolf*	film
2003-present	*The Walking Dead*	comic books
2003	*The Zombie Survival Guide*	book
2004	*Dawn of the Dead* (remake)	film
2004	*Shaun of the Dead*	film
2005	*Land of the Dead*	film
2006-2008	*Jericho*	TV series
2006	*Life as We Knew It*	novel
2006	*The Road*	novel
2006	*World War Z*	novel
2007	*Diary of the Dead*	film
2007	*I Am Legend*	film
2007	*The World Without Us*	book
2008	*The Last Man*	film
2008-2010	*Life After People*	TV series
2008-2010	*Survivors*	TV series
2008	*World Made by Hand*	novel

2009-2010	*The Colony*	TV series
2009	*How to Survive the End of the World as We Know It: Tactics, Techniques, and Technologies for Uncertain Times*	book
2009	*One Second After*	novel
2009	*Survival of the Dead*	film
2009	*Zombieland*	film
2010	*After Armageddon*	TV program
2010	*Be Ready When the Sh*t Goes Down: A Survival Guide to the Apocalypse*	book
2010	*The Book of Eli*	film
2010-present	*The Walking Dead*	TV series
2011	*Survivors: A Novel of the Coming Collapse*	novel
2012-2014	*Doomsday Preppers*	TV series
2013	*This Is the End*	film
2013	*The World's End*	film
2014-present	*Z Nation*	TV series
2015-present	*The Last Man on Earth*	TV series
2015	*Mad Max: Fury Road*	film