The Search for Closure

in Selected Literary Representations
of the End of the World

Andrew Craig, B.A. (Hons)

Department of English and Creative Writing

Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

Flinders University

Contents

Abstract

Fictional representations of the end of the world suggest a failure of the idea of closure by representing a world that has failed to end. This thesis examines the issue of closure in selected texts of the end of the world in the atomic era. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980) are used as the primary examples. There are also detailed discussions of Walter M. Miller, Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960), Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) and H.G. Wells' *The World Set Free* (1914). These are used primarily to contextualise the two main texts within the genre, and to develop the concept of the failure of closure. All five texts are further contextualised within the broader field of fictions of the end of the world, within the tradition of mythic representations of the end of the world, and within their contemporary historical and cultural developments.

This thesis explores closure in these novels as it relates to narrative, myth, language and landscape, as well as their nature as warnings. Narrative in such fictions is first problematised because they contain a disjunction between the end of a fiction and the end of the fictional world represented therein. In such fictions, myth is often used as a symbol of the failure of endings, as the characters find themselves in cyclical, mythic time, often looking back to a half-remembered past to find meaning in their world. This partial connection with the past implies neither a complete break nor complete rebirth, either of which would suggest a sense of closure. In a similar way to myth, language is also a symbol of a half broken connection with the past in these fictions, as the characters attempt to understand the language of the past. Furthermore, language may actually defer closure in itself by slowing reading and obfuscating meaning. The characters of these fictions also use landscape as a way of attempting to find structure and closure in their lives, although these attempts are frustrated. Finally, these texts may act as a warning, and in doing so may offer a kind of extra-textual closure. Examining these texts through the lens of closure allows new critical insight. *The Road*, in particular, has not yet been examined within the context of fictions of the end of the world.

In pursuing this investigation, this thesis also argues that endings are important in creating a sense of meaning and purpose. The denial of an ending, therefore, denies such meaning. The development of end of the world fictions has paralleled a general sense that endings have failed, and that humanity might be headed towards meaningless destruction.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Andrew Craig

Acknowledgements

Introduction

'Begin at the beginning,' advises the King in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), 'and go on till you come to the end: then stop.'[1] This advice may seem obvious, but it stands in stark contrast with that given by the Water-rat in Oscar Wilde's 'The Devoted Friend' (1888), who claims, 'Every good story-teller nowadays starts with the end, and then goes on to the beginning, and concludes with the middle.'[2] Closure and structure are important. They give meaning and sense, they provide purpose to whatever precedes them, and they are part of a chronological progression. Imagining an ending provides a sense of finiteness, and allows understanding. In this final state, meaning and purpose can be found. Without an ending, the reader is left always awaiting that final full-stop and always suspecting the possibility of another subordinate clause that will undercut the expected meaning. On the other hand, as the Water-rat's comment suggests, contemporary literature often demands a certain obfuscation of that purpose, a complexity that provides both a sense of sophistication and in some way better pretends to represent the complex and confusing state of the real world. This is what Frank Kermode calls 'clerkly scepticism', a knowing cynicism about the possibility of representing the world in a neat, tidy form.[3] When a text can end with the middle, and begin with the end, then the very concept of endings becomes uncertain, potentially undermining meaning. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions, the focus of this thesis, begin with the end-of-the-world, run straight past the end-of-the-world, or even end with that purposeless destruction. By obfuscating notions of ending, these fictions question the very idea of meaning. Ultimately, these questions, more often than not, are

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[1] Lewis Carroll, 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', in *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition,* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000), pp. 3-128 (p. 121).
[2] Oscar Wilde, 'The Devoted Friend', in *Complete Short Fiction,* ed. by Ian Small (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 24-34 (p. 27).
[3] See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

answered to some degree. Meaning is usually found; these are fictions constructed to a purpose, after all.

However, the fact that these questions are *asked* is a direct result of the changing way humanity sees itself in the world, and these texts offer an intriguing investigation into meaning, closure and purpose in a world that could self-destruct. Fiction about the end of the world focuses on the most absolute of endings, the end of everything. However, in doing so, these fictions question the very possibility of closure and invoke a search for meaning, a search that is intrinsic to the condition of contemporary Western culture. They explore the distinction between endings and closure, for an ending merely suggests that something is over, while closure suggests that it is also complete. Closure is when something has not merely ended, but *should* have ended. The concept of closure is explored further in Chapter Two.

The human need for closure explains what I call eschatological desire. This desire is the impulse behind the creation of myths of the end of the world, and the desire of many people to join with such ends-. Whether taken in a light-hearted way (such as the mostly cynical discussion about the end of the Mayan calendar in 2012), or seriously in the extreme (such as the mass suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult, members of which hoped to ascend spiritually into the arms of an alien life-form and escape the coming destruction), the human condition appears to include the desire to imagine an end. However, in the twentieth century, humanity has had to come to terms with the genuine possibility of initiating the end of the world and destroying itself through nuclear war, biological agents, or environmental decay, and this has bred a parallel phenomenon: eschatological fear. These new potential endings generally seem meaningless and horrible. This confrontation between eschatological desire and fear has demanded a literary response. Throughout the Cold War in particular, the

possibility of imminent nuclear war and the perceived importance of dealing with it as a political issue demanded serious artistic and critical attention. Many fictions have also highlighted other, imminent concerns, such as the genetic apocalypse of *Oryx and Crake* (2003),[4] the environmental degradation that seems to have inspired *World Without Us* (2007),[5] or, for believers, the religious visions of *Left Behind* (1995).[6] However, rather than just representing an imminent fear, such as a fear of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) or environmental collapse, apocalyptic destruction can also represent a broader uncertainty about life and meaning. Apocalypse can represent a 'disenchantment in our culture,' as through 'their images, Western man expresses disbelief that his civilization can endure, in anything like its present form.'[7] Visions of the end of the world can represent a failure of faith, and a lack of hope in direction or meaning as 'those watching the newsreels are faced with the likelihood of an empty projection booth, a projector out of control.'[8] On the other hand, such visions may attempt to resolve these questions through the provision of a meaningful ending.

In the same way that eschatology might give a sense of meaning to life by giving it an ending, literature also reflects life in a way that is ordered and meaningful. Frank Kermode lays out this parallel *The Sense of an Ending*. It is certainly true that literature reflects and restructures life in a way that holds it finite, complete and poised for analysis. This means that works of literature that include failed apocalyptic endings have a metafictional

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[4] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).
[5] Alan Weisman, *World without Us*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 2007).
[6] John Layman, Tim F. LaHaye, and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001).
[7] W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 6.
[8] David Cowart, 'Time Present and Time Past: History and the Contemporary Novel', in *History and the Contemporary Novel,* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), pp. 1-30 (p. 2).

component as they recursively include in their narrative structure another, failed structure.[11] This metafictional recursivity suggests the fictional nature of structure and of closure.

Even when the narrative structures do align, such as in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957),[12] the possibility, or impossibility, of meaningful endings is engaged with. However, texts that most directly deal with these concerns are not those that end with apocalyptic finality, but those that are post-apocalyptic narratives, in which the end has truly failed to bring about closure. Indeed, in such texts the world has simply failed to end. These texts build worlds in which civilisation has collapsed, yet humanity still limps on. They problematise structure and engage in a quest for meaning, purpose, and closure.

Eschatology and Criticism

Eschatology, broadly, is the study of the end of things.[13] W. Warren Wagar begins his detailed account of eschatological myth and fiction by declaring that '[f]ollowers of fashion in popular and serious culture since the mid-nineteen seventies have been calling wry attention to the resurgence of interest in Last Things',[14] before soberly and cogently arguing that the apocalypse has, in fact, always been with us. Frank Kermode, similarly, suggests that when eschatological prophecy fails, as it always must, 'we make little images of moments which seemed like ends; we thrive on epochs.'[15] This, for Kermode, suggests a time of perpetual crisis. He also remarks that H.W. Fowler saw the word 'epoch' as so overused that he included an entry in his famous guide to English usage:

> If an epoch were made every time we are told that a discovery or other event is epoch-making, our bewildered state of ceaseless transition from the thousands of eras we were in yesterday to the different thousands we were in today would be pitiful indeed. But luckily the word is a

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[11] This is explored further in Chapter Two.
[12] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach*, (Adelaide: Heinemann, 1958).
[13] This is further defined in Chapter One.
[14] Wagar, p. 1.
[15] Kermode, p. 7.

blank cartridge, meant only to startle, & not to carry even so imponderable a bullet as conviction.[16]

Literary theorists, too, often draw attention to eschatological metaphors and claims. Indeed, Fowler's sarcastic description of a world of ceaseless transition has an uncanny resemblance to later theorists' descriptions of the post-modern condition.

Many of these theorists turn to the Christian Apocalypse, as laid out in the Book of Revelation, as a metaphor. In addition, readers and scholars use the term 'apocalypse' loosely to refer to destruction or the changing of epochs or to eschatologies in general. As the Christian Apocalypse appears to be the most commonly understood cosmic eschatology, it serves this thesis as a reference point. However, the Apocalypse laid out in the Book of Revelation is only one of a number of Christian and Jewish apocalypses, and these apocalypses only one family of eschatological myths. Furthermore, with the exception of perhaps *The Road*, the fictions studied herein do not conform with the model of Christian Apocalypse;[18] however, as I hope will become clear, the Christian Apocalypse is a useful demonstration of what is expected of eschatological myth, and it is these expectations that end-of-the-world fictions often play with, deny or entirely supplant. A further, more detailed, definition of the terms 'apocalypse' and 'eschatology' is given in Chapter One, under the heading 'Eschatology'.

As an example of the use of the concept of apocalypse by critics, Ihab Hassan explores apocalyptic absence in *Literature of Silence*.[19] Similarly, David Ketterer sees the apocalypse as intricately related to America, science fiction, and the romance, and all as

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[16] H.W. Fowler, 'Epoch', in *Modern English Usage,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 144.

[18] *A Canticle for Leibowitz* contains explicit reference to the failure of the myth of Apocalypse. *Riddley Walker* and *On the Beach* reference the Christian mythos, and both lament at the failure of an ending. While they may not be seen as referring to the Revelation of John, they certainly engage with religious eschatology and Christian myth. In any case their secular vision can be contrasted with the religious, and they are still commonly referred to as apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic by readers and scholars.

[19] Ihab Hassan, *Literature of Silence*, (New York: Knopf, 1967).

intricately related to each other.[20] In *New Worlds for Old*, he claims that in a 'teleological sense […] all literature is apocalyptic'.[21] Northrop Frye includes 'Apocalyptic Imagery' as one of his mythic archetypes.[22] Jacques Derrida discusses at length 'An Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy'.[23] D.H. Lawrence's final major work was the very broad critique of western civilization called *Apocalypse*.[24] Fredric Jameson describes post-modernism as an 'inverted millenarianism' in *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,[25] suggesting that post-modernism implies the end of the world has already passed. He is joined by other scholars such as James Berger, Teresa Heffernan, Daniel Cordle, David Sheridan, Richard Dellamora and Elizabeth K. Rosen, who all essentially 'argue that apocalyptic tropes and sensibilities largely inflect the broad philosophical/theoretical/cultural and historical orientations grouped under the terms *postmodernism* and *poststructuralism*'.[26] Kermode's discussion of the immanent apocalypse and eternal crisis in *The Sense of an Ending* can also be taken to refer to the post-modern

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[20] David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974).

[21] Ibid. p. 12.

[22] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, (Princeton: Princton University Press, 1957).

[23] Jacques Derrida, 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy', in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, trans. by John P. Leavey, Jr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 25-71.

[24] D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

[25] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

[26] James Berger, 'Introduction: Twentieth-Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 46 (2000), pp. 387-95 (p. 392). Emphasis in original. Berger writes in a special issue of *Twentieth Century Literature* called 'Twentieth Century Apocalypse', which explores the relationship between literature and apocalypse. The connection between post-apocalyptic stories and post-modernism has been explicitly explored by a number of scholars:. Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Daniel Cordle, 'Beyond the Apocalypse of Closure: Nuclear Anxiety in Postmodern Literature of the United States', in *Cold War Literature,* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 63-77; David Sheridan, 'The End of the World: Closure in the Fantasies of Borges, Calvino and Millhauser', in *Postmodern Approaches to the Short Story,* ed. by Farthat Iftekfarrudin et al (Westport; London: Praeger, 2003); Richard Dellamora, *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Elizabeth K. Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008). This connection is also explored further below, particularly in the discussion of *Riddley Walker*. Intriguingly, as recently as 2008, Rosen argued that 'there has been little or no analysis of postmodern apocalypse at all.' Elizabeth K. Rosen, 'Introduction', in *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination,* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. xi-xxxiv (p. xxv).

condition, although that term did not yet exist when he wrote. Paul Fiddes expands on Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* and applies it to a series of literary works, combining a study of literature with the theology of eschatology, in *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*.[27] David J. Leigh similarly looks to eschatological theology as an exegetical tool for literature, and his treatment of *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is used in this study.[28] The introduction to Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture* offers an excellent summary of the broad ways that critics have used the apocalypse that goes even further than the short list provided here.[29]

Of particular interest in this crop of apocalyptic literary theorists is Frank Kermode. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode explores the way that myth and fiction both express the same innate human needs and desires. For Kermode, literature and eschatology are both born of similar impulses to find structure and meaning. Literature and myth are cousins, then, and it is to be expected that their structures will mirror each other in some ways. Kermode claims that the novel flourished as belief in Apocalypse waned; this is not to say that the novel is religious or directly inspired by religion, but instead that it is a secular fulfilment of similar needs. Although now quite old,[30] Kermode's work is still widely cited as foundational in the study of apocalypse and closure, and this thesis was in part inspired by the question of how a novel could mimic the structures of apocalypse, and yet contain within it a representation of the end of the world that did not conform to the Apocalypse. All the fictions studied herein demonstrate the failure of closure; they use eschatological motifs to explore the sense of meaninglessness in a world that can destroy itself. While Kermode's views are not taken

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[27] Paul Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*, (London: Blackwell, 2000).
[28] David J. Leigh, *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).
[29] Heffernan, pp. 1-26.
[30] The recent edition does, however, include an epilogue by Kermode that acknowledges its weariness while also countering many of the claims that have been brought against it and arguing for its continued relevance.

wholesale, or used throughout the entirety of the thesis, this thesis developed through an exploration of what would happen if these views that are so often invoked in discussion of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction were seriously brought to bear on them, and the sense that this suggested an intriguing sense of recursivity.

If all the critics cited above are presumed to be correct, then modern culture is apocalyptic, science-fiction is apocalyptic, as is the romance, and the satire;[31] indeed *all* literature is apocalyptic. Post-modernism and post-structuralism are also apocalyptic, as is modernism (maybe then structuralism as well). Mythology and theology are certainly, at least in part, apocalyptic, but according to these critics so is America, and Britain; indeed the whole of western civilisation is both founded on, and headed towards, Apocalypse. As Jean Baudrillard puts it:

> [A]pocalypse […] which we had been able to postpone [infinitely has been] passed […] unawares and now [we] find ourselves in the situation of having overextended our own finalities, of having short-circuited our own perspectives, and of already being in the hereafter, that is, without horizon and without hope[.][32]

It is certainly true that there are strong eschatological undercurrents in culture, and part of the reason for apocalyptic infatuation is the striking power and absoluteness of the symbols of apocalypse. Apocalypse is endlessly versatile as an explanatory metaphor because, as Kermode makes clear, it is an expression of the need to humanise time and give it structure. Other expressions of this same need, such as literature, are easily transposed and seen as reflections of apocalypse.

While these critical and cultural movements form a backdrop, and sometimes a key, for the study at hand, the real focus here is on those fictions that actually represent the end of

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[31] Ketterer suggests that this is the claim of Alvin Kernan in his *The Plot of Satire*. Ketterer, p. 9.
[32] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Anorexic Ruins', in *Looking Back on the End of the World,* ed. by Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, trans. by David Antal (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), pp. 29-45 (pp. 33-34).

the world. That is, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. Critical attention on fiction of the end-of-the-world has waned since the 1980s, when it was loosely grouped together as nuclear criticism, with nuclear war being the dominant cause of fictional apocalypse throughout the Cold War. This term was never fully defined in its time, and the field was best summarised after its wane by Ken Ruthven in *Nuclear Criticism* (1993),[33] an insightful work that serves as a tombstone for that particular critical genre. The term nuclear criticism was first used as the title of a special issue of *diacritics* in 1984. The issue contains a diverse collection of articles, relating the nuclear issue to Machiavelli,[34] abortion,[35] and literary theory. This issue describes itself as a reaction to:

> [R]ecent criticism and critical theory […] that […] without exception […] recounts an allegory of nuclear survival; and […] the sense that critical theory ought to be making a more important contribution to the public discussion of nuclear issues.[36]

This second point, that 'critical theory ought to be making a […] contribution', was the most unifying aspect of the movement. Nuclear criticism was a critical reaction to the seeming inevitability of coming nuclear war. The most notable article from the issue is Derrida's deconstructionist reading of nuclear war as text, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)'.[37] In it, Derrida suggests that scholars of the humanities should 'concern [… themselves] seriously with the nuclear issue',[38] as 'the stakes of the nuclear question are [not just] those of humanity, [but] of the humanities.'[39] Nuclear war is a text, according to Derrida. In fact, he claims it is *'fabulously textual'*,[40] and

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[33] Ken Ruthven, *Nuclear Criticism*, (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

[34] Michael McCanles, 'Machiavelli and the Paradoxes of Deterrence', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 11-19.

[35] Zoe Sofia, 'Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-Semiotics of Extraterrestrialism', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 47-59.

[36] 'Proposal for a Diacritics Colloquium on Nuclear Criticism', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 2-3.

[37] Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter, and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 20-31.

[38] Ibid. p. 22.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid. p. 23.

vulnerable to the same kind of critical deconstruction as other texts. For Derrida, nuclear criticism is a genre of *criticism*, and does not relate to any specific genre of literature. As with Marxist, Feminist, or, even more pertinently, eco- criticism, nuclear criticism could be used as easily to explore Shakespeare as to explore contemporary fiction.[41]

A completely different response to nuclear criticism is embodied in the approach of Paul Brians, whose work fits more into the fields of bibliography and literary history. The difference of approach is best summarised by Roger Luckhurst:

> [I]n "No Apocalypse, Not Now," Derrida argues that the condition of literature under the nuclear is dealt with more "seriously" in texts by Mallarmé or Kafka "than in present-day novels that would offer direct and realistic descriptions of a 'real' nuclear catastrophe" [28]; in Paul Brians's bibliography an entry under "Sources" notes: "An entire issue of *Diacritics* (Summer 1984) was devoted to 'nuclear criticism' without any of the contributors so much as mentioning a single piece of nuclear war fiction" [99].[42]

That Brians finds this notable belies the concerns of his study, which explores literal representations of nuclear war. However, although it is not directly stated, Brians's *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* seems to begin from the same point as other works of nuclear criticism:[43] nuclear war is important, Brians suggests, possibly imminent, and the creative exploration of the theme may help to avoid it. The field covered in *Nuclear Holocausts* is extremely well-defined: only fictions that explicitly represent nuclear war need apply. The work offers a taxonomy, dividing texts by causes, settings and results. Ultimately, the harsh boundaries are limiting but necessary, as the bibliography is already exhaustive, almost exhausting. While the original text is very out-dated now, it has been updated in an

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[41] Peter Schwenger, though, does apply Derridean theories to the genre of end-of-the-world fictions in Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[42] Roger Luckhurst, 'Nuclear Criticism: Anachronism and Anachorism', *Diacritics,* 23 (1993), pp. 88-97 (p. 91).

[43] Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nuclear/1chap.htm> [accessed 3 May 2013].

online version, which is cited in this thesis. As a resource, the work is ultimately invaluable, along with Brians's other work in the field, particularly his other bibliographies.[44]

The role of nuclear war fictions as rhetorical devices that aim to deter from nuclearism is explored in Patrick Mannix's *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction*.[45] This work, intriguingly, manages to avoid any explicit connection with the broader field of nuclear criticism or science fiction criticism, even while engaging with fictions of nuclear war as tools for the anti-nuclear project. Other key works offering overviews of the field of eschatological visions in fiction include I.F. Clarke's *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749*,[46] David Dowling's *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*,[47] Harold L. Berger's *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*,[48] and Martha A. Bartter's *The Way to Ground Zero: The Atomic Bomb in American Science Fiction*.[49] Of particular note also is the work of David Seed, whose *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* covers that

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[44] Paul Brians, 'Nuclear War in Science Fiction, 1945-1959', *Science-Fiction Studies,* 11 (1984), pp. 253-63; Paul Brians, 'Resources for the Study of Nuclear War in Fiction', *Science-Fiction Studies,* (1986); Paul Brians, 'Nuclear War Fiction for Young Readers: A Commentary and Annoted Bibliography', in *Science Fictions, Social Conflict and War,* ed. by Philip John Davies (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Paul Brians, 'Nuclear War Fiction Collection at Washingon State University, The', *College & Research Libraries News,* 48 (1987), pp. 115-18; Paul Brians and Vladimir Gakov, 'Nuclear-War Themes in Soviet Science Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography', *Science-Fiction Studies,* 16 (1989), pp. 67-84; Paul Brians, 'Nuclear Family/Nuclear War', *PLL: Papers on Language & Literature,* 26 (1990), pp. 134-42; Paul Brians, 'Revival of Learning: Science after the Nuclear Holocaust in Science Fiction', in *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World,* ed. by Carl Yoke (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987); Paul Brians, 'Red Holocaust: The Atomic Conquest of the West', *Extrapolation,* 28 (1987), p. 319; Paul Brians, *Nuke Pop,* <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nukepop/index.html> [accessed 14 November 2008]; Paul Brians, 'Nuclear War/Post-Nuclear Fiction', *Columbiana,* Winter (1987), pp. 31-33. Paul Brians was also editor of the journal *Nuclear Texts and Contexts*, which is now available online at *Nuclear Texts & Contexts*, <http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/ntc/> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[45] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, (Lewisburg; London; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1992).
[46] I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford UP, 1993). Clarke has also written a very short, but insightful, summary of the history of apocalyptic visions: I.F. Clarke, 'The Tales of the Last Days, 1805-3794', in *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis,* ed. by David Seed (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 15-26.
[47] David Dowling, *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*, (London: University of Iowa Press, 1987).
[48] Harold L. Berger, *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976).
[49] Martha A. Bartter, *The Way to Ground Zero: The Atomic Bomb in American Science Fiction*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

period through short, focused studies of key texts.[50] Another particularly useful resource is W. Warren Wagar's *Terminal Visions*,[51] which offers both a concise and insightful overview of the myths of the end-of-the-world, and an historical and cultural analysis of the development of the genre of end-of-the-world fictions. *Terminal Visions* remains one of the most cited texts in the field. Notably, the number of critical texts studying the apocalypse in speculative fiction has diminished greatly since the end of the Cold War, while the study of the same theme in mainstream literature appears to be increasing. It is as if the explicit vision of apocalypse, particularly when posited as a warning, has waned as the implicit apocalypse has waxed. This means that the scholarship surrounding fictions that literally represent the end of the world is generally quite dated, although these key texts still offer the most detailed discussions of the field. The fact that they are dated is somewhat assuaged by the fact that they are still recent enough to cover all but one of the key texts studied in this thesis. A study such as this one, which offers a deep analysis of a small number of key texts, cannot hope to fill the gap in broad, recent scholarship. However, the discussion of *The Road*, in particular, may go some small way towards doing so.

The aforementioned overviews have been used to contextualise the fictions studied in this thesis within the broader genre of fictions of the end-of-the-world, and are drawn on where relevant. Other studies of more general apocalyptic visions and metaphors in literature are also drawn on, such as James R. May's *Towards a New Earth*,[52] which argues for a connection between American literature and the apocalypse and a distinction between redemptive apocalypse and mere destruction. This thesis also recognises this important

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[50] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). Seed has also edited a book of essays in the field of particular note. David Seed, *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis*, (London: Macmillan, 2000). His other essays in the field are also referred to in this thesis.

[51] Wagar.

[52] John R. May, *Toward a New Earth : Apocalypse in the American Novel*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972).

distinction, and uses the terms 'hopeful apocalypse' and 'fearful apocalypse', following from Zbingniew Lewicki's assertion in his exploration of the Apocalypse in American literature:

> There is no better metaphor to expression [...] duality of fear and hope than that of apocalypse: While we do not always remember it, the true meaning of the term includes not only destruction, but also a rebirth into a new and infinitely better world.[53]

Elizabeth K. Rosen makes a similar assertion by exploring the distinction between those traditional apocalyptic visions that depict a New Jerusalem, a Heaven on Earth, and those more recent visions that do not.[54] However, the discussion in this thesis focuses exclusively on those apocalyptic visions which are explicit and intended to be read in a literal way. Therefore, it looks to speculative works. As with most speculative fiction, the genre of fictions of the end-of-the-world is most often examined in broad strokes, and from a cultural perspective. This thesis engages with cultural changes, but focuses on literary analysis, close reading and comparison between fictions. Following this methodology, the focus throughout this study is on a small number of fictions in the hope that new ground can be found deep below this well-trodden path.

The overviews of end-of-the-world fictions mentioned above were also used – along with other works – to develop a survey of the genre, from which texts were selected for this study. The reasons for selection are outlined below, with the essential one simply being that the fictions chosen here demonstrate features that are important for the discussion of the failure of closure. That is, the fictions studied exaggerate aspects of closure that are implicit throughout the genre of end-of-the-world fictions. The field of nuclear criticism is reappropriated in Chapter Six of this thesis, which explores the concept of fictions of the end-of-the-world being used as a warning, and finding their meaning and closure through such a

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[53] Zbingniew Lewicki, *The Bang and the Whimper: Apocalypse and Entropy in American Literature*, (Greenwood Press, 1984), p. xi.
[54] See Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination*.

warning. Derrida's work, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now', is also used extensively within the theoretical framework of this discussion, particularly the concepts of nuclear war as textual, which notion informs the discussion of language in Chapter Four, and nuclear war as a speed race, which is referred to in Chapters Five and Six. Unfortunately, a detailed engagement with post-structuralist theory is impossible due to the large increase in scope required to do such a study justice. However, some post-structuralist critics (Derrida, Roland Barthes and J. Hillis Miller) are essential here. Derrida is one of the key theorists in the field of apocalyptic fictions, while Miller is a key figure in any discussion of closure. The connection made between post-apocalypse and post-modernism by Berger and others forms one of the two foundations of the discussion in Chapter Three, through the link of Hutcheon's claim that *Riddley Walker* is a work of historiographic metafiction. As this study involves the in-depth analysis – and close readings – of selected texts, the most important contextual framework is the one that arises from the scholarly/critical reception and discussion surrounding each of these texts. A great deal of research has therefore been focussed on analysis of this discussion, and is apparent throughout this thesis.

The most important single theoretical framework for this study, however, is Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. While it is not always referred to, it is always there, like the immanent apocalypse that Kermode suggests lies behind literature and culture. This thesis is founded on the suggestion that literature is a secular replacement for apocalypse, and therefore provides the same sense of closure. It follows that literature that actually represents the apocalypse would be recursive and would therefore represent a failure of closure. This concept is the seed of this thesis, and has inspired a study of the way in which fictions of the end-of-the-world represent closure and its failure. The concepts of apocalypse and closure, connected by Kermode, are separated out in Chapters One and Two of this thesis. This is accompanied by an examination of the history of eschatology, the concept of closure in

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literature, and the development of the changing way in which eschatology has been depicted in literature leading up to the atomic age. These concepts are reunited as a series of separate, yet interrelated theoretical underpinnings that inform the longer discussion.

Claims, Methods and Boundaries

This thesis explores five selected fictions of the end-of-the-world. Using these, it argues that end-of-the-world fictions suggest a failure of closure and a search for closure and meaning. These texts focus on endings, yet they problematise closure by depicting worlds that fail to reach their promised ends. Without closure, meaning and purpose are also uncertain. In this way, these texts represent broader cultural concerns about the uncertainty of narrative, closure, structure and meaning.

As mentioned above, Chapter One offers an overview of the development of myths and fictions of the end-of-the-world. The next two chapters focus on narrative structures and the representations of myth in these fictions. These chapters provide a discussion of the theory of closure in the novel. They use the examples of H.G. Wells' *The World Set Free* (1914), Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957), Walter M. Miller, Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980) to explore these issues. These chapters lay the groundwork for the rest of the study. *The World Set Free*, *On the Beach* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* have been selected for their archetypal natures: they are all considered important and influential works in the field and they depict narratives that lead up to apocalyptic destruction, continue through apocalyptic destruction or start after apocalyptic destruction. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, the spotlight turns to *Riddley Walker* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. While these chapters draw on comparative examples from the other key texts, from myth, from culture and from the broader field of end-of-the-world fictions, *Riddley Walker* and *The Road* anchor the discussion. The five selected texts are also

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introduced chronologically through the thesis, allowing some discussion of historical and cultural developments to be woven throughout.

The focus on close textual analysis makes it impossible to also engage with all the ways in which the end-of-the-world and closure can be represented, and this study should not be seen as representative of the whole of the genre. However, this spread of key fictions is intended to illustrate the key moments of the development of apocalypse through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and many of the key themes of the genre, with texts chosen because they are exemplars of some of the main subgenres. *The World Set Free* sits well before the development of real atomic weapons, whereas *On the Beach* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* fit within the first peak of nuclear paranoia, in the late 1950s and 60s, when the idea of obliteration was constantly present. *Riddley Walker* sits at the very start of the second peak of nuclear fears, which rose following from the end of *détente* and through the 1980s. *The Road* appeared well after the end of the Cold War, when fear of nuclear apocalypse had waned, yet apocalyptic anxiety remained. Although eschatological fears have proved a constant through history, these texts constitute key moments in the development of the issue through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with *The Road*, in particular, begging the question of why these themes continue to be prominent.

Chapter One undertakes a brief discussion of the history of the way that the end of the world has been seen in myth and fiction leading up to the atomic age in order to provide a context for the rest of the study. It traces the path of contemporary post-apocalyptic literature back to the Romantic period, with the questioning of the role of science and progress. It argues that the development of the atomic bomb has changed the nature of apocalypse, and this has been part of the development of the failure of meaning in the twentieth century.

Chapter Two focuses on literary closure. Chapter Two offers a discussion of closure in the novel in order to lay the groundwork for the analysis of the ways that literature of the end-of-the-world denies, subverts or defers a sense of closure. *The World Set Free* is explored in contrast with religious eschatological visions, suggesting that it is a secular parallel of religious, cosmic eschatology and uses the atomic bomb to wipe the slate clean and bring about a scientific utopia. In this way, secular apocalypse is imbued with meaning and purpose. However, the narrative itself is problematic, suggesting the difficulty of writing past the ending. This discussion is built on with a textual analysis of Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* as a kind of tragedy, and a discussion of its attempts to offer closure in the face of meaningless destruction. This chapter draws on eschatology and narratology as a theoretical framework, with Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* forming a junction in between.

Chapter Three focuses on the way that fictions that run past the end feature a return to mythic, cyclical time. It explores the post-apocalypse and the way that it subverts the possibility of closure. It begins with a brief overview of the sense of endlessness and the possible failure of endings that is apparent in literature of the twentieth century. It then continues with a reading of Walter M. Miller Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Building on previous theoretical frameworks of closure and eschatology, this reading focuses on the mythic nature of the text, and the way that its use of myths implies a return to cyclical time, following the model of Mircea Eliade's *Myth of Eternal Return*.[55] This is then followed by a comparative analysis of Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* that also draws on Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist concepts of myth.[56] This chapter argues that *Riddley*'s use of myth suggests the failure of closure. The characters in the novel search myth to try to find meaning

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[55] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).
[56] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1968), pp. 206-31.

and closure, yet the complicated and obfuscatory nature of myth merely highlights the impossibility of ever attaining these goals. Riddley finally must accept a multiplicity of forms of narrative knowledge, and learn to live within the mythic landscape. Following from this is a brief exploration of the way *Riddley Walker*'s deferral of closure is tied to its status as a work of historiographic metafiction. This also suggests a connection between post-apocalypticism and post-modernism and that Riddley's final acceptance of the multiplicity of narrative truths is a post-modern acceptance of his post-apocalyptic world. The ends of the world depicted in these fictions are failed, and simply cycle back, not to rebirth, but to a decaying circle of mythic time, denying a sense of closure.

Chapter Four focuses on language and the way that language use after the end is problematised. This chapter demonstrates that fictions of the end-of-the-world, with the key example being *Riddley Walker*, represent the failure of closure through their language, which stands in eternal oscillation between meanings. Like myth in the novel, the language of *Riddley Walker* is multi-layered, networked and multivalent. Also like myth, Riddley Walker must ultimately accept multivalence. The fracturing of language by the apocalyptic moment of history, and the hesitation of meaning, is yet another way that closure is deferred. This chapter draws on Saussurean linguistics and also Derrida's essay, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now.'[57] Given the large amount of scholarship on the use of language in *Riddley Walker*, this chapter also uses this critical tradition as a kind of theoretical framework, summarising and re-contextualising it around the discussion of closure.

Chapter Five focuses on landscape, the way in which landscape represents a kind of absence of meaning and closure, and how the characters in these fictions attempt to discover narrative structure through laying their lives out on the road. This chapter uses Cormac

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[57] Derrida, Porter, and Lewis.

McCarthy's *The Road* as the primary example, with *Riddley Walker* drawn in for comparative analysis. Chapter Five argues further that Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, along with a number of other fictions of the end-of-the-world, is not apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic, but instead takes place within this liminal moment, the dream state between the world that has ceased to end, and the new world that has failed to come into existence. This chapter then argues that the characters in *The Road* have created a structure in their lives through the use of landscape. They place their lives down the road.

Chapter Six continues the close reading of *The Road* with comparisons drawn with *Riddley Walker* and other key fictions of the end of the world. It argues that *The Road* may be a call to action, although to what action is unclear. It certainly is an indictment of contemporary society and of America, and may be an environmental parable, although both the extremity of the event and the lack of a specified cause denies a narrow eco-critical reading. What is clear is that *The Road* ultimately asks that we get off the road. The race to a conclusion is a race to disaster. Finally, the chapter argues that, while denying and deferring meaning throughout the text, McCarthy offers standard narrative closure, through the love of a son, the death of a father and generational change.

This study of closure in these selected fictions offers a number of new critical approaches to the genre. While the failure of closure is implicitly or explicitly suggested throughout the critical literature in the field, this thesis represents a detailed examination of the concept in relation to end-of-the-world fiction. The lens of closure allows an engagement with texts that rarely receive long critical treatments — *On the Beach* and *The World Set Free* — while it also opens often discussed issues, the language of *Riddley Walker* and the cycles of history in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, to a fresh critical eye. It is also hoped that the critical tools sketched out in this thesis can be applied to other works in the genre.

1 Apocalypse as Symbol and Structure: Myth, Fiction and Atomic Culture

Cosmic eschatologies, such as the Christian Apocalypse, the Hindu *mahāyuga*, or the Heaven's Gate suicidal cult's belief in the coming of the Hale-Bopp comet, are part of the mythic foundation that helps humanity make sense of a world that sometimes seems senseless. As Paul Corcoran notes:

> Human consciousness of the End activates our capacity, indeed our instinctual drive, to make meaning. Apocalypse, literally the 'unveiling' of aims and deeds, is an expression – always incomplete, partly hidden, therefore controversial – of our purposeful nature as human beings. It is both a recourse to divine authority and an appeal to mortal powers to make things whole, to see things complete and finished. This, in fine, is *apocalypse*. 'Now there it is and that's an end to it!' That stern, prophetic injunction as to existence and time is compelling at every level of human awareness, at once a theology and a parent's exercise of power and authority.[1]

There have been stories of the end-of-the-world throughout history; however, over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, stories of the end-of-the-world, at least in the western tradition, underwent a radical transformation, recast by technology and secularism. Science offered new possibilities for the end, and as human ingenuity led to exponential increases in technology it became evident that humanity now possessed powers that were previously reserved for the gods. This problematised the mythic foundations of eschatology. It also allowed, even demanded, fictional representation of the end of the world. Fictions have, for a long time, included apocalyptic themes and images, as well as general Biblical allusions. However, truly fictional depictions of the end-of-the-world required the secularisation of eschatology. Great, apocalyptic destruction had to become seen as part of history rather than simply an end of it. These fictions are attempts to explore, to express, and to come to terms with the anxieties created by the possibility of incomplete, seemingly meaningless, secular apocalypse.

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[1] Paul Corcoran, *Awaiting Apocalypse*, (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), p. 7.

This chapter argues that literature has had to come to terms with the changing nature of apocalypse, as it has become first secularised, then placed under the control of human hands, leading to a questioning and uncertainty about the nature of science, progress, and western culture. The word apocalypse certainly conjures images of destruction and death – of four horsemen sowing chaos and of angels pouring bowls of wrath upon the world. However, traditionally, apocalypse is not just about destruction. It is also a prophecy that provides a sense of narrative closure, a sense of final purpose and meaning. Therefore, the apocalypse narrativises history. As scientific understanding of the world has developed, and the apocalypse has been secularised, this has problematised its narrative function. The possibility of a meaningless, purposeless end of the world has arisen. Concurrent with this secularisation, fictions began to integrate these images of grand destruction. They expressed the desire for meaningful, fulfilled endings, and the fear of meaningless, horrific destruction. Apocalypse moved from divine promise to random act of nature and then, finally, to the product of human volition. The development of the atomic bomb, in particular, came to symbolise humanity's ability and willingness to pointlessly self-destruct. The atomic bomb is an icon of the human-wrought apocalypse, both imminent and immanent. It demands to be represented in literature and art. However, the atomic bomb is a kind of all-consuming, expanding, contagious absence. It is a nothingness that can only be represented by clearing an empty space, and even then that space is defined and structured, and thus not really nothingness at all, for this structure gives it meaning. This has led to a use of religious and poetic language, steeping the atomic bomb in myth and metaphor. Religious language is interesting because of the way it reinstates closure and meaning; it returns the trimmings of religious apocalypse to the atomic bomb. Poetic language, on the other hand, represents absence through metaphor, leading to a deferral of meaning. The second half of this chapter looks at the way that the atomic bomb has been seen historically, and engages in a close

reading and comparison of a number of historical documents, speeches and ephemera in order to better understand the way in which the bomb has been spoken and written about. This chapter lays out the changing nature of apocalypse, and the way it has been integrated in fiction, and thereby forms a foundation for the rest of this study.

Eschatology

Eschatology is the study of '[t]hat which is concerned with the last things, the final destiny both of individuals and of humanity in general, and of the cosmos.'[2] Eschatology broadly refers to anything related to endings, but the term is most commonly used in a religious, spiritual or philosophical sense, and suggests the asking or answering of the question, What happens at the end of life, or the end of the world? These questions seem to be central ones for humanity. Broadly, eschatologies can be divided along two axes: they can be cyclical or linear, and they can be personal or cosmic.[3] Cyclical and linear eschatologies are different ways of organising one's understanding of time that make sense of the world and give it purpose: cyclical through repetition, linear through its finite structure. While personal eschatologies simply describe what happens at the end of a single life, cosmic eschatologies are myths and stories about the end of the world and are the most important in this discussion. Another important division is between religious and secular eschatologies. Eschatology has undergone a distinct shift from religious to secular, and this has resulted in a changing of the ways it provides a sense of meaning and closure. Traditionally, eschatologies are ways of narrativising and humanising time, and of finding the world meaningful. For instance, the Christian Apocalypse 'ends, transforms and is concordant' with the stories that precede it in

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[2]   'Eschatology',   in   *The   Concise   Oxford   Dictionary   of   World   Religions* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t101.e2290> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[3] John T. Collins, 'Apocalypse: An Overview', in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. by Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 334-6.

the Bible,[4] and it forms the capstone on a religious model of history and time. Religious, cosmic eschatologies are often peppered with fear of destructive horror, but also tend to contain hope for a purposeful transformative resolution. Through this transformative resolution, 'the apparent disorder of history will finally affirm order',[5] and the imagination of this order can 'reassure in times of widespread crisis.'[6] The massive scientific, technological and cultural developments from the seventeen nineties through to the end of the Victorian Age, however, led to many new, secular apocalyptic ideas that often lack this sense of resolution. This trend continued through the twentieth century, with the most significant development towards secular apocalypse being the development of the atomic bomb in the 1940s.

In general usage, great, cosmic, destructive eschatologies have become known as 'apocalypses'. The term 'Apocalypse' can refer to the Apocalypse of John, from which the lower case word 'apocalypse' is derived. It can also refer to religious writings of revelatory prophecy, of which the Apocalypse of John is an example, and it can refer to more recent literature that entails visions that are similar to these early apocalypses.[7] Thus, the term 'apocalypse' can be confusing, but there is a scarcity of other terms to use. W. Warren Wagar, encountering similar difficulties, writes of 'terminal visions';[8] however, since this is the title of his book on the subject, that term is inextricable from his work and is not used here. In general, when the word 'apocalypse' is used in this thesis it refers to its broader, modern, general-use meaning: visions of great destruction in fiction and myth. The Apocalypse of John, when mentioned below, is usually named in full and always capitalised

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[4] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5.
[5] John Dewey, *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper of the American Novel of the Nuclear Age*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1990), p. 11.
[6] Ibid. p. 10.
[7] Such is the use, for instance, offered in Edward J. Ahearn, *Visionary Fictions: Apocalyptic Writing from Blake to the Modern Age*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
[8] W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

to make the distinction clear. The other meanings of apocalypse are not discussed at length. When a distinction between different types of apocalypse is needed, it is made. This includes, for instance, the distinction between the traditional, religious and mythic apocalypses and the modern secular apocalypse. It also includes the difference between complete, meaningful endings, and purposeless, destructive, failed apocalypse. Confusion may also arise from the distinction between apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions. These are, respectively, fictions that represent the lead-up to a cosmic eschatological moment, and those that lead on from it. The awkward, but broader, phrase 'end-of-the-world fictions' is therefore used throughout this thesis. As will become clear, the fictional apocalypses explored in this thesis are generally not in the model of the upper-case Apocalypse. They are instead grand destructions that supplant the Apocalypse, but usually are inferior or incomplete or, in some other way, failures. The distinction between Apocalypse and apocalypse is sometimes blurred, but more blurry is the distinction between apocalypse and mere destruction. In some sense, every death, every failed state, every *fin de siècle* is a little, failed apocalypse. While accepting this necessary fuzziness of distinctions, this thesis focuses on those fictions in which, at least, all of humanity seems under threat of extinction, or all of civilisation seems at threat of ending.

Eschatologies seem to exist in most cultures.[9] Of these, the Apocalypse of John is the most influential in western culture and therefore serves as a useful example. This final book

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[9] It has been suggested that apocalyptic prophecy lay behind the sending of Catholic missionaries to England, the Crusades, Columbus's journey to America and contemporary US involvement in the Middle East. Apocalyptic belief is surely not the only motivation behind these events, and lensed histories which investigate everything in relation to apocalypticism are likely to be blinkered, but apocalyptic beliefs are certainly an often forgotten undercurrent in history and politics. See Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, (London: Paladin, 1970); Jonathan Kirsch, *A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006); Jay Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

of the New Testament is commonly known by two different names: Apocalypse and Revelation. These two titles connote radically different readings in contemporary English. Revelation suggests prophecy, religious understanding, a pulling back of the veil by spiritual forces in order to display the inner workings of the Universe and 'the supposed disclosure of knowledge to humankind by a divine or supernatural agency'.[10] Apocalypse, in common usage, suggests destruction, the end of all things, or 'a grand or violent event resembling those described in the Apocalypse' of John.[11] Revelation suggests explanation, purpose and meaning. Apocalypse suggests obliteration. Yet these two words are, respectively, the translation and the transliteration of the same Koine Greek word, Ἀποκάλυψις, which means 'to reveal' or 'to unveil.'[12] Originally, the term apocalypse referred to any Jewish and Christian texts that involve:

> [R]evelation mediated by a heavenly messenger and presented in written form […] containing both a horizontal, or historical, dimension, and a vertical one concerning the relation of the terrestrial and celestial realms[.][13]

That is, apocalypses, in this context, claim to prophetically reveal the patterns and plans of history and the relationship between Heaven and Earth. This explains the title of the biblical Apocalypse, which is supposedly a prophetic revelation of the future end of the cosmos. However, the use of 'apocalypse' in English to refer specifically to the Apocalypse of John has inextricably linked that word with the vision of the end times in that book, and it is for this reason that the word has come to refer more generally to any vision of the final destruction of the world. Apocalypse embodies a fear of destruction, and finality, as well as a

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[10] Bruce Moore, *The Australian Oxford Dictionary*, Second edn (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1102.
[11] Ibid. p. 55.
[12] Bernhard McGinn, 'Revelation', in *The Literary Guide to the Bible,* ed. by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 523-54. See also Collins, p. 334.
[13] Collins, p. 334. It still holds this meaning in most theological contexts.

hope for resolution, meaning, vengeance and transformative change.[14] Apocalypse is a

duality of hope and fear.[15]

The Apocalypse of John, full of obscure imagery and patterns, involves an angelic

prophecy that speaks of a coming period of destruction called the Great Tribulation,

culminating in the release of Satan,[16] and followed by the Millennium.[17] The Millennium will

be a time when, the myth goes, Christ will reign for a thousand years, leading to a battle with

Satan and the destruction of evil,[18] a final judgement,[19] and a new heaven.[20] This would

resolve the narrative of history into eternal order. This cosmic eschatology is reflected in the

[14] The connection between Apocalypse and vengeance is notable, within both myth and literature, although it is not covered in depth here. Wagar says that 'in imagining universal death and destruction, the neurotic may also be venting repressed hostility. Sadistic desires that cannot be fulfilled in overt behaviour find play in relishing the doom scheduled to befall others.' Wagar, p. 69.

[15] This is explains the desire of many to meet with this end and, thereby, give importance to their lives. See Boyer. Cohn. Kirsch. Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956). It is often suggested that this apocalyptic desire is strongest among the dispossessed, those with little to lose and much to gain from destructive transformation. This desire, according to James Berger, leads to literary explorations of apocalypse he calls 'the apocalypses of liberation'. James Berger, 'Introduction: Twentieth-Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 46 (2000), pp. 387-95 (p. 390). Such apocalypses of liberation can be seen in Maxine Lavon Montgomery's discussion of African-American apocalypses, and Richard Dellamora's study of queer apocalyptic fictions. Richard Dellamora, *Apocalyptic Overtures: Sexual Politics and the Sense of an Ending*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994). African American literature is discussed in detail in Maxine Lavon Montgomery, *The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996). Intriguingly, Rachel Blau DuPlessis writes of the feminist subversion of endings, that feminism suggests an avoidance or deferral of endings, to avoid the anti-feminist endings of traditional narratives. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'Endings and Contradictions', in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure and Frames,* ed. by Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 282-89. The Christian Apocalypse can also be considered an apocalypse of repression. It is generally assumed that writer of the Christian Apocalypse, purportedly John of Patmos, wrote as a member of a repressed minority desperate for change and frustrated by the failure of prophecy, and that Revelations 'was produced for purposes of consolation and theodicy among a subject people frequently laboring under a strong sense of persecution.' McGinn, p. 526. While it is easy to understand why this apocalyptic desire might be popular among the oppressed, this desire has also been influential on people of power.

[16] The 'lamb of god' opens the seven seals, each seal signalling greater destruction, (Revelation 6. 1-8. 5) and unleashes the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This period is the Great Tribulation. The Seventh Seal unleashes seven trumpets sounded by seven angels – signalling the destruction of a third of the trees, rivers, oceans and the human population. (Revelation 8. 6-9. 21) A third of the sky is also darkened. (Revelation 8. 12-13) On the seventh trumpet, Satan is released, (Revelation 12. 7-12) as well as a dragon, (Revelation 12. 13 – 17) and beasts of the sea and land. (Revelation 13. 11-18) This is then followed by the ever popular seven bowls of angelic wrath poured upon the world, (Revelation 15. 1-16. 17) and the destruction of New Babylon. (Revelation 18. 1-8).

[17] Revelation 19. 11-20. 6.

[18] Revelation 20. 7-10. Those who believe in this coming period, or in the Christian Apocalypse in general, are therefore often called 'millennialists' or 'millenarians'.

[19] Revelation 20. 11-15.

[20] Revelation 21. 1-8.

Judeo-Christian personal eschatology, which is the belief that when a person dies, he or she goes to an afterlife for eternity. In Christian mythology,[21] the Universe has a distinct beginning, middle and end, somehow floating in what Frank Kermode calls the '*nunc stans*', meaning eternity, the spiritual space outside of time.[22] Narrativising time gives it purpose and instils it with hope of resolution. It also provides ultimate meaning to life and to history. Emma Kafalenos, in her study of narrative, suggests that '*meaning* is an interpretation of the relations between a given action […] and other actions […] in a causal sequence.'[23] Meaning is intrinsically tied to causality and, therefore, to narrative. Meaning also requires finiteness. Something can only be understood once it is rendered finite; otherwise, one is always waiting for the final full stop, and anticipating yet another subordinate clause. As Peter Brooks claims, 'the interminable would be the meaningless.'[24] The Apocalypse has cultural significance, prophetic intensions, political polemic, and wish-fulfilment,[25] but it is also a literary ending. It repeats the tropes and forms of the rest of the Bible, it ties off the various narrative threads, and it ends the story. The Apocalypse 'ends, transforms and is concordant.'[26] By repeating earlier imagery, it gains resonance and authority, while also placing a new meaning into those symbols. It reinterprets the preceding work, and forever changes it. The Apocalypse, therefore, is a way of giving structure and meaning.

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[21] It is important here to acknowledge that this is by no means true of all types of Christianity. The Orthodox Churches, for instance, do not consider Revelation to be canonical at all, and within other denominations its importance is often downplayed, although it is important also to remember that an eschatology was already implicit in the Jewish texts of the Old Testament, and leaving off Revelation only denies a very specific eschatological vision. Revelation is currently most important in the American Evangelical tradition, but its importance in other denominations has waxed and waned over the centuries.

[22] Kermode, p. 85.

[23] Emma Kafalenos, *Narrative Causalities*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 1.

[24] Peter Brooks, 'Freud's Masterplot: Questions of Narrative', *Yale French Studies,* (1977), pp. 280-300 (p. 283).

[25] McGinn.

[26] Kermode, p. 5.

While it may be that '[n]owhere does eschatology figure so prominently as in Christianity', eschatologies are an almost universal feature of myth, culture and religion.[27] Unlike the Apocalypse of John, many of these myths imagine cyclical rebirth. Hindu mythology, for instance, imagines cycles within cycles of destruction and rebirth for the Universe, with each age more corrupt and debased than the last. This includes great years (*mahāyuga*) lasting some 4 320 000 regular, solar years, with one thousand great years making a *kalpa*, and one hundred *kalpa* being the time-span of the Universe. The Universe is then reborn after lying fallow for 311 040 000 000 000 years. These are only some of the many interlocking cosmic cycles of Hindu mythology.[28] This cosmic, cyclical eschatology is reflected by the personal, cyclical eschatology of *samsara*, the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Similar, cyclical patterns can be seen in Babylonian, Norse, Native American, Buddhist, Shinto, and ancient Greek mythologies, among others.[29] While differently structured, 'cyclical and linear paradigms of history agree in finding the world meaningful, and the end of the present order of things inevitable'.[30] In cyclical eschatologies, meaning is found in the end through the hope for rebirth. It is also found through the ritual

> imitation of a celestial archetype [... and] rituals and significant profane gestures which acquire the meaning attributed to them, and materialize that meaning, only because they deliberately repeat such and such acts posited *ad origine* by gods, heroes or ancestors.[31]

In such mythologies, 'the modern age is the worst, and cannot fail to deteriorate still more in the years remaining.'[32] However, human actions become a reflection of the divine, repeated over and over by humanity. Meaning is provided by the golden past rather than by a transcendent future. These rituals also remove the participant from 'concrete, historical

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[27] Wagar, p. 6.
[28] Ibid. p. 39.
[29] Ibid. pp. 6, 40. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), p. 116.
[30] Wagar, p. 42.
[31] Eliade, p. 5.
[32] Wagar, p. 40.

time,'[33] allowing a ritual cleansing and a way of temporarily escaping the horror of history. All eschatologies are ways of narrativising and humanising time. Indeed, Wagar suggests that '[t]oo much can be made of the difference between the cyclical and the linear models of history. A curved line, after all, is still a line.'[34]

These eschatological myths have changed over time. The massive scientific, technological and cultural developments from the seventeen nineties through the end of the Victorian age, in particular, led to the conception of many new, secular apocalypses. The growing population throughout the eighteenth century led famously to the predictions of Thomas Robert Malthus that the world would inevitably be unable to deal with the exponential growth. Malthus published his *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798,[35] and this led to a sense of uncertainty and doom. As extinction of various species became understood as a fact in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, based

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[33] Eliade, p. ix.

[34] Wagar, p. 42. Furthermore, mythologies often contain elements of both linear and cyclical time. Norse myths suggest a final end, for instance, and there is evidence of similar myths in Ancient Greek culture. Ibid. pp. 43-4. For all the discussion of the uniqueness of Judeo-Christian linearity and historicity, the Judeo-Christian Apocalypse is somewhat tacked on to the end of the Bible, and remains a contentious addition. Other parts of the Bible suggest a cyclical notion of time, with rising arrogance followed by destruction. These include the story of Eden, (Genesis 2-3) the Great Flood, (Genesis 6-9) the Tower of Babel, (Genesis 11. 1-9) and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Genesis 18-19) The Apocalypse is just the final such destruction. In the Bible, God promises to Noah that 'never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth'. (Genesis 9. 11) However, instead of being taken as a promise not to destroy the earth, this is often taken to mean that the world will next be destroyed by fire, as immortalised in the spiritual 'Mary Don't You Weep', which combines the message of apocalypse and liberation with its haunting lyric, 'No more water, the fire next time.' Apocalypse, with its millennium of peace, even fits in with a Jewish tradition of dividing history into six millennia, which has a hint of the cyclical about it. While both modes fulfil similar desires, the difference remains important in relation to storytelling, as, ultimately, 'the cyclical model speaks of recurring crises whereas the linear model speaks of death' and

> [i]n the linear model, the end acquires a gravity that it cannot have in the cyclical. The end is once-only, facilitating a once-only judgement of all creaturly beings. Justice is done. Ibid. p. 43.

[35] This idea was revived in the environmentalist movement of the nineteen sixties and seventies, largely embodied in the work of Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, (London: Ballantine, 1971). A glut of fictions about apocalyptic population explosion appeared including *Make Room! Make Room!*, *Stand on Zanzibar* and *The World Inside*. Such concerns were also strongly hinted at in films such as Douglas Trumbull, dir., *Silent Running*: Universal Pictures, 1972; and John Boorman, dir., *Zardoz*. USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1974; Harry Harrison, *Make Room! Make Room!*, (New York: Ace Science Fiction, 1980); John Brunner, *Stand on Zanzibar*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1968); Robert Silverberg, *The World Inside*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971).

largely on the work of Georges Cuvier,[36] the possibility of catastrophic destruction of human civilisation must have also arisen in the human psyche. Wagar notes the rise of the 'last man' genre in the first quarter of the nineteenth century as evidence of a rising secularism and a replacement of God by nature,[37] and suggests that the popularity of stories about plague-ridden ends of humanity in the eighteen sixties must similarly owe something to the development of germ theory by Agostini Bassi in the eighteen thirties.[38] Physics bore its own apocalypse in the form of universal heat death, which is the ultimate extrapolation of the second law of thermodynamics. The concept of universal heat death was developed by Lord Kelvin in the eighteen fifties, based on a general understanding that, as a star gives out energy, it slowly enlarges and cools, as it warms its surroundings. This would eventually result in universal thermal equilibrium, under which mechanical energy would cease to exist, and life would become impossible.[39] This theory is particularly fascinating because it follows from basic physical principles. That the world will end can be derived from the observation of a steam engine. The theory of heat death was popular through the second half of the nineteenth century,[40] and was further popularised by Camille Flammarion, astronomer and author of the apocalyptic fiction *La Fin du Monde* (1893), which also explored the possibility of a comet impact with earth.[41] Flammarion later caused a controversy when he suggested that cyanogen gas dispersed by Halley's Comet could wipe out all life on Earth when it passed in 1910. This suggestion was taken seriously, and led to a run on gas masks and

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[36] Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Georges Cuvier, Fossil Bones, and Geological Catastrophes*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 22-4.
[37] Wagar, p. 88.
[38] Ibid. p. 100.
[39] Ibid. p. 90. Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 187.
[40] Wagar, p. 90.
[41] Weber, p. 187.

'comet pills'.[42] Combining with these science-bound fears of secular endings, the Victorian era also suffered a *fin de siècle* unease of technological progress outstripping moral progress, of the sense of the British Empire being at its peak – which inevitably meant watching over its downfall – and simply of the neatness of the zeroes in 1900. (Similar thoughts of endings also surrounded the year 2000, and there are also claims that they encircled the year 1000 as well.)

In the twentieth century, another change occurred as eschatology was placed in human hands. As developing science and manufacturing was finally applied to warfare in the trenches of the Western Front, apocalyptic destruction was enacted, not by God or Nature, but by human hands. The First World War signalled another step on the path toward secularising apocalyptic visions. The untenable destruction wrought by the war seemed so grand that it might make the current social and political systems impossible, and it might destroy the world in order to build a new one. However, despite what was, at the time, unparalleled destruction, the world continued on as it had before. This provoked eschatological fear, but also eschatological frustration. Despite the horror of the First World War, the failure of apocalypse brought a hope for another, truly apocalyptic war, a war that would finally bring change. Just a few years after the end of the First World War, Yeats writes that '[t]he danger is that there will be no war […] Love war because of its horror, that belief may be changed, civilization renewed.'[43] It is difficult to read this passage without a sense of irony; this was written so shortly after the horror of all horrors, the war to end all wars, yet belief was barely changed, civilization hardly renewed. Yet Yeats demonstrates a desire for a greater apocalypse, a true and complete apocalypse. This desire fits with his

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[42] Ibid.

[43] William Butler Yeats, *Explorations*, (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 426. Yeats here quotes himself in *A Vision*.

broader apocalyptic ideals, as he believed that history moved in cycles, and that he lived in the flux between two of these cycles, which was immortalised in his poetry as 'the widening gyre'.[44] The wish for greater destruction was fulfilled: more destruction did come. The secularisation of the apocalypse came to its apotheosis with the dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945, yet still this led not to change but to stagnation girdled by an iron curtain and buttressed by atomic missiles as the Cold War took hold. The Cold War highlighted humanity's ability to destroy itself, a fear primarily focused through the lens of atomic weapons, but also through weaponised disease, gas, and mere conventional war. The willingness of the military industrial complex to build such weaponry, and to point humanity down a path headed for destruction, created a sense of distrust, which surely exacerbated concerns about environmental collapse and science-gone-mad. Yet the stagnation of the Cold War denied the possibility of apocalyptic rebirth.[45]

This rise of secularism did not result in a wholesale dismissal of religious eschatology. The Christian Apocalypse, for instance, is surprisingly resilient, largely due to its symbolic nature that allows readers to:

> With impunity discover in its pages the message they themselves put there out of a sense that so menacing a document […] can have application only to the unprecedented world-historical crisis of their own moment in time.[46]

It is often assumed that the symbols of Apocalypse, such as the Anti-Christ, the Whore and the Dragon, are references to repressive forces seen by the book's author. The symbolic nature of the text, however, allows it to be constantly re-read into new times, instilling the world with a mythic power. The apocalypse is always about to happen, contemporary problems are always fulfilments of biblical prophecy through this connection, 'conflict and

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[44] William Butler Yeats, 'The Second Coming', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), p. 1948.
[45] The atomic bomb is explored further below.
[46] McGinn, p. 523. See also Kermode, p. 29.

its fallout are always and everywhere.'[47] In the twentieth century, for instance, some preachers have claimed that the World Council of Churches is aligned with the Great Apostasy and the European Union is the Great Empire of the Anti-Christ; the Internet has been seen as the Great Beast, and Bill Gates the Anti-Christ;[48] and, in non-literal interpretations, 'Babylon […has become] a metaphor for big business, global trade, invasive unionism, capitalism, and technology.'[49] The figures can be found anywhere, with, for instance, the number of the Beast mentioned in Revelations, 666, appearing in 'product codes, computer programs, license plates and telephone prefixes', to be found by the millenarian sleuth.[50] As evidence of this survivability, a TIME/CNN poll shortly after the September 11 attacks found that 'fully 59% say that they believe the events in [the Book of] Revelation are going to come true, and nearly one-quarter think the Bible predicted the Sept. 11 attack.'[51] Nuclear war was also integrated into religious visions, sometimes with worrying implications. As Patrick Mannix reminds us:

> In 1980, for example, the Reverend Jerry Falwell suggested that the United States was failing in its duty to God by falling behind in the nuclear arms race: "Ten years ago, we could have destroyed much of the population of the Soviet Union had we desired to fire our missiles. The sad fact is that today the Soviet Union would kill 135 million to 160 million Americans, and the United States would kill only 3 to 5 percent of the Soviets because of their anti-ballistic missiles and their civil defense."[52]

While the religious view of the end times continues, and can even be reinforced by secular destruction, secularisation did offer the possibility of new, often horrific and meaningless, ends of the Earth.

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[47] McGinn, p. 526. Weber, p. 234.
[48] Weber, p. 204.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Mervyn F. Bendle, 'The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture,* 11 (2005) <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA147624534&v=2.1&u=flinders&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w> [accessed 12 May 2013].
[52] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, (Lewisburg; London; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 56. Within this quotation, Mannix cites Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America*, (New York: Doubleday, 1980), p. 98.

As already suggested, the desire to see patterns and meaning in time is not simply a symptom of religious belief. Secular thought has also birthed its own apocalyptic desires:

> [P]ost-Christian thinkers and writers have imagined ends comparable in awesomeness to any foreseen by religion, ends with natural or historical causes that sometimes supply opportunities for salvation comparable in grandeur.[53]

There have been a number of such attempts to make sense of history, to turn it into a series of cycles, including 'theories of the business cycle in economics' and 'organicist theories of the rise and fall of civilization associated with Oswald Spengler, Arnold J. Toynbee, Pitirim A. Sorokin, and others.'[54] In a similar vein, linear apocalypses have found a secular mimic in Karl Marx's theories of class warfare,[55] which places faith in class revolution following on from a final great depression of the markets. Such a revolution is essentially an apocalyptic moment. The time after the revolution is, supposedly, a post-historical time:

> Marxism affirms that when the capitalist economy is fully mature, the final business depression of the series will bring on a worker's revolution that prevents the collapse of civilization and raises it to unimaginably higher levels of achievement.[56]

Nazism, too, had apocalyptic overtones, with the term 'Third Reich' borrowed from the apocalyptic writings of Joachim of Fiore, a Benedictine monk of the twelfth century who believed that time was divided into three periods in line with the Trinity.[57] This was an apocalyptic vision that the Nazis attempted to confirm by making a reality of it.[58] Conversely, the much more recent Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* proposes that we now live in a post-historical time, in which liberal capitalism will forever reign.[59] While noting *The End of History*'s similarities to Marxism, Jacques Derrida also claims that Fukuyama's thesis is

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[53] Wagar, p. 60.
[54] Ibid. p. 109. Wagar also notes that such secular cycles are predated by Chinese traditions of cyclical time based upon the rising and falling of their dynasties, the falling being due to moral corruption. Ibid. pp. 40-1.
[55] Ibid. p. 108.
[56] Ibid. pp. 108, 11-12. Murray N. Rothbard, 'Karl Marx: Communist as Religious Eschatologist', *The Review of Austrian Economics,* 4 (1990), pp. 123-30.
[57] Kermode, p. 13.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

'essentially Christian eschatology.'[60] Alternatively, Slavoj Žižek has more recently suggested the apocalyptic end of capitalism.[61] The end of history advocated by these secular theories is not literally an end of time, or an end of the physical world, but it is an end of the grand narrative, and the end of any of the great movements of politics. These eschatologies seek to impose the same purpose and meaning on history, but in secular, non-literal ways.

While religious traditions of the ending continue, and there have also been many attempts to return the meaning and purpose to apocalypse in secular terms, the general trend of eschatology has been the development of new and horrific, meaningless endings, without divine influence. Imagining the end of the world is a way of giving the world structure and purpose, and such imagining appears to be a human tendency; it is a way of narrativising and humanising time. The religious Apocalypse provides a similar purpose as literary closure, by implying that the world is ordered and meaningful. The end of the world can offer hope as well as destruction. As these myths have been secularised, their ability to make sense of the world has been problematised. Secular ends of the world, such as comet impacts or universal heat death, generally lack the purpose and meaning provided by religious and mythic endings. While meaning can be found, there are many eschatologies that provide it, the possibility of meaningless destruction has still become a possibility that needs coming to terms with. Fiction about the end of the world is one of a number of ways of engaging with the question of meaning and purpose in a world that can no longer find faith in imminent Apocalypse. It may create new structures, or explore the meaninglessness of contemporary life.

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[60] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 60.
[61] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London ; New York: Verso, 2011).

The secularisation of apocalypse has specific repercussions for literature. Frank Kermode relates 'cyclic ritual' and mythic, cyclical time to the oral epic with its small packaged stories often repeating the same patterns, and giving those motifs greater and greater meaning.[62] Kermode also suggests that novels are based on the similar structure as basis of the Christian Apocalypse, with its linear structure resolving into timelessness. Kermode sees the novel as a stand-in for Apocalypse, for a world that can no longer believe in an imminent end of the world. In short, they both fulfil similar needs. In this conception, novels provide a reflection of the world, but a reflection that is meaningful and purposeful: a reflection that has an ending. Kermode's views suggest two intriguing points about the kind of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions this thesis is concerned with: If novels contain the pattern of the apocalypse, then surely those that contain images of the apocalypse are out of joint and somehow recursive; and, when the possibility of the end of the world has returned in the form of the atomic bomb, surely the novel as a stand in for apocalypse is redundant.

The Development of End-of-the-World Fictions

Literature, of course, must come to terms with the changing way humanity sees itself, and this has been apparent through the development of end-of-the-world fictions. Many such fictions depict a world that runs past a failed ending, and it is impossible to differentiate clearly between those that are visions of a failed end, and those that include lesser visions of destruction or disaster. Every fiction of disaster or tragedy can be seen as a little, failed apocalypse. However, broadly speaking, texts that actually depict the end of the world within a fiction required the transformation of prophetic religious visions into mere stories; the end

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[62] Kermode, p. 5. The specific example given by Kermode is Homer's *Odyssey*.

of the world needed to be secularised and placed within history.[63] This process first occurred in an identifiable way in the last half of the eighteenth century, and this change can be seen in the fiction of the period.[64] Radical social change and revolutionary war during the late eighteenth century formed a feedback loop with apocalyptic prophecy. This inspired Romantic art, with its morally uncertain heroes, sublime landscapes and questioning of Enlightenment values, which provided a medium for the development of fictions of the end of the world. These same themes run through contemporary fictions of the end times. The first generation of Romantic poets embodied an apocalyptic desire that was both mystical and a response to secular social changes under way at the time. Later Romantics carried these themes on, and the Gothic, in particular, spawned apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fables that are curiously modern. The apocalyptic was a broad concern for the Victorian era, too, and apocalyptic themes are heavily represented in the literature of the period, as scientific concerns about the possible end of the world fed fiction. This reached a peak in the last decade of the nineteenth century, as worries about the effects of industrialisation, rising nationalism and imperial, *fin de siècle* malaise hit the round neatness of the year 1900. Yet, this was merely a precursor, for truly modern apocalyptic tendencies would reach their zenith in the first half of the twentieth century, as the western world reeled from successive human-wrought destruction in two world wars.

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[63] The distinction between myth and fiction is difficult to make. Kermode simply suggests that the only difference is that the reader knows fiction not to be real, and that '[f]ictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive.' Kermode, p. 39. However, when discussing prophetic myth, the distinction becomes more difficult. A work of fiction about a coming nuclear war might be taken, and be intended, as prophetic.

[64] In Linda Woodson's analysis of *The Road*, she connects McCarthy's novel with the short apocalyptic vision in William Wordsworth's *Prelude*. While this passage is not engaged with here, Woodson's analysis forms an intriguing and coincidental bookend of this study, which begins with the Romantics and ends with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*: 'It is no surprise that writing in the first years of the new century and new millennium, McCarthy's prose would be reminiscent of the Romantic poets' apocalyptic visions at the turn of another century.' Linda Woodson, 'Mapping *The Road* in Post-Modernism', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 87-99 (p. 87). I.F. Clarke takes his study back slightly earlier, although his focus is on wars of the future, which are not always entirely apocalyptic. See I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

A century and a half before this, though, revolution offered the possibility of human-driven apocalypse, being truly destructive and founded on the hope for transformation. Both the American and French revolutions were fodder for apocalyptic visions in their time. Both offered the promise of the creation of a new world, unfettered by the old, through destructive transformation. In turn, these visions informed the writing of the Romantic period. Visions of the apocalypse, full of both fear and hope, can be seen throughout the poetry and prose of Romantic period, from its earliest to its latest incarnation. William Blake, in particular, was taken by these apocalyptic prophecies, especially the works of earlier 'Swedish Mystic Emanuel Swedenborg', whom he first embraced but later repudiated.[65] Blake's visionary work is full of apocalyptic imagery, mostly of the hopeful kind. His 'London' (1794),[66] for instance, shows a desolate, corrupted landscape. It is commonly described as apocalyptic, and is certainly a fear-inspiring description. However, this is less a post-apocalyptic landscape and more a landscape desperate for apocalyptic cleansing and transformation. In a mode similar to the jeremiad, which is 'a prolonged lamentation or a prophetic warning against the evil habits of a nation',[67] Blake's poem focuses on the horrors of the current age rather than the radical, destructive transformation into a new age. The poem, in fact, calls desperately for such a transformation. Blake's apocalyptic visions reached their height in 1791 with the publication of *The French Revolution*, which identified 'the French Revolution with the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.'[68] This was followed by *America a Prophecy* (1793),[69]

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[65] Peter J. Kitson, 'The Romantic Period, 1780-1832', in *English Literature in Context,* ed. by Paul Poplawski (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 306-93 (p. 321).
[66] William Blake, 'London', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), pp. 42-3.
[67] Chris Baldick, 'Jeremiad', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e620> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[68] William Blake, *The Poetical Works of William Blake; Including the Unpublished French Revolution, Together with the Minor Prophetic Books, and Selections from the Four Zoas, Milton, & Jervsalem*, (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1914); Kitson, p. 321.
[69] William Blake, *America, a Prophecy*, (Normal, Ill.: American Blake Foundation, 1974).

which similarly saw the troubles of the mundane world as a sign of the coming Apocalypse. In titling it a prophecy, Blake casts the work as not just a description of historical events, as in *The French Revolution*, but as a prescription for apocalyptic transformation. Blake's early, Romantic, apocalyptic visions thus exist in the liminal space between fiction, prophecy and a call for apocalyptic action, a call to revolution.

It soon became clear that Romanticism and apocalypse are very well-suited to one another. The romantic hero, with characteristic melancholic wanderlust, introspection and misanthropy, matched the lonely exploration of an abandoned world, free of societal constraint, in which one must become a force of nature. In the later generation of Romantics, the genre of last human fictions capitalised on these characteristics. Furthermore, fodder for apocalyptic visions can be found in the terrifying aspect of the sublime and the questioning of Enlightenment values, both implicit in Romanticism. This questioning of science and progress underlies many fictions of the end of the world, which often also suggest a failure of wisdom in the face of technological knowledge. This failure can be seen represented in Blake's engraving of Newton, checking his calculations as he ignores the heavens above. Connecting this thread, Wagar calls those more recent fictions of the end-of-the-world that blame destruction on scientific misadventure 'neo-Romantic'.[70] It is therefore unsurprising that Romantic poetry is replete with apocalyptic imagery. Along with its descriptions of the wonder and terror of nature is a fear of the city, a fear of progress, and a fear of (and sometimes a hope for) apocalyptic warfare. The religious Apocalypse, too, is equal measures fear, terror, wonder, grandeur, beauty and horror; the apocalypse is, ultimately, sublime. The sublime, the indescribably beautiful wonder of nature, split open, would ultimately be coupled with absolute terror in the body of the atomic bomb. The apocalyptic trend of

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[70] Wagar, p. 137. Wagar sees contemporary 'Terminal Visions' as divided between positivistic and neo-Romantic.

Romanticism is most apparent, however, in the Gothic, which is, after all, the dark underbelly of the Romantic.

While the apocalypse is implicit in Romanticism, Lord Byron's 'Darkness',[71] written in 1816, offers an explicit apocalyptic vision, in blank, sombre, verse. Its depiction of the end of the world, despite its rendition in poetic and archaic language, could well sit alongside recent apocalyptic visions. The depiction of a world with a dying sun, for instance, has been reiterated in the filmic poetry of Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007).[72] 'Darkness' describes itself as 'a dream, which was not all dream',[73] placing it in the ambiguous space of revelation between dream and prophecy, as a continuation of the original apocalyptic tradition and of Blake's works. This visionary nature also reinforces these apocalyptic visions as standing against the singular, empirical narratives of the Enlightenment. Byron's poem, in sharp strokes, depicts a world in which the 'sun was extinguished'.[74] Desperate '[t]o look once more into each other's face',[75] to connect again with one another, the characters trapped in darkness burn palaces, thrones, cities and forests. They war to feed themselves as '[t]he meagre by the meagre [... are] devoured';[76] and, notably, cannibalism has remained one of the dominant features of post-apocalyptic literature since.[77] The poem then follows the unravelling of the world in the same way it was first made (according to the Judeo-Christian tradition). In Genesis, '[t]he earth was without form and void'.[78] In 'Darkness', it returns to 'void'.[79] In Genesis, 'God formed man of dust from the ground',[80] in 'Darkness' there is 'a

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[71] Lord Byron, 'Darkness', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), pp. 510-12.
[72] Danny Boyle, dir., *Sunshine*. UK; USA: Fox Searchlight, 2007.
[73] Byron. l. 1.
[74] Ibid. l. 2.
[75] Ibid. l. 15.
[76] Ibid. l. 46.
[77] See Chapter Six.
[78] Genesis 1.2.
[79] Byron. l. 69.

chaos of hard clay.'[81] In Genesis, 'there was light',[82] and here it extinguishes to darkness. This is an undoing of creation, but unlike the biblical creation, or Apocalypse, there is no murmur of a God, unless, following poetic tradition, the sun is taken for an image of God. However, the sun here is dead. In 'Darkness', God has turned from creation, or perhaps creation from God, its final consummation signalled by the final desperate burning of 'a mass of holy things'.[83]

Blake's prophecies and Byron's 'Darkness' are bridging texts between earlier, religious, apocalyptic visions and later, secular ones. Blake's works, while relying on religious imagery and faith, place the apocalypse within history, as an unveiling of the present. 'Darkness', while suggesting a religious narrative, and relying on religious allusion, also depicts an apocalyptic cause that hovers between the godly and the rational scientific. Indeed, the poem was influenced by Byron's experience of a genuine, ecological crisis. The year of the poem's writing, 1816, was known as the Year Without a Summer. An historic number of sun spots covered the sun that year, dimming its output and lowering temperatures worldwide. Unknown to those in Europe, there was also a massive volcanic eruption in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), which further cooled the world. The results were temperature aberrations, lost harvests, and, in areas of the United States of America, fog obscuring the sun to the point that the sunspots could be seen with the naked eye. Such a reality must certainly have seemed apocalyptic, as if the world would slowly dim into an eternal night. 'Darkness' was written while Byron took refuge from the unseasonal cold and rain on a Swiss holiday. The same holiday resulted in two other masterpieces of gothic

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[80] Genesis 2.7.
[81] Byron. l. 72.
[82] Genesis 1.3.
[83] Byron. l. 59.

literature: John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819),[84] which would initiate the Romantic Vampire genre, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).[85] From this real-life darkness, the Year Without a Summer, was born 'two of the chief myths that have since haunted the Western imagination – the myth of the creature made by man who returns to torment him, and the myth of the vampire who preys on mankind'.[86]

Shelley's *Frankenstein* is another bridging text, containing an apocalyptic vision and also providing a mythic framework for the dawn of speculative fiction. In a short, apocalyptic vision, Dr Frankenstein imagines war with the descendants of his monster, as 'a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror.'[87] *Frankenstein*, with its subtitle *A Modern Prometheus*, is linked to a long tradition of stories in which *hubris* brings about downfall, and of little apocalypses that are a punishment for reaching for the power of the gods. These include the story of the expulsion from Eden,[88] the building of the Tower of Babel,[89] Aristophanes' story of the origin of love in Plato's *Symposium*,[90] and, of course, Prometheus's theft of fire for humanity. *Frankenstein* returns these stories to their metaphoric roots, for '[t]he stories of Adam and Noah in Genesis reach deeply into the psychic underworld. They speak to the helplessness of childhood, the awful power of parents, and the pain of shame and guilt.'[91] While Frankenstein embodies a similar sense of guilt, shame and helplessness, born after the gathering of power beyond control, it is humanity that has created

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[84] John William Polidori, *The Vampyre* <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/p/polidori/john/vampyre/> [accessed 15 May 2013].
[85] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (Australia: Modern Publishing Group, 1993).
[86] John Clubbe, 'The Tempest-Toss'd Summer of 1816: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*', *Byron Journal,* 19 (1991), pp. 26-40 (p. 26).
[87] Shelley, pp. 154-55.
[88] Genesis 3.
[89] Genesis 11.1-9.
[90] Plato, *Symposium*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 24-30.
[91] Wagar, p. 139.

its own child, inverting the tale of Genesis. While the monster is never named, he does refer to himself as his creator's Adam. More specifically, he claims that he *ought* to have been his creator's Adam: 'I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel'.[92] *Frankenstein* taps into the same cultural memory of punishment for attaining a power befitting gods that stories of the end of the world do.

Another novel by Shelley tells an even bleaker apocalyptic tale: *The Last Man*, published in 1826.[93] *The Last Man* is a ponderous story that imagines humanity in 2100 whittled down to a single specimen by plague, war and finally drowning. The novel was not the only one of its type, or the earliest; it was predated by the French work, *Le Dernier Homme* (1805),[94] a prose poem about a religious end of the world likely inspired by Thomas Malthus' theories about population explosion and thus also an early work of environmental catastrophe.[95] Shelley's *The Last Man* was not hugely successful at the time (it was rediscovered only in the nineteen-sixties as a precursor of the nihilistic post-apocalyptic works that were then becoming prominent) but it was part of a trend. 'Thomas Campbell, George Darely, Thomas Hood, Thomas Ouseley, Edward Wallace, and Byron' all engaged in the 'remarkable vogue for poems about The Last Man' in the early nineteenth century.[97] Campbell's attempt is particularly interesting for its similarities to Byron's 'Darkness', as it depicts a vision of a world with a fading sun. *The Last Man* continues to inspire, and last human stories continue to be one of the most common subgenres of end-of-the-world fiction,

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[92] Shelley, p. 88.

[93] Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1985).

[94] Maurice Blanchot, *Le Dernier Homme*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

[95] Wagar, p. 16. Paul Alkon further argues that *Le Dernier Homme* represents the dawn of science fiction, and places apocalypse as the dominant trend of the genre. 'The Secularization of Apocalypse', in *Origins of Futuristic Fiction,* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 158-91.

[97] I.F. Clarke, 'The Tales of the Last Days, 1805-3794', in *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis,* ed. by David Seed (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 15-26 (p. 18). A collection of 'last man' stories is maintained at *Other Works on "the Last Man"*, University of Maryland, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/mws/lastman/lms.htm> [accessed 26 September 2012]. Wagar also discusses the numerous 'last man' stories of the Romantic period. Wagar, p. 16.

with some examples discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. They tend to contain an odd mix of nihilism and despair; despair at what has been lost, and a nihilistic thrill of losing it. *Frankenstein* may well retell the terror of parenthood in mythic terms, but the last human story tells of loss of parents. Imposed social structures are unbound, and these stories entail a kind of growing up, of deciding what one should do when one is no longer constrained by imposed strictures.

The gothic tales emerging from America also provided apocalyptic visions. Edgar Allen Poe's 'Eiros and Charmion' was inspired by the apocalyptic Millerite prophecies of 1844.[98] These rather convoluted mathematical prophecies led to the Great Disappointment of 1844 when they failed to come true, which, in turn, led to the creation of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Poe may have also been inspired by the arrival of Halley's Comet in 1835. The short story involves the souls of two people in the afterlife. One is explaining the events of the end of the world, during which he died, and which was caused by the near impact of a comet. The story is very short and mostly forgettable, but contains some of the key features of fictions of the end-of-the-world. The religious nature of 'Eiros and Charmion' suggests the continuing conscious connection between 'the heavens' and Heaven. It further suggests that the growing understanding of comets did nothing to assuage the sense that they were portents of destruction. As they gained a physical existence, they simply turned from mere signs in the heavens to possible implements of apocalypse. Comet strike is also the first of two apocalyptic events in Cammille Flammarion's influential late Victorian text *La fin du Monde* (1893). Indeed, comet strike, and meteor strike, retain this apocalyptic potential in recent

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[98] Killis Campbell, *The Mind of Poe and Other Studies*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 169; Edgar Allen Poe, *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*, The University of Virginia, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/POE/convers.html> [accessed 7 May 2011].

fictions of the end. This can be seen in Arthur C. Clarke's *Hammer of God* (1993),[99] Larry

Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977),[100] and the popular filmic

representations of apocalypse averted, *Deep Impact* (1998) and *Armageddon* (1998).[101]

The fear of the extinction of humanity also found its way into canonical poetry in the

Victorian era. As science began to seriously contend the origins of life, most notably with the

publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859,[102] it was simultaneously contending

with the end of life. In fact, it was species extinction, proven earlier by Georges Cuvier in his

1796 paper,[103] that prompted discussion of evolution. A world where extinction is possible

can no longer be considered to have been made perfect, and following from this is a doubt in

a plan or narrative for life. It also begs the question of whether the diversity of life

continually decreases as species go extinct. The fossil record demonstrates that the opposite is

true, and the answer to this puzzle is evolution. Extinction, however, was already a source of

doubt. In Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memorium, AHH*, completed in 1849, the poet laments:

> 'So careful of the type?' but no,
>> From scarpe'd cliff and quarried stone
>> She [Nature] cries, 'A thousand types are gone;
> I care for nothing, all shall go.'[104]

Tennyson surmises that the origin of humanity, a godless and random process, belies its

ending.[105] He questions the value of individual life being part of a meaningless whole (a

single life is meaningless, therefore all life is meaningless). The man in *The Road* (2006)

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[99] Arthur C. Clarke, *The Hammer of God*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).

[100] Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, (New York: Ballantine, 1998).

[101] Michael Bay, dir., *Armageddon*. US: Touchstone Pictures, 1998; Mimi Leder, dir., *Deep Impact*. US: Paramount Pictures, 1998.

[102] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[103] Rudwick, pp. 22-4.

[104] Alfred Tennyson, Lord, 'In Memoriam A. H. H.', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), pp. 1128-76 (p. 1147).

[105] This is unless Darwin's theories are read with humanity at the peak of evolution. See Wagar, p. 109.

suggests a similar idea as he thinks, 'The last instance of a thing takes the class with it.'[106]

This sense of 'radical futurelessness',[107] of all achievement being without value, had its kernels a century before the invention of the atomic bomb. Tennyson is, in fact, making a simple observation: other species have died, as can now be seen from the fossils of extinct animals; our species will also die. Nothing is eternal. Tennyson challenges religious authority, as well as hope, and brings forth a view of the end of humanity. He does this with the same evidence that Darwin would use to describe humanity's origins. God was being replaced by Nature. Nature is available to scientific understanding, but also wholly irrational and purposeless, and, in Tennyson's words, 'red in tooth and claw'.[108]

The theory of heat death, formulated by Lord Kelvin but popularly laid out by Camille Flammarion in *La Fin du Monde*, would, according to Leon Stover, become the inspiration for the final fate of Earth in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895).[109] H.G. Wells uses ideas about humanity's demise from both biology and physics in *The Time Machine*, ideas founded in his scientific training under evolutionary biologist T.H. Huxley. *The Time Machine* is full of little apocalypses. Humanity as it is currently known disappears, after evolving into two different species. That future world is then ravaged by fire.[110] It finally gives way to the creeping, slow apocalypse in chapter eleven, as the sun turns to a 'sullen red-heat' and,[111] finally, the death of the world as we know it is signalled by absolute nothingness:

> Beyond these lifeless sounds the world was silent. Silent? It would be hard to convey the
> stillness of it. All the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of

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[106] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (London: Picador, 2007), p. 28.
[107] Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 66.
[108] Tennyson, p. 1147.
[109] See Stover's annotations. H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine: An Invention*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996), pp. 163-4. See also Clarke, p. 20.
[110] Wells, pp. 149-51.
[111] Ibid. p. 158.

insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives – all that was over [...] In another moment the pale stars alone were visible. All else was rayless obscurity. The sky was absolutely black.[112]

This apocalyptic overture is connected with its religious counterpart by the title of the chapter: 'The Further Vision'.[113] Of course, the horror of Wells' vision is redeemed by his faith in science. Human life is long since extinct, by the joined forces of its own heartlessness and evolution, but life still continues in the form of 'a round thing, the size of a football perhaps, or, it may be, bigger, [... with] tentacles trail[ing ...] down from it'.[114] Tennyson lamented that not just an instance of a class but the entire type would fail; Wells reminds us that if the 'type' is 'life', it will never fail. Life will always continue, and will forever adapt to its environs.

The first major shift in apocalyptic visions is that from the purely religious to the more secular and scientific. Nature and randomness bring destruction. The second great shift is the placement of the tools of destruction in the hands of humanity. While revolution had long been a portent of apocalyptic doom, Wagar claims that the first time that stories of apocalypse by human hands became common was in the penny dreadfuls of the late Victorian era, particularly in stories of poisonous gas. These tales were revived after the First World War. In such stories, poisonous gas attacks 'are almost always just as ruinously effective as nuclear strikes in stories written after 1945',[115] but are 'usually fitted with "happy" endings.'[116] M.P. Shiel, 'one-time King of Redonda, mystery man, philosopher, probable lunatic, and author of thirty-one books',[117] famously makes use of apocalyptic gas in his *The*

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[112] Ibid. p. 163.
[113] Ibid. pp. 157-64.
[114] Ibid. p. 164.
[115] Wagar, p. 124.
[116] Ibid. p. 108.
[117] Brian W. Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1986), p. 145.

Purple Cloud (1901),[118] and H.G. Wells does the same in *The War of the Worlds* (1898).[119] *The War of the Worlds* represents another layering of apocalyptic visions by Wells, as it depicts the slow, apocalyptic failing of the ecosystem of Mars, alien invasion, gas, and, finally, the destruction of the Martians by bacterial infection, as they are 'slain, after all […] by the humblest things […] upon this earth.'[120] Rather than meaningless destruction, many of these stories include weapons so powerful that they would end war. Examples include Hollis Godfrey's *The Man Who Ended War* (1908) and Stanley Waterloo's *Armageddon* (1898).[121] Given the similarity to Wells's later *The World Set Free* (1914),[122] and the influence of that text on the atomic bomb project, it worth considering: Did this fictional concept of a weapon so powerful it must bring peace affect the way the atomic bomb was developed and ultimately used? Beyond the scope of this study, this intriguing and difficult question has been explored by a number of scholars.[123]

Almost simultaneous with the publication of *The World Set Free*, the First World War broke out. The First World War was a scientific, industrialised apocalypse; however, as stated earlier, at its conclusion the world did not change. There was no meaning in the destruction. The First World War, as Joseph Dewey notes, destroyed the sense that the world had purpose:

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[118] M.P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/11229> [accessed 30 April 2013].
[119] H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, (USA: Aerie Books Ltd, 1987).
[120] Ibid. p. 187.
[121] Hollis Godfrey, *The Man Who Ended War*, (Boston: Little, Brown & company, 1908); Stanley Waterloo, *Armageddon*, (Boston: Gregg Press, 1976). *Armageddon* is discussed in Wagar, p. 120. In *Armageddon*, war becomes impossible due to the development of dynamite and aeroplanes.
[122] H.G. Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001).
[123] John Canaday, *The Nuclear Muse: Literature, Physics and the First Atomic Bombs*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); H. Bruce Franklin, 'Fatal Fiction: A Weapon to End All Wars', in *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature,* ed. by Nancy Anisfield (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), pp. 5-14; H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Super-Weapon and the American Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Charles E. Gannon, *Rumors of War and Infernal Machines : Technomilitary Agenda-Setting in American and British Speculative Fiction*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littefield, 2005).

> What emerged was an eerie sense of living already in a post-apocalypse world, a conviction on the part of these writers – particularly strong in those who had engaged the Great War firsthand – that they were like biblical survivors wandering in a world of ash.[124]

Many artists reacted to the meaninglessness of the war by creating meaningless works, and many attempted to use madness to bring about a true apocalypse of culture. The apocalypse of the First World War was incomplete:

> The war of 1914-18 was not racial, aircraft and other super-weapons did not prove decisive, no worldwide revolution or world republic emerged from it, and it did not destroy or radically transform the civilization of white Western capitalism.[125]

In the words of Sir Herbert Read, the 'world was not renewed'.[126] Despite its horror, the destruction had simply reinforced the powers that brought it about. Read, one of the Poets of the New Apocalypse who preached the coming end in the nineteen thirties and forties, writes of a veteran of the First World War crying, 'Our victory was our defeat!'[127] Despite this failure, apocalyptic visions continued, some representing the horror, and some hoping for a greater, complete destruction.

Interestingly, despite or perhaps because authors had seen the failed apocalypse of the First World War, warfare was not the dominant form of apocalypse in fictions of the interwar years. From '1914 to 1945, the accidents and miscalculations of scientists overtook revolution as a cause of world's end.'[128] However, there were still a large number of texts about a second world war published between the nineteen twenties and thirties.[129] When the Second World War finally appeared, when the apocalypse actually occurred in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Dresden, Stalingrad, Nanking, Tokyo, Okinawa, and at other locations across the

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[124] Dewey, p. 34.
[125] Wagar, p. 123.
[126] Sir Herbert Read, cited in Arthur Edward Salmon, *Poets of the Apocalypse*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), p. 14.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Wagar, p. 110.
[129] Ibid. p. 124.

globe, it was again meaningless, again a 'disappointment'.[130] The image of this destruction, and of the possibility of even greater destruction as a result of the Cold War, became a focal point of apocalyptic visions in the twentieth century. While many other apocalyptic visions still abound, this moment, the dropping of the bomb and the Second World War, still forms a final change in the way the apocalypse was seen. From an event initiated by a god figure, the apocalypse had become a meaningless process of nature, then finally an event that could be triggered by humanity, and now that possibility was confirmed and even became a matter of state policy. Other than *The World Set Free*, all the fictions given detailed attention herein were written after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and must come to terms with this sense that humanity may possibly destroy itself, and that the coming end is imminent, meaningless and self-enacted.

Therefore, as the sense of purpose and meaning has been stripped from apocalypse, fiction has engaged with an increasingly meaningless end. As Weber makes clear, while ninety-eight passages of the Apocalypse of John refer to catastrophe, one-hundred and fifty refer to joy,[131] as the traditional mythic end does not simply prophesy doom but also joy, reward, and even bloody vengeance against the oppressor. It is the failure of this purpose, the failure of meaningful endings, that brings fear and uncertainty. It is fear and uncertainty that demands artistic attention, and an attempt to make sense and provide meaning. The greatest symbol of the failure of sense-making, however, is the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb has become a kind of recurring nightmare that demands and denies sense-making.

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[130] Ibid. p. 126.
[131] Weber, p. 230.

The problem of writing past the end begins with the problem of writing about the end, which is a nothingness that cannot be represented. The atomic bomb is the most potent symbol of humanity's ability to destroy itself. While this thesis does not restrict itself to atomic apocalypses, the atomic bomb is the most prominent reason for and symbol of the change in the way the apocalypse is seen that took place through the twentieth century. Given the definite article, the atomic bomb becomes not just one of the many thousands of nuclear weapons now in existence, but instead seems to refer to a singular, conceptual bomb. While there are many other imagined ends, even human-made ends, the atomic bomb represents a massive leap in destructive potential and a decades-long focal point of geopolitical relations. Since the dropping of the atomic bomb, the human potential for destruction has become apocalyptic in scope. Humanity now possesses the power once considered supernatural, and this power is poised, ready to be turned to destruction. It is no surprise that this thesis focuses mainly on the period after the dawn of the atomic bomb and the change in apocalyptic sensibilities that followed. Even now, after the wane of the Cold War, the atomic bomb remains. Massive stockpiles remain in the U.S. and Russia, and nuclear proliferation continues. The atomic bomb demands exploration and artistic representation. However, the bomb remains difficult to represent. The purpose of the bomb is to create absence, physically, and it also embodies a kind of psychological and cultural absence. Artistic works that attempt to engage with this further place it at the heart of and as final inevitable goal of western culture. For instance, the works of Nigel Kneele and Walter M. Miller, Jr suggest that the seed of inevitable destruction lies at the dawn of the Enlightenment. The atomic bomb is a great, all-consuming singularity of nothingness that sucks in everything around it, after it and before it. It is a cultural black hole with which humanity must come to terms. The need to engage with the bomb drives literature of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse in the atomic

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age. Art attempts to make sense of the bomb, to find a point in the seeming meaninglessness of potential atomic destruction. However, this attempt is always complicated. The atomic bomb demands attempts at making sense, but denies such sense making. This endless cycle of engagement and failure makes it a recurring nightmare image of western culture, a forever unresolved trauma in the artistic consciousness, and forever indescribable.

In the twentieth century, human power usurped the divine in the form of the atomic bomb. The first nuclear weapons test, called Trinity, proved successful on 16 July 1945. The Gadget, codename for the prototype plutonium implosion atomic bomb, exploded with a force equivalent to about twenty thousand tons of TNT and formed a massive fireball emitting a menagerie of colours, 'golden, purple, violet, gray and blue',[132] melting the surface of the Jornada del Muerto desert sand into a green, slightly radioactive glass now known as trinitite. The event was given religious connotations by witness to the explosion and official journalist of the Manhattan Project, William L. Laurence:

> [I]f the first man could have been present at the moment of Creation when God said, "Let there be Light," he might have seen something very similar to what we have seen.[133]

This statement was in response to Dr George B. Kistiakowsky's description of the same event: 'in the last millisecond of the earth's existence—the last man will see something very similar to what we have seen.'[134] Already the bomb encapsulated humanity's growing power, invading the traditional domain of the divine. This included both the origins and the endings of the world, both Genesis and Apocalypse. The use of religious language to describe the bomb is found throughout the fictions of the end-of-the-world. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*,

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[132] General Thomas Farrell, cited in Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 261.

[133] William L. Laurence, *Men and Atoms: The Discovery, the Uses and the Future of Atomic Energy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 118. Laurence also calls it the 'first cry of a newborn child', invoking a different type of birth than Genesis. Ibid. p. 117.

[134] Ibid. p. 118. Interestingly, at the time of the first bomb test, Kistiakowsky was noted for hugging others in joy, according to Leslie R. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told : The Story of the Manhattan Project*, (London: Deutsch, 1963), p. 437.

the bomb gains the moniker 'Lucifer',[135] in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), mutants venerate the last bomb as a God,[136] in *Deus Irae* (1976), Carleton Lufteufel, the man who created and detonated the bomb, is worshipped,[137] and in *Dark Star* (1974) the sentient bomb sees itself as god-like, muttering 'let there be light' before exploding.[138] *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* also suggests the way in which the bomb's ineffable nature can be turned to literary purpose, here magically allowing the existence of telekinetic humans and talking apes. In *Them!* (1954),[139] the bomb similarly releases a swarm of giant ants. This power that cannot be understood leads almost inevitably to religious metaphor. Indeed, the religious power of the bomb was already suggested in the name of the first nuclear test, Trinity, which implies that this human made warhead would somehow, in fact, be transubstantiated into the triune Godhead.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, who reportedly named the test Trinity in reference to the works of John Donne,[140] claimed that his first thought after witnessing the explosion was a quotation from his own translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*: 'If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the mighty one.'[141] He later expanded on this:

> We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad-Gita*; Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty and, to impress him, takes

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[135] Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971), p. 200.
[136] Ted Post, dir., *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. USA: 20th Century Fox, 1970.
[137] Philip K. Dick and Roger Zelazny, *Deus Irae*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).
[138] John Carpenter, dir., *Dark Star*. USA: Jack H. Harris Enterprises, 1974.
[139] Gordon Douglas, dir., *Them!* US: Warner Bros., 1954.
[140] Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), pp. 571-2. In reference to which particular poem, however, is uncertain.
[141] Robert Jungk, *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), p. 201.

on his multi-armed form and says, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another.[142]

Intriguingly, it is uncertain who in this metaphor is the figure of the Prince and who is Vishnu, and this leaves the statement suspended between guilt and pride, responsibility and victimhood, awe and fear. This tantalising ambiguity becomes almost comical as Oppenheimer dryly generalises his poetically described experience out to his colleagues. He states that 'we all thought that', but has not made clear what this thought really is. The 'thought' remains absent and indescribable. In any case, Oppenheimer is more eloquent than Kenneth Tompkins Bainbridge, who simply turned to Oppenheimer immediately after the test and said, 'Now we are all sons of bitches.'[143] But most important in relation to this discussion is the way Oppenheimer has given the event religious and mythic significance, and highlighted the ineffable nature of the bomb. As Joseph Dewey makes clear, 'journalists, military leaders, politicians [...] and even atomic scientists themselves found sufficient language in the radical vocabulary of religion.'[144] Almost immediately upon its first test, the bomb was seen as both referring back to, and replacing, the religious Apocalypse with all its trimmings of beauty and horror. A decade after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Oppenheimer turned to even simpler religious vocabulary, stating, 'We did the Devil's work'.[145]

Within a month, two atomic bombs had been used against human targets. On 6 August 1945, Little Boy was exploded over Hiroshima. It was a gun-type device, essentially a canon firing uranium-235 into itself, creating super-critical mass and an explosive nuclear

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[142] J. Robert Oppenheimer, 'J. Robert Oppenheimer "Now I Am Become Death..."', *Atomic Archive,* <www.atomicarchive.com/Movies/Movie8.shtml> [accessed 2 July 2011]. See James A. Hijaya, 'The *Gita* of J. Robert Oppenheimer', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* 144 (2000).
[143] 'Memorial Minute -- Kenneth Tompkins Bainbridge', *The Harvard University Gazette,* (1998) <www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/1998/05.07/MemorialMinute-.html> [accessed 2 July 2012].
[144] Dewey, p. 5.
[145] Oppenheimer, cited in ibid. p. 6.

chain reaction. The few hundred grams of mass converted to energy in the reaction was enough to provide the explosive force of somewhere between thirteen and eighteen thousand tons of TNT, producing a mushroom cloud some twenty thousand feet high.[146] The more complicated Fat Man was of a similar design to the Gadget tested at Trinity, using shaped explosives to precisely implode a ball of plutonium. Fat Man was dropped over Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, releasing an explosive force equivalent to about twenty-one thousand tons of TNT.[147] The estimates of deaths and casualties from the explosions vary widely, but likely the most conservative estimate is from the *U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey: The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, which suggests figures of around 80 000 deaths in Hiroshima and 40 000 deaths in Nagasaki.[148] More recent estimates tend to put the figures at least fifty percent greater, and often higher again. The precise number can never really be known, and cannot account accurately for the innumerable cases of cancer and disease that followed. It is possible that there is nothing else to be said about the bomb other than these stark, empty figures, or maybe the almost haiku-like final summary of the survey: 'To avoid destruction, the surest way is to avoid war.'[149] The true horror is un-representable. But, like any survivor unable to find psychological closure, humanity has re-engaged with and reinterpreted the bomb in a futile attempt to make some kind of final sense of it all. John Hersey's *Hiroshima* tries the journalistic approach,[150] yielding 'a documentary novel whose

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[146]   'Little Boy', in *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t63.e463> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[147]   'Nagasaki, Bombing Of', in *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t63.e463> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[148]   *U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey: The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, (Washington: US Government, 1946).
[149]   Ibid.
[150]   John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1946). The contrast between the way that Hersey and Laurence depict the bomb is explored in the short but insightful David Seed, 'The Dawn of the Atomic Age', in *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis,* ed. by David Seed (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 88-102.

flat, reportorial voice suggested bare restraint before the magnitude of the bomb's fury'.[151]

Also interesting is the intriguing autobiographical art project, *Unforgettable Fire* (1981),[152] in which, many decades after the explosions, *hibakasha*, survivors of the bomb, have illustrated their memories. This results in a form of naive art that evokes a child-like innocence in the face of utter horror. Isao Takahata's semi-autobiographical animated film, *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988),[153] while set in the aftermath of the firebombing of Kobe rather than after one of the nuclear bombings, similarly evokes the childlike innocence, through the characters of two survivors. Masuji Ibuse's *Black Rain* (1961) offers an even more stark and haunting vision of the aftermath of Hiroshima,[154] through the parallel storylines of the journal entries of Shizuma Shigematsu in the period of the bombing, and her later life as she denies having been affected by the black rain (but she has).

However, true representation of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki seems always just out of reach. Even the massive death toll can ultimately end up belittling the bombings. In comparison, some 83 600 died in the conventional bombing of Tokyo, and over 60 000 000 died in the entire Second World War.[155] The atomic bombs were not, it seems, harbingers of new levels of destruction, but they were instead a new benchmark for efficiency, and are given much of their cultural import by the fact that that efficiency may well be turned to greater destruction in the future. In any case, the massive death count of World War Two should surely serve as a foil to the bombs, highlighting humanity's capacity for destruction. The tendency to draw religious parallels follows a trend found in the increasing secularisation and fictionalisation of apocalypse over the previous one and a half

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[151] Dewey, p. 8.
[152] *Unforgettable Fire: Pictures Drawn by Atomic Bomb Survivors*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
[153] Isao Takahata, dir., *Grave of the Fireflies*. Japan: Toho, 1988.
[154] Masuji Ibuse, *Black Rain*, trans. by John Bester (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971).
[155] *U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey: The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*.

centuries. For instance, those found in *Purple Cloud*'s use of the Adam and Eve myth, or *The World Set Free*'s modelling of religious patterns in secular terms. Such attempts would continue after the bomb was dropped. Even in Hiroshima, 'survivors not only expected that they too would soon die, they had a sense that *everyone* was dying, that "the world is ending."'[156] However, while the religious patterns of apocalypse are based on giving a reason and a meaning to history, it is hard to find reason in the firestorm of Hiroshima, and it is hard to find meaning in a human shadow burnt into concrete; in the nuclear age, 'humans, it would seem, would plot, construct, and then execute their own demise.'[157] The atomic bomb disrupts the ability to find purpose and resolution in the ending. As Joseph Dewey puts it, 'without a reliable God figure who would incinerate the planet only as prelude to glorious eternity, [...] humanity the creator would be humanity the destroyer.'[158] Furthermore, this horror of the bomb would hang over the head of civilisation for the rest of the twentieth century, ready to change the face of human civilisation, as tens of thousands of nuclear weapons were built, peaking at over 70 000 warheads in 1986.[159]

Yet another method of dealing with the bomb is through a kind of obfuscatory satire and comedy. While not covered in depth in this thesis, such texts form quite a large part of the nuclear canon. In some cases, these texts might simply express the absurdity of life, often with seemingly political aims of reducing the likelihood of war or environmental catastrophe. Paul Brians, on the other hand, suggests that they simply 'become[…] a coping mechanism which allows one to shelve nuclear war mentally as simply one of life's insoluble

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[156] Lifton and Falk, p. 275.
[157] Dewey, p. 7.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, 'Global Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945–2006', in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* (2006), pp. 64-66 (p. 66).

quandaries.'[160] Alternatively, they can satirise the very apocalyptic sensibility itself: Dewey

notes that before the atomic bomb, the 'apocalyptic temper' had moved, 'in America, towards

a satirical snicker.'[161] Texts of nuclear absurdity include, for instance, Aldous Huxley's *Ape

and Essence*,[162] one of the early post-nuclear holocaust texts published in 1949, which takes a

high-modernist approach that deconstructs the nature of fiction and incorporates many of the

themes that would later become par-for-the-course for nuclear fiction, such as mutation,

genetic purification, and the mining of libraries for physical resources (books burn well). It

also engages in a scathing satire that includes, for part, the exploration of America from New

Zealand, New Zealand now being one of the cultural capitals of the world. This inversion of

culture is common in the genre, and a similar, post-colonialist post-apocalypse is offered by

the much more serious *Fiskadoro* (1985).[163] Many of the key comic, absurdist and satirical

works are filmic. *Dr Strangelove: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*

(1964) has been so heavily discussed that there is no need to go into it here, sufficed to say it

is one of the key texts of the nuclear era.[164] Spike Milligan's *The Bedsitting Room* (1969)

revels in Milligan's trademark nonsense,[165] as a man slowly mutates into a bed-sitting room.

The landscape of the film is a wasteland of detritus, kept in line by British bureaucracy.

Whoops Apocalypse (1982),[166] which, as its title suggests, involves an accidental war, follows

a similar line of absurdist British humour. Satire and humour highlights the meaninglessness

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[160] Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nuclear/1chap.htm> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[161] Dewey, p. 17.
[162] Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence: A Novel*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949).
[163] Denis Johnson, *Fiskadoro*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
[164] Stanley Kubrik, dir., *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. US: Columbia Pictures, 1964.
[165] Richard Lester, dir., *The Bed Sitting Room*. UK, 1969. This is a filmed version of the play, Spike Milligan and John Antrobus, *The Bedsitting Room*, (Walton-on-Thames: Margaret and Jack Hobbs, 1970).
[166] John Reardon, dir., *Whoops Apocalypse*. UK: ITV, 1982. Remade as Tom Bussmann, dir., *Whoops Apocalypse*. UK: ITC Entertainment, 1986.

of destruction, and therefore avoids many of the problems of representation.[167] On the other hand, a fiction such as Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7* (1959) develops a more serious satire. The novel can be read as a commentary of nuclear culture, with the nuclear society rendered in miniature in a protective bunker. The satire is not obfuscatory, but it does, like many of the texts studied in this thesis, offer meaning and purpose outside of itself: it warns the reader against the nuclear society. Like the more comic texts, *Level 7*'s goal is not to make sense of the bomb, but to render its absurdity.

The representation of the bomb therefore proves difficult. The continuing secularisation of eschatology reached its zenith with the development of the atomic bomb. The bomb forms an important cultural artefact, being the device that may end culture and, indeed, everything. Like any trauma, the bomb is constantly re-engaged with in literature, yet making sense of it seems constantly problematised. It is all the more problematic because it is a trauma haunting our future as well as the past, making the need for sense-making all the more imminent. The fact that the bomb usurped the position of the divine in eschatology has led to the use of religious metaphor to describe the bomb, yet it is ultimately difficult to discover sense and meaning in the possibility of atomic warfare.

The Dead Heart of Culture

Furthermore, the atomic bomb and other possibilities of technological destruction question the very foundations of western culture. The bomb is often represented in fiction as the final, inevitable goal of science, rationality and the course of western culture. The apocalyptic sensibility of the Romantics was firmly tied to their questioning of Enlightenment values, and this type of questioning apocalyptic fiction has continued since. While there are many

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[167] For a further discussion of satire and apocalypse, see David Seed, 'Absurdist Visions: *Dr. Strangelove* in Context', in *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 145-56.

examples of end-of-the-world fictions that present irrationality as the apocalyptic danger, which Wagar calls positivist, this thesis focuses more on what Wagar refers to as neo-Romantic, those that see western culture's push towards progress and science as somehow tainted. In this view, the atomic bomb becomes a kind of horrific nothingness at the centre of culture that both demands and denies representation. It is the goal to which progress points, and the symbol of that which progress comes from, and yet it may also be the final destructive end of all progress and all culture. It is always present, never forgettable, yet indescribable. It is also, according to Derrida, the always present absence. Attempts to instil the bomb with meaning deny this absence.

Since the bomb, the possibility of meaningless, absolute destruction has been inextricable from modern life; the post-apocalypse, by extension, has also become part of life. Humanity must come to terms with having dropped the bomb, and with its seeming eagerness to do so again. Even as the rhetoric has diminished in the post-Cold War era, the bombs remain poised and ready.[168] They remain a repository of destruction, symbolic of a great moral failure of civilisation. The use of the atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki forms, along with the Holocaust, a kind of 'fulcrum' for the twentieth century in western thought.[169] The bomb is the pinnacle of science, progress and rationality, while the Holocaust is the pinnacle of 'nationalism, eugenics, efficient industrial techniques, sophisticated bureaucratic organization [… and] effective mass communication'.[170] Similarly, in *Ape and Essence*, the destruction of the world by nuclear holocaust is blamed on 'Progress and Nationalism'.[171] Together, the bomb and the Holocaust symbolise a final, inevitable horror at the heart of western ideals, as those ideals existed at the start of the twentieth century. This

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[168] In 2006, the number of active nuclear warheads was still over 26 000. Norris and Kristensen, p. 66.
[169] Berger, p. 391.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Huxley, p. 93.

taints the historical development of these ideals, laying down a great horror as their inevitable goal.

The taint of western history is often explored in fiction by following the long and winding causal thread running between the Enlightenment and the Manhattan Project. Enlightenment values were implicated in the doubts of progress and of meaningful apocalypse from at least the Romantic period, where they found their way into works of proto-post-apocalyptic literature, such as the writing of William Blake and Lord Byron. This connection is also highlighted in more recent works of the genre. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, it becomes clear that the world will eventually recreate the bomb and at the same point it becomes clear that an enlightenment is occurring along the same lines as the historical Enlightenment, through the guise of Thon Taddeo Pfardentrott, a secular scholar lacking the moral compass of religious faith.[172] This suggests that the seed of the scientific development that would inevitably lead to the bomb germinates in this moment.

This connection is even more clearly laid out in Nigel Kneele's confusingly entitled *The Road*,[173] which shares its name with one of the texts that is most deeply discussed in this thesis. This teleplay, set in 1768, follows Sir Timothy Hassall as he takes primitive scientific method to the task of understanding the haunting of a local road. He hopes to use jars to collect 'imponderable fluids' from spirits of the past.[174] He is using Enlightenment values, however misguided, to combat the mysticism of the past - a similar pattern is seen in many of Kneele's works.[175] What makes the text interesting, both generally and here in this thesis, is

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[172] See Douglas W. Texter, 'Institutional Crisis: State and Scholar in Hermann Hesse's *the Glass Bead Game* and Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*', *Extrapolation,* 49 (2008), pp. 122-41.
[173] Nigel Kneele, 'The Road', in *The Stone Tape,* (UK: Bfi, 2001). This teleplay is one of Kneele's more obscure works, partly due to the fact that it was performed live-to-air and never recorded. The script is available as an extra feature on the DVD of Kneele's *The Stone Tape*.
[174] Ibid. p. 5.
[175] *The Stone Tape* has similar themes, as does the *Quatermass* series.

that the entities in question turn out to not be spirits from the past, but instead spirits from the future. They are the manifestations, out of time, of the desperate escapees from a doomed city, doomed to nuclear obliteration, who die jammed in traffic along the road, representing a kind of final, frustrated bottle-neck of progress. They are the inevitable and eventual victims of this displacement of the mystical with the Enlightenment values that guide Sir Timothy. The irony is made clear as the character Gideon Cobb claims that machines 'can free man from his folly', only to be countered by Levinia asking, 'How can they? He'll have made them.'[176] The tools of humanity, such as the atomic bomb, are always an extension of human will. Suggestions in the teleplay that the ghosts may be of Boadicea's armies in retreat, after their apocalyptic destruction of Roman settlements, highlight the primal and timeless warlike nature of humanity. This primal instinct, with the unguided power of science, leads to the horror of the bomb. In the play, the horror of the spectacle of destruction, in ghostly form, is enough to burst Tetsy's heart in its cage, and to drive Cobb to mania. Yet the kind of horror imaginatively invented here, as the inevitable repercussion of western culture, is a horror that humanity must come to terms with.

This horror at the heart is always present, and never forgettable. According to Martin Amis, writing in the introduction of his book of short stories on the subject of apocalypses and nuclear war, *Einstein's Monsters*, it is impossible to forget the atomic bomb, which he likens to a gun in one's mouth.[177] Even if one closes one's eyes, one can still taste the metal. This is the constant pre-traumatic stress of the civil defence generation, forever waiting for the bombs to fall. Robert Jay Lifton studies the psychological effects of civil defence in his

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[176] Kneele, p. 17.
[177] Martin Amis, *Einstein's Monsters*, (London: Cape, 1987).

Indefensible Weapons,[178] as an extension of his studies of the psychological effects of the bombing of Hiroshima. He suggests that the fear of the bomb invoked in the American population a loss of fundamental beliefs, a loss in faith in anything, and even a desire to get it over and done with, to push the button.[179] Psychologically, the bomb is quite inescapable, and always immanent. It is, in a way, physically immanent as well. The energy of nuclear weaponry is quite literally everywhere, even in Amis's quivering mouth, as encapsulated in Einstein's famous equation, $E=MC^2$. That this energy is an intrinsic part of the world, awaiting understanding and release, is also an important part of many post-apocalyptic stories. The atomic bomb is always there, always present, and becomes the literalised figure of the immanent apocalypse proposed by Frank Kermode. The bomb has been with us since it was built, and even as its use has become less likely, it still remains as a symbol and a cause of a fundamental shift in the way humanity sees itself.

While the bomb forms a worrying cultural fulcrum or goal, and a taint on all western cultural development, and an unforgettable immanent feature of the world, it also remains indescribable. Thomas F. Farrel referred to the Trinity Test as 'that beauty the great poets dream about but describe most poorly and inadequately.'[180] The bomb is wondrously beautiful and powerful, and utterly sublime.[181] The discussion above traces the dawn of

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[178] Lifton and Falk. Lifton's body of work, which investigates various aspects of apocalypse from the perspective of psychology, is invaluable in the study of the apocalypse in culture. See Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It : Aum Shinrikyō, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1999); Robert Jay Lifton, *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age*, (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Robert Jay Lifton, *Superpower Syndrome : America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press; Nation Books, 2003); Robert Jay Lifton and Kai Erikson, 'Nuclear War's Effect on the Mind', in *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism,* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), pp. 274-8; Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat*, (London: Macmillan, 1991); Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America : Fifty Years of Denial*, (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1995).
[179] Lifton and Falk, *Indefensible Weapons*.
[180] Cited in Groves, p. 437.
[181] See Frances Ferguson, 'The Nuclear Sublime', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 4-10. The phrase 'nuclear sublime' is also taken up by Mick Broderick, 'Witnessing the Unthinkable: A Meditation on Film and the Nuclear

apocalyptic writing back to the work of the Romantics, who were known for their obsession with the sublime as a 'quality inherent in external objects, and above all in the scenes and occurrences of the natural world',[182] with a focus on those things that are 'terrible', and 'excite the ideas of pain, and danger',[183] with qualities of 'obscurity, immense power, and vastness in dimension or quantity.'[184] The apocalyptic elements that made their way into the writing of the Romantics are surely an extension of this emphasis. Worldwide catastrophe is nature in its most terrifying and vast aspect. While the atomic bomb places this power in the control of humanity, ultimately it is a natural phenomenon, based upon an understanding of the natural world. The atomic bomb literally cracks apart nature and opens it to inspection, with the release of explosive force. The atomic bomb releases the ineffable, the indescribable, the sublime and the pseudo-divine. The atomic bomb defies language. It is the pinnacle of human endeavour and of human horror. The bomb is famously 'unthinkable'. The bomb forms a kind of potential absence. It is a potential energy, released to destruction, to the breaking down of structure and order. The fear of the Cold War was that nuclear weapons are also contagious, through political means, and that the use of one would lead to the obliteration of civilisation through Mutually Assured Destruction. The bomb is a potential, all-consuming singularity, culturally and physically.

The atomic bomb forms a final, absent referent at the heart of the atomic age, and this absence is always present. Derrida, in his work of nuclear criticism, 'No Apocalypse, Not

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Sublime', *Antithesis,* 6 (1992), pp. 67-75. Tina Pippin similarly discusses the Judeo-Christian Apocalypse as sublime, specifically 'sublime horror.' Tina Pippin, 'Apocalyptic Horror', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts,* 8 (1997), pp. 198-217.

[182] M.H. Abrams, 'Sublime.', in *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), pp. 308-10 (p. 308).

[183] Edmund Burke, cited in ibid.

[184] Ibid.

Now',[185] describes the atom bomb in those terms, while also connecting the bomb with his deconstructionist project. The bomb, in this essay, becomes that final, absent referent towards which all literature must point. Nuclear war is a text, a political game, in which nuclear weapons are never intended to be used, but instead are tools for communication. Nuclear war is also, according to Derrida, a speed race where one attempts to outrun one's opponent. The final goal is nuclear war, an ultimate ending in which everyone loses. The only way to avoid that ending is the creation of a deterrent, that deterrent being the building of even more nuclear weapons. This speeds up the race. In Derrida's model, nuclear war itself cannot exist, as nuclear war is a moment of utter destruction, the obliteration of everything. It is a non-existent absence. Nuclear war is thus '*fabulously textual*',[186] as it can only ever exist as a text, a text that is self-consuming upon its ultimate realisation. Certainly, atomic bombs 'exist in our culture [...] primarily as literary entities'.[187] The atomic bomb is a paradox, an object, the only purpose of which is to destroy itself, as characterised by the anthropomorphic atomic bomb of John Carpenter's film *Dark Star*, which must resolve an existential crisis arriving from its understanding that its sole purpose is to cease to exist.

Nuclear war, for Derrida, will not only destroy humanity, but also the humanities, for it will destroy the literary canon on which all the humanities are based. This claim has become somewhat ironic, given that a number of former nuclear bunkers that have been given over to become secure libraries and secure data repositories. Like the Mount Kosciusko bunker built in *On the Beach* to preserve history, it seems more likely that the literary canon will out-survive humanity, but no-one will be there to read it. However, if Derrida's idea is

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[185] Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter, and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 20-31.
[186] Ibid. p. 23. Emphasis in original.
[187] John Canaday, 'Physics in Fiction: "The Voice of the Dolphins" and *Riddley Walker*', in *The Nuclear Muse: Literature, Physics, and the First Atomic Bombs,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 227-49 (p. 233).

accepted, then this destruction of the literary canon is also the destruction of literature, and the destruction of the possibility of there ever being literature again. As Cormac McCarthy puts it, 'Books are made out of books.'[188] Literature is made of literature, and while something may well be written after literature, it will not be literature, for it will not be able to refer back to that canon which no longer exists. Following along similar lines to this thesis, which suggests that meaning and purpose is found in endings, Derrida then claims that the ultimate, final end of all literature will be its own destruction. The final referent of all literature, then, is absent, and nuclear weapons become a final vindication of Derrida's deconstructionism. According to Martin Amis, writing in the introduction of his collection of apocalyptic short stories, to even think about life after nuclear war is inhuman, for it demands the need to conjure in one's consciousness the possibility of such inhuman destruction, and to imagine the inhuman acts that one would need to enact in the aftermath. Amis, for instance, imagines the need to travel home from work through the post-apocalyptic wasteland in order to murder his family to save them from the horror of post-apocalyptic life. In simply imagining such a thing, of putting oneself in the emotional and psychological position of accepting that one would pursue such an action, is to lose a part of one's humanity. To even build atomic weaponry is to make the decision to use it, and to therefore kill one's children. 'Can you do it?' asks the man in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006):

> When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesnt fire? It has to fire. What if it doesnt fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing? Can there be? Hold him in your arms. Just so. The soul is quick. Pull him toward you. Kiss him. Quickly.[189]

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[188] Richard B. Woodward, 'Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction', *The New York Times,* (1992) <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html> [accessed 19 April 2011].
[189] McCarthy, p. 120.

The very thought of the apocalypse puts humanity in a post-apocalyptic, inhuman state. And such a state is also implicit in all literature.

The bomb is both present and absent. It demands representation, it demands to be dealt with, yet it is a kind of nothingness that cannot be represented, as Derrida has suggested. This may be why poetic metaphor has found its way into eye-witness accounts, and even presidential speeches, about nuclear war. When JFK spoke during the Cuban missile crisis, he said:

> We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth – but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.[190]

The sentence is certainly politically interesting: the use of the phrase 'prematurely or unnecessarily' actually makes it clear that '[w]e' *are* willing to risk obliterating life on Earth, as is reinforced by the final subordinate clause. Also, the ashes are in one, collective mouth, 'our mouth', suggesting a communal, yet singular and thus unified, responsibility. Yet it is the image of the metaphorical fruit of victory which is most interesting, as it turns to literal ash. This, of course, suggests the bountiful world turned to nuclear winter, but also suggests the story of the fall. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, after tempting Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Satan returns to hell and gathers the fallen angels in Pandemonium, who find themselves turned into serpents with a tree rising before them, in mimic of the Tree of Knowledge. However, when they bite into its fruit, the fruit turns to 'bitter ashes'.[191] This is a literal representation in Hell of what had metaphorically occurred in Eden. The image of the taking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, of trying to attain godlike power, and instead being cast out of Eden, is one that is reiterated throughout

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[190] 'John F. Kenney: Address to the Cuban Crisis October 22, 1962', in *Modern History Sourcebook.* ed. by Paul Halsall <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1962kennedy-cuba.html> [accessed 8 May 2013].
[191] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (England: Penguin Classics, 2000). Book 10, l. 566.

fictions of the end. The allusion made in this speech to Milton's epic is intriguing in that it refers to future actions, and turns the speaker and his people into demons. It is as if Kennedy is anticipating a future guilt, and displaying his, or his nation's, willingness to bear that guilt. It echoes the same type of wilful sadness displayed by Robert Oppenheimer, hidden within a speech intended to motivate and incite. Such ambiguous poetic allusions seem inherently linked to attempts to talk about the always present absence of the bomb. It is unsurprising that poetry has engaged with the concept of nuclear weaponry.[192]

Derrida says, '[T]here is no atom.'[194] He is using the term, primarily, in its meaning of indivisibility, and claiming that nothing is indivisible. There is, for instance, no point at which language cannot be further broken down. However, if it is forgivable to embark on something of a deconstructionist reading of Derrida, the word 'atom' inevitably suggests the physical atomic particle, which was initially named thus because atoms were believed to be the fundamental, and utterly indivisible, building blocks of reality. The word atom, also inevitably, suggests the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb works by setting up a chain reaction of divisions among that which is named for its indivisibility (the atom), and releasing ultimate destruction in doing so. In Farrell's claim of the ineffability of the atomic bomb, he has poetically suggested this absence. This absence was most poignantly portrayed when the possibility of a memorial at Hiroshima was discussed. There was uncertainty as to what form such a memorial should take, and someone offered that there should be simply nothing

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[192] For discussions of nuclear poetry, see Jan Berry, 'The End of Art: Poetry and Nuclear War', in *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature,* ed. by Nancy Anisfield (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), pp. 85-94; Edward Bruner, *Cold War Poetry*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004); John Gery, *Nuclear Annihilation and Contemporary American Poetry: Ways of Nothingness*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1995); Robert von Hallberg, *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985). The destruction of the world is also the destruction of language, as Maurice Blanchot suggested in his discussion of the Holocaust. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. ix.
[194] Jaques Derrida, 'Dialanguages', in *Points... Interview, 1974-94,* ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 132-55 (p. 137).

'because that is what there was.'[195] Such a nothingness is imaginatively explored in the graphic work *Akira*,[196] where an explosion that seems at least a metaphor for nuclear obliteration is rendered on the page as an expanding, black absence. Yet even such attempts to represent absence seem doomed to fail. In order to present it, one must frame it, one must concrete over the ground to preserve it and keep it absent, one must place it within a structure that gives it meaning.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the development of apocalyptic ideas into their secular form, and the beginning of their integration into fiction. Furthermore, it argued that the final turning point towards this secularisation is the development of the atomic bomb, which demands representation, denies representation, and finally questions the trajectory of western culture that has led to its development. This is the groundwork for the rest of this thesis, demonstrating the way apocalypse functions as a tool of closure, and how this function has been subverted in the last two hundred years. The drive to rediscover closure and purpose is the object of study in this thesis, specifically the way that drive is represented in fiction. The apocalypse has developed from a divine instrument to meaningless product of nature, and finally to the result of human action and inaction. This is a path of progressive secularisation

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[195] Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, p. 278.

[196] This is suggested by Paul Brians, *Nuke Pop*, <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nukepop/index.html> [accessed 14 November 2008]. Katsuhiro Ôtomo, dir., *Akira*. Japan, 1988. Japanese visual works, film and *manga*, are famously replete with images of grand destruction, which, although this thesis has not the space to deal with the issue in detail, may be taken as an attempt to deal with the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, it must be acknowledged that this perception may be as much based on a selection bias of foreign audiences as it is on Japanese tastes. In any case, the same concern has led to a kind of taboo against the depiction of the bomb. Therefore, it truly is the unpresentable image that demands representation. For examples, see the ambiguously named 'reflex' weapons of *Macross*. Even more curious are the 'n^2 mines' of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which do not rise into the sky as a mushroom cloud, but instead in the image of a crucifix. Hideaki Anno, dir., *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Japan: Gainax, 1995-1996; Noboru Ishiguro, dir., *The Super Dimension Fortress Macross*. Japan: Studio Nue, 1982-1983. For a discussion of the apocalyptic imagery of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, see Mick Broderick, 'Anime's Apocalypse: Neon Genesis Evangelion as Millennarian Mecha', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific,* 7 (2002).

and progress. This path has led to an ever diminishing sense of meaning and closure to the world. If inevitable, meaningless destruction is the final end of the earth, then this suggests the possibility that everything is pointless.

This chapter uses the example of the atomic bomb as the most prominent symbol of the failed, human-driven end of the world. The bomb represents an absence that must be engaged with. Closure is not just a state of narrative but of psychology. It suggests the ability to let things go, to put them down, and to resolve trauma. The atomic bomb is an instigator of pre-traumatic stress. It is always there, always immanent. It is both a fundamental force of nature and of contemporary international politics. Its existence implies a decision to use it. It is also the final, inevitable goal of western culture and the scientific ideals of progress. It demands representation and resolution. However, a nothingness is un-representable. The atomic bomb demands a resolution that cannot be achieved. Literature must come to terms with this changing nature of apocalypse, as it has become secularised and then placed in human hands, casing a dark shadow of the failed ending to fall over the heart of western culture.

This sense that everything might be pointless demands a literary response, and this thesis turns now to those fictions that integrate the end of the world. The next chapter explores the concept of literary closure. It argues that fictions that incorporate the end of the world problematise their own closure.

While all stories end, there is more to closure than simply ending. Closure suggests a sense of purpose, a sense that, not only are things over, but that they are meant to be over. In fictions of the end-of-the-world, the world represented has a narrative structure physically imposed upon it, and this is made concrete by destruction. To write on past the end-of-the-world is to deny closure and metafictively bring attention to the fictional nature of closure, for, in reality, nothing really does end absolutely. For instance, all physical constituents of our bodies predate us and will outlast us. As theoretical physicist Dr Lawrence Krauss puts it: '[E]very atom in your body came from a star that exploded. [...] You are all stardust. [...] So, forget Jesus. The stars died so that you could be here today.'[1] In the graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986), in which destruction is used as an escape from a deterministic world turning towards absolute obliteration, Dr Manhattan goes even further: 'A live body and a dead body contain the same number of particles. Structurally, there's no discernible difference. Life and death are unquantifiable abstracts.'[2] Riddley Walker portrays the same sentiment in the poetic, invented, phonetic language of Riddleyspeak:[3]

> I dont think it makes no diffrents where you start the telling of a thing. You never know where it begun realy. No moren you know where you begun your oan self. You myt know the place and day and time of day when you ben beartht. You myt even know the place and day and time when you ben got. That dont mean nothing tho. You stil dont know where you begun.[4]

In the contemporary age, it is increasingly difficult to believe in beginnings or endings; it is even more difficult to believe they have purpose or meaning.

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[1] Lawrence Krauss, 'A Universe from Nothing', in *Youtube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ImvlS8PLIo#t=16m49s> [accessed 31 March 2013].
[2] Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, and John Higgins, *Watchmen*, (New York: DC Comics, 1987).
[3] While the term 'Riddleyspeak' is not used in the novel, this thesis uses it to refer to the dialect of *Riddley Walker*.
[4] Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 8.

This chapter takes as its initial premise Frank Kermode's claim that apocalypse and literary structure are closely related, with contemporary literature being a stand in for apocalypse in a world that can no longer believe in an imminent end. This chapter also builds from the suggestion in Chapter One that the word 'apocalypse' now refers to meaningless destruction, and that fictions must engage with this fact. This chapter begins by defining closure in the novel, and then draws on two examples of fictions that end with a secular end of the world and thereby attempt to reintegrate secular apocalypse and literary structure. These are H.G. Wells's *The World Set Free* (1914) and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957).[5] In both these instances, the attempt at reintegration is problematic.

This thesis's analysis of *The World Set Free* focuses on the way this novel represents a secular eschatology. This novel contains the first written use of the phrase 'atomic bomb',[6] and uses these fictional devices to wipe the earth clean of the corruption of the past in order to resolve the world into order and peace, just as in religious and mythic eschatologies. While by no means the only novel to offer a fulfilled, secular apocalypse, *The World Set Free* is interesting in the way it runs past the end. The fictional apocalypse is not aligned with the narratological elements of the fiction itself. Despite attempting to create a secular, fulfilled apocalypse, the novel demonstrates the problematic nature of representing the end of the world in fiction. Moreover, it has become increasingly difficult to offer closure in such simplistic terms after the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This thesis then turns to an example of a fiction that ends with final, meaningless, secular apocalypse. In the examination of *On the Beach*, this chapter uses the theory of

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[5] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach*, (Adelaide: Heinemann, 1958); H.G. Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001). Note that while *The World Set Free* was originally released in 1914 under the title *The World Set Free*, the recent edition by Bison Books has, for no apparent reason, been retitled *The Last War*. Therefore, while the novel will be referred to in the text as *The World Set Free*, footnotes will refer to *The Last War: The World Set Free*.
[6] Wells, p. 56.

tragedy as a framework. *On the Beach* is a form of tragedy taken to its extremes until it becomes, in some respects, an inversion of tragedy. Tragedy is similar to apocalypse, but it denies ultimate destruction. Apocalypse represents the destruction of the world, but tragedy focuses merely on the death of a person or a group. Yet the cathartic purpose of tragedy still remains, and may at least offer some sense of purposeful resolution. *On the Beach* does this by reminding the reader of the horror of the secular ending. *On the Beach* also places meaning in the middle rather than the end. By suggesting the frailty and brevity of life, Shute's novel highlights the importance of living for the now. In these ways it subverts the nature of literary endings through the positing of a massive, destructive, human-wrought conflagration.

Closure and the Novel

According to Peter J. Rabinowitz, emphasis is placed on the end of a literary text merely because 'readers assume that authors put their best thoughts last, and thus assign a special value to the final pages of a text.'[7] If this is true, then the importance of the ending is more a matter of convention than necessity. However, there generally is a broad, intuitive understanding of what closure is, and some consensus as to its importance. Just as apocalyptic myths offer a sense of closure, with resolution into rebirth or order, so do fictions. Closure gives meaning and purpose to the narrative that precedes it. Closure provides structure and a sense of finiteness that allows understanding. Closure releases narrative tension so that the novel may be put down. However, attempts at defining closure more precisely have not come to a consensus. The theory of closure has been discussed at

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[7] Peter J. Rabinowitz, 'Reading Beginnings and Endings', in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Closure, and Frames,* ed. by Brian Richardson (Ohio: The Ohio State University, 2002), pp. 300 - 13 (p. 304).

least since Aristotle's 'Poetics',[8] and has continued to be discussed relatively recently by critics such as Marianna Torgovnick and J. Hillis Miller.[9] Intriguingly, while all the aforementioned commentators agree that conclusions are important, this agreement falls apart in regard to whether conclusions are actually possible. This section navigates the scholarship of closure and proposes a common sense, working definition. Closure may be illusory; however, it remains an important illusion. If closure cannot be found, the feeling of closure may be substituted, however saccharine or delusory it may be. Most importantly, this discussion reframes closure from being something that is defined by critics into something that is a problem for authors to resolve, and a tool for them to use. Closure is problematic, and different authors take different approaches to instating it, denying it and playing with it. To create the sense of tension and then resolution within a world that is believably and meaningfully constructed remains a challenge. Closure may even be impossible and undesirable to fully grasp. Despite the final page, critics such as J. Hillis Miller argue that texts never truly end,[10] and if closure is a state of having all one's questions answered, then it is also true that texts are always open to re-questioning: even the sense of closure need not be truly final.

All novels end. They all have a final page. These ends are also the temporal-spatial limits of the world invoked by the words of the text. To walk to the tip of a peninsula may be to walk to the end of the land, the physical border of that land. In the imaginatively created world of a novel, the ending may metaphorically form a final edge, demarcating the ends of that world. However, walking to the edge of a landscape does not provide a sense of closure

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[8] Aristotle, 'Poetics', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, trans. by Richard Janko (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), pp. 90-116. Originally written around 350$_{BCE}$.

[9] Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). J. Hillis Miller, 'The Problematic of Ending in Narrative', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 33 (1978), pp. 3-7.

[10] See Miller. Miller summarises essentially the same argument in J. Hillis Miller, 'Three: The End of the Line', in *Reading Narrative,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), pp. 52-56.

and neither does the simple stopping of a narrative. This definition, of an ending being simply a cessation, or 'negation' as George Eliot puts it,[11] is unable to account for incomplete, open endings, and it cannot account for closure. Closure is the sense that something has not simply ended, but instead has been resolved and is now complete. It is the sense that something *should* be over, which is distinct from it merely being over. It is the sense that something has been designed, that it provides meaning and purpose. It is the sense that something is not just finished, but complete. When a sentence reaches a full stop, it has reached its ending. However, a sentence does not just require a full stop, but a closed internal structure. A sentence requires a subject and a finite verb. Otherwise, the sentence may be finished, but it is possibly also meaningless and ill-designed. It has ended, but it has not achieved closure.

Closure is the sense that all narrative threads have been tied off, rather than simply cut. The dawn of critical thought on endings is a few sentences devoted to the subject in Aristotle's 'Poetics' suggesting what an ending should be like in a well-designed tragedy. Aristotle suggests an ending is 'that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it'.[12] This claim makes more sense when placed next to his earlier statement that a tragedy is 'a complete [...] action'.[13] A tragedy is a singular narrative thread, a complication followed by a resolution: an action and its repercussions, ceasing at the point at which there remains nothing more to be said about that singular action. A single narrative thread may be neatly answered: the scene is set, the complication asks a question, and then the question is resolved in the *dénouement*, the untying. However, when the threads are tangled, as in longer novels, or when they attempt to represent the infinite complexities of real life, simple closure seems all the more difficult. For

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[11] George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1978), p. 324.
[12] Aristotle, p. 96.
[13] Ibid.

the realist Henry James, a novel is a recreation of life, and in life '[r]eally, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.'[14] James's definition departs slightly from Aristotle's narratological model. The word 'relations' suggests that James is not merely talking about narrative complications, but a broader relationship between people, events, locations, ideas and so on.[15] Every person exists within an infinitely expanding social network. Every location sits within a broader landscape. Every idea is founded upon other ideas. The term '*appear*' is also particularly important in this statement, as it suggests the failure of wholly resolvable endings. Instead, there is merely the sense of closure.

Following on from James's suggestions, when more complicated structures are attempted, Aristotle's threads of narrative form a fabric that is, essentially, infinite. The novelist's job, then, is to reflect this infinite fabric of the world, both infinitely large and infinitely small, but to cut it into a finite piece for investigation, and then hem the threads together into a closed network. A novel is a balance of *mimesis*, 'the representation of reality',[16] or at least its appearance, and *harmonia*, arrangement,[17] or at least its appearance. Both are in opposition. Part of that arrangement is the attempt at the creation of a discrete, finite system. Separated out from infinity, the novel is frozen in time, investigable and understandable. In this way, endings 'create the illusion of life halted and poised for analysis.'[18] In order to achieve this, they must be planned with 'some principle of

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[14] Henry James, 'Preface to "Roderick Hudson"', in *The Art of the Novel,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 3-19 (p. 5). Emphasis in original

[15] In a way, James is hinting at the kind of analysis developed later by structuralist critics, and also the failure of structuralism, for 'relations stop nowhere'.

[16] Torgovnick, p. 208. Ross Murfin; Supryia M. Ray, 'Imitation', in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms,* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), p. 214 (p. 214).

[17] Torgovnick, p. 208.

[18] Ibid. p. 209.

organization or design that implies the existence of a definite termination point.'[19] They must provide an ending which suggests closure.

Through these narrative structures, closure in the novel is the provision of a feeling of nothing more needing to be said, a feeling of being comfortable putting a book down. In this subtle recasting, the emphasis turns to the psychological state of the reader, and the use of the word closure may be related to the usage of the word in psychology, which implies the resolution of a trauma. Presumably, most novels do not attempt to create trauma. However, they generally institute a state of emotional uncertainty, an engagement with that uncertainty, and resolution of that uncertainty. Norman Holland suggests that 'plots arouse emotions and endings resolve them',[20] before embarking on a neurological examination of the way that this occurs in the brain. D.A. Miller further suggests that a narrative may pursue happiness, but not achieve it, for narrative is a 'state of lack, which can only be liquidated along with the narrative itself.'[21] Happiness, in Miller's usage, is a stand-in for closure, release, and resolution of narrative tension:

> [T]raditional narrative is a quest after that which will end questing; […] an interruption of what will be resumed; an expansion of what will be condensed, or a distortion of what will be made straight; a holding in suspense or putting into question of what will be resolved or answered.[22]

To create a narrative requires the creation of tension, and the possibility of resolution drives the narrative forward until that resolution is achieved and the narrative itself abolished. This, of course, seems to be 'a truth generally acknowledged in every manual for aspiring

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[19] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 2.
[20] Norman Holland, '14. Endings', in *Literature and the Brain,* (Gainesville: PsyArt Foundation, 2009), pp. 164-70 (p. 166).
[21] D.A. Miller, 'Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel', in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames,* ed. by Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 272-81 (p. 272).
[22] Ibid.

writers—namely, that there must be conflict to generate a story and resolution to end it.'[23]

Continuing this idea, E.M. Forster claims that the only objective merit a story can have is 'that of making the audience want to know what happens next', and the only merit of a conclusion is to make the audience cease wanting to know. [24] Along similar lines, Torgovnick suggests that closure is 'a sense that nothing necessary has been omitted from a work.'[25] This is the pursuit of happiness, the frustration of that pursuit, and its extinction, that D.A. Miller conceives as the goal of the traditional novel.[26] The traditional goal of literature, then, is to invite readers into the desire of wanting to know what happens, to then fulfil that desire, and release them.

Traditional literature is expected to offer such a sense of resolution, a sense of nothing more needing to be said and of no more questions needing to be asked. However, the field of literary studies implies that texts can be re-engaged with, re-questioned and re-read into new times and places. Even in the great tragedies, with their plots unified around the inevitability of an ending, this is the case. *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*, for instance, offer thorough, almost apocalyptic closure. In tragedy, 'all exist[s] under the shadow of the end', to borrow this phrase, a little out of context, from Frank Kermode.[27] The death-ridden *dénouement*s are predictable, intractable, and final. Yet these texts have been reengaged with throughout the centuries. They are re-read in new times and places, offering up new questions, new answers. In this respect, all texts are open. All texts exist in oscillation between being closed and open, complete and incomplete. Resolution may always be disrupted by further questioning.

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[23] Ibid. p. 274.
[24] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd, 1927), p. 29.
[25] Torgovnick, p. 6.
[26] See D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
[27] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

Discussion of closure, necessarily, is a discussion of the expectations of closure, and of the traditions of closure. It should not be taken as a denial that many fictions subvert these expectations: there are always exceptions. Many texts revel in the failure of closure. Indeed, the question of closure has become more difficult over time, as readers have come to expect complicated texts, which more fully represent the complicated real world. However, these still reinforce the importance and the expectations of closure. When literature fails to fulfil this expectation, it is notable. Some novels take this to the extreme. The cyclical *Finnegans Wake* (1939),[29] the never-starting *If On a Winter's Night A Traveller* (1979),[30] or the multiply ending *French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) could not be described as failures,[31] but they do deliberately fail to meet expectations of closure. In fact, they succeed in their goal of failing to offer simple closure. These experimental works still offer a unity of artistry and purpose, which leaves them complete and structured, despite lacking a traditional ending. The final pieces still fit into a network of meaning, even if it is complicated and constructed to remind the reader of the failure of endings. In any case, closure is generally expected of literature, and novels that discuss the failure of endings remind the reader of the impossibility of real closure, the impossibility of this literary expectation actually being fulfilled and the artifice of literature in general. Yet, while these novels do question endings, they also ultimately end and often provide a sense of closure.

Kermode suggests that endings supply a meaning and purpose, that real endings are impossible, and that, therefore, fictions supply the sense of an ending that is missing in life.[32] 'Ultimately [...] the passion that animates us as readers of narrative is the passion for (of)

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[29] James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake* (London: Faber, 1949).
[30] Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Minerva, 1992).
[31] John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1998).
[32] See Kermode.

meaning,'[33] writes Peter Brooks, and 'this passion appears to be finally a desire for the end.'[34] Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* suggests that literary endings fulfil the role of the apocalypse. In a similar vein to Henry James's claims, Kermode argues that literature attempts, temporarily, to fool its audience into believing in the possibility of final conclusions. Kermode sees literary endings and myths of cosmic endings as reflections of one another. This is not at all to say that literature is modelled on these myths, but instead that both myth and fiction fulfil similar needs and desires. Kermode uses the Apocalypse, for instance, as a useful metaphor, and sees it as a cousin, structurally, of the novel. However, the genre of end-of-the-world fictions puts them at odds. Fictions about the end of the world are inherently stories about endings. They lead to the end, go through the end, or follow on after the end. The genre of end-of-the-world stories revolves around a crisis point of absolute destruction and conflagration, the apocalyptic end-point. This final cosmic ending, or its failure, is always present in the text, lingering behind every word. The setting and the motivation depend upon it. Yet they deny a sense of closure.

In post-apocalyptic texts, such as *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and *Riddley Walker* (1980),[35] the narrative ending cannot coincide with the cosmic ending. To 'generate a story' post-apocalypse, the apocalypse cannot be the narrative's resolution. It must instead be a source of conflict and, therefore, cannot be complete. If endings are already a 'negation',[36] then in post-apocalyptic stories, the ending is doubly absent, because it must have failed for the narrative to continue. The sole duty of an ending is to cease, but in these stories this duty is dismissed. The stories continue on and, therefore, the ending fails in its goal of absence. As Michael Chabon claims in his review of *The Road*, 'The only true account of the [post-

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[33] Peter Brooks, 'Freud's Masterplot: Questions of Narrative', *Yale French Studies* (1977), pp. 280-300 (p. 282).
[34] Ibid.
[35] Hoban; Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971).
[36] Eliot, p. 324.

apocalyptic] world […] would be a book of blank pages, white as ash.'[37] The first paradox of post-apocalyptic literature is that 'to annihilate the world in prose one must simultaneously write it into being.'[38] In these blank pages, when narrative has broken down, even the illusion of time passing created by narrative would cease to exist. As Aristotle puts it, 'Time cannot exist without a soul (to count on it)'.[39] Narrative requires action and tension, which is impossible to create after the narrative has reached closure. The true apocalypse must end action and interaction and, therefore, must also invoke an end of narrative. Heat death, examined above, is a literal example of interaction, change and tension being impossible after the end. At the point of maximum entropy, time literally ends in any meaningful sense of the word.

Stories of the end of the world may also disrupt closure through an absolute, final and meaningless ending. These stories are not post-apocalyptic, but instead lead to a secular apocalypse, such as Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*.[40] These texts end with negation, absolute nothingness, Chabon's 'blank pages, white as ash.'[41] In D.A. Miller's terms, they resolve lack into lack, rather than into completeness and purposeful closure. A traditional religious apocalypse resolves into completeness rather than emptiness; the world is cleansed and redeemed. In most instances of end-of-the-world fiction, the secular apocalypse does not achieve this.

Secular Millennialism and *The World Set Free*

While this thesis broadly claims that the development of the idea of a secular end of the world has led to a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness, this is not to say that

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[37] Michael Chabon, 'After the Apocalypse', *The New York Review of Books,* 54 (2007), p. 28.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Aristotle, cited as epigraph in Kermode.
[40] Shute.
[41] Chabon.

meaning cannot be found in a secular end. In the discussion of the development of eschatology above, secular millennialism is mentioned. This is the belief in a secular pattern to history; such a belief may be explored alongside religious eschatology (indeed, the term 'millennialism' has strong religious connotations), and may even follow similar patterns, even though not necessarily directly inspired by religious belief. However, secular millennialism appears to be born of the same desire as its religious counterpart, which is the desire to make sense of history by imagining a pattern to it. H.G. Wells, while an atheist, espouses secular millennialist ideas in a number of his texts. These generally explore his understanding of science as well as his faith in his socialist idealism. *The World Set Free* follows the millennialist mode most closely, by imagining atomic destruction followed by a utopian society. Thus, humanity deals its own destruction but also its own rebirth.

In an ironic twist, Wells's atheist paradise follows similar patterns as the religious eschatology, even paralleling the Christian Apocalypse. This is likely not by direct influence, but instead, as mentioned above, through a desire to find patterns in history that fulfil similar desires as those fulfilled by Apocalypse. Following the patterns of Apocalypse, the novel begins by placing history in concord with its atomic ending. That is, Wells reformulates history as a history in progress towards the development of atomic bombs and their use. History, for Wells, is a history of the attainment of power, and will be ended by the ultimate power of the atomic bomb. Society is also painted as diseased in the novel, further making atomic destruction inevitable, but also desirable. It is only through destruction that the corrupt world may be cleansed, and a new secular heaven on earth built in its place. As explored below, this is not without its problems. Ever since real atomic bombs were built and used in 1945, it has been increasingly difficult to imagine the bomb as a tool for bringing about utopia, and the novel also suggests the difficulties of writing past the end, difficulties that are explored more fully in Chapter Three of this thesis.

The World Set Free is not the only fiction to attempt to re-instil the secular ending with pseudo-religious promise. There are numerous ways in which elements of found in religious eschatology may be introduced into secular, end-of-the-world fiction. For instance, many of the 'cosy catastrophes' (that Brian Aldiss suggests are a feature of post-World War II British science fiction) relate a relatively calm approach to the end of the world,[50] in which the characters are freed from societal constraints and suffer little hardship in the end. Aldiss's key example is John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951),[51] which follows an invasion by intelligent plants after the population of the world is afflicted with blindness. These cosy catastrophes are part of the broader range of last human stories, which often include an element of hope and even joy at the ability to found a new world, and often revel in the destruction of the old – much like the Christian Apocalypse, although these elements also often have a healthy dose of scepticism attached.

More like the traditional religious Apocalypse are those American texts that posit a return to a frontier-like spirit and the building of new, small communities. These fictions are generally founded on the possibility that atomic war would destroy the cities, the military and industry, forcing a return to a simpler life closer to the land. Atomic bombs become a kind of god-like force. For instance, Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959) includes in its title the suggestion that the cities destroyed in the nuclear war the novel depicts are Babylons ripe for cleansing.[52] In the novel, the inhabitants of Fort Repose are actually protected from the radiation drift by a quirk of wind patterns. This allows them to build the American dream, a simple village-like society. Despite worldwide nuclear conflagration, the only death by radiation poisoning in the novel is of someone who ventures into the city and steals jewellery,

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[50] Brian W. Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1986), pp. 252-5.
[51] John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003).
[52] Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon*, (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1959).

now worthless and tainted. Somehow, amidst the worldwide, human-orchestrated destruction, the hand of God protects the innocent and punishes the wicked. The rebuilt America is founded on similar principles in Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955).[53] In that novel, it seems that the advice of the *U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey* that the only possible defence against nuclear war is the dispersion of industry and population has been taken to heart,[54] and a new 'Thirtieth Amendment' now declares: 'No city, no town, no community of more than one thousand people or two hundred buildings to the square mile shall be built or permitted to exist anywhere in the United States of America.'[55] This has led to a return to pre-industrial life, the domination of the Mennonites, and a generally held belief that this amendment reflects God's law and that the Destruction was God's punishment. While idyllic for the most part, the violence with which this stasis is maintained has strong hints of the dystopian, wherein the narrative tension of this landmark novel lies. The destructive return to a frontier spirit in these novels continues a theme suggested through the history of American literature of a simplification of values and a distrust of the cities. It is by this return that these texts find meaning, purpose and closure in human made devastation. The tele-movie *The Day After* (1983) may well be directly confronting this myth of the post-nuclear idyll when farmers are told to strip all the top-soil after a nuclear attack,[56] due to its radioactivity. This request is impossible to practically fulfil, which denies the possibility of a pastoral post-apocalypse. Similarly, visions of agrarian failure are depicted in post-apocalyptic wasteland of *The Day After*'s trans-Atlantic contemporary, *Threads* (1984).[57]

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[53] Leigh Brackett, *The Long Tomorrow*, (Rockville, MD: Phoenix Pick, 1983).
[54] *U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey: The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, (Washington: US Government, 1946).
[55] Brackett, p. 7.
[56] Nicholas Meyer, dir., *The Day After*. USA: ABC, 1983.
[57] Mike Jackson, dir., *Threads*. UK: BBC, 1984. For discussion of *Threads*, see Patrick Mannix, '*Threads*: A Synthesis', in *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction: Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films,* (Lewisburg:

Many end-of-the-world fictions go further than *Alas, Babylon* in positing a post-apocalyptic utopia and an end to warfare. A particularly interesting example for this study is Wells's *The World Set Free*. In this novel, corruption drives a misuse of science, leading to an apocalyptic, destructive transformation into a peaceful utopia, ruled by science. This model closely parallels religious eschatology, but stripped of any god. Instead, there is the atomic bomb. The sense-making of these myths of ending is maintained, even while the myths themselves fail. The divine is replaced by this scientific saviour. Similar texts can be found throughout the Cold War, but the writing of this novel so long before Hiroshima or Nagasaki, before even the slaughter of the Battle of the Somme, allows a naïve extremity. Its resolution of nuclear anxiety is all the more pure because it predates that anxiety. *The World Set Free* is also interesting because, even while the apocalyptic destruction resolves into utopia, the narrative continues on. The narrative stalls, because after the ultimate closure there can be no more narrative.

Despite its historical significance, *The World Set Free* sits among Wells's least known works, probably because it takes a polemic, essay-like approach, and this reaches its zenith in the post-historical, utopian section of the novel. As Paul Brians states, '[t]he novel [...] belongs to Wells's pontificating middle period and is relatively plotless, consisting in the main of lectures on history and an account of a utopian but authoritarian world government'.[58] *The World Set Free* explores what was, at the time of writing, the futuristic concept of the development of nuclear energy. The atomic reactors imagined in the novel set the world free from its hunger for energy, and, unlike real reactors, leave only gold as a by-product, finally fulfilling the alchemists' dream of the philosopher's stone. However, the

Bucknell University Press, 1992), pp. 160-71. See also Gregory A. Waller, 'Re-Placing *The Day After*', *Cinema Journal,* 26 (1987), pp. 3-20.
[58] Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nuclear/1chap.htm> [accessed 3 May 2013].

huge surplus of gold destroys economies, while the surplus of production creates mass unemployment. The result of this power is, ironically, depression, poverty, and, in the fictional year 1956, war between the 'Allies' and the 'Central Powers'. Atomic bombs dropped from bi-planes level a number of great cities and make continued war impossible. While this first half of the novel could be seen as a warning against scientific misadventure, the second half is a utopic vision of a world governed entirely by scientific principle. The problem made clear in the novel is that science has been controlled by politics in the past. Once science becomes too powerful for the tools of politics to manage, the only solution, according to the text, is to make science sovereign regent of the world. In this way, Wells creates a world that is ripe for apocalyptic cleansing by its own hands, through the tools of science, and the building of a new world in the ashes, also founded on science.

This scientific apocalypse is not the only one formulated by Wells. The end of the world is a major theme of his writing, and apocalyptic visions are included in *The Time Machine*,[59] *The War of the Worlds*,[60] and *The Food of the Gods and How it Came to Earth* (1904).[61] Even *Tono-Bungay* (1909),[62] a realist, although somewhat satirical, novel, contains what Greg Bear calls the first description of a nuclear wasteland and gives voice to Wells's first fears about the new atomic science.[63] Wells even approaches the Christian Apocalypse in his 'A Vision of Judgement' (1899).[64] While all these fictions are apocalyptic in scope, most of his secular apocalyptic visions are failed apocalypses. They follow the *Frankenstein* model

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[59] H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine: An Invention*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996).
[60] H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, (USA: Aerie Books Ltd, 1987).
[61] H.G. Wells, *The Food of the Gods, and How It Came to Earth*, (London: Macmillan, 1904).
[62] H.G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay*, (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1909).
[63] Greg Bear, 'Introduction', in *The Last War: The World Set Free,* (Lincoln; London: Bison Books, 2001), pp. vii-xxiv (p. viii). Wells, *Tono-Bungay*, p. 413.
[64] H. G. Wells, 'A Vision of Judgement', in *The Short Stories of H.G. Wells,* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 109-15. This intriguing short is rather thoroughly explored in Axel Stahler, 'Apocalyptic Visions and Utopian Spaces in Late Victorian and Edwardian Prophecy Fiction', *Utopian Studies,* 23 (2012).

of rendering scientific and social problems without necessarily providing the hopeful apocalyptic resolution. In Elizabeth K. Rosen's terms, they lack a New Jerusalem. Therefore, they represent apocalyptic fear rather than hope. However, particularly similar to *The World Set Free* is *The War in the Air* (1908).[65] Both posit a utopia brought about by air power, although in *The War in the Air* the utopia is not described in detail.

The World Set Free prefigures a number of the images of post-apocalyptic fiction, cementing its place within the canon. There are 'rumours of cannibalism and hysterical fanaticisms',[66] preminiscent of *The Road*, *Riddley Walker*, and others. The political implications of nuclear first strike capability are also suggested when Wells writes that '[p]ower after power about the globe sought to anticipate attack by aggression. They went to war in a delirium of panic, in order to use their bombs first.'[67] The landscape is obliterated, in a way that also prefigures post-apocalyptic stories written half a century later: 'One's sense was of destruction so far-reaching and of a world so altered that it seemed foolish to go in any direction and expect to find things as they had been before the war began.'[68] The world is ominous, and filled with a 'red-lit mist',[69] 'like London sunsets.'[70] This image of the sunset, with the end of the day implying the end of the world, and the sun filling in for the atomic bomb, or being filled in for by the atomic bomb, is one that recurs throughout fictions of the end-of-the-world. Other than prefiguring post-apocalyptic fiction, *The World Set Free* is most well-known for its 'prophetic elements',[71] specifically for imagining the atomic bomb. Despite it being regarded as prophetic, Wells considered his novel a failure of prediction, as the war to end all wars occurred just as *The World Set Free* was being published, in 1914, and

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[65] H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
[66] Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, p. 77.
[67] Ibid. p. 79.
[68] Ibid. p. 75.
[69] Ibid. p. 76.
[70] Ibid. p. 74.
[71] Bear, p. viii.

there was no atomic bomb. Wells lived just long enough to see just how ironic this failure was, when atomic weapons were used in that much greater war, in 1945. However, instead of transformative apocalypse and utopia, the real bomb would bring stalemate and entrenched *status quo*. The real bomb led more to dystopia than utopia. Wells's vision turned out to be no less mythological than the religious visions before it. Furthermore, this prophecy may well have been partially self-fulfilling. Physicist Leo Szilard read *The World Set Free* in 1932, and, once a nuclear chain reaction was demonstrated in 1939, he wrote a letter to President Eisenhower urging for the development of a bomb that would harness this fundamental energy; a letter that Szilard had Albert Einstein sign. This would lead to the development of the real atomic bomb.[72] However, saying this may overstate Wells's involvement, and the progress of scientific understanding means that the development of the bomb was surely inevitable.

The hopeful, scientific apocalypse in *The World Set Free* is created first through the reformulation of history in a way that reinforces the need for destructive transformation. Religious eschatology generally follows a destructive change that is concordant with origins; that is, it logically flows from what has come before, giving history a purpose and meaning. According to Derrida, history is linked to 'linearity [...] teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc'.[73] All history imposes a structure, an ending, and therefore a particular meaning upon the events. When a destructive ending emerges, history may be rewritten in concord with it. For instance, in the Russian post-apocalyptic film *Dead Man's*

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[72] H. Bruce Franklin, 'Strange Scenarios: Science Fiction, the Theory of Alienation, and the Nuclear Gods', *Science Fiction Studies,* 13 (1986), pp. 117-28 (p. 121). John Canaday, 'Physics in Fiction: "The Voice of the Dolphins" and *Riddley Walker*', in *The Nuclear Muse: Literature, Physics, and the First Atomic Bombs,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 227-49 (p. 228).
[73] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 57.

Letters (1986),[74] one of the characters trapped in a bunker beneath the museum of history rewrites history with a focus on all that is vile and repugnant. Wells, too, rewrites and refocuses history. All of human endeavour and existence is rewritten in the shadow of the inevitable end. 'The history of mankind', writes Wells, 'is the history of the attainment of external power.'[75] History, at its first impulse, is pointed directly towards the eventual development of ultimate power: the atomic bomb. Since the first humans evolved, they, according to Wells, 'began the setting of that snare that shall catch the sun.'[76] This suggests an Icarus-like figure rising up to the Sun. Yet the irony is that the power of the sun is not up high, but all around, 'hidden [...] by the thinnest of veils'.[77] Atomic energy, the energy that powers the Sun, is always everywhere, ready to be harnessed. The harnessing of this power is the inevitable development of all science. However, this power is no less dangerous than the Sun to Icarus, and capturing it is no less an act of *hubris*.

Furthering the suggestion that destructive change is needed, the novel then turns to criticism of the *status quo*:

> Government was an obstructive business of energetic factions, progress went on outside of and in spite of public activities, and legislation was the last crippling recognition of needs so clamorous and imperative and facts so aggressively established as to invade even the dingy seclusions of the judges and threaten the very existence of the otherwise inattentive political machine.[78]

This suggests that the *status quo* is doomed to fail and that it should fail in order to make way for a new world. The old systems are unable to deal with the new powers they have been given, and this is equivalent to 'a box of loaded revolvers [being given] to a Crèche'.[79] This is the foundation of apocalyptic desire, of the desire to wipe the slate clean. Wells continues his

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[74] Konstantin Lopushansky, dir., *Dead Man's Letters*. Russia: New Yorker Films, 1986. Originally titled Письма мёртвого человека in the Soviet Union, and also known as *Letters from a Dead Man* in the West.
[75] Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, p. 1.
[76] Ibid. p. 3.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid. p. 27.
[79] Ibid. p. 20.

diatribe against the legal system, which 'hasn't an idea',[80] the 'absurd electoral arrangements' in America,[81] the classical education system ('probably the most paralysing, ineffective, and foolish routine that ever wasted human life'),[82] and the military.[83] All these systems are corrupt, wasteful and, worse, tradition-bound. They are ready to be swept away by destructive change. The highlighting of these problems follows a pattern similar to the jeremiad, which is a long religious diatribe against the world as it stands and a warning away from the present course. The inevitable self-destruction implied in the atomic bomb is prefigured when, in their first use in *The World Set Free*, one is accidentally detonated on the plane carrying it.[84] Wells later recalls this imagery with the phrase, 'They did not see it until the atomic bombs burst in their fumbling hands.'[85]

According to C.D. Innes, Wells took his cue from George Bernard Shaw who wrote, 'Whatever can blow men up can blow society up'.[86] Destructive transition, according to Innes, would allow Wells to bridge the gaps between *The Time Machine*'s horrific end-of-humanity based upon humanity continuing on its current path and *A Modern Utopia* (1905),[87] a fantastic utopia which seems impossible to actualise. While Brians is right in suggesting that 'Wells' vision of a united world did not […] need the new scientific discoveries to prompt it':[88]

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[80] Ibid. p. 30.
[81] Ibid. p. 31.
[82] Ibid. p. 32.
[83] Ibid. pp. 33-4.
[84] Ibid. p. 59.
[85] Ibid. p. 61.
[86] C.D. Innes, 'Utopian Apocalypses: Shaw, War, and H.G. Wells', *SHAW The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies,* 23 (2003), pp. 37-46 (p. 39).
[87] H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, (Lincoln,: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).
[88] Brians.

> [Wells] knew the entrenched power of the capitalist-nationalist old order, the conservatism of the masses, the need for militancy, the resistance of social organisms to change except under the traumatic effects of great public disasters[.][89]

The prerequisite for apocalyptic desire is a world that needs change but is unable to change except through violent destruction. In *The World Set Free*, the destructive potential of the atomic bomb becomes the tool for this change. This destruction is followed by a period of tribulation, of uncertainty between the destruction of the old world and the building of the new. This is finally resolved when the King of the Balkans, a symbol of the old order, is killed and then buried by Firmin, 'an ex-professor of International Politics'.[90] Just as the Sun sets with the onslaught of atomic war, it rises now with this act.[91] A new world is born, and it is one dictated by scientific principle. Politics, nations, and their interactions, which form what is usually thought of as 'history', are ended. Post-historical utopia begins. As David Seed notes, this transformation is somewhat problematic, as it is stressed 'how diseased the world had been and therefore how much it needed its atomic medicine', a 'metaphor of illness' that 'in effect dehumanizes the expendable masses into corruptions of the ideal body politic, as reconstituted by a right-minded elite.'[92] This secular millennialism, then, is morally troublesome. In parallel with religious apocalypse, the victims of destruction are disregarded as sacrifices to the new atomic god.

The new social order, Wells's utopia, is laid out in the last fifty pages of the novel. It is a world where 'science [...] is [made] the new king of the world',[93] and endless progress is enabled. This is a secular parallel of the New Jerusalem in which traditional notions of history are abolished. There is no politics, there is no war, and there are no nations. This

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[89] W. Warren Wagar, 'H.G. Wells and the Radicalism of Despair', *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* 6 (1973), pp. 1-10 (p. 2).
[90] Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, p. 111.
[91] Ibid. p. 110.
[92] David Seed, 'H.G. Wells and the Liberating Atom', *Science Fiction Studies,* 30 (2003), pp. 33-48.
[93] Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, p. 94.

utopia, in keeping with Wells's personal desires, is a world finally 'set free for love-making.'[94] Apocalypse, in the Christian model, resolves the world into utopia outside of time, which is the final closure of the cosmic drama. Wells has transposed this into a secular age as a post-historical time. It is outside of time in a metaphorical sense, for it is outside of the great narratives of history. As it is put in Stuart Cloete's 'The Blast' (1948),[95] a nuclear attack 'was what might be called the last real event in history. I seem to be in the interesting position of having survived history, of being history itself'.[96] Utopia, just as the heaven on earth in Apocalypse, signifies an end of history and a resolution of the narrative of history.

Wells also demonstrates the difficulty of writing past the ending. While still of interest intellectually, particularly for scholars of H.G. Wells, there are few defenders of *The World Set Free*'s value as a novel. The novel's wooden characters exist entirely as mouthpieces for Wells, and its attempt at future history is often unconvincing. However, the failure of *The World Set Free* as a narrative occurs in the post-historical part of the novel. The necessity to explain the coming utopia differentiates it from the simple pronouncement of the city of heaven in religious vision. The novel turns from future history into utopia. A true perfect world is a world without narrative tension. In utopian literature, therefore, narrative tension must be contrived through the movement of perspectives, exploration, invasion or some other problematisation of the utopian world. A pure utopia would be perfection, and narrative drive comes from disruption. D.A. Miller, in his 'Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel', discusses the un-narratable, suggesting that narrative requires tension and must have a 'state of lack, which can only be liquidated along with the narrative itself.'[97] This

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[94] Ibid. p. 156.

[95] Stuart Cloete, 'The Blast', in *6 Great Short Novels of Science Fiction,* ed. by Groff Conklin (New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1954), pp. 9-64.

[96] Cloete cited in David Seed, 'Introduction', in *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 1-11 (p. 7).

[97] Miller, p. 272.

is why narrative breaks down in Wells's post-apocalyptic world and turns to mere description. With chaos finally resolved into order (the goal of religious Apocalypse and this secular attempt) there is no narrative. A real post-apocalyptic environment would, therefore, be un-narratable. This is why, unlike this one, post-apocalyptic novels tend to be about failed apocalypses, apocalypses that are incomplete and have not resolved into order. Post-apocalypse is a misnomer, for this genre is primarily full of anti-apocalypses. In *The World Set Free*, Wells has attempted to write past a true ending, the point of closure, and in doing so the narrative has broken down.

As suggested earlier, the secularised millennialism differs fundamentally from the religious, as the ending has changed from something that is desired and purposeful into something that is horrific and meaningless. Wells has resolved this by reintegrating the sense of purpose and meaning into the secular apocalypse, mimicking the religious apocalyptic tradition. The world is depicted as having a history that leads inevitably to a state of political and social disease, as well as scientific and technical innovation. These will inevitably collide, turning to destruction. This destruction is a period of apocalyptic obliteration and tribulation, wiping the slate clean of the old order and testing the characters to ensure their potential for building a new world. The new world is then rebuilt in Wells's utopian vision of a socialist state ruled by pure science, without politics or political interventions. This is similar to the biblical Apocalypse, void of God; but it is not void of meaning, despite its narrative limitations. The apocalypse in *The World Set Free* is not only meaningful, but by retaining meaning, it becomes desirable, or is at least depicted as such. Just like the biblical Apocalypse, evil and injustice are burnt from the earth, leaving a perfect society in their place. This apocalypse is depicted as something not to be feared, but embraced, at least for the righteous who will survive it. *The World Set Free* creates a secular apocalypse, full of meaning and purpose. However, it also demonstrates the difficulty of writing past the ending.

A complete apocalypse is also the end of narrative. Narratives that write past the end, post-apocalyptic fictions, depict the failure of the ending. If the ending does not fail, there is no narrative.

On the Beach in Context: the Last Humans

On the Beach is a story of utter despair, and a nuclear fiction continuing the last human tradition of the Romantic period. It portrays Melbourne in 1963, isolated after a 'thirty-seven' day nuclear war that has devastated the northern hemisphere.[98] Melbourne awaits the inevitable drift of radiation, as towns and cities slowly 'go out'. Dwight Towers remains in command of the U.S.S. Scorpion, one of two remaining American nuclear submarines, and suffers the disaster through a dedication to his diminishing duties and a hope that he will return home to his family in the afterlife. Peter Holmes is his Australian Navy liaison officer, also dedicated to his duty, who plants gardens, maintains his home, and cares for his wife and baby daughter, all in preparation for a future he will never see. John Osborne is a C.S.I.R.O. scientist who races cars.[99] Moira Davison is a young woman who finds solace in drink, and tries to portray a promiscuous image, which Shute is sure to tell us is 'all on the surface',[100] while seeking the never-consummated love of Towers (its lack of consummation final evidence of the lack of genuine closure in the novel).[101] It is within this wait for inevitable destruction that the narrative finds itself, the ending irrevocable and closure foretold from the beginning of the novel. What actually happened during the war that will now destroy the world is not particularly important. What is important is that neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R.

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[98] Shute, p. 4.

[99] Julian Smith suggests this is symbolic of humanity's obsession with gadgets right to the end of humanity caused by such gadgets. Julian Smith, *Nevil Shute*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 128. The first atomic bomb built was called the 'Gadget'.

[100] Shute, pp. 24-5. Smith suggests that the characters deal with their scenario through '[d]rug, drink, car'. Smith, *Nevil Shute*, p. 128.

[101] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, (Lewisburg; London; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 135.

is fully responsible, that the war resulted from mistakes and uncertainty and that Australia 'didn't have anything to do with it at all' but will be completely wiped out by it.[102] This drives home the meaningless absurdity of the war. The novel was originally intended to be 'a kind of modern Swiss Family Robinson,' about how safe Australia was,[103] but this was replaced by a much more sombre story.

On the Beach is Shute's most famous novel, as Andrew Milner makes clear in his article about the novel,[104] and in its time the most famous story of nuclear holocaust. Earlier examples, such as The World Set Free, Robert A Heinlein's 'Solution Unsatisfactory' (1940) and Aldous Huxley's Ape and Essence (1948),[105] and the large number of other science fiction stories published in the 1940s and 50s, achieved nothing like the same level of popular success. This is in large part due to Shute being considered a mainstream author who wrote some science-fiction elements into his otherwise mimetic narratives. It is not the first novel to imagine a future war, but it is far more pessimistic than his much earlier What Happened to the Corbetts.[106]

The '[t]ruly pessimistic' nature of the text,[107] particularly in comparison to The World Set Free, contextualises it within an era that was directly facing nuclear obliteration. The 1950s were a time of famously building fear, and On the Beach signalled a rising tide of

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[102] Shute, p. 301.
[103] Smith, *Nevil Shute*, p. 124.
[104] Andrew Milner, 'On the Beach: Apocalyptic Hedonism and the Origins of Postmodernism', in *Australian Popular Culture,* ed. by Ian Craven with Martin Gray and Geraldine Stoneham (Cambridge; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 190-204 (p. 190). The same argument is made in a chapter of Andrew Milner, *Locating Science Fiction*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012). See also Corbin S. Carnell, 'Nevil Shute Norway', in *British Fantasy and Science-Fiction Writers, 1918-1960.* ed. by Darren Harris-Fain. Vol. 255 <http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CH1200010583&v=2.1&u=flinders&it =r&p=LitRG&sw=w> [accessed 31 May 2011].
[105] Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*. Huxley.
[106] Nevil Shute, *What Happened to the Corbetts*, (London: Heinemann, 1939).
[107] Mick Broderick, *Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster*, <wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/~mickbrod/postmodm/m/text/armaged4.html> [accessed 3 August 2007].

popular nuclear holocaust fictions that would extend throughout the sixties. During this period, continuing tensions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were exacerbated by the so called missile gap, itself a fiction invented by the Soviet Union, spread by J.F.K. for political purposes,[108] and satirised in *Dr. Strangelove* (as General 'Buck' Turgidson cries, 'Mr President, we must not allow a mineshaft gap!').[109] The U.S.S.R. developed the first inter-continental ballistic missile (I.C.B.M.) in 1957; they used it to place Sputnik, the first artificial satellite, in orbit the same year, its radio beeps a reminder that the Damocles-ean feast of American success may be ended at any moment. This is the core of what Milner calls the 'apocalyptic hedonism' portrayed in the novel, a mythic examination of the post-modern era in which great material excess was coupled with the possibility of imminent destruction.[110] In the same decade, the hydrogen bomb was developed, first tested by the U.S. in 1952 and by the U.S.S.R. in 1955. The hydrogen bomb was a game changer, which turned atomic weapons into civilisation destroyers. Ivy Mike, the very first test of a thermonuclear weapon, yielded 10.4 megatons, roughly four-hundred and fifty times the explosive force that devastated Nagasaki. The world was thus ripe to confront the horrors of absolute nuclear obliteration.

On the Beach depicts the use of civilisation ending cobalt bombs. A type of salted bomb, cobalt bombs were theorised in 1950 by Leo Szilard, one of the fathers of the atomic bomb. They were never built, at least publicly, and Szilard's intention was actually to remind of the danger of continuing the arms race, and avoid the possibility of such a bomb ever being used. The a-bomb, according to Szilard, would be inevitably followed by the civilisation-

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[108]'Missile Gap', *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military,* (2001) <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t63.e5191> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[109] Stanley Kubrik, dir., *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.* US: Columbia Pictures, 1964.
[110] See Milner.

destroying h-bomb and the species-destroying c-bomb.[111] The hypothetical salted bomb, named for the ancient practice of salting land after conquest, contains radioactive material that can irradiate land for extensive periods of time. In a cobalt bomb, the cobalt transmutes into the radioactive cobalt-60 during a nuclear explosion. Unlike regular fallout, which loses most of its potency within a couple of weeks, cobalt-60 has a half-life of five years, and in relatively small doses releases a deadly level of radioactivity. Its radioactivity is at a sweet spot, making it practical to build bombs with enough deadly fallout lasting long enough that fallout shelters would not afford survival. While the kind of accidental apocalypse depicted in *On the Beach* is most likely impossible, it is still theoretically possible to use these types of bombs to wipe out most of humanity in a deliberate and methodical way. In any case, as Beka Doherty points out in her review, '*most people believe that it could happen*'.[112]

On the Beach was embraced by the public, and is usually mentioned in any discussion of the genre, but receives little detailed critical attention. Cathy Giffuni's bibliography of works on Nevil Shute would suggest that no serious critical work had been done on *On the Beach* before 1988.[113] This is not strictly true, but serious critical analysis is rare. Many of the scholarly texts that do discuss *On the Beach* only give it cursory mention, and it tends to be dealt with as a cultural artefact, a popular example of a trend, rather than a work of literature. This is likely due to its straightforward nature. While the plot is captivating for its apocalyptic import, all the more so for readers not used to this type of fiction, the writing style of *On the Beach* is dry, to say the least, and not of the type that begs for critical engagement. Paul Brians still praises the novel in *Atomic Holocausts*, although only after almost dismissing it:

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[111]'C-Bomb', *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations,* (1998) <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t25.e3750> [accessed 1 July 2011].
[112] Beka Doherty, 'Review: *On the Beach* and *The Genius and the Goddess*', *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* 14 (1958), p. 93. Emphasis in original.
[113] Cathy Giffuni, *Nevil Shute, a Bibliography*, (Adelaide: Auslib, 1988).

> Inferior to the 1959 film based on it, the novel is unconvincing in its plot, its characters are stereotypes (too many of them deny the inevitable in the same way), and the love story is mawkish. But what makes *On the Beach* nevertheless one of the most compelling accounts of nuclear war ever written is its almost unique insistence that everyone – without exception – is going to die.[114]

The book's simplicity, in fact, may even be its greatest asset:

> Shute directly addresses the most primal fears of the human race, which has spent most of its history denying or compensating for the fact of personal death, and does so with a relentlessness which the complex technique of a more sophisticated writer might have muted. For once, there are no distractions [. …] There are simply a man and a woman reaching the agonizing decision to kill their only child in its crib and commit suicide as the rest of the human race expires around them.[115]

On the Beach properly belongs within the last human tradition. Early examples of this genre have already been examined in Chapter One of this thesis, including Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). Frank Kermode, in *The Sense of an Ending*, claims that we are all born '*in medias res* [... and] also die *in mediis rebus*',[116] we live and die in the middle of things, without truly touching the beginning or the end. Last human stories fling the reader into the middle of an ending. The apocalypse has struck down all but a select few, and the reader now waits in tension to discover whether this will be the end, an end followed by rebirth, or simply a disaster. There are no real sharp delineations between these last human stories and the broader post-apocalyptic: Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* follows an entire community surviving past the end, and they eventual realise that much of America has survived; George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) begins as a last human story,[117] although mostly by choice – there are other survivors that Ish decides not to engage with – and only for its first book, as the second, longer book deals with rebirth; and even the much more recent *The Road* borrows liberally from the last human genre, as the characters are constantly harassed by those who have lost all shreds of humanity. These frustrated last human stories, where the last human

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[114] Brians.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Kermode, p. 7. Emphasis in original.
[117] George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides*, (London: Gollancz, 1999).

finally fails to connect with the end and instead connects with other survivors, are stories of rebirth, ranging from the extreme horror of *The Road* to the *Walden*-esque *Alas, Babylon*. In both cases, purpose and meaning is found in life through a great simplification of values and return of American frontiersmanship. Unlike these other tales, the ending of *On the Beach* is not frustrated, but instead intractable and final from the very start. The end of the characters meets the end of the world. In one of the longer scholarly engagements with *On the Beach*, Roslyn Weaver sees it as an example of the apocalypticism of Australia, Australian literature, and the Australian landscape.[118] While American apocalypse may resolve into a return of American frontiership, in Australia:

> [T]he outback already substitutes as a hostile post-apocalyptic wasteland [… so] it would seem there is nowhere to go. The outback offers no refuge or future [. … T]he prevailing atmosphere in [… Australian] survivalist texts is not optimism but a sense of continued apocalypse because surviving the catastrophe still means enduring life in a dystopian world until death.[119]

This, once again, reinforces the absoluteness of the apocalypse represented in the novel.

The absolute ending of *On the Beach*, as Brians suggests, places it as part of a much rarer breed, but there are other examples. Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954) resolves its last human plotline with the death of that last human, and an ironic inversion as he becomes the legendary monster of humanity's successors, although humanity does, at least, have successors;[120] Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7* (1959) follows a similar path to *On the Beach* as survivors in a shelter slowly await their death;[121] Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963) depicts the final frozen earth;[122] Gore Vidal's *Kalki* (1978), eventually, depicts the

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[118] Roslyn Weaver, 'Nevil Shute: *On the Beach* (1957)', in *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film: A Critical Study,* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), pp. 62-72.
[119] Ibid. p. 72.
[120] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend*, (New York: Tor, 1995).
[121] Mordecai Roshwald, *Level 7*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).
[122] Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, (Hammondsmith: Penguin Books Ltd, 1988).

final survivor on Earth, and humanity will die with him;[123] as mentioned above, the much earlier *The Last Man*, in which humanity will also end with the eventual death of Lionel Verney; and Thomas Hood's poem also entitled 'The Last Man' (1826) features an executioner who, despite humanity's endangered state, still executes the second to last man, leaving only himself as inheritor of the earth.[124] It is unsurprising that this genre would return to prominence in the 1950s. Here was a generation of people that had every reason to believe that they may well be the last humans.

In these fictions, the apocalypse has failed, leaving survivors. The end has failed. This failed apocalypse is not a resolution into stable order, as in *The World Set Free*, but instead into an uncertain path towards another final ending. Last human stories begin and end with the end. *The Road* exists in a similar moment. It exists in the liminal state between an old world and a possible new one, and is also a kind of last human story. After a great ending, the narrative follows just two weary survivors possibly waiting to die, possibly waiting for a new world to be born. The post-apocalyptic *A Canticle for Leibowitz* also exists between two endings, and the weary vestiges of humanity between, even though the time between covers many centuries, and the vestiges of humanity build a new society in the meantime. The distinction between these different types of end-of-the-world narrative is indistinct, and harsh boundaries are impossible. The difference is one of emphasis. However, *On the Beach* does, more than most, exist in the shadow of its own, final, intractable end, without real hope for rebirth. It is a nuclear tragedy.

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[123] Gore Vidal, *Kalki*, (London: Heinemann, 1978).
[124] Thomas Hood, *The Last Man*, University of Maryland, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/mws/lastman/hood.htm> [accessed 3 November 2012].

These stories that lead inevitably to the end via nuclear war are nuclear tragedies. Kermode claims that tragedy can be a secular 'successor of apocalypse,'[125] with the cosmic eschatology replaced by personal, mundane death, and possibly the end of a dynasty. If this is true, then last human stories, which follow the last moments of the last humans, are an inversion of this model. In last human stories, the personal, mundane death is also the completion of the grand apocalypse. *On the Beach* is a nuclear tragedy, where the death of the characters does not just stand in for the end of all humanity, but actually becomes the end of all humanity. Like tragedy, the end is wrought by human hands, the unavoidable consequences of human action, but like apocalypse it is grand. While most of the texts discussed in this thesis run past the end, belonging to the post-apocalyptic genre, *On the Beach* has an absolute ending, an utter finality, wrought by the atomic bomb. It belongs to a group of nuclear tragedies, texts that confront the reader with the pointless, meaningless horror of the atomic bomb, and are closely related to the broader field of last human fictions. While post-apocalyptic texts question endings by paradoxically running past them, nuclear tragedy embraces the end, but questions traditional closure by leaving those ends apparently empty and devoid of meaning. Nuclear tragedies leave their characters desperately searching for a purpose in an inevitable ending. They represent the condition of all humanity in the nuclear age, faced with the possibility of destruction so severe that it could never be justified. Unlike tragedy, there are no weary survivors, merely weary victims, waiting to meet others in death. There is no cleansing like in religious Apocalypse. There is no final joyous *peripeteia*, or any reasonable hope for one. There is no revelling in destruction as might be found in many of the more nihilistic apocalyptic narratives. Nor is the text satirical, like *Dr. Strangelove*. The subdued tone and narrative purity have led to *On the Beach* being one of the most popular end-of-the-

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[125] Kermode, p. 82.

world novels of all time, even while it may be accused of being 'unconvincing, didactic to the point of accusative, and oddly (even serenely) cinematic.'[126] The novel's pure finality, which is meaningless and sad, is the ultimate tragedy, and one of the most absolute instances of Aristotle's unity of action. Yet it may find meaning through its cathartic nature, through its nature as a warning and finally, as a representation of the simple joys of life. Meaning may well finally be in the middles rather than the end.

Tragedy, traditionally, involves the confrontation of fate with the human condition. The part of fate in *On the Beach* is fulfilled by the scientific inevitability of radiation drift. A sense of inevitability is common throughout stories of nuclear holocaust, through the inevitable progress towards destruction, of developing tools humanity cannot comprehend and will eventually use. For instance, in *Miracle Mile* (1988),[127] the missiles have already been launched, and the characters merely, futilely attempt to escape the inevitable – although it later becomes understood that the missiles might not have been launched until after the panic. This sense of inevitability is also often depicted through mechanisation. The logic of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) demands systems that make destruction inevitable, in order that nuclear deterrents deter. To allow humanity into the decision making process is to allow the possibility that a counterattack will not occur, and therefore increase the possibility of a first strike. *Dr. Strangelove*, *Fail-Safe* (1964) and *Level 7* all include errors of equipment leading to inevitable destruction.[128] They also, intriguingly, include humans that have been trained to act as machines and continue the process towards destruction. Humanity is thus dehumanised. An ironic inversion of this theme is depicted in Philip K. Dick's 'The

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[126] A charge that Dewey also levels at *Alas, Babylon*. John Dewey, *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper of the American Novel of the Nuclear Age*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1990), p. 9.
[127] Steve De Jarnatt, dir., *Miracle Mile*. US: Hemdale Film, 1988.
[128] Sidney Lumet, dir., *Fail-Safe*. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1964.

Defenders',[129] in which the two robotic armies come to peace without the knowledge of their human creators. Like the tic-tac-toe playing computer of *Wargames* (1983), these death-machines have decided that war is irrational, and 'the only winning move is not to play.'[130] Patrick Mannix explores the function of these computers, primarily through the example of *Wargames*, as an example of Aristotle's ethical rhetoric.[131] Computers in these texts offer an appeal through their character which, in this case, is purely rational and thoroughly informed. They point to the absurdity and irrationality of nuclear war. Doomsday weapons, such as that in *Dr. Strangelove*, also fulfil this role of creating inevitability. These variations are, loosely, examples of the two types of apocalypse defined by W. Warren Wagar as the positivist apocalypse, which blames irrationalism, and the neo-romantic apocalypse, which blames the end on science and technology.[132] Inevitability is also demonstrated through a different narrative course in the film *12 Monkeys* (1995),[133] where time travel is used as a plot device to make the release of a civilisation destroying virus inevitable from the opening scenes. The sense of tragic inevitability is therefore apparent throughout the field. However, this rarely comes in as pure form as in *On the Beach*: the radiation is already released, and it would take a *deus ex machina* to stop it. A happy ending would, in fact, be so absurd as to likely be unsatisfying.

The ending, in all of these cases, is always there, always immanent. This provides for the unity of action that Aristotle finds so important for tragedy. The ending is implicit in every act in the text through its utter inevitability. The inevitable destruction is final and absolute, connecting all the events together and completing them. As will be discussed

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[129] Philip K. Dick, 'The Defenders', in *Beyond Lies the Wub,* (London: Gollancz, 2003).
[130] John Badham, dir., *Wargames*. USA: 20th Century Fox, 1983.
[131] Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, pp. 63-9.
[132] W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 139.
[133] Terry Gilliam, dir., *12 Monkeys*. US: Universal Pictures, 1995.

further in Chapter Three, Aristotle's concepts of perfect closure may well be impossible, for endings are always beginnings, yet here, surely, *On the Beach* comes as close as possible (although Osborne does remind the others, 'It's not the end of the world at all [...] it's only the end of us. The world will go on just the same, only we shan't be in it.')[134] In this way, nuclear holocausts can surpass the traditional tragedy, even the high death counts of Shakespearean tragedy, for its purity; here is an action, after which nothing can logically follow. Early tragedies often took stories from myth and imposed upon them personal eschatologies. Here, Shute has created a new myth of cosmic eschatology.

On the Beach faces this ending directly and without hope, refusing satirical or simple allegorical readings, and refusing the tropes of traditional apocalyptic myths, such as rebirth and cleansing. *On the Beach* is a captivating novel, and certainly not for its dry prose. In fact, the critical reaction was mostly negative at the time.[135] Nor is its captivating nature due to the desire to know 'what happens next',[136] because that is already known. The inevitable ending of the novel is signalled by both the title and the epigraph, taken from T.S. Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' (1925), with its famous final lines:

> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *This is the way the world ends*
> *Not with a bang but a whimper.*[137]

There are ironies implicit in this: Shute managed to turn the bang of thermonuclear war into a whimper through his imagining of salted bombs, which also make the ending absolutely inevitable. Although it was likely unrelated, Eliot claimed that he would not have penned those lines if he were writing the poem over again, since, 'while the association of the h-

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[134] Despite Shute, *On the Beach*, p. 89.
[135] Judith Webster, '"Many Splendid Fictions" : Atomic Narratives in Australia, 1945-1965', (Australian National University, 2001), p. 234.
[136] Forster, p. 29.
[137] Eliot, cited in Shute, *On the Beach*.

bomb is irrelevant to it, it would today come to everyone's mind.'[138] Yet the epigraph

remains, and the extract still reflects the novel in miniature: an inevitable ending, quiet both

in itself and in reaction to it, as people merely 'grope' and 'avoid speech'.[139] There is a sense

of uncertainty as to what to do facing the end, how to react, and an adamant finality,

encapsulated in a childishly innocent song.

Three main possible avenues for hope are supplied through the novel, and all are

promptly dismissed. While the Scorpion embarks on a quest north to search for survivors, to

examine whether radio signals from 'some place near Seattle' are being sent by a human,[140]

the possibility is roundly dismissed before the Scorpion even arrives. The signals are

completely random, and show no sign of any pattern, not to mention Morse code. Similarly,

even though the Scorpion tests the possible truth of the so-called 'Jorgenson effect',[141] which

suggests radiation might diminish sooner than expected, Jorgenson is claimed to be crazy.

The other hopes for survival are even less concrete. For instance, maintaining human

knowledge and history by sandwiching documents in glass, and preserving them in a bunker

on Mount Kosciusko. There is a hope expressed throughout the novel that there should be

history written of these last times. This follows the obsession in nuclear literature with

history, with understanding how history would lead to this horrible ending, and pulling

history into concord with those endings. The perpetuity of documents is an ironic inversion of

the theories that would be much later expressed by Derrida, that nuclear war would destroy

the literary canon.[142] Here is the chance for literature to remain long after its readers. The

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[138] Henry Hewes, 'T.S. Eliot at Seventy, and an Interview with Eliot', in *T.S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage,* ed. by Michael Grant (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

[139] T.S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', in *The World's Contracted Thus,* ed. by J.A. and J.K. McKenzie (Port Melbourne: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1991), pp. 254-6. ll. 58-9.

[140] Shute, *On the Beach*, p. 38.

[141] Ibid. p. 207.

[142] See Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter, and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 20-31.

futility of this act is also made clear, however; even if someone, or, more likely, something, eventually were to read these documents, they would find it impossible to understand them. This points to the crisis of language that is reflected throughout post-apocalyptic literature. A similar possibility is satirised in *Level 7*, the recent edition of which is prefaced by a fictional Martian archaeological report on the artefacts of the now silent Earth, including a discussion of the impossibility of translation. The final hope in *On the Beach* is hope for an afterlife. Towers ultimately lives for the hope that, on his death, he will return home to his family. He lives as if they are still alive, buying presents for them and remaining celibate despite seemingly falling in love with Moira. Some of his final moments are spent discussing his family with Moira, in the hope that she might also join them. These hopes offer no more than a slight solace. They are not so much an attainment of heaven as a return to it. Towers' vision of a perfect afterlife is the life that he once had, now lost: every hope of return is simply a reminder of what has already gone. Harold L. Berger summarises inevitability of the ending and the hopelessness it implies:

> While *On the Beach* avoids overt philosophizing, the catastrophe, the total and permanent snuffing out, compels one to ask: If this can happen, what is the human race all about? Shute symbolically raises that question in a curious episode – the *Scorpion*'s trans-Pacific cruise to investigate unintelligible telegraphic signals from Puget Sound. But the answer to the riddle is only a mocking happenstance. A blown-out window-frame, resting on an overturned bottle and rocking on the breeze, taps a babble on a live key. Is the human adventure too but a babble loosed by a cosmic wreckage as it, randomly poised, teeters on the winds of chance.[143]

Through this failed ending, *On the Beach* actually makes the final death seem a blessing, and, indeed, all the major characters select the nature of their death. Their deaths by suicide are a release from this inevitable horror. The option of suicide is taken as uncontroversial. The creation of a system in which death is a blessing is something common to the traditional genre of tragedy. The core of tragedy is a story involving human misery

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[143] Harold L. Berger, *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), p. 148.

with *pathos*. The atomic holocaust is the ultimate human misery. While the goodness of the characters, that they never riot or go completely out of control, may seem unbelievable, it simultaneously, as Mannix claims, arouses sympathy in these characters.[144] According to Aristotle, misery of good characters elicits *pathos*, while the misery of bad characters elicits comedy. It is unsurprising, then, that Peter George's *Red Alert* (1958), a serious book about impending nuclear catastrophe,[145] could be so easily turned into *Dr. Strangelove*, a satirical comedy. When faced with the greatest of nightmares, the possible reactions are either to laugh or cry.

Tragedy has always had an apocalyptic aspect. Frank Kermode, in his *The Sense of an Ending*, often discusses the relationship between tragedy and apocalypse, with the example of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1608). According to Kermode, the consistent failure of apocalyptic prediction, throughout the middle ages, led to the focus on personal eschatology, on the death of the individual, and the role of Apocalypse was subsumed by tragedy.[146] Yet this tragedy is, ultimately, a frustrated apocalypse:

> In *King Lear* everything tends towards a conclusion that does not occur; even personal death, for Lear, is terribly delayed [...] The end is now a matter of immanence; tragedy assumed the figurations of apocalypse, of death and judgement, heaven and hell; but the world goes forward in the hands of the exhausted survivors.[147]

Lear, for his part, wishes for a complete apocalypse, he wishes for the heavens to fall on him and he wishes to join the end-of-the-world, as he cries:

> Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
> Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
> You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
> Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
> Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,

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[144] Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, p. 136.
[145] In the novel, the crisis is finally averted by luck.
[146] Kermode, p. 27.
[147] Ibid. p. 82.

> Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
> Crack Nature's molds, all germens spill at once,
> That make ingrateful man![148]

He desires that the apocalypse be made complete through thorough, regenerative destruction. This is not to be, and the mere death of a dynasty becomes an imperfect placeholder for apocalyptic desire. *On the Beach* takes the tragedy, and reimplants it with the utter finality of Apocalypse, as all things die. Yet it still retains the inherent sadness of tragedy, with an uncertainty of meaning; it remains a tragedy, but more absolute, in a sense more pure for its utter finality. The weary survivors are also victims. The kings and queens of traditional tragedy, whose deaths invoke the *pathos* of the lower order audience and become a placeholder of apocalyptic desire without directly threatening that audience, are, in *On the Beach*, already dead. The nations that warred are already wiped out. The characters, these common survivors, now await their own death.

By invoking the end of all things, this utter finality, *On the Beach* raises its most personal tragedy of common people to a mythic tale encompassing all things, in an act of *apotheosis*. This chapter earlier stated that *On the Beach* does not lend itself to simple allegorical interpretations; however, like 'The Apocalypse of John', which invokes the ending and becomes a mythic retelling and reframing of the entire story of the Bible, and of creation, *On the Beach* becomes a mythic reframing of the story of humanity, of the archetypal human life. The last human becomes the everyman, the final pinnacle of humanity, and finally, necessarily, represents all humanity because in that final moment they are all humanity. They represent the human condition confronted with the tragic fate of mortality. From the novel's first page, the characters are doomed to death and they finally die, along with all humanity. As X-127 puts it in *Level 7*, as he awaits his inevitable death by radiation,

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[148] William Shakespeare, 'King Lear (Conflated Text)', in *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1997), pp. 2479-553 (pp. 3.2 ll.1 - 9).

'I am dying, and humanity dies with me. I am the dying humanity.'[149] Here, in these last days, is the story of creation both in miniature, crammed in some three-hundred pages, and in grandeur as all are joined in a final great and absolute death rather than simply dying into the middle, as the rest of us are doomed to do. The repeated statement through *On the Beach* that we all must die anyway, and this way makes no difference, becomes a chant, an invocation: the human condition has always involved the confrontation of mortality and ever-more-imminent death. The characters are born into a life that will result in death, as all do.

Despite its tragic nature, in between the beginning and the end there is life. This is life in the shadow of the end, as it always is. It is life knowing that one will die, as one always knows. The stakes are heightened, as there can be no hope for any type of continuance, not in children or good works or other people,[150] and the text gains a certain weight from the possibility of nuclear war actually occurring in reality, that humanity might actually end, that the audience may succumb to the same fate as the characters, that this might not simply be fiction. All these factors ultimately bring into focus this aspect of the human condition: the human condition is life between birth and death. The discussions, quests, romances and play are all about living sandwiched between birth and death.

On the Beach suggests that it is in the middles, not in the end, that life finds its true meaning. This is true even as that middle exists in the shadow of that end. Towers suggests this through poetic metaphor when he says, simply, 'Some games are fun even when you lose. Even when you know you're going to lose before you start. It's fun just playing them.'[151] Knowing that the end is near, the characters live their lives rather normally. The Holmeses plant a vegetable patch, which they will never eat from, raise a baby that will never

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[149] Roshwald, p. 138.
[150] See Robert J. Lifton's analysis of how the possibility of nuclear war destroys any idea of immortality.
[151] Shute, *On the Beach*, p. 65.

grow up and buy a garden chair they will never sit on, as the radiation sickness overtakes them. There is drunkenness, apparently worse in the early days of the crisis,[152] and there are some refugees, but they are few in number. The society chooses to carry on as it did before, with a little more fear, a little less understanding, and a little more focus on the moment. The 'now' comes into focus as the future disappears, as Osborne demonstrates when he dedicates much of his remaining time to car racing, risking his life. The heroes are those that remain dedicated to their duty, their jobs, to the last, that 'just [...] take it'.[153] While this may be unrealistic, the story creates all the more sympathy because this is a fundamental human condition: the continuance of mundane life in the face of eventual, possibly meaningless death, its imminence and meaninglessness brought into focus in the nuclear age. This single action, a beginning, middle and an end, becomes a mythic representation of all life, of all things, and the most absolute unity, and at least a kind of closure. Due to its utter finality, it offers a life in perfect miniature for inspection, it offers catharsis, and it is ultimately life affirming. As explored further in Chapter Six, this all enhances its effect as a warning, as a call to action to save the life that it affirms.

Conclusion

Apocalyptic visions create a purpose and meaning for the world by structuring it and giving it closure. Literature offers a similar sense of closure and purpose. However, when these two structures collide, both are problematised. The secular apocalypses depicted in fictions of the end-of-the-world often lack the intrinsic sense-making of religious apocalypse. The two texts focused on in this chapter, *The World Set Free* and *On the Beach*, both try to give some type of meaning and purpose to these horrific visions by realigning the secular apocalypse with

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[152] Amusingly, it is stated that the alcohol may have a prophylactic effect against radiation.
[153] Shute, *On the Beach*, p. 40.

their literary structure. Both suggest the problems inherent in doing so. *The World Set Free* offers a secular imitation of apocalypse. However, its prediction of a world of peace and science where war is impossible has proven not to be the case. The unthinkable nature of nuclear war in the twentieth century led not to utopia, but instead to a Cold War stalemate that did not stop conventional war. The real history of nuclearism has more in common with dystopia than utopia. The atomic stalemate without rebirth that leads to the dystopia of *1984* (1949) is much closer to what actually occurred.[154] *The World Set Free* also displays a failure of narrative after the end. The fulfilled, complete apocalypse resolves the tension that drives narrative. The next chapter of this thesis investigates two post-apocalyptic texts and the way they demonstrate a failure of endings. The apocalyptic ending must fail if a narrative is to continue. *On the Beach*, on the other hand, revolves around its horrific and meaningless ending. If there is meaning, it is in demonstrating the meaninglessness of the nuclear tragedy, and to act as a warning against it.

The problematic nature of ending in fictions of the end-of-the-world is both a problem and an opportunity. The opportunity is to demonstrate the problem and to explore the failure of ending. This chapter forms a foundation for the rest of this study, as it demonstrates the problem, made apparent through the collision of myths and fictions of the end of the world. The next chapter explores post-apocalyptic fictions. In the examples of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *Riddley Walker*, the post-apocalyptic world is a return to mythic cyclical time, and these myths reinforce the sense of the failure of closure.

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[154] George Orwell, *1984*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

In Mircea Eliade's *Youth Without Youth* (1976),[1] Dominic Matei, an old academic, is struck by lightning and reborn into a youthful and extremely brilliant form. After this he embarks on a philological quest to discover the ur-language, the prelapsarian tongue to which all signs must ultimately point. During an academic discussion that takes place in the novel, a young man interjects claiming to 'justify nuclear conflagrations in the name of the eschatology of electricity':[2]

> I know what's in store for us: hydrogen, cobalt, and so on. But […] the true meaning of the nuclear catastrophe can only be this: the mutation of the human species, the appearance of the superman. [… B]oth the *end* and the *salvation of man* will be obtained by means of electricity.[3]

He claims that the electricity released through atomic explosion will mutate humanity in to a new, more powerful form. To understand this passage fully requires a familiarity with Eliade's academic work in the field of anthropology,[4] in which Eliade suggests that societies that are 'archaic' or 'primitive' engage in 'periodic repudiation or transcendence' in order to remove themselves from history, and from its horror.[5] This involves ritually reconnecting with a golden age or mythic temporally transcendent age outside of time. For these cultures, time is cyclical and mythic. The interlocutor of *Youth Without Youth* suggests that, while western culture currently models itself on a linear, historical time of progress, the inevitable dropping of the bomb will return everyone to a primitive existence wherein 'neither the life

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[1] Mircea Eliade, *Youth without Youth*, trans. by Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[2] Ibid. p. 123.
[3] Ibid. pp. 123-4. Emphasis in original.
[4] As laid out in Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).
[5] David Cowart, 'The Way It Will Be', in *History and the Contemporary Novel,* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), pp. 76-119 (p. 83). Eliade's use of the word 'primitive' is obviously problematic.

nor the history of man would have any meaning.'[6] Humanity would 'be forced then to accept the idea of cosmic and historical cycles, the myth of eternal repetition.'[7] The alternative, according to the interlocutor, is to imagine that nuclear war will instead raise humanity to the next level of human evolution, returning nuclear war from its status as mere destruction to fully fledged apocalypse, hence the 'eschatology of electricity'. This exchange demonstrates the failure of endings in the atomic age (as they will return humanity to mythic, cyclical time) and the need to imagine a transcendental apocalypse. Ironically, Matei, the protagonist of *Youth Without Youth*, has gone through a personal eschatology of electricity, being reborn as brilliant after a lightning strike. However, this is squandered as his academic intentions still outgrow his reach. His abilities deteriorate and he once again ages. His life has become a cycle of repetition and regret, a personal eschatology that parallels the cosmic spiral of cyclical time.

Earlier discussion in this thesis has explored the concept of apocalypse in myth and in fiction, and the way that the possibility of humanity destroying itself has demanded an engagement with the question of closure. In *The World Set Free* (1914) and *On the Beach* (1957),[8] nuclear war is used to create a sense of absolute ending, mimicking apocalypse on one hand and tragedy on the other, yet those texts point to the failure of closure, of meaning and purpose. However, the young interlocutor in *Youth Without Youth* implies a wholesale failure of the ending. Nuclear war is unlikely to be redemptive, but it is also unlikely to truly be ending at all, as life will run past it. The word 'apocalypse' has changed meaning in common use in the twentieth century. Rather than primarily referring to the religious end of the world, with other uses metaphorically alluding to that meaning, the word has come to

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[6] Eliade, *Youth without Youth*, p. 125.
[7] Ibid.
[8] H.G. Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001); Nevil Shute, *On the Beach*, (Adelaide: Heinemann, 1958).

refer to simply any 'destruction or damage on a catastrophic scale.'[9] Apocalypse now refers to a great destruction within history, rather than an end of history. However horrific it may be, the apocalypse has become an event that may be experienced and even survived. Such an event is not an apocalypse in the traditional sense. It is not a fulfilment of the promise of closure. It does not necessarily resolve, or concord with previous events, or summarise, or achieve any of the aims of closure. It is this lack that has led to the desire to reintegrate nuclear apocalypse into traditional modes of closure in *The World Set Free* and *On the Beach*. Another path, however, is to explore the failure of the ending. When the apocalypse is merely an event in history, instead of the end of history, post-apocalypse becomes possible.

This is the result of humanity's ever increasing capacity for destruction. The manufactured destruction of the First and Second World Wars was greater than any destructive force humanity had ever controlled, but it was also greater than many could imagine even a deity possessing. It was beyond imagination, even apocalyptic imagination. To have this power in the hands of humanity disrupts the principles of narrative that are important for making sense of the world, by denying the possibility of meaningful endings. This has resulted in what James Berger calls a 'pervasive post-apocalyptic sensibility':

> [I]n the late twentieth century we have had the opportunity, previously enjoyed only by means of theology and fiction, to see after the end of our civilization—to see in a strange prospective retrospect what the end would actually look like: it would look like a Nazi death camp, or an atomic explosion, or an ecological or urban wasteland. We have been able to see these things because they actually occurred. The most dystopic visions of science fiction can do no more than replicate the actual historical catastrophes of the twentieth century.[10]

The second half of the twentieth century, and the twenty-first, is in this sense post-apocalyptic. We have lived on past the ending, and now exist in a world too late for that ending. The genre of post-apocalyptic fiction is fiction set in a period after a great

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[9] *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 55.

[10] James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. xiii.

destruction. The most common archetype is the post-nuclear-war novel. If post-apocalyptic worlds are those that have limped on after nuclear war, then our world, in a very real sense, has been post-apocalyptic since 1945, since the Second World War was, arguably, the first atomic war.[11] Furthermore, as unimaginably horrific as the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima were, they were mere pin-pricks in relation to the death and destruction of the war in its entirety, which included the Holocaust and the Eastern Front.

As has already been made clear, this post-apocalyptic condition is one in which endings have failed, and purpose, meaning and structure are questioned. The post-apocalyptic condition, then, is similar to the post-modern condition. Post-modern and post-apocalyptic literature both deal with the same concerns: the disruption of structure and the questioning of meaning. While the scope of this thesis does not allow an in-depth analysis of this proposition, this chapter does use Linda Hutcheon's model of historiographic metafiction to explore the way these fictions institute and deny history, and create an ambiguous sense of narrative and closure that is essentially post-modern. In some texts, the connection is explicit. Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980), for instance, is often considered a literary depiction of a post-modern post-apocalypse. However, this connection can be present even when it is not explicit. Frank Kermode, discussing the failure of the religious Apocalypse to occur, writes of 'the modern concept of *crisis*':

> No longer imminent, the End is immanent. So that it is not merely the remnant of time that has eschatological import; the whole of history, and the progress of the individual life, have it also, as a benefaction from the End, now immanent.[12]

The Apocalypse, in Kermode's view, has been promised for too long, and failed to occur. Therefore, it is difficult to now believe in an imminent ending. The Apocalypse has instead

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[11] Derrida, for instance, argues otherwise. See Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter, and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 20-31.
[12] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 25.

become immanent, an intrinsic feature of all life. While he does not use the term 'post-modern', Kermode's use of the word 'crisis' seems to describe the same phenomena other critics describe as post-modern. It describes an artistic world churning with a pervasive sense of eternal beginnings and endings, which at once attempt a schismatic break with the past while denying its possibility. The post-apocalyptic, too, is a world of churning, half-broken connections with the past. This crisis-ridden world is, in a sense, post-apocalyptic. The post-apocalyptic has indeed become immanent.

Just as apocalyptic fiction ties the end of the world to literary closure, the post-apocalypse can also be tied to the failure of literary closure. Fictions of post-apocalypse, by their nature, imply questions about closure. They depict worlds and run past the natural ending of those worlds. They run past what would, intuitively, be a point of closure. That is not to say that these texts do not end. Instead, they play with closure and question it. Rather than 'the sense of an ending,' they create a 'sense of endlessness.' As J. Hillis Miller makes clear in his 'Problematic of Endings',[13] closure is always a difficult concept. The human need for closure is strong, and, as Marianna Torgovnick says, the existence of endings is 'common sense'.[14] However, explaining what endings and closure are, and what entails effective closure, remains difficult. The goal of Miller, as a deconstructionist critic, is to tease out this uncertainty as a loose thread that might unravel an entire cloth. This unravelling is also the result of post-apocalyptic fiction, which denies the possibility of endings. This chapter explores these concepts of the failure of literary endings in order to better understand how the return to cyclical time in post-apocalyptic novels also represents a failure of narrative closure.

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[13] J. Hillis Miller, 'The Problematic of Ending in Narrative', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 33 (1978), pp. 3-7.
[14] Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 4.

One of the most prominent examples of post-apocalyptic fiction is Walter M. Miller Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which depicts a world separated from history yet desperately trying to understand that history. Just as Eliade's interlocutor fears, without the stabilisation of a grand narrative, or progressing history, the world of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* spins down a vortex of cyclical, mythic time. While Eliade suggests mythic time is created in order to connect with an imagined golden age of the past,[15] the people of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* confront a world where there truly was a golden age, but one that was corrupted. They attempt to resurrect that past, never realising that this is merely a fatalistic dash towards recreating the same destruction that befell that age. Hope is maintained in an escape from this cycle back to a linear, historical time of progress, but tempered by spiritual faith. However, this is merely hope. Resolution remains ambiguous.

Riddley Walker moves further into the space of mythic, cyclical time. This mythemic network both demands and denies understanding. Just like the characters in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the inhabitants of Inland are driven to try to understand a past that is hidden from them by a firebreak in history. Their society falls into a web of myths. They understand their world through re-enactment of what they call the Eusa Story. This forms a network of iterations, versions and revisions. They are denied any contact with a consistent, singular, objective history. This mythic network expands out infinitely, as it alludes to and reiterates other myths and stories, denying any sense of closure or of authorship. Both these novels, *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, express a search for meaning in a world in which closure and meaning has been denied. They represent a world too late for apocalypse, too late for purpose and too late for meaning. They represent the atomic age. In *Riddley Walker* the answer to these questions is to accept the multiplicity of meaning implicit in this

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[15] See Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*.

ambiguous world. Riddley acknowledges that there are many types of knowledge, and uses his power to deny power, to deny singular grand narratives. This finally demonstrates the interrelationship of post-apocalypse, mythic time, the failure of closure and historiographic metafiction.

The Sense of Endlessness

Nuclear tragedy, for example *On the Beach*, offers a final and unconditional ending, but the closure remains frustrated or problematic. By wrapping tragedy back into the cosmic apocalypse,[16] the horror becomes absolute and irrecoverable, lacking resolution, hope or joy. The use of human-made destruction in *The World Set Free* to create a utopia, on the other hand, still implies a desire for resolution. It also still proves narratologically problematic. These are two of the many ways stories of the end of the world can problematize endings, creating doubt and uncertainty about meaning and purpose. This suggests doubt about fiction's ability to provide closure.

According to J. Hillis Miller, 'The Problematic of Ending' is that stories are always ending, beginning, beginning endings and ending beginnings,[17] and that 'no narrative can show either its beginning or its ending. It always begins and ends still *in media res*, presupposing as a future anterior some part of itself outside itself.'[18] Therefore, there is no such thing as neat, final closure, and 'the notion of ending in narrative is inherently "undecideable".'[19] Miller revisits Aristotle's metaphor of a knot, but claims that this narrative knot is forever ravelling and unravelling, wherein, as Miller says, both can quite literally

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[16] As has been noted, the apocalypse in *On the Beach* is not truly cosmic, but it does involve the end of all human life.
[17] Miller.
[18] Ibid. p. 4.
[19] Ibid. p. 3.

mean the same thing.[20] This juxtaposes popular conceptions of closure as tying off loose ends, and also of closure as untying narrative complexities. Both images are in contradiction and 'indeterminable oscillation'.[21] The metaphor of a knot also hints at the process of deconstruction, which seeks to find 'the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all.'[22] Therefore, Miller suggests that stories come undone through the pulling apart of the ending, which is the hemming that normally stops the narrative from fraying,[23] and that all texts are part of a continuing discourse that never really begins or ends because all texts rely upon the existence of other texts. To suggest that endings are illusory, however, is not to suggest that they do not exist at all, but instead that they are frail, human constructs.

According to Kermode, human beings are driven by an attempt to humanise time, poignantly signalled by the 'tick, tock' of a clock. In reality, a clock tick-ticks, or tock-tocks and never tick-tocks. '[T]ick, tock' is an invention, a humanisation of time that imparts upon a sound a beginning and an end.[24] This beginning and end is a reflection of the human, bound by a beginning of birth and an end of death. Human beings turn the world into a reflection of their own existence, and this reflection is one that is designed, one that has meaning, one that makes sense. Writing in the same period as Kermode, although specifically about poetry rather than the novel, Barbara Herrnstein Smith suggests that '[h]aunted, perhaps, by the spectre of that ultimate arbitrary conclusion, we take particular delight, not in all endings, but in those that are designed.'[25] Smith suggests a desire to feel that endings are purposeful and meaningful, that they have an intelligence operating behind them. This is as true of literature

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[20] Ibid. p. 6.
[21] Ibid.
[22] 'Cleanth Brooks', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 1350-52 (p. 1352).
[23] Following from a metaphor suggested in Chapter Two.
[24] Kermode, p. 45.
[25] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 1.

as it is of the world. The beginning and middle live in 'the shadow of the end'.[26] History, too, tends to place facts into a narrative leading to an ending that is concordant.[27] History is always written in a time and a place, which will affect the goal that history is seen as running towards. As Kermode argues, this is part of a fundamental desire to show that endings are in accord with beginnings and middles. Desirable endings, in fiction, follow logically from beginnings and middles, and they reflect and summarise what came before. By imagining the world as being finite, with beginning and end, a human life becomes a cog in that massive machine. While this may be small comfort, the alternative would be for a finite human life to disappear into the infinite.

To some extent, then, meaning is provided by endings, and there has been a consistent desire throughout human history to join with this final, finite conclusion, or at least to see one's life as being reflected in it. The word 'meaning' is a slippery one, slippery enough that Claude Lévi-Strauss describes it as 'the most difficult' to define.[28] For Lévi-Strauss, to have meaning is to be translatable into a higher or lower form. Rather obviously, one can say that something has meaning when we can say what that meaning is, by either summary or by description. While circular, this definition aligns with the work of Emma Kafalenos, who claims that '*meaning* is an interpretation of the relations between a given action [...] and other actions [...] in a causal sequence.'[29] In this thesis, the word 'meaning' is associated with purpose, or a goal, and these terms are also closely associated with each other, for a goal implies an intended final state. A goal suggests a narrative, a 'causal sequence'. An ending is

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[26] Similarly, Torgovnick suggests that endings provide 'the "goal" of reading, the finish-line toward which our bookmarks aim.' Torgovnick, p. 6.

[27] According to Derrida, history is linked to 'linearity [...] teleology, eschatology, elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth, etc'. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 57. All history imposes a structure, an ending, and therefore a particular meaning upon the events of history.

[28] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), p. 12.

[29] Emma Kafalenos, *Narrative Causalities*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 1.

important in both these cases. Endings offer a final state, a goal to which things are pointed. They often offer a summarisation, and also a finiteness, allowing the reader to make sense of a text. A sentence without a full-stop may always be followed by a further subordinate clause; its assumed meaning can always be undone. The same is true of any text. Without an ending, meaning can always be undone, or subverted. To question endings, as texts about the end of the world do, is to question meaning. To search for closure is to search for meaning and purpose.

Endless reengagement with texts brings doubt as to whether endings can ever really exist, as is made clear by Miller.[30] Even straightforward texts, which would normally be called closed, often invite sequels, prequels, extended universes, adaptations, and other re-engagements that forever hold off closure. This is taken to remarkable limits in some genre work, particularly the great corporate franchises. James Bond has lived half a century beyond his creator. The universes of Star Wars and Star Trek expand faster than our own, absorbing every new media format. The end of the novel may become just the wane of a cycle within cycles: the end of a novel, which is part of a series, which is part of a broader series, which is part of a franchise. All that can be hoped for is a little pause before reengaging. This is not exclusively a feature of the genres, and, historically, communal texts, the great myths that can be constantly rewritten and expanded, seem the norm. More recently, post-modern literature has revelled in similar intertextual experimentation and expansion, as in the Wold Newton family of Philip José Farmer, and Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999-).[31] These texts are often limited only by the exigencies of copyright law; otherwise they expand in an infinite 'mindscape', Moore's term for the world

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[30] See Miller.
[31] Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Volume One*, (La Jolia: America's Best Comics, 2000).

of the human imagination.[32] Furthermore, as Teresa Heffernan argues, these texts are part of a broader trend: 'the twentieth century's abnegation of and exhaustion with the end.'[33] Heffernan, however, does not see this trend as a negative one:

> The sense that the power of the end in narrative is exhausted leads on the one hand to the anxiety that we exist after the catastrophe, after the end, and on the other to the hope that the very openness of a narrative that cannot be claimed by a unifying telos, that resists the pull of imagined or real absolute ends, keeps alive in infinite directions and possibilities.[34]

On its face, this may contradict the premise that closure is critical to providing meaning to a narrative. However, it can alternatively be seen as substantiating the discussion of *Riddley Walker* below, wherein the problematic nature of closure is resolved through an acceptance of multiplicity and uncertainty. This acceptance is the post-modern solution to the post-apocalyptic problem.

Contrasted with the impossibility of endings, and championing the knowability of endings, Marianna Torgovnick says of Miller's ravelling/unravelling metaphor that:

> Such ideas have a tantalizing newness and a certain abstract validity. But they violate what common sense and practical experience tell us: novels do have forms and meanings, and endings are crucial in achieving them.[35]

This appeal to common sense may well justify Torgovnick's approach, but as Karen Lawrence suggests in her review of *Closure in the Novel*, it fails to justify the wholesale dismissal of Miller's work.[36] Indeed, it may even imply an inability to offer a convincing dismissal. Torgovnick's work consists primarily of a taxonomy of endings.[37] These form an

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[32] DeZ Vylenz, dir., *The Mindscape of Alan Moore*. UK: Shadowsnake Films, 2005.

[33] Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 29.

[34] Ibid. p. 14.

[35] Torgovnick, p. 4.

[36] Karen Lawrence, 'Review: Closures and Disjunctions', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction,* 16 (1983), pp. 177-81 (p. 181).

[37] Endings are, for instance, circular when they recall their story's origin, parallel when they refer to other parts of the text, incomplete when they miss either of these, tangential when another subject is introduced, and end with linkage when they point to further, future stories. Torgovnick, p. 13. Simultaneously, endings can be

important step in the development of a discussion about endings, which is the development of a language for endings. However, Torgovnick defines and discusses how texts fit within the framework of closure without fully explaining what closure is.

There is, in fact, no need for these two approaches to be at odds with one another; the reality may be an ambiguous state between the two. Miller does not entirely dismiss the concept of closure. In taking away the certainty of closure, he actually acknowledges the desire for a 'sense of an ending,' in Frank Kermode's famous phrase.[38] Closure may not be tangible or clearly delineated, but it exists as a concept, a desire, and a feeling. Similarly, Torgovnick, in appealing to common sense, also suggests that there is nothing hard and fast about these distinctions. It is what is done with this fact that is in disagreement. Miller's short article offers just enough to tug at the threads that hold literature together to create doubt, while Torgovnick embarks upon a long study of form, in an attempt to objectively quantify closure. This thesis attempts a long and detailed analysis of endings while acknowledging their failure to offer closure. Engaging with fictions about the end of the world reveals this relationship, because it is a genre of literature obsessed with endings, while consistently demonstrating the failure of closure. This failure is apparent through these novels in part through the way they connect themselves to mythic cycles. *Riddley Walker*, in particular, develops a mythemic network that expands beyond the possibility of understanding or closure. It denies closure for the characters and for the readers as well. Frank Kermode connects traditional narrative structure with the structure of apocalypse; here, the failure of traditional structure is connected with mythic time.

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defined as overview or close-up, (ibid.) and complementary, ingruent, (ibid. p. 17.) confrontational, self-aware, or self-deceiving. Ibid. p. 18.
[38] See Kermode.

As an example of the way truly closed narrative may never be attained, one of the landmark works of post-apocalyptic fiction, Walter M. Miller, Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, was rewritten, revised, taken from its original short-story, trilogy form and turned into a novel. [39] Closure was kept at bay – for if the author can revise, rewrite and reinterpret, then the text never really ends. Where the full-stop may lie next is uncertain. Miller, who never published another work of fiction in his life, attempted to work on a sequel – or a midquel – for thirty years. Despite the end of the world at the finale of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, with its nuclear conflagration, closure was held off with the promise of *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* (1997). [40] Unable to find an ending, Miller eventually took his own life in 1996, in shockingly ironic juxtaposition to the poignant plea against euthanasia at the end of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Walter M. Miller, Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

A Canticle for Leibowitz is an archetype of post-apocalyptic literature and for this reason serves as a pillar for the discussion of the genre. It depicts a world that is doomed to face cycles of destruction. This denies the sense of closure that may be given by a hope in meaningful apocalypse. It is not, as Kermode suggests about contemporary society, merely too late for apocalypse; the apocalypse has already occurred and it has failed. While the text does demonstrate an attempt to connect with a mythic past and transcend mundane reality, as Eliade suggests, mythic time *is* the mundane reality of the world in the novel. The world has spiralled down into destructive cycles, and these have not offered rebirth, purpose or

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[39] Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971). It was significantly rewritten from the three short stories 'A Canticle for Leibowitz', 'And the Light is Risen' and 'The Last Canticle', which were published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1955, 1956 and 1957 respectively. See Alexandra H. Olsen, 'Re-Vision: A Comparison of A Canticle for Leibowitz and the Novellas Originally Published', *Extrapolation,* 38 (1997).

[40] Walter M. Miller, Jr, *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman*, (London: Orbit, 1997). The book was completed by Terry Bisson. Terry Bisson, *A Canticle for Miller; or, How I Met Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman but Not Walter M. Miller, Jr.*, <http://www.sff.net/people/TBisson/miller.html> [accessed 9 May 2011].

meaning, as might be expected from the cyclical myths explored in Chapter One. Nor are they a transcendent age that can be connected with to escape history. A reconnection with this 'mythic' time is simply a return to the horror of history, but with a firm reminder of the failure of closure and the inevitability of destruction. The world of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a constant reminder of this failure, as it is 'built mostly of rubble from another age',[41] both physically and intellectually. While built from pieces of the past, these pieces are also 'empty of content'.[42] They have been separated, diachronically, from their referents in the past. They have also lost their synchronic structural connections with each other, and this has destroyed their meaning. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, fragments of the past are misunderstood and misconstrued. A fallout shelter is imagined to be a shelter for containing fallouts, and blueprints and a shopping list are given religious import. This decontextualised landscape is the landscape of post-apocalypse: it is one that denies meaning while constantly implying the failure of closure.

In 1944, the reclusive Walter M. Miller, Jr flew with the U.S. Army Air Corps in a bombing raid over Cassino, which destroyed an ancient Catholic monastery. Reportedly, this was the most ancient monastery surviving at the time. Ironically, two years after the war, he converted to Catholicism. The destruction of the monastery seems to have haunted him, for monasteries appear throughout his work, underpinned by a sense of Catholic guilt and responsibility. While he only finished one novel, he was a prolific writer of short stories, with some forty-one to his name.[43] Throughout these, David Cowart notes a sense of

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[41] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 103.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Most of the more famous of his works are collected as Walter M. Miller, Jr, *The Best of Walter M. Miller, Jr*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1980). For a discussion of the way his short stories relate to his novel, see David Cowart, 'Walter M(Ichael) Miller, (Jr.)', in *Twentieth-Century American Science-Fiction Writers* <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1200001697&v=2.1&u=flinders&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w> [accessed 4 May 2013]; David N. Samuelson, 'The Lost Canticles of Walter M. Miller, Jr.', *Science Fiction Studies,* 3 (1976), pp. 3-26; David Seed, 'Recycling the Texts of Culture: Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for*

'eschatological transcendence'.[44] This transcendence is seen through the integration of spiritual and religious vision, and these motifs form a basis for *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. The image of the bombed-out monastery is inverted in the novel. Rather than the target of destruction as at Cassino, the monastery in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a sanctuary from the destruction of the rest of the world and a final holdout of civilisation. While this is obvious at the beginning of the novel, as the world has descended into a barbarian state and the monastery holds the final repositories of science and knowledge, it continues to be true well after technological culture returns. While the world rediscovers science, it fails to discover true spirituality. At its heart, the culture remains one of barbarians. The great fall into the apocalyptic destruction of nuclear war is not such a long fall at all.

While he never published any other novels, Miller did edit an anthology of short stories 'about the aftermath of a Megawar',[45] called *Beyond Armageddon* (1985).[46] Presumably, Miller was picked due to being a father of the genre, and the anthology likely hoped to capitalise on the mounting apocalyptic anxiety of the time. In any case, the introduction he wrote offers a rare insight into Miller's reclusive mind. Megawar 'will come because human reason has finally and permanently prevailed over human compassion',[47] he writes. This suggestion seems a reiteration of the themes of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, of Catholic compassion standing against science. However, reason is supposedly an aspect of the divine. The Catholic God and science both claim reason. It is this that Miller takes issue

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Leibowitz', *Extrapolation,* 37 (1996), pp. 257 - 71. There is also a short introduction to Miller's personal relationship with his work and some of the themes of the novel in Lewis Fried, '*A Canticle for Leibowitz*: A Song for Benjamin', *Extrapolation,* 42 (2001), pp. 362-73.
[44] Cowart.
[45] Walter M. Miller, Jr, 'Forewarning (an Introduction)', in *Beyond Armageddon,* ed. by Walter M. Miller, Jr and Martin H. Greenberg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), (p. xi).
[46] Walter M. Miller, Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg, *Beyond Armageddon*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). The anthology contains many of the landmark short fictions of the genre, and is highly recommended.
[47] Miller, p. xx.

with. According to Miller, reason is not an aspect of God, but instead 'Logos-Reason was the Snake';[48] it is only by the success of the snake that we have come to be convinced that reason is divine. *Logos*, the word, allows division, and it is through *logos* that came 'the ability to think in categories, the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, product of the Fall.'[49] The creation of division through language hints suggestively at structuralist linguistics and the quest to put two back together into one investigated in *Riddley Walker*,[50] to reunite reason and compassion. Miller's later views stand in contrast to those that appear in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. However, Miller's plea, coming from a time when humanity once again stood at the precipice of nuclear destruction, still resonates with it: 'we need to learn to sacrifice reason when it's crazy to be rational.'[51] While the *doctrinaire* views expressed in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* have dissipated, or perhaps were never really the author's own views after all, the importance of the reunification of spiritual and temporal power remains. The scientific ideal of progress is expressed in *The World Set Free* as a kind of utopian singularity. In fictions of post-apocalypse, it has failed. Religious eschatological promise has also failed. The only way to return to a hope in closure is to reunite these differing forms of knowledge under the guidance of wisdom.

Published as a novel in 1960, Walter M. Miller, Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* confronts the disparity between apocalyptic promise and reality through its exploration of religious faith in a seemingly meaningless, post-apocalyptic world. In a world which has become consumed by cyclical, mythic time, hope is offered through a return to linear time. The story opens some six centuries after the 'Flame Deluge'. This is the characters' name for a nuclear war that occurred in the nineteen sixties or seventies, after which a hatred of all

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[48] Ibid. p. xxi.
[49] Miller, p. xxi.
[50] See Chapter Four.
[51] Miller, p. xxii.

knowledge led to a book burning called the 'Great Simplification', so that 'the world […

could] begin again.'[52] The Great Simplification is an attempt to fulfil apocalyptic promise,

and to complete the destruction so that it may turn into rebirth. Book burning is a common

trope of post-apocalyptic fiction. For instance, in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), a

library is destroyed due to '[s]ome rage at the lies arranged in their thousands row on row.'[53]

These burnings firstly speak to the nature of the world as text, with burnt books

representative of burnt worlds. It also, as in this case, suggests the nature of written text as a

repository of knowledge, and the danger of knowledge.[54] In any case, this attempt to expunge

the last fragments of the past is not successful. There remain a small number of

misunderstood volumes held by the Catholic Church, specifically by the Order of St

Leibowitz. It is, as Paul A. Carter says, 'assumed that the only social institution able to

survive the holocaust of a nuclear war would be the same one that had survived the raids of

the Goths and Vandals: the Roman Catholic Church.'[55] In a state similar to that of Dark Ages

Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Church holds the only repository of

knowledge from the past,[56] and stands as the only 'communication network.'[57] Instead of a

complete break with the past, history repeats itself, with 'the three sections [of the novel …]

correspond[ing] to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the age of technology',[58] all built

upon this seed of knowledge stored by the Church. The slow rediscovery of knowledge from

the past leads, inevitably, to the redevelopment of nuclear weapons, and resultant crises of

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[52] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 52.
[53] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (London: Picador, 2007), p. 157.
[54] Explored further in Chapter Four.
[55] Paul A. Carter, 'By the Waters of Babylon, Our Barbarous Descendents', in *The Creation of Tomorrow: Fifty Years of Magazine Science Fiction,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 229-55.
[56] This is also true in *Ape and Essence*, although in that novel the Church is a Satan worshipping satire.
[57] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 47.
[58] Cowart, p. 82.

faith. The novel depicts a world in which 'history consists of a cyclical script determining human behavior from era to era.'[59]

The novel is presented in three books, each separated in narrative time by six centuries. The first book takes place in the twenty sixth century. Brother Francis Gerard of Leibowitz Abbey is on vigil in the desert when he encounters a strange wanderer, later identified as Benjamin, who writes a Hebrew character on a stone. On overturning the stone, Francis discovers the entrance to a fallout shelter and 'relics' including a shopping list penned by Leibowitz, a blueprint, and the skull of Leibowitz's wife, Emily. Francis spends many years illuminating a copy of the blueprint, and is eventually allowed to take it to the Pope during a canonisation ceremony for Leibowitz. However, Francis is killed by mutant bandits on his return. The second book, set in 3174, follows the slow return of science. Thon Taddeo Pfardentrott appears at the abbey to study the Memorabilia, while primitive experiments with electricity are being performed by Brother Kornhoer. Meanwhile, political developments lead to the beginning of a new empire under Hannegan, and a schism between the Church and the state. The third book, set in 3781, depicts a highly technologically advanced civilisation, but one in which a cold war has continued for fifty years between the Asian Coalition and the Atlantic Confederacy. The Church, prompted by Dom Jethras Zerchi, the abbot of Leibowitz Abbey, builds a space ship with a plan to begin civilisation anew on another planet. A limited nuclear war is followed by a ceasefire, during which the story primarily concerns a conflict between the abbey and a euthanasia station. This, however, is followed by a final war, and the presumed destruction of civilisation.

For genre work, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has received significant critical attention, and continues to be written about. This can be at least partly explained by the period Miller

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[59] Seed.

was writing in, shortly after *On the Beach* had broken into the mainstream with themes previously consigned to the genre of science fiction. That the novel continues to be read and taught suggests its broad relevance, and many serious critics have called it 'the best science fiction novel of the modern period'.[60] The proliferation of long studies of Miller's work is hampered by the fact that *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is the only novel ever completed by its author.[61] Biographies of Miller and discussions of his work are normally shorter chapters, entries or comments in other works. However, a mention of the novel has become almost obligatory in any discussion of the field, and these cursory glances are too numerous to engage with here. A large body of articles has emerged over the years, with the bulk appearing in *Extrapolation*, and coverage appearing in most of the key works of criticism in the field of fictions of the end of the world. James E. Hicks offers a very concise, selective bibliography of work about Miller, but it is unfortunately long out-dated.[62] Notably, David Dowling uses *A Canticle for Leibowitz* as one of two examples of 'exemplary fictions' in which 'themes and debates are held in suspension in every line',[63] in his *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*. Lewis Fried suggests that its relatively broad appeal is due to:

> The clarity of our recognition that we have failed to bring one aspect of technological progress under moral supervision. We understand that a moral sensitivity to the ecology of human existence—its complex, interdependent relationships with nature and culture, has been pushed aside by the calculated desire to subordinate and commodify nature.[64]

These issues underlie much of the genre, which is one reason why this novel is an archetype. Even in this thesis, which endeavours to see the genre as something other than only a

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[60] James E. Hicks, 'A Selective Annotated Bibliography of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*', *Extrapolation,* 31 (1990), pp. 216-28 (p. 216).
[61] The longer works that do exist are closer to reference guides rather than academic studies. See William H. Roberson, *Walter M. Miller, Jr. : A Reference Guide to His Fiction and His Life*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011); William H. Roberson and Robert L. Battenfeld, *Walter M. Miller, Jr. : A Bio-Bibliography*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992); Rose Secrest, *Glorificemus: A Study of the Fiction of Walter M. Miller, Jr.*, (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2002).
[62] Hicks. Hopefully, for those looking for more recent work on the subject, the references used in the present study will serve as useful, even while not intended to be exhaustive.
[63] David Dowling, *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*, (London: University of Iowa Press, 1987), p. 200.
[64] Fried, p. 364.

warning, these issues still emerge. In this chapter's discussion of myth, for instance, it is clear that the mythic cycles of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *Riddley Walker* are important both as a lesson in responsibility, and as a symbol of the failure to break from the misguided moral systems of the past. For the most part, the critical discussion around *A Canticle for Leibowitz* focuses on discussions of religion, science and morality, and the way the novel 'rails mightily against humanity's inability to find values that guide its existence other than those of rampant technology and political power bereft of moral supervision.'[65] More relevant to this thesis, however, is the way the novel disrupts closure, through a depiction of a world that attempts to find meaning and purpose by connecting with a half-hidden past. This past is tantalising in its promises of redemption, but it is unable to fulfil them, for the past of the characters is simply the mundane present of the reader, and is tainted by inevitable self-destruction.

The Firebreak of History in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

Therefore, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* suggests a cyclical model of history. The sense of endlessness has been written onto the world of the novel in a physical, concrete form. Incomplete apocalypse has not cleansed the world of original sin and humanity is doomed to 'play the Phoenix in an unending sequence of rise and fall'.[66] The focus on a Catholic abbey makes the failure of the Judeo-Christian Apocalypse always apparent. The power of the Apocalypse's cosmic and final closure has been usurped by the pointless destruction of nuclear war. With the failure of cosmic eschatology comes a questioning of personal eschatology, and a questioning of the possibility of God and the possibility of meaning. Smith suggests the power of endings comes from the power of imagining an intelligence behind them.[67] A loss of faith in an ending becomes a loss of faith in a guiding intelligence. This, in

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[65] Ibid. p. 366.
[66] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 217.
[67] Miller and Greenberg.

turn, leads to a loss of meaning. The novel suggests a quest for closure, meaning and personal eschatological redemption. To this end, Miller peppers his novel with ways of escaping the horror of these endless historical cycles. There is hope for rebirth in the space missions organised by the Church and in the immaculate conception suggested in the character of Mrs Grales. Finally, hope is given through pure faith and the acceptance of suffering. These all suggest the possibility of a return to historical, linear time, with its promise of spiritual closure.

The death of civilisation by nuclear war, and the dark ages that follow, are modelled by Miller on the Fall of Rome. Nuclear holocaust becomes, in the text, a kind of fictionalisation of Oswald Spengler's theories of metahistorical cycles, made concrete by nuclear war.[68] Furthermore, just as in the mythic cycles described by Mircea Eliade, these are decaying cycles. Each age is doomed to be lesser than the past. However, these are not the imagined mythic cycles of rebirth or transcendence, even as the characters wish it to be. As with the nuclear eschatologies discussed in Chapter Two, the reality of these mythic cycles is instead pointless destruction. Just as the interlocutor in *Youth Without Youth* realises, the possibility of mythic cycles being burnt into history by war is an horrific one. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the atomic weapons have not just caused the destruction of civilisation and society, but have also decayed the landscape and caused 'genetic festering'.[69] The mutants in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* are a new creation by humanity, but like the patterns of history that have been literally turned to cycles by atomic war, the mutants have also been tainted physically by a kind of original sin, in distorted mimicry of Genesis. Their genetic damage is an un-erasable result of human pride. As Fried puts it:

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[68] Oswald Spengler and Charles Francis Atkinson, *The Decline of the West*, (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1926).
[69] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 227.

> *Genesis* would no longer be a "foundational" account of humanity created in the image of God. Humanity would now be acting out and living within *its* self-made image, bereft of hopes transcending the city of man.[70]

This new reality is not just without hopes of transcendence. Corruption has been ineradicably written into the genome. The physical repercussions of nuclear war resonate with the failure of closure, the failure of rebirth and the failure of the apocalyptic promise. In the post-apocalyptic world, the tropes, symbols and signs of the failure of structure, closure and apocalypse have been made physical and concrete.

The world of the past, which is only seen through the haze of misconstrual, is both a golden age to be understood and emulated, as well as a corrupt age that will lead to destruction. The historical past is appropriated into mythic time, as can be seen in the use of history in prayers,[71] and in myth,[72] while fiction is appropriated into history.[73] The ordinary of the reader's time is seen as fantastic by the people in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. For instance, 'a simple scribbled message such as "can kraut, six bagels – bring home for Emma" becomes a sacred document to future monks unable to decipher the allusions to the trivia of our own age.'[74] The corruption of this golden past, physically manifest in the genomes of the mutants, is also articulated by them when they cry, '*We* despise our ancestors'.[75] The perceived golden nature of this past promotes an attempt to connect with it. However, as fragments are discovered, '[r]econstruction of their meaning goes hand in hand with the re-enactment of the narrative they only partially disclose.'[76] This re-enactment is dangerous, as

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[70] Fried, p. 366.

[71] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, pp. 14-5.

[72] Ibid. pp. 151, 92.

[73] Karel Čapek's 1920 play, *R.U.R.* (famous in the field of science fiction due to the invention of the word robot), is taken as real, and even used as a reason to deny human guilt for the earlier nuclear holocaust. Ibid. pp. 190-1. This is noted by David Seed, 'The Signs of War: Walter M. Miller and Russell Hoban', in *American Science Fiction and the Cold War,* (Edinburgh: Fitzroy Dearborn Pubs., 1999), pp. 157-67 (p. 161).

[74] Gary K. Wolfe, *The Known and the Unknown : The Iconography of Science Fiction*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 138.

[75] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 83. Emphasis in original.

[76] Seed, p. 159.

this golden age was corrupt, which led to final nuclear devastation. This consistently reiterates the failure of closure, and the failure of rebirth.

As is apparent through many fictions of the end, the reader views the world of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* from a privileged position. The reader understands the world in a way that the characters cannot, for the hidden past that the characters attempt to understand is the present of the reader. Novels that create new, Secondary Worlds, speculative fictions, are normally concerned with describing that new world. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz* this is inverted, with the characters attempting to understand, and explain, the world of the reader. This inversion is quite common in post-apocalyptic works.[77] These worlds are often ironic reflections of the world of the reader,[78] and by having the characters look back to this past, which is usually better understood by the reader than those characters, room is made for commentary and satire. Misunderstandings about that past are similarly used to question the general notion of historical knowledge. There is, more broadly, the possibility of defamiliarisation, which allows the reader to see his or her own world afresh, and to question its values.

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the fact that the past is seen as a golden age puts the privileged reader in a Cassandra-like position. The reader knows that the past is being repeated, and knows of its corruption. Towards the end of the novel, there are treaties,[79] and the development of a World Court.[80] This should diminish the possibility of destruction. However, in the world of the reader there have been treaties, such as the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT), there is an International Court of Justice (commonly known as the

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[77] And, indeed, in speculative fiction in general. Gary K. Wolfe offers the examples of Arthur C. Clarke's 'History Lesson', Leo Szilard's 'Grand Central Terminal', Anthony Boucher's 'The Greatest Tertian' and Horoce Coon's '43 000 Years Later'. Wolfe, p. 138.
[78] Cowart, p. 9.
[79] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 200.
[80] Ibid. p. 217.

World Court) and there is the United Nations. Since the novel is post-apocalyptic, these institutions obviously failed. Rather than offering solace, this repetition reinforces the inevitability of failure. The characters, similarly, have some understanding of the coming war, but this understanding seems insufficient to stop them. Dom Paulo, for instance, understands that '[i]t had happened once before'.[81] He hopes to leverage this information, thinking, '[T]his time […] we'll keep them reminded of *who* kept the spark burning while the world slept.' [82] However, this hope proves futile, and the horrific repetition is as likely as the setting of the sun:

> 'Soon the sun will set'—is *that* prophecy? No, it's merely an assertion of faith in the consistency of events. The children of the world are consistent too.[83]

The bombs seem always doomed to drop again. When Zerchi claims, 'Now they have the bitter certainty. My sons, they cannot do it again. Only a race of madmen could do it again',[84] he is interrupted by the smirks of Benjamin, who knows just how foolish humanity is, and how doomed it is. The core of these problems seems to be that '[t]he closer men came to perfecting for themselves a paradise, the more impatient they seemed to become with it, and with themselves as well.'[85] The blame is placed on the thoughtless forward rush of progress. Rather than avoiding destruction through learning from the past, this cyclical repetition guarantees it. The Cassandra-like position of the reader makes the ending always present.

Similar to *On the Beach*, the ending of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is an inevitable nuclear apocalypse, one that suggests a failure of meaning and purpose. As Kermode

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[81] Ibid. p. 120.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid. p. 144.
[84] Ibid. p. 227.
[85] Ibid. p. 235.

suggests of all novels, everything exists in 'the shadow of the end'. [86] However, *On the Beach* presents an apocalypse that was complete and inescapable; *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is post-apocalyptic. It suggests that history and time will run past this ending as well, and that this ending will be no ending at all. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* points firmly backwards and forwards. It points forwards towards the possibility of new stories, linkage in Torgovnick's terms,[87] yet this future also points back to a repetition of the past. The ending is therefore also circular.[88] The past it repeats is the world of the reader, and this opens the text further by connecting it with another world, and other stories. This narratological complexity, made more difficult by its juxtaposition of the narrative of the characters and the narrative structure of the world they live in, is the shadow of a failed end that falls across the whole. To repurpose a phrase from J. Hillis Miller, this novel 'begins and ends still *in medias res*, presupposing as a future anterior some part of itself outside itself'.[89] Moreover, the 'problem of the ending [...] becomes displaced to the problem of the beginning'.[90] The failed ending reflects the failed beginning and cannot be understood without reference to it.

Throughout the novel, Benjamin also symbolises both the survival of humanity and the weary lack of rebirth. Benjamin is an old Jew who lives in the desert and survives the centuries supposedly due to the milk of a mutated goat. However, many of his statements suggest that he lived well before even the first Flame Deluge, and he 'is generally read to be the Wandering Jew of medieval folklore'.[91] The Wandering Jew is a mythic character that is

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[86] Similarly, Torgovnick suggests that endings provide 'the "goal" of reading, the finish-line toward which our bookmarks aim.' Torgovnick, p. 6.
[87] Ibid. p. 13.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Miller, p. 4.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Amanda Cockrell, 'On This Enchanted Ground: Reflections of a Cold War Childhood in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* and Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts,* 15 (2004), pp. 20-36. Gary K. Wolfe Makes the same connection, suggestion that his first appearance is similar to

said to have been punished by Jesus and doomed to wander the earth until the end of the world. The figure does not appear in the Bible, but is instead a medieval invention, likely an anti-Semitic one, although it has more recently become a symbol of Jewish perseverance despite persecution. Indeed, the Wandering Jew has been used as a symbol both by Nazis and by Zionists.[92] Benjamin describes himself as a former 'wanderer',[93] connects himself with that other Jew who defies death, 'Lazarus',[94] and claims quite clearly that he is waiting for the messiah,[95] who will bring about the end of the world. George K. Anderson, in his study of the Wandering Jew myth, sees the Wandering Jew as 'a symbol of weary but persisting mankind'.[96] However, he claims that in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the Wandering Jew's 'general participation […] is too uncertain to be significant, just as the whole is too formless to be satisfying.'[97] While the novel may seem 'formless', and it is simply a matter of opinion as to whether it is un-'satisfying', these are actually important aspects of the novel's purpose, which is to disrupt modes of narrative and of understanding. The novel is about the failure of endings, and the persistence of humanity after the ending, which is, in fact, a curse. The real ending has not come, as evidenced by the existence of the Wandering Jew. The Wandering Jew, through his 'weary' persistence in a 'formless' and un-'satisfying' world becomes, contrary to Anderson's suggestion, one of the most 'significant' images. Benjamin is not just a symbol of weary survival, but also a symbol of the failure of the end, and the persisting quest for closure.

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appearances of the Wandering Jew reported in Prague. Wolfe, p. 138. Lewis Fried suggests that he is also suggestive of the concept that 'Judaism was theologically superseded by Christianity.' Fried, p. 362.
[92] See George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965).
[93] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 137.
[94] Ibid. p. 228.
[95] Ibid. p. 135.
[96] Anderson, p. 394.
[97] Ibid.

The cyclical model of time is replicated by the cyclical structure of the novel. As mentioned above, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is based on three short stories published in the pulp science fiction magazines of the nineteen fifties.[98] The resulting novel is an expanded, retold, and re-formulated version of the earlier stories. These types of fix-ups are particularly common in science fiction, and form a process similar to that of the ancient epic. Various tales, of various quality and connection to the others, are combined to form an over-arching narrative. Kermode connects the epic with cyclical mythic time, and a similar connection is apparent here. Rather than the novelistic structure based upon the model of Judeo-Christian Apocalypse, as suggested by Kermode's work, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* follows a model of cyclical time, wherein the story is formed of cycles within cycles. These three stories are each separated in time but connected in form. Each contains renaissance, suffering and then death. The most dramatic example is contained in the first section, '*Fiat Homo*',[99] which begins with the discovery by Brother Francis Gerard of the ancient fallout shelter. The controversy surrounding the artefacts he finds forces Brother Francis to remain a novice for an extended period, and he passes the years in devotion, making an ornate illuminated copy of a circuit diagram discovered in the ruins. He reaches a spiritual zenith when he is allowed to present his copies to the Pope in New Rome. However, he is then murdered by one of the 'Pope's children', the mutants. His body is circled by buzzards.[100] The buzzards suggest a cycle of death and life as they 'laid their eggs in season and lovingly fed their young: a dead snake, and bits of a feral dog.'[101] This pattern of rising enlightenment, here through the discovery of artefacts that will help to rebuild scientific knowledge, spiritual awakening and then death, is repeated in the second book, with the death of the Poet, and the third book, with the second

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[98] See Olsen.
[99] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, pp. 1-98.
[100] Ibid. p. 97.
[101] Ibid.

flame deluge and the death of Abbott Zerchi. The final sequence does not include buzzards, but it does imply that life may still murmur beneath the oceans, ready to start another, longer cycle. This is part of a broader emphasis on cyclical time as 'Miller sets up countless obstacles to reading history as linear progress by inverting his images, shifting contexts, and introducing reversals.'[102]

The structure of the novel emphasises the inevitability of repetition. This is made clear in the final pages as 'the structure [...] ends immediately before its narrative cycle will start over again.'[103] The novel, it seems, is always beginning and ending, as J. Hillis Miller suggests all novels do, yet this process is here made explicit. The inevitable failed ending haunts the whole, and invites a tense wait for the beginning of the end. This inevitable ending is always implicit. Death haunts every page, and the predictability of destruction turns the novel into a patient wait as the failed ending is deferred. This is most clear when Francis's life is put on hold, as he is kept a novice, and he dedicates his life to the copying of a blueprint he cannot understand. The monastic life, with its tedium and its consumption of human lives by menial tasks, such as the copying of manuscripts, makes this wait all the more apparent. The end is implicit in every page, and narrative tension created by its deferral.

As nuclear war becomes, again, inevitable, hope for a release from cyclical time is offered through three possibilities of the return to linear time. These are the space mission organised by the Church, the birth of Rachel, and personal redemption through the forbearance of suffering. These are all ambiguous though, and the text remains an open one. The cyclical structure of the novel also makes standard narrative closure difficult, for the only

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[102] Seed.
[103] Seed, p. 163.

consistent character is Benjamin, and he is always simply a watcher. The possibilities of narrative resolution lie with history, as if it were a character itself.

The first hope for salvation comes through a union of faith and science in the space mission organised by the Catholic Church, although it is unclear whether the new civilisation birthed by such a mission is doomed to the same cycles. This, according to Dominic Manganiello, suggests a hope that:

> [T]he linear, providential pattern of salvation history will offset the cyclical, destructive pattern of nuclear history. […] Miller's eschatological optimism […] is […] grounded in the biblical experience of divine renewal, which permits the individual and the race to make a fresh start by going back to the past in the hope of reconstructing a new self and a new world from the ashes of the old.[104]

Therefore, the space mission is a hope to escape the horror of cyclical history. Hope is founded on the belief that, in this new colony, science may well be guided by the hand of spirituality. David J. Leigh sees the novel in light of traditional apocalyptic literature, that of revelation, and in the form of this Godly spaceship:

> [T]he remnant departs from the self-destructive earth to a new planet where they are destined to carry on the redemption within an eschatological community that is always waiting with radical expectations for an ultimate cosmos, a "new heaven and a new earth."[105]

The space mission signals both a hope for rebirth and redemption, but also a hope for final, divine, eschatological closure. However, the Memorabilia, the recorded wisdom of the ages, is carried with them. This Memorabilia is the same knowledge that survived the first Flame Deluge. While the hope is that a spiritually guided mission will keep science and technology steered by morality, this same hope failed to protect civilisation in its last cycle. Like genetic

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[104] Dominic Manganiello, 'History as Judgement and Promise in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*', *Science Fiction Studies,* 13 (1986), pp. 159-69 pp. 166-7).
[105] David J. Leigh, *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p. 148.

mutation, the Memorabilia signals the original sin of humanity. The Memorabilia may be 'cursed'.[106] It may deny rebirth.

Another hope arises in the spiritual rebirth of humanity embodied in Mrs Grales. Mrs Grales appears throughout the final book of the novel. She is a pitiful tomato-merchant and a mutant, with a lifeless and mute second head. What makes Mrs Grales interesting is that her second head grew after she was born, and, while it is completely mute and lifeless, Mrs Grales insists on having this 'Cherubic head' with its 'features of infancy' baptised. She calls it 'Rachel'.[107] This is an embarrassment for the church. The priests refuse to baptise Rachel, refuse to even touch her. Mrs Grales contends that Rachel is her daughter and therefore it is her responsibility to have her baptised, but Abbott Zerchi is unsure. While not heartless on the issue, he is also glad not to be the one that has to answer the difficult theological questions that arise from this:

> [T]here's some question as to whether Rachel is her daughter, her sister—or merely an excrescence growing out of her shoulder. […] I'm grateful to Heaven that it's not up to me to figure it out. If it were a simple case of Siamese twins, it would be easy. But it isn't. The old-timers say Rachel wasn't there when Mrs. Grales was born […] How many souls has an old lady with an extra head—a head that 'just grew'? Things like that cause ulcers in high places[.][108]

Brother Joshua, after meeting Mrs Grales, has visions of a surgeon attempting to remove the 'deformity'. The head of Rachel turns to Joshua and says 'I am the Immaculate Conception'.[109] While, in general, the image of the mutants is one of the continued stain of original sin, Rachel is born without a mother, and is separated from the line of humanity. She is born completely free of this stain. David Leigh, continuing this idea, writes that Rachel is

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[106] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 236.
[107] Ibid. pp. 221-3.
[108] Ibid. p. 224.
[109] Ibid. p. 228.

the new Mary.[110] Mrs Grales' final appearance is as Abbott Zerchi is giving penance for his violent attack on a doctor involved in euthanasia. Grales wishes to ask forgiveness, but first to forgive God for his 'justice'.[111] The concept of forgiving God shocks the Abbott. The gesture stands in juxtaposition of the general trend throughout the novel to exult the bearing of suffering in the name of God.

After the second Flame Deluge, Rachel seems to finally come alive. Instead of being given baptism, Rachel baptises Abbott Zerchi. This final gesture suggests a new beginning, free of the guilt of the past. It suggests redemptive closure of the narrative of sin, whether that was the original sin of developing the atomic bomb, or the Original Sin of Eden. However, as the bombs fall, it is unclear if it is simply too late. The new Mary may well be killed by the misadventures of humanity just as she is born.

Joshua's earlier vision of Mrs Grales is a strange one, and the obfuscation of language in the passage, as Joshua mishears what she is saying, likely continues the themes involving language confusion that permeate both the novel and the post-apocalyptic genre.[112] Beyond that, this is an image of science embodied in the surgeon trying to strip away something that is pure and beautiful, however horrific it may seem. Utilitarian morality, which is used to justify the clearing away of that which is distasteful, in this case also destroys the possibility of redemption. This is also suggested in the long discussion of suicide at the end of the novel. After the Second Flame Deluge begins, mass euthanasia occurs, similar to *On the Beach*. This leads to disputes between the monks of Leibowitz Abbey, and both a doctor and a patient involved in the practice. The ultimate message of this section is to take what one can

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[110] Leigh, p. 141. For David J. Tietge, it is the second coming of Christ. David J. Tietge, 'Priest, Professor, or Prophet: Discursive and Ethical Intersections in A Canticle for Leibowitz', *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 41 (2008), pp. 676-94 (p. 692).
[111] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 267.
[112] In the novel, hate is seen as being born of the breaking apart of language. Ibid. p. 52. See Chapter Four for a further discussion of language.

bear, and to suffer it through fate. Without life, evil may be impossible, but so is goodness. After the Second Flame Deluge, Zerchi tells a woman with terminal radiation sickness, and a child also sick, to simply '[b]ear it and pray.'[113] The euthanasia station offers '*COMFORT*', with an image of a secular '*christus*'.[114] A secular faith has taken the symbols of religion and repurposed them. The Catholic faith of the monks places hope in the ultimate salvation beyond physical existence. It asks for forbearance of discomfort in order that salvation may be attained. Here, however, lacking hope, the goal becomes merely to cease to exist. The goal is death, without the hope of spiritual rebirth. In this time of nuclear war, comfort is to accept death and, therefore, 'ABANDON HOPE', as the monks paint on protest signs around the station.[115] The euthanasia stations, a result of the secular utilitarian morality that values non-existence above painful existence are a result of the same society that may well euthanize itself. A species that has obliterated itself in nuclear war also feels no pain. Instead of simply avoiding pain, one should, Miller suggests, bear the suffering in acceptance and in hope for a transcendent, spiritual meaning, and an imposed godly purpose to the world.

This message, of course, is problematic. The inclusion of the child heightens the tension of the decision, for one cannot tell a baby to withstand suffering. Its mother is willing to take upon herself the sin of murder to save her daughter from this suffering. This acceptance is also problematic as it can lead to fatalism, particularly when one wonders what God's will is that one should endure. The first Flame Deluge, for instance, as well as the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction, has been mythologised as an act of God:

> It was said that God, in order to test mankind which had become swelled with pride as in the time of Noah, had commanded the wise men of that age, among them the Blessed Leibowitz, to devise great engines of war such as had never before been upon the Earth, weapons of such might that they contained the very first of Hell, and that God had suffered these magi to place

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[113] Ibid. p. 254.
[114] Ibid. p. 259. Emphasis in original.
[115] Ibid. p. 258.

the weapons in the hands of princes, and to say to each prince: "Only because the enemies have such a thing have we devised this for thee, in order that they may know that thou hast it also, and fear to strike. See to it, m'Lord, that thou fearest them as much as they shall now fear thee, that none may unleash this dread thing which we have wrought."[116]

This mythologising denies human responsibility, and if destruction is God's will, then this suggests that this destruction should be allowed to occur. Regardless, it seems that 'Miller attempts to anchor his vision of historical circularity in the transcendent idea of the Christian God: all cycles will eventually be subsumed in the timeless divine order.'[117] That is, while the novel tends towards a demonstration of the horror of cycles, faith must be maintained in a divine plan within those cycles, and beyond them. W. Warren Wagar maintains, 'Miller's message is essentially the same as that of C. S. Lewis. The promises of redemption refer to time beyond time, not to a higher life under any sun known to astronomers.'[118] The ultimate problem with this view, however, is a simple one. The book 'fails to convince the sceptical reader that Christianity remains undiminished as the universal solution to the human condition'. [119] The once failed apocalypse is not just an indictment of human secular power, but also of the eschatological promise of closure. With this comes a doubt regarding the nature of God. However, the novel represents a desire for, a hope for, a transcendent religious sense of closure to deny the secular cycles of horror that have descended upon the world.

The shadow of the failed end haunts every page of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. By burning a firebreak in history, the novel signifies a return to cyclical mythic time, but one that is made concrete. The obsession with the past is juxtaposed with the impossibility and the danger of connecting with it. This is reiterated in the structure of the novel. Hope is offered,

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[116] Ibid. p. 51. As David Seed notes, the 'palimpsest-parable on the pride of princes which results in the "Flame Deluge" [...] combines three catastrophes: the flood, the destruction of Sodom, and the fall of Babel in linguistic division.' Seed, p. 162.
[117] Cowart, p. 82.
[118] W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 190.
[119] This is a point that even Miller has admitted. Cowart, p. 82.

however much it may seem unlikely. The weary perpetuation of life embodied in Benjamin, for instance, the union of science and religion in the space mission, and the immaculate conception of Rachel, all offer some form of hope for a return to a linear pattern, with final resolution. Hope resides in faith and in the bearing of the suffering of history with grace. This is similar to *On the Beach*'s adulation of those who bear the coming apocalypse quietly and respectfully, and both novels find part of their symbolic closure in the promise of personal redemption in a time out of time. It is in contrast with the secular apocalypse of *The World Set Free*, which finds a secular, physical kind of redemption. Miller's most important message is that 'neither infinite power nor infinite wisdom could bestow godhood upon men. For that there would have to be infinite love as well.'[120] It is a warning against *hubris*. However, the concept of infinite love is not a simple one. Likely the most poignant moment is when a mother suffering radiation sickness readies herself and her baby for euthanasia. Unlike those in *On the Beach*, who unquestioningly take their lives into their own hands, the mother seems to believe that her actions are sinful, but she is willing to accept the possibility of Hell in order to save her child from suffering. To risk eternal damnation may well be infinite love. A reunion of science and faith may appear to be the key to survival, but the purported infinite love of God is difficult to find in this scenario. As the mother pleads, 'I cannot understand a God who is pleased by my baby's suffering!'[121] While unresolved, Miller highlights the spiritual angst that accompanies the post-apocalyptic condition. To lose faith in God is to lose faith in endings as well.

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[120] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 195.
[121] Ibid. p. 200.

These issues of myth and closure are also engaged with in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, which displays a similar concrete realisation of cyclical time and an attempt by its characters to understand their world through an engagement with myth. However, the mythic world of *Riddley Walker* is much more complex. It is a multivalent, infinite system of references that does not simply represent a failure of closure, but actually denies closure.

Russell Hoban is primarily known for his works of fiction for children. Most notable is *A Mouse and His Child* (1967),[122] which concerns two toy mice, joined at the hands, and their quest to become self-winding.[123] In a metaphorical sense, this same quest finds its way into Hoban's most famous work for adults,[124] *Riddley Walker*, which includes a child-like play with language, a problematic relationship between father and son and a very young protagonist. Moreover, it contains a quest for meaning and purpose in a world where fundamental structures have broken down. Since meaning can no longer be imposed by an external authority, Riddley must create meaning for himself. He must become self-winding. *Riddley Walker* was followed by its spiritual sequel, *Pilgermann*, in 1983.[125] While *Riddley Walker* is set in a future medieval-like society, *Pilgermann* takes place in the historical medieval world, and follows a journey towards the inevitable, historical, apocalyptic destruction in the midst of the Crusades. Russell Hoban is well regarded within the field of children's literature, while his adult works have received a small, but loyal, following. *Riddley Walker*, on the other hand, is considered one of the most important works of post-apocalyptic literature. It may be because of this genre disjunction that the only book length

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[122] Russell Hoban and Lillian Hoban, *The Mouse and His Child*, (New York,: Harper & Row, 1967).
[123] Alida Allison, 'Russell (Conwell) Hoban', in *American Writers for Children Since 1960: Fiction* <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1200001374&v=2.1&u=flinders&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w> [accessed 4 May 1986].
[124] Hoban says, '[Q]uests for self-winding of one sort or another come into my work a lot.' Hoban cited in Edward Myers, 'An Interview with Russell Hoban', *Literary Review,* 28 (1984), pp. 5-16 (p. 8).
[125] Russell Hoban, *Pilgermann*, (London: J. Cape, 1983).

study of Hoban's work is Christine Wilkie's now out-dated *Through the Narrow Gate: The Mythological Consciousness of Russell Hoban*,[126] which offers only a short coverage of *Riddley Walker*. For further resources, one might turn to Dave Awl's excellent website, *The Head of Orpheus*,[127] which covers basic information about Hoban's work and life. Hoban's intriguing collection of essays, fictions and art, *The Moment Under the Moment* (1992),[128] also offers clues to the attentive. As with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the bulk of the scholarship on *Riddley Walker* takes the form of journal articles and chapters in larger studies of the genre.

Riddley Walker appeared in 1980. While *A Canticle for Leibowitz* sits on the crest of the first big wave of nuclear fictions, *Riddley Walker* sits just before the very beginning of the second.[129] This second wave of fictions follows the abandonment of *détente* as the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1980, and the warming of the Cold War with a political union of US President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Famously, Reagan called the USSR an 'evil empire' in 1983, and the world once again seemed headed toward destruction. This led to a sense of claustrophobia in Britain, with its high density of both nuclear targets and population. This was heightened by twin senses of Britain possibly being an American puppet, and being on the doorstep of their mutual enemy.[130] *Riddley Walker*'s

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[126] Christine Wilkie, *Through the Narrow Gate: The Mythological Consciousness of Russell Hoban*, (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickeson University Press, 1989). A book of essays on his work has been published, but it focuses on his work for children and offers only a very short coverage of *Riddley Walker*. Alida Allison, *Russell Hoban, Forty Years: Essays on His Writings for Children*, (New York: Garland, 2000).

[127] Dave Awl, *The Head of Orpheus*, <http://www.ocelotfactory.com/hoban/index.html> [accessed 30 April 2013].

[128] Russell Hoban, *The Moment under the Moment : Stories, a Libretto, Essays and Sketches*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992).

[129] As clear from Paul Brians, *Chart of Trends in Nuclear War Fiction*, <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nukepop/chart.html> [accessed 3 May 2013].

[130] While ostensibly writing about the American experience, Charles E. Gannon's exploration of the British response to possible nuclear war, through the examples of the films *Threads* (1984) and *The War Game* (1964), is of particular interest. Charles E. Gannon, 'Silo Psychosis: Diagnosing America's Nuclear Anxieties through Narrative Imagery', in *Imagining Apocalypse: Studies in Cultural Crisis,* ed. by David Seed (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 103-17. *Threads* continues the odd BBC tradition of producing horrific films about

publication on the eve of the thaw proved propitious, and the novel was widely taught and discussed throughout the eighties. David J. Leigh calls it '[t]he most intensely written and artistically complex apocalyptic story of a postnuclear world',[131] and Harold Bloom lists the novel in his controversial 'Western Canon.'[132] Anthony Burgess claims that it 'is what literature is meant to be—exploration without fear'.[133] It receives detailed attention in this thesis due to its exemplary quality, literary complexity, archetypal nature, and the cultural context into which it was published. It is also, simply, the most intricate example of post-apocalyptic myth and language.

As with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *Riddley Walker* explores the end of society by nuclear destruction, an 'orgy of anti-intellectualism',[134] a return to a dark age, and the rising control of religious forces. Hoban has acknowledged *A Canticle for Leibowitz* as an inspiration, and the two are often discussed in comparison to one another, as they are again here.[135] While writing *Riddley Walker*, Hoban even wondered, '[A]m I too close [to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*]?'[136] However, *Riddley Walker* is distinguished by being a fictional autobiography written entirely in an invented dialect of English. For example, the novel begins:

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nuclear war. Intriguingly, Russell Hoban has reviewed the film. Russell Hoban, 'A Personal View of *Threads*', *The Listener,* (1984), pp. 3-4. Mike Jackson, dir., *Threads*. UK: BBC, 1984. Peter Watkins, dir., *The War Game*. UK: BBC, 1965.

[131] David J. Leigh, 'The Ultimate Conflict: The Cosmic Battle in the Violent End-Times of C.S. Lewis and Russell Hoban', in *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction,* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), pp. 69-104.

[132] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), p. 565.

[133] R.D. Mullen, 'Dialect, Grapholect, and Story: Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* as Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 391-417 (p. 391).

[134] Cowart, p. 81.

[135] For instance, see Cockrell; Seed; Paul Starr, 'More Than Organic: Science Fiction and the Grotesque', in *Seriously Weird: Papers on the Grotesque,* (New York: Lang, P., 1999), pp. 135-52. David Cowart, while lamenting the way science fiction has 'vulgarized' visions of the future, still cites the two novels as examples of sophistication. David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*, (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1989), p. 9.

[136] Seed, p. 165.

On my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs any how there hadnt ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen.[137]

In the novel, the eponymous Riddley lives some two and a half thousand years in the reader's future,[138] after a nuclear war has devastated England, now known as Inland. Riddley lives in a time of transition, as civilisation is finally returning. The *fents*es (fenced communities which survive by hunting and mining scraps buried from the past) are giving way to *forms* (farmland). Riddley, too, is transitioning, as he has gone through his naming ceremony, he kills the last wild boar in the area, and his father dies in a mining accident trying to find the mythical 'Eusa's head'.[139] After discovering a puppet from an ancient Punch and Judy show, Riddley embarks on a journey into the wilderness, but finds himself drawn into a political battle to rediscover gunpowder. Riddley engages with a world full of stories and rhyme, included throughout the text, as he follows the Fools Circl 9 wys, a kind of mythic path around Cambry (the dead heart of their civilisation). On his journeys he encounters wild, mutated dogs, who become his friends; Lissener, a blind and deformed 'Eusa person' kept in the dead town of Bernt Arse in order to be scapegoated and killed in an act of mythic transcendence; Goodparley, *Pry Mincer* and performer of the Eusa Story, who is attempting to discover how to recreate gunpowder using sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal, and who believes that its mysteries are hidden in myth and rhyme; Granser, the former master, and sexual abuser, of Goodparley, who now works as an abject *chard coal burner*; and, Orfing, the *Wes Mincer* and performance partner of Goodparley, who attempts to depose Goodparley in a coalition with the Eusa Folk. The attempts at recreating gunpowder are finally successful, with disastrous results, and Riddley and Orfing are the only ones left alive.

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[137] Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 1.
[138] The last date found recorded before the destruction is 1997. They have been recording time for 2347 years. The gap between these two times is unknown. Ibid. p. 125.
[139] Ibid. p. 27.

They perform a new show, based on Punch and Judy and now informed by Riddley's developing understanding of the world.

As with the other texts studied in this thesis, *Riddley Walker* engages in a quest for meaning and closure in a seemingly endless and meaningless world. In particular, it does this through the development of a mythic landscape that both demands and denies understanding. Riddley's world is replete with myths and stories, which are peppered throughout the novel. What knowledge of the past the characters possess is woven through these stories. Riddley is unable to place his hope in an ending, since endings have failed in this post-apocalyptic world, so he instead looks to the past. As with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, in *Riddley Walker* this hidden past is seen as a divine, golden age from which knowledge can be gained, as is made clear when Riddley laments, 'O what we ben! And what we come to!'[140] The inhabitants of Inland attempt to reconnect with this age through ritual re-enactment, following the pattern laid out by Eliade's *The Myth of Eternal Return*,[141] in order to connect with the divine and give their lives meaning. In parallel with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and unlike Eliade's mythic cycles, this mythic time has been burnt onto the world by nuclear war, and the cycle of decay seems inevitable. Goodparley makes this clear, as he says:

> *Riddley we aint as good as them befor us. Weve come way way down from what they ben time back way back.* May be it wer the barms what done it poysening the lan or when they made a hoal in what they callit the O Zoan.[142]

According to Eliade, the development of these myths is an attempt to escape history. However, in *Riddley Walker*, nuclear war has resulted in decaying cycles existing within

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[140] Ibid. p. 100.
[141] Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*. David Cowart also engages in an extensive comparison of *Riddley Walker* and *The Myth of Eternal Return*. While differing significantly from the reading offered here, it still suggests the importance of the relationship between the two. Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*. The connection between Eliade and *Riddley Walker* is also made in Leonard Mustazza, 'Myth and History in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*', *Critique,* 31 (1989), pp. 17-26.
[142] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 125.

history. These mythic cycles are not just imagined attempts at dealing with the world, but, at least in part, they are actually part of the world that confronts Riddley.

The attempt to understand the stories of the past is constantly frustrated. This difficult relationship with history is signalled by the novel's epigraph, which is taken from the *Gospel of Thomas*:

> Jesus has said:
> Blessed is the lion that
> the man will devour, and the lion
> will become man. And loathsome is the
> man that the lion will devour,
> and the lion will become man.[143]

The precise meaning of this passage is difficult to pin down,[144] already suggesting the vague, poetic and mythic nature of the novel it precedes. Moreover, the provenance of the quotation indicates a complicated relationship with truth, history and religion. *The Gospel of Thomas* is part of the collection of Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi in 1945.[145] These texts included a number of apocryphal gospels that told different, contradictory accounts of Biblical stories and had lain hidden for millennia. The discovery of these texts called into question the notion of canonical, religious truth. The hidden nature of the texts brings to mind the bookleggers from *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, hiding their inconvenient knowledge from those who disapprove of it. It hints at the nature of the Story of Eusa in *Riddley Walker*, as a story that entails multiple, multi-layered accounts. *The Gospel of Thomas* is also a work of Gnosticism, a belief system that suggests the world as it is known is an illusion. The illusory, multi-faceted nature of truth is hinted from before the start of *Riddley Walker*, and is part of the

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[143] Ibid.

[144] According to David Lake, 'The sense of the epigraph, probably, is that power should be mastered and humanized: it should not devour humanity. The politicians are "loathsome"; Riddley is "blessed".' David J. Lake, 'Making the Two One: Language and Mysticism in *Riddley Walker*', *Extrapolation*, 25 (1984), pp. 157-70 (p. 170).

[145] 'Thomas, Gospel Of', in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by W. R. F. Browning (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

way the novel depicts a post-modern, post-apocalyptic, mythemic network, that is never closed.

In *Riddley Walker*, the apocalyptic promise has failed. In Revelation, after destruction, there comes 'a new heaven and a new earth',[146] in which 'night shall be no more'.[147] In *Riddley Walker*, the golden age of the past is described as having 'day time all the time',[148] in mimicry of Revelation's heaven on earth. However, the power used to do this is that same power used to create 'the 1 Big 1' (the atomic bomb). This leads to destruction and 'nite for years on end.'[149] Apocalypse has failed, for this is no golden age but instead a mere repeat of the hubristic destruction of the Tower of Babel, or of Babylon, or of the casting out from Eden. Unable to find meaning in an ending, the characters of *Riddley Walker* look to the past, even as that quest backwards in time leads them closer and closer to the original sin of nuclear devastation. They find themselves literally mining the past out of the ground, as machinery and scrap is used as a resource. That this mining leads to the death of Riddley's father is a mythic prelude to the mining of metaphor and myth leading to the destruction of society. However, it is also in the earth that Riddley discovers a Punch and Judy puppet. He is confronted by the existence of a very real, but completely unreachable, past, and this sets him on his path of discovery.

As the references to the past become clearer to the reader, so too does the failure of the characters to understand history. This suggests a broader failure of the idea of history. The primary mythic basis of Riddley's world is the Eusa Story, which is eventually discovered to be based on the Legend of St Eustace. As John Canaday suggests in his discussion of this revelation:

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[146] Revelation 21.1.
[147] Revelation 22.5.
[148] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 19.
[149] Ibid.

> We feel simultaneous shocks of recognition—suddenly we can interpret with new confidence many of the references in "The Eusa Story" that had seemed mysterious to us ("Ah, so Eusa is St. Eustace!")—and discomfort, for we see the fragility of all acts of interpretation, including the thousands of basic, unspoken assumptions on which our lives depend.[150]

This irony has already been mentioned in relation to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, where the written artefacts of St Leibowitz (a shopping list and a circuit diagram) are used to question notions of religious faith, and Thon Taddeo Pfardentrott's belief that *R.U.R.* is a historical text is used to question notions of historical truth. This misunderstanding can also be seen alongside the example of the characters in *Fiskadoro* (1985),[151] who read a history of the atomic bombing of 1945 and imagine that it must, in fact, be a description of the bombing that has devastated their world. While, in this latter case, they actually are reading history and not fiction, it is still a history out of history, a history being read into the wrong time. In *Riddley Walker*, the effect is enhanced through the use of a fictional autobiographical form. A third person omniscient narrative would put the focus on describing Riddley's world to the reader, but the fictional autobiography puts an emphasis on Riddley's attempts to understand and explain the past; the mundane details of his present, which he takes for granted, are of little interest to him.[152] The effect is that Riddley's world is as difficult for the reader to make sense of as the past is for Riddley. *Riddley Walker* shows a 'distant mirror',[153] of a 'tragically irrecoverable past'.[154] The characters attempt to find meaning in the past, but that is an already fragile task.

As with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *Riddley Walker* is an archetypal text of the post-apocalyptic genre. The characters are split from the past by the same nuclear firebreak of

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[150] John Canaday, 'Physics in Fiction: "The Voice of the Dolphins" and *Riddley Walker*', in *The Nuclear Muse: Literature, Physics, and the First Atomic Bombs,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 227-49 (p. 243).
[151] Denis Johnson, *Fiskadoro*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
[152] Hoban is rather unfairly criticised for this technique as being against the project of science fiction, not that he ever claimed it was science fiction, by Mullen.
[153] Cowart, p. 77.
[154] Ibid. p. 81.

history and, unable to find meaning and hope in final closure, they instead look to the past and to the repetition of mythic cycles to find meaning in their lives. This past is half hidden, and half understood, and representative of a failure of closure in this post-apocalyptic world. This mythic framework is far more complex, however, than that offered by *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Mythemic Networks in *Riddley Walker*

The people of Inland have founded their understanding of the past on a myth, the Eusa Story. In this myth, Eusa builds machines of war for Mr Clevver, who decides that instead of 'fytin aul these Warrs', they should 'jus do 1 Big 1,' with '1 Big 1' being also a synonym for the atomic bomb. In a mythic retelling of the development of the bomb, Eusa is told that he 'mus fyn the Littl Shynin man the Addom'.[155] Eusa finds Addom, 'both Adam, the archetypal man, and the atom, the basic unit of matter',[156] between the antlers of a stag. He tears Addom in two and unleashes devastating nuclear war, a mythic allusion to Ernest Rutherford's splitting of the atom. After this, Addom tells Eusa he has to go through 'thay Nos. uv thay Master Chaynjis',[157] seemingly an allusion to mythic cycles of penitence that humanity must undertake after dropping the bomb. This Eusa Story is performed for the illiterate masses by roving puppeteers, Goodparley and Orfing, and then interpreted by a local *connexion man*, who is part-seer and part-theatre critic. The myth is multi-layered and mediated. The oral story changes, '[t]he shows are diffrent all the time thats how its meant to be [... since] a show is some thing youre doing right now in this here time weare living in'.[158] However, these oral stories are anchored by the privileged written story, as 'that story ben wrote time

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[155] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 30.
[156] Daniel C. Noel, 'The Nuclear Horror and the Hounding of Nature: Listening to Images', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 70 (1987), pp. 289-308 (p. 93).
[157] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 35.
[158] Ibid. p. 52.

back way back nor you cant change it no 1 never ever changit the story befor this.'[159] The

mythic, oral tale of Eusa is anchored in what they take to be unchanging written history.

History is still, however, heavily mediated, and therefore highly malleable. Goodparley does change the details of the Eusa story in his show, by having Eusa deny culpability, saying, 'If I hadnt some 1 else wudve done.'[160] As well as culturally connecting the world of Inland, Goodparley and Orfing also represent political and religious power. They are, respectively, the *Pry Mincer* and the *Wes Mincer*. Orfing's changes to the story are an attempt to wrest political control, and to set up a cultural acceptance of the redevelopment of science and technology; a science and technology that will inevitably lead to the redevelopment of the atomic bomb. Instead of any real history, Riddley's people have mythic narratives that have been constructed to political purposes. This places the importance and power of narrative at the centre, but then suggests that these narratives do not necessarily concord with any objective reality and, even if they did, this reality has been formed into a narrative that is constructed to political ends. To this end, the political powers of Inland have developed their own, apocryphal additions to the Eusa Story. In Goodparley's addition, a great flood comes as punishment for cutting off Eusa's head. Goodparley's story blames the ancestors of Lissener for the beheading.[161] However, Lissener has his own apocryphal story in which it is the ancestors of Goodparley that do the beheading.[162] The story of Eusa, while anchored with the written 'strait story',[163] is twisted and added to for political reasons. Control is intrinsic in the performance of the stories; like the Bible in medieval society, the Eusa Story is a 'controlled text',[164] which can only be possessed by 'the connexion men and

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[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid. p. 53.
[161] Ibid. p. 121.
[162] Ibid. pp. 81-3.
[163] Ibid. p. 20.
[164] Canaday, p. 241.

the Eusa show men', and could not be read by others in any case 'becaws no 1 else knows how to read.'[165] The mythic history is malleable, mediated and controlled.

The connection with history is further problematised by the revelation that even the written history is not a 'strait story', [166] and that the decontextualised objects of the past have been placed in a mythic structure in order to imbue them with meaning. Riddley's revelation comes when he realises that even the written Eusa Story is questionable, as Goodparley explains to him that it is based on the ancient tale of St Eustace.[167] The Eusa Story is a '[p]alimpsest'.[168] However, while structurally based on this myth, the characters and symbols have been decontextualised and replaced with symbols understood by Riddley's people. In the Legend of St Eustace, Jesus appears in between the antlers of a stag. Riddley's people, however, have no cultural concept of who Jesus is, so the Littl Shyning man the Addom appears as messianic prophet. The decontextualised past has been broken apart, and then fitted back together into an existing mythic structure. Mr Clevver, a signifier of the military-industrial complex that developed the atomic bomb, has replaced the Roman Emperor Trajan of the earlier tale. St Eustace was originally a Roman general, but Eusa is a scientist in a world where science is a weapon of war. Destruction of the world, making Eusa a scapegoat, has replaced the personal destruction of St Eustace within a brazen bull, which made him a martyr. The apportionment of blame, of martyrdom or scapegoat-ery, is a continuing battle waged within the mythic landscape of *Riddley Walker*, as diminishing responsibility for the

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[165] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 29.
[166] Ibid. p. 20.
[167] Ibid. pp. 123-4.
[168] Martin L. Warren, 'Notes and Correspondence: Riddley Walker as Palimpsest', *Science Fiction Studies*, 34 (2007) <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/notes/notes101/notes101.html> [accessed 3 May 2013].

past increases the chance of cultural acceptance of the rediscovery of the '1 littl 1', gunpowder.[169]

Riddley and Goodparley develop an understanding of the constructed nature of these myths, as Goodparley acknowledges that '[w]ho ever this bloak wer what wrote our *Eusa Story* he connectit his self to this here Legend or dyergam'.[170] That is, they acknowledge at least a partial author, who has inserted himself into a pre-existing story. This suggestion that the Eusa myth is already a political construction is what makes Goodparley feel able to twist the myth of Eusa to his own ends. Of course, the reader is likely to be even more sceptical about the provenance of this original Legend of St Eustace, and understand that the summary is a relatively modern description of an ancient myth. The *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* even refers to the Legend of St Eustace as 'historically worthless'.[171] Even the written history of Riddley's people is constructed, distorted and disconnected from Riddley's contemporary world.

The Eusa story is further connected with a broader, mythical, cyclical landscape. As has already been stated, the 'historically worthless' myth of Eustace is not a pure, original story, having instead its own complicated relationship with other myths and stories. For instance, much of the myth was recycled into the story of St Hubert.[172] As the stag is symbolically important in the Celtic world, St Eustace also likely borrows this symbol from earlier, pre-Christian myths. The apocryphal additions of the talking head to the story of Eusa, by both Lissener and Goodparley,[173] further connects it with the Welsh tale of Bran the

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[169] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 188.
[170] Ibid. p. 127.
[171] David Hugh Farmer, 'Eustace', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints,* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 171.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, pp. 82, 121. John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia,* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006).

Blessed, whose talking head supposedly protects England from French invasion.[174] The talking heads are signs of the division between the rational mind and the compassionate heart,[175] with the sacrifice of the heart being clear in '*The Hart of the Wood*'. In the *Mabinogi*, where the myth of Bran is written, Bran's sister, Gwern, is burnt to death in a fire.[176] St Eustace and his family are 'roasted to death in a brazen bull.'[177] In *Riddley Walker*, the story of '*The Hart of the Wood*' includes 'old 1s' being burnt to death.[178] This, according to Riddley, is 'why theywl tel you the aulder tree is bes for charring coal',[179] because 'aulder' sounds like 'old'. In a circular mythical allusion, the myth of Bran is also associated with the aulder tree, with Gwern translatable as 'aulder' and with the topmost branch of the tree known as the 'head of Bran' in British folklore.[180] The talking heads of Bran and of Eusa are also reminiscent of the myth of Orpheus, and the concept of the talking head directly connected with Riddley in a short, comic rhyme told about him.[181] Orpheus's wife dies in a nest of snakes, precipitating Orpheus' quest into the Underworld. In *Riddley Walker*, Lissener describes 'some poasyum' in which the 'Eusa folk', who hold the secrets to recreate the atomic bomb, 'get all in a tangl sliding and sqwirming and ryving to gether [...] skin to skin' like a 'nes of snakes'.[182] The figurative nest of snakes into which the past has fallen is scientific progress unguided by wisdom. Furthermore, Orpheus's journey through the underworld is mimicked by Riddley's journey through the dead heart of Cambry, stalked by

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[174]   James   MacKillop,   'Mabinogi',   in   *A   Dictionary   of   Celtic   Mythology* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609674.001.0001/acref-9780198609674-e-3102?rskey=NmnfyS&result=2&q=mabinogi> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[175] This separation is laid out by David Cowart. Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*. It also forms one of the many signs of division and reunification.
[176] MacKillop.
[177] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 124.
[178] Ibid. p. 4.
[179] Ibid.
[180] The name Bran can also be translated as 'raven' or 'crow', which may be, perhaps tenuously, linked to the symbolic   use   of   the   crow   in   Hoban's   book.   Koch;   *Riddley   Walker   Annotations*, <http://www.graphesthesia.com/rw/index.html> [accessed 13 November 2008].
[181] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 63.
[182] Ibid. p. 107.

the ghostly 'wite shadder[s]'.[183] The myths of *Riddley Walker* are not discrete stories; they connect to, reflect and reinforce each other, each cycle snowballing with meaning. The tale of Riddley is also drawn into this mythic landscape, which then further connects with and alludes to myths outside of this fictional world.

In this way, *Riddley Walker* portrays the cyclical structure of myths, as laid out in Claude Lévi-Strauss's 'The Structural Study of Myth'.[184] Lévi-Strauss suggests that, in a similar way to language, myths are constructed of individual units he calls mythemes,[185] and that these gain meaning 'only in the way these elements are combined.'[186] As is already clear, in *Riddley Walker*, the structure of myths remains, even as mythemic elements are changed. Jesus being replaced with Addom is one example used above. Lévi-Strauss suggests that myths create meaning through a repetition of mythemes, and this repetition is just as important as any linear narrative. Cyclical time is intrinsic to this mythic space. In language, meaning is created by synchronic relationships; that is, the relationships of words as they exist now. Diachronic analysis, conversely, is the study of how words change over time. Mythemic analysis, Lévi-Strauss claims, must be simultaneously diachronic and synchronic. Myths find their meaning not just through their relationships now, but the way those elements have changed over time. According to Lévi-Strauss, 'There is no single "true" version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth.'[187]

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[183] Ibid. p. 76. These are the silhouettes burnt into concrete of people killed by the nuclear explosion, similar to those marks left in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
[184] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1968), pp. 206-31.
[185] Ibid. p. 211.
[186] Ibid. p. 210.
[187] Ibid. p. 218.

There are, in *Riddley Walker*'s terms, no 'strait storys'.[188] All variations are equally important and vital in creating meaning.

Mythemes exist in a linear relationship in the story while also relating to earlier and later iterations of the same mytheme. Therefore, they simultaneously form cycles. They also have a relationship to different versions of the same stories. Lévi-Strauss suggests analysing myths by using cards for mythemes, grouped in columns by theme and layered by variations. While an exhaustive, and exhausting, analysis of *Riddley Walker* is not demonstrated here, the novel does yield to an attempt, to some extent. However, the recursive nature of the text makes the analysis extremely difficult. *Riddley Walker* is a mythic tale involving characters that tell mythic tales, many of which are variants of each other, and many of which allude to even more variants outside of the fiction.

Through its allusion to reiterative myth, *Riddley Walker* suggests a mythemic network that is infinite. The character of the '*clevver* looking man' in the '*Hart of the Wood*' tale may well allude to 'Rumpelstiltskin'.[189] The taking of children features prominently in both *Riddley Walker* and 'Rumpelstiltskin'. The clevver man of the '*Hart of the Wood*' myth in *Riddley Walker*, for instance, is a trickster who gives the gift of fire in exchange for the heart of a child, in reiteration of the mythic themes of short-sighted *hubris* bringing about a cannibalistic consumption of children. Both include heavy use of rhyme. Both are based on the importance of language and naming. The novel opens with Riddley's 'naming day',[190] Rumpelstiltskin is destroyed by his name, and Goodparley tries to dissect language to find the

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[188] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 20.
[189] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Grimm's Fairy Stories* <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11027/11027-h/11027-h.htm#rumpelstiltskin> [accessed 3 May 2013]; Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, pp. 2-3.
[190] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 1.

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meaning of the world and claims that words can 'move things', and that '[t]heywl fetch.'[191]

Both stories also include a focus on alchemy. In *Riddley Walker*, it is the Littl Shynin Man who engages in the genuine alchemical transmutation of nuclear science,[192] while Rumpelstiltskin similarly spins straw into gold in a kind of alchemy. They are both also torn in two in a frustrated tantrum.[193] Rumpelstiltskin, further, has its own pedigree, its own variations, and the dissection and iteration of variant myths can be continued indefinitely.[194]

Riddley Walker connects its own narrative with an infinite, authorless mythic network, portraying cycles within cycles of myth, reiterating mythemic motifs both internally and externally. Once unlatched, the external connections with myth are, essentially, endless. Relying, as it does, on the effort of the reader, it is unclear even which allusions have been placed by the author, and which have been spontaneously read into existence. While the post-structuralist critic Roland Barthes famously demands the 'death of the author',[195] this novel, despite its obviously heavily constructed form, attempts to deny its own authorship. With this loss of the god-author, there also comes a loss of assumptions of purpose and structure that the god-author implies,[196] following on from the assumptions of Smith. The novel connects to a network of thought that is vast, and the edges of that book disappear into mythemic space. The novel subverts Henry James's claim that '[r]eally, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the

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[191] Ibid. p. 122.
[192] While it may well be a stretch, the statement by the clevver looking bloke in the *Heart of the Wood* that, 'Fires my middl name you myt say', could connect him, in this mythic cycle, with the Littl Shynin Man, whose middle name is 'Shynin'.
[193] However, later editions of the Grimm retelling of 'Rumpelstiltskin' change this brutal ending.
[194] While very outdated, an interesting discussion of the way the story has existed in almost endless variance can be found in A.W. T. and Edward Clodd, 'The Philosophy of Rumpelstiltskin', *The Folk-Lore Journal,* 7 (1889), pp. 135-63.
[195] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 1466-70.
[196] This point will be returned to in Chapter Four.

circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.'[197] Here, the infinite nature of structural relations is made plain, and closure subverted through connection to an infinite mythemic structure.

Not only does *Riddley Walker* deny the possibility of connecting with historical truth through mythemic obfuscation, but it suggests that truth is also dangerous. As in many post-apocalyptic stories, in *Riddley Walker*, science becomes a symbol for *hubris*, and inevitable destruction; it suggests those other mythic stories of pride and of knowledge begetting the fall, such as the Tower of Babel, or Prometheus's stealing of fire, which also bears a loose similarity to *Riddley Walker*'s the '*Hart of the Wood*', or the story of Eden.[198] Eden, specifically, is directly referenced by Riddley when he says, 'In the stanning and the moving is the tree. Pick the appel off it. Hang the man on it. Out of the holler of it comes the berning chyld.'[199] The tree, possibly the Tree of Knowledge in the story of Eden, is associated with Inland's own myths of knowledge leading to the fiery death of children, as recounted in the '*Hart of the Wood*'.[200] The '*Hart of the Wood*' is one of the many stories in the novel that warn against *hubris*. It involves the trading of a child for fire. The child's parents, however, are then consumed by that very same fire. In Riddley's statement, the child is born out of the tree, but is born also burning. The suggestion of original sin is reinforced when Riddley wonders whether 'the wrongness ben the 1st frute of the tree.'[201] As in *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* original sin implies a failure of closure, for the destruction has not wiped the slate

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[197] Henry James, 'Preface to "Roderick Hudson"', in *The Art of the Novel,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 3-19 (p. 5).

[198] It is always interesting to note that, in the story of Eden, Adam and Eve eat from the 'Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil'; however, it seems that, more often than not, this name is shortened to simply the 'Tree of Knowledge', which has the effect, however un-deliberate, of allowing the story to be used as a simple metaphor for science gone awry.

[199] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 161. Taylor also makes this connection with the Tree of Knowledge. Nancy Taylor, "... You Bes Go Ballsy': *Riddley Walker*'s Prescription for the Future', *Critique,* 31 (1989), pp. 27-39 (p. 31).

[200] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, pp. 2-4.

[201] Ibid. p. 162.

clean and has not led to true rebirth. The tendency to sin remains. As in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the original sin of Riddley's world is not the eating of a fruit, but instead the creation of the atomic bomb. The power of the atomic bomb is always everywhere, in the fundamental make-up of all matter. As the Littl Shyning Man the Addom makes clear, one can find him 'on the water lyk [...] in the stoan [and, in fact,] enne wayr'.[202] Jacques Derrida writes at some length to argue that the Humanities will be one of the irrecoverable victims of nuclear holocaust, since nuclear war will likely involve the 'total destruction of the basis of literature',[203] and one of the assumptions of Derridean deconstruction is that literature has no referent outside itself. Therefore, to destroy the literary archive is to destroy the possibility of anything called literature. While it may not at first seem relevant, the inverted corollary of this observation is that science, being founded on an objective reality external to itself, is immune to apocalypse. Scientific knowledge may be destroyed, but the objective reality on which it is based will not be. From this, knowledge may sprout again.

Patrick Mannix, who sees the novel as a text against nuclear war,[204] agrees with the importance of this concept in the novel. As he claims:

> Since the power of the atom is a constant principle of physics, man's capacity for nuclear weapons can never really be eradicated; even if we could succeed in ridding the world of these weapons, they could always be redeveloped since the secret of how they are made is a constant that can either be preserved or rediscovered.[205]

If atomic power is sin, then sin is the potential of all matter, before even the first human. It is 'the 1st frute'. It is this same potential for destruction implicit in all matter, and 'hidden [...] by the thinnest of veils',[206] that haunts H.G. Wells' *The World Set Free*, but is therein turned

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[202] Ibid. p. 35.
[203] Derrida, Porter, and Lewis, p. 26.
[204] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, (Lewisburg; London; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 27.
[205] Ibid. p. 85.
[206] Wells, p. 3.

to redemptive purposes. However, in *Riddley Walker*, the apocalyptic promise is always doomed to fail, for rebirth brings with it a rebirth of the seeds of destruction.

These suggestions also distort Orfing's apparently inspirational quotation about the hope for rebirth: '[T]heres hoap of a tree if its cut down yet itwl sprout agen.'[207] Life will 'sprout agen' after destruction. If the Tree of Knowledge bears the fruits of destruction, then the hope of the tree to be reborn is possibly a dangerous one. Culture and science will be reborn, but with them will come a rebirth of this original sin; rebirth is never truly a complete break from the past. Orfing's statement becomes even more sinister when it is identified as almost a direct quote of Job 14:7-9,[208] for that quotation continues on, stating that although the tree may sprout back to life, 'man dies, and is laid low; man breathes his last [...] and rises not again'.[209] Therefore, 'Job's bitterness is antithetical to the political triumphalism Orfing extracts from his slogan'.[210] This is made clear to Orfing:

> After witnessing his hevvys' bombing of the Eusa Folk and learning from Riddley that Goodparley and Granser have blown themselves to bits in the moment of their teckernogical breakthrough with the 1 Littl 1, [that is, the re-creation of gunpowder, the 1 Littl 1, has led to a terminal explosion] Orfing yields to despair. [... H]e sees that the will to power is thwarted by the very chaos it breeds and that his own hours as master are numbered. As he and Riddley exhange horror stories at Cambry, Orfing abjectly recants his Joban go word: "Riddley dyou think theres hoap of any thing?" (198)[211]

Even Orfing realises the meaning hidden in deep in the roots of his devastated language. David Huisman's reading further suggests St Eustace's trials mirror those of Job. Since St Eustace is the basis of the Eusa Story, this reinforces the need to consider the expanded Biblical quote. The apocalyptic promise of closure is subverted in *Riddley Walker*, and

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[207] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 176.
[208] 'For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant.'
[209] Job 14. 10-12.
[210] David Huisman, "Hoap of a Tree' in *Riddley Walker*', *Christianity and Literature,* 43 (1994), pp. 347-73 (p. 374).
[211] Ibid. pp. 364-5.

simple meaning cannot be found in it, for humanity is doomed to death, and to rebirth still tainted with original sin.

When Addom suggests that he is everywhere, this could be taken as a symbol of material power. This quotation then suggests the ubiquity of nuclear power. However, he is actually paraphrasing a statement from the *Gospel of Thomas* about the ubiquity of spiritual power: 'Split a piece of wood: I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there.'[212] This reinforces the colocation of spiritual and temporal power already suggested by Addom, as he is both the figure of Jesus from the original Legend of St Eustace and the symbol of the atomic bomb, both the first man (Adam) and the end of humanity (the atomic bomb). The 'cross of radiant light',[213] for instance, is depicted in the Eusa myth as one 'isomorphic with the diagram of nuclear explosion'.[214] This connection is made by Goodparley, who suggests that the 'radiant light' is the same as 'radiating lite or radiation'.[215] This confusion between spiritual and material energy is also made by Riddley when he suggests that the 'Spirit of God may be that same what woosht roun the Power Ring time back way back.'[216]Addom is consistently a symbol of splitting and doubling, with the mythic goal of Riddley's people to put the two back into one.[217] This may be read as a reuniting of spiritual and temporal power, and of holding science to moral account. Here lies the importance of guilt and scapegoating that also threads throughout the novel, as Eusa, the people of the Ram, the Eusa people, and the *chard coal burners* are variously scapegoated. By avoiding guilt and responsibility for the previous holocaust, it becomes possible to resurrect technological power without the guiding principles of morality. Rather than reuniting technology and spirituality, the myths are read as

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[212] *Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 77.
[213] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 123.
[214] Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992). Such a diagram can be found in Christopher and Hogg Chant, Ian, *Nuclear War in the 1980's?*, (New York: Harper, 1983), p. 139.
[215] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 127.
[216] Ibid. p. 158.
[217] As is discussed extensively in Lake.

recipes for the recreation of science. This is seen as the lynchpin of the recreation of past glories. The people of Inland do not understand how doomed a recreation would be. This may be why Riddley senses that 'THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER.'[218] Not only is Inland unable to find a direct connection with history, with objective truth, or with some overriding grand narrative, the concern is that a discovery would be destructive. Huisman declares that Job, Eustace and Riddley all come finally to an acceptance of 'NO POWER'.[219] Riddley's acceptance will be explored further later in this chapter, and is tied to his acceptance of multiple narrative truths. As Huisman makes clear, 'the HOAP OF A TREE that Job despaired of is offered to those who do not shirk the Drop John riding on their backs—the double burden of humanity's first disobedience and fall, and of responsibility for friend and foe.'[220] The Drop John, which Riddley accepts, is the symbol of guilt. By accepting guilt, by denying power, and by accepting multiple narrative truths, Riddley is opening up the possibility of rebirth for his people:

> [Riddley] refuses to embrace the re-ascendant mythology of violence and opts instead for creativity and intellectual playfulness [...] out of the chaos surrounding him, he constructs a way of being human, a personal mythology, an original "pattern-that-connects," in anthropologist Gregory Bateson's term[.][221]

Post-apocalyptic worlds deny simple, linear, historical time, and with them notions of grand narratives, progress and closure, and the sense of meaning that these notions imply. In this example, *Riddley Walker*'s world is founded on a mythemic network. Due to the nuclear holocaust, the characters of *Riddley Walker* can find no meaning in an ending, so they look to the past; however, history is obscured from them by this same nuclear holocaust. They attempt to connect with myth through the Eusa Story. This story is heavily mediated, layered

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[218] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 167.
[219] Huisman, p. 366.
[220] Ibid. p. 367.
[221] Millicent Lenz, '*Danger Quotient*, *Fiskadoro*, *Riddley Walker*, and the Failure of the Campbellian Monomyth', in *Science Fiction for Young Readers,* ed. by C.W. Sullivan (Westport: Greenwood, 1993), pp. 113-21.

and highly malleable, and twisted to political ends. Even the written story on which it is based is not a straight story, but instead part of a broader mythic network. This network is centreless, authorless, and non-linear. It is infinite. While Inland attempts to connect with this mythic world in order to find meaning, meaning is fluid and ambiguous.

Historiographic Metafiction and Closure

Linda Hutcheon, in an almost throwaway claim, alludes to *Riddley Walker*'s particular connection (and disconnection) with the past, when she proposes that the novel is a work of historiographic metafiction.[222] Despite the general acknowledgement of the post-modern nature of *Riddley Walker*, and the post-modern nature of post-apocalypse, there has surprisingly been no methodical analysis of Hutcheon's claim about *Riddley Walker*. Doing so allows a further understanding the novel's problematised connection with the past, and the way that this is part of a broader failure of narrative and closure. Historiographic metafictions, Hutcheon suggests, are 'novels that are intensely self-reflective but that also re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge.'[223] The text involves 'an acknowledgement of limitation as well as power' of knowledge of the past.[224] The power of the past is symbolised by Riddley's desperate search for spiritual and temporal understanding among the rubble, its limitations by Riddley's failure to understand. Historiographic metafictions, as metafictions, draw attention to their own fictive nature, but their inclusion of historiographic elements then brings into doubt the very possibility of historical truth, by making clear the 'important parallels between the processes

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[222] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 58. Brian McHale, conversely, suggests that *Riddley Walker* is 'not historical or historiographic at all in any normally accepted sense of these terms, unless we choose to think of [it ...] as [a history ...] of the future'. Brian McHale, 'Postmodernism, or the Anxiety of Master Narratives', *Diacritics,* 22 (1992), pp. 17-33 (p. 21). He then continues to claim that, under that definition, all science fiction is historiographic metafiction.
[223] Linda Hutcheon, 'The Pastime of Past Time', *Genre,* 20 (1987), pp. 285-305 pp. 285-6).
[224] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 58.

of history-writing and fiction-writing [and ...] their common assumptions about narrative and [...] mimetic representation.'[225] Historiographic metafictions are, according to Hutcheon, an archetype of post-modern literature. In *Riddley Walker*, a world is created in which the characters can truly never know the '"ultimate objects" of the past',[226] and where the past can be nothing but '*discursive*'.[227] The nuclear firebreak has left the past unknowable, even as the characters are driven to search the past for meaning and purpose in this world where closure has been denied.

More broadly, the problematic relationship with history in *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* creates a mythic world that is both post-apocalyptic and post-modern. The post-apocalyptic and the post-modern are closely related, and are both expressions of a sense of loss of structure, a lack of a grand narrative, and a general failure of meaning in the latter half of the twentieth century and onwards. The post-apocalyptic is an expression of those same concerns that are integral to the post-modern condition. These are the troubled relationship with narrative and meaning, and also a failed schismatic break from that past. Nineteen forty-five is sometimes given as the dawn of post-modernism, just as it is a significant moment in the rise of post-apocalyptic literature. As the year the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 1945 is the crisis point of modernity and progress. If post-modernism arises at the same time as post-apocalyptic literature becomes significant, and if post-modernism arises out of many of the same events and concerns, then it becomes possible that the post-modern era, at least metaphorically, is post-apocalyptic. The Second World War, in this model, becomes the final destructive dissolution of modernism, of the Enlightenment and of progress. As Berger points out, the apocalyptic destruction of the

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[225] Ibid.
[226] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, (Cambridge: Routledge, 1988), p. 24.
[227] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

Holocaust becomes a 'revelatory, traumatic, apocalyptic fulcrum of the twentieth century.[228] It is not a completely schismatic break from the past. The post-apocalyptic implies not an ending, but a failure of endings, and a problematized relationship with that past. Therefore, post-apocalyptic literature expresses post-modern concerns and ideas through its post-apocalyptic content and structure; this hypothesis is borne out through the texts studied in this thesis, most convincingly in *Riddley Walker*.

A thorough engagement with post-modern culture would distract from the study of closure. However, Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction can be used as a way of exploring the disconnection with history and the failure of closure, supplemented by Jean-François Lyotard's theories of *The Postmodern Condition*.[229] Lyotard suggests that post-modernism is characterised by the 'disappearance of [the...] idea of progress',[230] and the resulting 'crisis of narratives'.[231] More broadly, post-modernism challenges any ultimate, final meanings; specifically, post-modernism challenges 'institutions', 'boundaries',[232] 'value', 'order', 'meaning', 'control', 'identity',[233] 'closure', 'originality',[234] 'autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, center, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin,'[235] and any type of 'master narrative'.[236] In order to question these, post-modern art must first embrace, and then under cut them. It must first centre, and then de-centre. The discussions of *Riddley Walker*

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[228] James Berger, 'Introduction: Twentieth-Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 46 (2000), pp. 387-95 (p. 391).
[229] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
[230] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Defining the Postmodern', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002), pp. 1612-15 (pp. 1612-13). This quotation refers specifically to certain post-modern architecture, but is useful in thinking about all post-modernity.
[231] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiii.
[232] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 9.
[233] Ibid. p. 13.
[234] Ibid. p. 23.
[235] Ibid. p. 57.
[236] Ibid. p. 6.

and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* have already explored the way those texts, as exemplars of the post-apocalyptic genre, highlight the importance of the concepts of history, progress, closure, continuity and teleology. They do this by their literal rendition of endings, and by their depiction of quests to find meaning in the past and to find ultimate closure or to recreate progress. However, they simultaneously undercut the possibility of ever truly having meaning or closure, or of accessing historical truth, by placing a nuclear firebreak in the path of history and reverting to a model of cyclical, mythic time. Hutcheon claims that 'the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted';[237] post-apocalyptic fictions, then, depict a world where the referent is destroyed, where access to the past is limited, and where the mapping of signs to signifiers breaks down. Post-apocalyptic fictions create worlds where Hutcheon's suggestions about history are necessarily, physically (within the fictional world) the case. This mythic time, as well as the mediation of these myths through performance and through the *connexion men* in *Riddley Walker* also denies originality, uniqueness, origin and authorship, as all myths are developed from preceding myths, and places the characters into a world that is ambiguous and uncertain.

Post-apocalyptic worlds are, both physically and culturally, worlds where the past has been broken apart, disconnected and then pieced back together. This act of *bricolage* inherent in post-apocalyptic worlds is another suggestion of a post-modern world, where items are decontextualised, made devoid of their status, and then reconstructed in new forms. The post-apocalyptic world is one in which the past is available only as a random pastiche. This is reminiscent of Fredric Jameson's suggestion of history being available only through 'our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach'.[238] As

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[237] Ibid. p. 122.
[238] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London; New York: Verso, 1991), p. 118.

mentioned above, cities in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* are 'built mostly of rubble from another age'.[239] More intriguingly, the hill people of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* use electrical wires as jewellery, but they consider them to be '"parts of the body of the god"—of the fabled *Machina analytica*, hailed as the wisest of their gods. By swallowing one of them, a shaman could acquire "Infallibility," they said. He certainly acquired Indisputability'.[240] Here, a simple piece of wire, now decontextualised, becomes a shard of godhood, suggesting that there is nothing intrinsic or essential in these states. Instead, they are defined by their structural connections with the world. These acts of post-apocalyptic *bricolage* are most apparent in visual texts, and can be seen in the cricket pads used as armour in *Mad Max 2* (1981),[241] the bizarre pieced-together landscape of *The Bedsitting Room* (1969),[242] and the diesel-punk retro future of the *Fallout* computer games wherein bottle tops have been turned into currency and attained value.[243] The novel *Fiskadoro* similarly offers such a world, in which 'floats the debris of our civilization, stray bits of matter that have penetrated like germs, or seeds, into the novel's zone.'[244] Post-apocalyptic *bricolage*, like the devastated landscapes from the reader's time, and the decontextualised languages of post-apocalyptic fictions, engages the sense of *Unheimlich*, the uncanny notion of the familiar being unfamiliar. These things allow the reader to see their own world anew, which can be comic, enlightening or disconcerting. This 'is the familiar science fictional pattern of a partial recognition of our reality, but with sufficient alternativity to render the effect of

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[239] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 103.
[240] Ibid. pp. 20-21.
[241] George Miller, dir., *Mad Max 2*. Australia: Warner Bros, 1981.
[242] Richard Lester, dir., *The Bed Sitting Room*. UK, 1969.
[243] *Fallout 2: A Post Nuclear Role Playing Game*. Interplay. 1998. [on CD-ROM]; *Fallout 3: Collector's Edition*. Prima Games. 2008. [on DVD-ROM]; *Fallout: A Post Nuclear Role Playing Game*. Interplay Productions. 1997. [on CD-ROM].
[244] Eva Hoffman, 'Postapocalyptic Fasotral', *The New York Times,* (4 April 1985) <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/07/09/specials/johnson-fiskadoro.html> [accessed 4 May 2013].

defamiliarisation, or what Darko Suvin with particular reference to science fiction calls "cognitive estrangment".'[245]

The case for the connection between post-modernism and nuclear anxiety is convincingly made by Daniel Cordle, who argues that nuclear anxiety is better represented in a 'range of post-modernist texts' rather than in 'nuclear disaster fiction.'[246] He cites, for example, the direct reference to the nuclear threat in:

> Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age* (1985) [...] E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), Don DeLillo's *End Zone* (1972), Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977), Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) [... and] Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977).[247]

Cordle sees these texts as displaying a 'generally muted [...] more accurate depiction of the Cold War mentality'.[248] Cordle argues that post-modern literature is particularly suited to dealing with nuclear anxiety because of:

> [P]ostmodern concern with the charged connections between language and reality [which] takes on further significance in an anxious nuclear age, for a world that no one has experienced, and that exists only in words, can suddenly and terribly come to pass, negating everyday experience.[249]

Moreover, Cordle sees a connection between nuclear anxiety and post-modernism because of the lack of resolution of fear during the Cold War.[250] Very broadly, Tony Jackson makes similar connections between post-modernism and the possible nuclear destruction of the Cold War.[251] This connection between the lack of resolution of post-modernism and the world in the throes of nuclear threat once again reiterates the problem of closure. Rather than an ending, the Cold War provided a churn of anxiety. This chapter argues a similar connection

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[245] Peter Stockwell, *The Poetics of Science Fiction: Textual Explorations*, (Harlow: Longman-Pearson, 2000), p. 61.
[246] Daniel Cordle, 'Beyond the Apocalypse of Closure: Nuclear Anxiety in Postmodern Literature of the United States', in *Cold War Literature,* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 63-77 (pp. 65-6).
[247] Ibid. p. 66.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid. p. 73.
[250] Ibid. p. 75.
[251] See Tony Jackson, 'Postmodernism, Narrative, and the Cold War Sense of an Ending', *Narrative,* 8 (2000), pp. 324-38.

between post-modernism and nuclear anxiety as Cordle, but inverts it, suggesting that texts of apocalyptic disaster display this same lack of resolution, and also a general concern with language. Post-modernism is very well suited to dealing with the possibility of a post-apocalyptic world, but then the post-apocalyptic world is itself post-modern.

Post-modernism is often seen as schismatic, and has been described as apocalyptic by numerous scholars. As mentioned in the Introduction, James Berger mentions the 'apocalyptic tropes and sensibilities largely inflect the broad philosophical/theoretical/cultural and historical orientations grouped under the terms *postmodernism* and *poststructuralism*.'[252] Berger points to postmodernist literature which has a focus 'on some revelatory catastrophe whose traumatic force reshapes all that preceded it and all that follows.'[253] The idea of post-modernism as apocalyptic is supported by Jameson, who calls post-modernism 'an inverted millenarianism' informed by 'senses of the end of this and that (the end of ideology, of art, or social class…)'.[254] Post-modernism is certainly obsessed with endings, using and abusing 'self-consciously multiple endings [...] or resolutely arbitrary closure'.[255] However, by their nature, these kinds of endings are not so much apocalyptic as post-apocalyptic. As argued previously, the apocalyptic is narrative, it is endings, it is ultimate, universal and finite truth. The post-modern is the subversion of this. The post-modern is the failure of endings, the questioning of narrative, the subversion of meaning. The post-modern is post-apocalyptic, not apocalyptic. The post-modern, like the post-apocalyptic, is not schismatic. It is not a complete break with the past, and it does not believe in complete breaks. A complete break would imply a teleology, a grand narrative, or progress of some kind towards some final point. Grand narratives are schismatic, believing in ultimate goals that are timeless and

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[252] Berger, p. 392. Emphasis in original
[253] Ibid.
[254] Jameson, p. 1.
[255] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 59.

beyond history. Grand narratives believe in an end of history, and ultimate meaning. Post-modernism doubts these. Similarly, the post-apocalyptic demands an engagement with the past, and is often built literally out of the past. Post-apocalyptic texts, like post-modernism, engage in a constant churn of the past. The past is something to be constantly re-engaged with, but this engagement denies an ultimate purpose or goal.

Post-apocalyptic fiction is, broadly, a field that tends towards historiographic metafiction, and that implicitly explores post-modern themes. This is clearly true of *Riddley Walker*, which is often described as post-modern. However, other post-apocalyptic works, such as *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, clearly express similar concerns and possibilities, even though it is highly unusual to hear this novel described as an exemplar of post-modernism. The themes dealt with in post-apocalyptic fiction, and the tools used to deal with them, can be described as inherently post-modern. Both post-modern art and post-apocalyptic literature deal with the sense of the failure of meaning and closure, and of the repercussions of being part of a species that may simply auto-destruct.

Post-modernism, according to Jean-François Lyotard, is a condition caused by the uncertain state of knowledge in the twentieth century.[256] If, as Lyotard demonstrates, in the post-modern world knowledge is legitimated through narrative,[257] meaning must also be tied to narrative. Post-apocalyptic worlds, which deny endings and narrative, therefore intrinsically problematise meaning and knowledge. As Lyotard describes, knowledge has traditionally been in narrative form, with various narratives legitimating themselves through their own systems of knowledge. As scientific progress has cast doubt on these narrative systems as myths, progress has also revealed itself to be a grand narrative and science

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[256] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.
[257] See ibid.

legitimated only by recourse to this grand narrative.[258] While accepting the problematic nature of narrative forms of knowledge, post-modernism further contends that science is merely a narrative form of knowledge. Post-modernism, in Lyotard's view, demonstrates a shift towards a non-absolutist view of knowledge, whereby epistemologies are mixed-and-matched according to their usefulness. The post-modern condition is self-aware and understands the illogical nature of holding concurrent and contradictory epistemologies. Post-modern art, in Hutcheon's view, is one of constant engagement with these ideas. Post-modernism centralises the importance of knowledge, while suggesting its impossibility. Therefore, a cyclical, obsessive, never-resolved engagement with these ideas is an important feature of post-modernism. These features can also be seen at work in *Riddley Walker*, where different forms of knowledge, particularly mythic and scientific, compete against each other and are used to different ends by different factions. Knowledge is, for instance, a political tool, wielded by Goodparley and Orfing. Post-apocalyptic literature similarly denies the value of scientific knowledge, for, unfettered, this knowledge will result in destruction.

Post-modernism suggests a crisis of meaning, but that is not to say that it is inherently meaningless. Its questioning of everything is not nihilistic, but all-embracing. Everything is equally questioned, and therefore equally valid. Postmodernist questioning does not claim 'either/or' but 'both/and'.[259] In order to question, post-modernism must install. It must centre grand narratives in order to engage with them. Rather than denying any particular form of knowledge, escape in these fictions comes with an embrace of multiple forms of narrative knowledge. The escape of the Catholic Church in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a unification of forms of spiritual and scientific knowledge. Riddley's final resolution, similarly, is not to deny the import of other narratives. He does not deny the Eusa Story, and the scientific

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[258] Ibid. p. xxiii.
[259] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 49.

knowledge of the development of gunpowder is explosively vindicated. What he does do is reintroduce a new narrative, the narrative of the Punch and Judy show. This show is important firstly because it offers a counter to the politically enforced Eusa Story, one that highlights the theme of child-eating that is synonymous with responsibility to the future, promoting a culture of responsibility. Riddley, claims Huisman, 'senses the old show's subversive value.'[260] This theme of responsibility is further embodied in 'Drop John the Foller Man',[261] a ghost that haunts Punch is the show and, metaphorically, Riddley himself as 'Drop Johns ryding on his back.'[262] It also contains the first hints of political satire, as punning tendencies of Riddley's people are used to associate Mr Clevver with the 'Pry Mincer of Binland'.[263] Therefore, the Punch and Judy Show speaks to power, and suggests an alternative. More importantly, however, is that it does not make any claim to historical truth. The story is a fiction. Riddley moves from being the first diarist, to the first writer of fiction. What separates fiction from the rigid mytho-history enforced by the Ram is that fiction denies any claim to its own absoluteness, or objectivity. The narrative knowledge found through fiction, while a valid attempt to understand the world, does not displace any other attempts. Riddley's Punch and Judy shows, therefore, do not simply undercut the Eusa Show specifically, but they alternatively demonstrate an acceptance of the multiplicity of meaning. There is no final, authoritative text. As Jack Branscomb states, 'At the end of the novel, he [Riddley] is still on the road, walking and looking for answers to the unsolvable riddles of sin and guilt.'[264] Rather than fighting a post-modern world of uncertain meaning, Riddley accepts and embraces it. This acceptance is cyclical, unsurprisingly, for Lorna Elswint makes clear

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[260] Huisman, p. 368.
[261] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 139.
[262] Ibid. p. 220.
[263] Ibid. p. 137.
[264] Jack Branscomb, 'The Quest for Wholeness in the Fiction of Russell Hoban', *Critique,* 28 (1986), pp. 29-38 (p. 33).

near the beginning of the novel, 'You hear diffrent things in all them way back storys but it dont make no diffrents. Mostly they aint strait storys any how. What they are is diffrent ways of telling what happent.'[265] Lorna claims that 'there aint never ben no strait story I ever heard [...] Onlyes writing I know of is the Eusa Story which that aint nothing strait but at leas its stayd the same.'[266] As has been made clear above, the supposed immutability of even the Eusa Story is questionable. Writing is not privileged, and literature is not an unchanging foundation. As David Dowling suggests, 'no position is privileged' in Riddley's world.[267] This acceptance is taken as something of a negative by David Seed, who, in response to Goodparley's suggestion that 'it all fits' responds simply that 'it doesn't all "fit".'[268] 'Despite the climactic excitement', Seed claims, 'Riddley does not experience any moment of insight and the novel closes with him back on the road. The Bad Time remains an impenetrable mystery.'[269]

Meaning, in these texts, can be found through an acceptance of narrative forms of knowledge, and of those multiple forms being equally valid. Hoban sees the answer of accepting mythic realities as more than just an answer for Riddley, but also an answer to the problems of the world at the time he was writing: 'If the heads of governments, East and West, could perceive events in a mythic way, they would be in a better shape for working things out.'[270] In this may be found a kind of closure, even if that closure is an acceptance of openness. This prospect is particularly important in post-apocalyptic fictions, as they engage with the possibility of dominant narratives leading to destruction. The possibility of destruction embodied in the atomic bomb sparks a fear of science, a fear of claims to

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[265] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 20.
[266] Ibid.
[267] David Dowling, 'Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*: Doing the Connections', *Critique,* 29 (1988), pp. 179-87 (p. 183).
[268] Seed, p. 166.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Myers, p. 9.

objective truth (which may be true, but also dangerous) and of the kind of absolutist ideologies that led to the destruction of the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb, and the possibility of post-apocalypse, promotes post-modern sensibilities, and post-apocalyptic texts explore these same sensibilities. The mythic networks of *Riddley Walker* are both a result of the post-apocalyptic environment and an exploration of the post-modern condition. The post-apocalyptic is also, as James Berger suggests, post-structural, or at least it makes post-structural realities apparent, for '[t]he center on which all structure depends will be lost [in the apocalypse] – but really it already has been lost, indeed it has always been lost.'[271] The post-apocalyptic, the post-structuralist and the post-modern are all intertwined and interdependent. Post-apocalyptic texts demonstrate a constant, often manic, re-engagement with a past that can never be understood, and is often decontextualised. They are often examples of historiographic metafiction, through this attempt at engaging with history that also denies the possibility of understanding it, as seen in these two key examples of *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. This misunderstanding of history allows, often demands, an exploration of the narrative nature of knowledge.

Conclusion

Chapters One and Two demonstrate the way fictions of the end of the world represent the failure of endings by having a narrative structure that is disjoined from or disharmonious with the eschatological structure of the worlds they represent. This chapter extends this concept by exploring those fictions that begin after the ending. In these two examples, this has resulted in a return to mythic time, denying access to linear historical time. The failure of closure in these fictions of the end of the world is both represented and instituted by their use of myth.

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[271] Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, p. 110.

There is no 'eschatology of electricity',[272] and nuclear war has merely made concrete the downward mythic spirals suggested in Eliade's work. These myths are not a release from the horror of history, but a return to a particularly horrific form of it. With their failure of closure, parallel a general sense that closure in literature may have failed, which is also reinforced in the structure of these novels. Kermode's connection between literary ending and apocalypse rears its head again. These fictions of the end of the world represent a return to epic.[273] The uncertain connection with history also suggests that these novels are examples of Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction. This hints at the possibility that the unwinding of Kermode's theories in these texts may be an example of a broader cultural trend. In any case, these texts represent a troubled relationship with historical truth, narrative and closure that is tied to their mythic structure, and to the concept of historiographic metafiction. They place the concept of closure at the centre and then show its failure. The disruption of narrative structure is, in both instances, partially resolved through an acceptance or reconnection of various forms of narrative knowledge. Both represent an attempt to reunite the rational with the spiritual. In *Riddley Walker*, particularly, Riddley must come to accept this multiplicity of ways of seeing the world.

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[272] Eliade, *Youth without Youth*, p. 123.

[273] *Riddley Walker*'s dedication, 'to Wieland', suggests a conscious connection with epic. It is Wieland who makes Beowulf's 'battle shirts'. *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2003). l. 453. This connection is suggested, and explored further, by Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*, p. 101.

4 The Deferral and Denial of Closure in Language: *A Canticle for Leibowitz, The Road* and *Riddley Walker*

Michael Chabon claims in his review of *The Road* (2006), 'The only true account of the [apocalyptic] world […] would be a book of blank pages, white as ash.'[1] Apocalypse is an absence, a destruction of the current order that allows a new order to come into existence. In post-apocalyptic fictions, however, the apocalypse has failed and there is some remainder from the pre-apocalyptic past. Often, part of this remainder is language. The language use in end-of-the-world fictions points to a failed, half broken connection with the past; the search to understand it is an obfuscated quest for meaning. In these ways, the language denies closure.

This chapter first draws on *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and *The Road* as exemplars.[2] In these texts, language becomes an icon of a lost past; language becomes both a reminder and a remainder of the failed ending of history. Furthermore, both novels hint at the suggestion that language might carry in it some original sin. The second section of this chapter is a comprehensive engagement with Riddleyspeak, the phonetic language used in *Riddley Walker* (1980).[3] Riddleyspeak serves a broadly similar role as language in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and *The Road*, but its application is significantly more complex, dramatic and integrated to the structure of the novel. The language of *Riddley Walker* has limped on beyond the ending, and, like in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *The Road*, it becomes an enduring symbol of the failure, and impossibility, of closure.

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[1] Michael Chabon, 'After the Apocalypse', *The New York Review of Books,* 54 (2007), p. 28; Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (London: Picador, 2007).
[2] Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971).
[3] Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

As one of *Riddley Walker*'s most prominent features, the use of language in the novel has been heavily discussed in the critical scholarship, which this chapter summarises. This scholarship falls into two primary modes, although many critics engage in both. The first mode is linguistic analysis, by which critics attempt to understand the language as if it were a foreign language, and then assess its completeness and consistency. The other mode focuses on the way language is 'one of the protagonists of the story.'[4] This study primarily uses the latter; it is primarily a literary study which sees language as an instrument to develop the themes of the novel. It follows this with a discussion of the way *Riddley Walker* uses language as a token of a forgotten past, as the tool of a hesitation of meaning, and as a way of avoiding closure. While earlier this thesis spoke of closure being lost due to an absent full-stop, in *Riddley Walker* the full-stop is consistently side-stepped.

Reading Past the Ending: Language as a Symbol of the Failure of Closure

'My name Fiskadoro [...] from over the Army. Mi father es Jimmy Hidalgo',[5] is how Fiskadoro introduces himself in Denis Johnson's post-apocalyptic *Fiskadoro* (1985). The illiterate inhabitants of Quarantine speak a strange patois of English and Spanish, highlighting the odd, inverted, post-colonial, post-apocalyptic cargo-culture landscape of the their world. In the film *Threads* (1984),[6] the children who grow up after the ending are brutalised and traumatised, and their language equally muted, as if words have disappeared along with the world once known. In both these cases, the spoken word directly represents the post-apocalyptic world. Written texts are also powerful images in the post-apocalyptic landscape. They are buried in the earth as treasured caches by the bookleggers in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Libraries serve as sanctuary in Paul Auster's post-modern novel of a decaying

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[4] Natalie Maynor and Richard F. Patteson, 'Language as Protagonist in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*', *Critique,* 26 (1984), pp. 18-27 (p. 19).
[5] Denis Johnson, *Fiskadoro*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 6.
[6] Mike Jackson, dir., *Threads*. UK: BBC, 1984.

world, *In the Country of Last Things* (1987),[7] as if words can shield one from the coming end. Libraries are a forlorn hope for the future in George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949).[8] In *Ape and Essence* (1949),[9] the characters collect 'loads of fuel from the near-by Public Library [...] In goes *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, out comes the cornbread. And damn good bread it is.'[10] Ironically, the otherwise illiterate masses in *Ape and Essence* are taught only to read the word 'No.'[11] Their written language can have only a negative meaning.

The representation of a changed language is a prominent feature of post-apocalyptic fiction, and this section explores the importance of language in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *The Road*. These fictions use language in a way that both refers to the broken connection with the past and represents it through form and structure. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, language is seen as a token from a past golden age. The language of the past, full of mythic significance, is seen as prelapsarian. The mythic world in the novel, as explored in Chapter Three, portrays the atomic bomb as its original sin, and therefore the language before the nuclear war is believed to be purer, better connected with the referents of reality, and able to avoid misunderstanding. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, on the other hand, sits in a liminal space between one world and the next, and portrays a language that is within that moment of absence. It is pared back, and almost absent itself, even as it points to the absent referent of the apocalyptic moment. In both these cases, language represents the denial and deferral of closure in fictions of the end of the world, for the language suggests a world that has failed to end properly. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, language is yet another sign of the eternal

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[7] Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things*, (New York: Viking, 1987).
[8] George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides*, (London: Gollancz, 1999).
[9] Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence: A Novel*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949).
[10] Ibid. p. 67. Books are also used as fuel for the fire in Konstantin Lopushansky, dir., *Dead Man's Letters*. Russia: New Yorker Films, 1986.
[11] Huxley, p. 67.

descending spiral of humanity. In *The Road,* the absence of the language suggests a moment of hesitation, awaiting meaning.

Language change is a common feature of post-apocalyptic fiction 'as a metaphor for the scale of human disaster.'[12] The loss of ornate language is a sign of the loss of humanity, and the desperate attempts to reattain the language of the pre-apocalyptic past are indicative of an attempt to reattain that humanity:

> [S]mall bands of dedicated thinkers try to rise above the bestial conditions around them. [...] For the wordsmith of such a world, the semiotic system of written and oral language is a teasing, enigmatic collection of signs whose references have been blasted to atoms and whose constituent parts have been mutated into strange new forms. [... *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*] foreground language as well as vividly realising a devastated landscape[.][13]

The desire to reattain an understanding of the past is an attempt to search for meaning in the seemingly meaningless world. In order to connect with these earlier languages, the monks of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* engage in excruciating work to untangle the damaged manuscripts of the past. The copying, illumination, and development of intricate mathematical systems to discover what the writing means, as well as maintaining the physical books, results in the giving over of lives to the texts, a martyrdom to a forgotten literary canon. Yet, this dedication does not always result in meaning; it often results in confusion.

The monks of Leibowitz Abbey, as native Latin speakers, have difficulty understanding the English of the past. This forms an inversion. Latin has been preserved due to its status as the religious, literary language in the Catholic Church. Over time, this has turned it into a common language for the monks. It is English that is now their literary language from a divine time, and fragments of English form misunderstood tokens from that

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[12] David Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), p. 90. David Cowart, 'The Way It Will Be', in *History and the Contemporary Novel,* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), pp. 76-119 (p. 87).
[13] David Dowling, *Fictions of Nuclear Disaster*, (London: University of Iowa Press, 1987), p. 193.

divine past. Brother Francis, in particular, is confused by '[t]he way nouns could sometimes modify other nouns'.[14] For instance, '*house cat* did not mean *cat house*'.[15] This leads him to particular difficulty with 'a triple appositive like *fallout survival shelter*'.[16] Francis assumes that this must be a shelter for fallouts, rather than from them, and that a 'fallout' is a fiend 'of Hell.'[17] When the shopping list is discovered within the fallout shelter, this is also misunderstood, and Father Cheroki is said to be 'slurring over some of the unfamiliar words' when he reads '*Pound pastrami*'.[18] The misunderstandings of language are partly for comic effect:

> The linguistic fun here lies in the reader understanding the meaning of what the characters find, while the characters themselves do not. But while the readers are in on the joke, so to speak, such fictions also offer an opportunity to look at our language in new ways.[19]

However, they also accentuate the sense of a lost past and a problematised history. The language of the reader is reflected, but misunderstood. The language of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* highlights the disconnection with the past, along with the supposed divinity of that past. This obfuscation is highlighted by Benjamin's use of Hebrew, an even more ancient religious language. This is a sign of his nature as the eternal wanderer, and of the eternal repetition of time. A monk's attempted reading of the Hebrew characters Benjamin writes leads the monk to falsely believe that it spells 'Leibowitz',[20] which highlights the lack of the monk's understanding of Hebrew and is part of a broader misunderstanding of Benjamin's wisdom and warnings.

These confusions also demonstrate the power of language, and the dangerous nature of both understanding and misunderstanding. The language confusions reach their height in

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[14] Miller, p. 17.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid. p. 18.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid. p. 27.
[19] Sisk, p. 91.
[20] Miller, p. 37.

the novel as the Second Flame Deluge looms. The Abbott's frustrations with his automatic translating machine (an 'autoscribe') seem to parallel the growing tensions in the world:

> [L]est readers miss his [Miller's] subtler points regarding the problems inherent in slavish adherence to logocentrism and unquestioning confidence in language, Miller layers his foreshadowing of the second Apocalypse with depictions of the senior monk's struggles with his new-fangled 'autoscribe,' a voice-to-hardcopy transcription and translation machine that never works correctly. [...] Dom Zerchi's denunciations thematically link the machine and its typographic atrocities to the hubris of Babel, and also to Lucifer, the Prince of Lies, who does not use bombs or bullets to bring about humanity's fall, but 'mere' words.[21]

As Derrida makes clear in his 'No Apocalypse, Not Now', nuclear war is a text, a political discourse, and in such a text, misunderstanding and confusion can turn to destruction.[22] As the discourse breaks down, nuclear war may become reality, but this reality is an absence. For this reason, nuclear war can never be anything but text; however, it is a text that may destroy all texts, and the world with it. Through nuclear discourse, text attains the ultimate power of destruction. Language breakdown becomes dangerous. The film *Fail-Safe* (1964),[23] for instance, while ostensibly about a coming nuclear apocalypse, does not depict explosions, battles or acts of physical war. Instead it depicts a dialogue, between the heads of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., as they desperately attempt to defer the ending. Thoughts and words, which are texts, are extended into physical space by bodies and the technology those bodies interact with, with the ultimate destructive extension of text being the atomic bomb. The breakdown of communication, therefore, is dangerous.

The language breakdown in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* also suggests that '[t]his world on the brink of its fourth world war is another Tower of Babel',[24] and their mythic history of the First Flame Deluge, in support of this suggestion, also makes reference to the confusions

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[21] Charles E. Gannon, 'They Speak in Mangled 'Memberment': Miller's, Muir's, and Hoban's Recollective Journeys to the Edgy of Incomprehensibility', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies,* 1 (2003), pp. 26-36 (p. 28).
[22] See Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter, and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 20-31.
[23] Sidney Lumet, dir., *Fail-Safe*. USA: Columbia Pictures, 1964.
[24] David J. Tietge, 'Priest, Professor, or Prophet: Discursive and Ethical Intersections in A Canticle for Leibowitz', *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 41 (2008), pp. 676-94 (p. 692).

of language: 'From the confusion of tongues, the intermingling of the remnants of many nations, from fear, the hate was born.'[25] The desire throughout post-apocalyptic literature to connect with a language of the past is founded on the misperception that such a language would be in a prelapsarian state. This ur-language would have final, concrete connection with its referents. All other referents would merely point backwards to it.[26] Andrew Large, in his discussion of the artificial language movement since the seventeenth century, claims that this was similarly driven by a desire to understand the language of God, the pre-Babel language which 'had not merely been a universal medium of communication but a language which expressed precisely the nature of things; words mirrored reality.'[27] It is this same drive that one can see behind the character of Dominic Matei in Mircea Eliade's *Youth Without Youth* (1976).[28] This would be the language with which God spoke the world into existence. This desire to find an ultimate, concrete language that cannot lead to misunderstanding is connected to the desire to return to the innocence of Eden that runs through so much post-apocalyptic fiction. This connection is also made by Susan Spencer, who sees the language breakdown in *Canticle* as an expression of Eric Havelock's suggestion of a 'conflict within the civilized consciousness of man, between his sense of intellectual power and his distrust and fear of that power.'[29] This conflict, Spencer claims, is at least as ancient as the story of Eden, in which Adam and Eve are seduced by knowledge. As well as suggesting the failed firebreak of history, language in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* demonstrates the dangerous nature of failing to find meaning. The dangerous nature of *mis*understanding, however, is contrasted

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[25] Miller, p. 52.

[26] For an in depth discussion of the desire for the prelapsarian language in Western culture, see Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

[27] Andrew Large, *The Artificial Language Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 10.

[28] Mircea Eliade, *Youth without Youth*, trans. by Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[29] Cited in Susan Spencer, 'The Post-Apocalyptic Library: Oral and Literate Culture in *Farenheit 451* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*', *Extrapolation,* 32 (1991), pp. 331-42 (p. 332).

with the equally dangerous nature of understanding. It is by understanding the texts of the past that the atomic bombs are rebuilt; it is due to *mis*understanding other people in the present that they are used.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* offers a different vision of the future language, which has decayed along with the world it represents. While *The Road* does not achieve Chabon's white, ashen pages,[30] it attempts to get as close as possible by limiting language through its use of simplified sentence structure, reduced punctuation and limited word choice (although this is juxtaposed by occasional use of arcane and obscure words). *The Road* exists in a liminal state between one world and another, between the world that has not yet disappeared and the world that has not yet come into existence, a topic that is argued further in Chapter Five of this thesis. This liminal state is a state of nothingness, and this sparseness can be seen in the use of language, as even '[t]he writing is stripped down'.[31] This is immediately apparent in the lack of punctuation in the novel, which has been pruned. Words such as 'cant' have lost their apostrophes (although they are in other cases, confusingly, maintained). It seems that even contractions are not contracted enough, and many words are defoliated. In this sense the writing achieves a minimalism, devoid of unnecessary ornament. As McCarthy drily replies during his interview with Oprah Winfrey, '[Y]ou don't need punctuation if you write properly.'[32]

The sentence structures of the novel are also simplified:

They made a dry camp in a woodlot not far from the road. They could find no sheltered place to make a fire that would not be seen so they made none. They ate each of them two of the

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[30] McCarthy.

[31] Stephen Abell, 'Another Terra Damnata: Cormac McCarthy Covers a Post-Nuclear Terrain.', *TLS. Times Literary Supplement,* (2006), pp. 19-20 (p. 19).

[32] Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac McCarthy*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 14.

cornmeal cakes and they slept together huddled on the ground in the coats and blankets. He held the child and after a while the child stopped shivering and after a while he slept.[33]

The repetitious, monotonous nature of the sentences accentuates the nature of survival in a barren and meaningless world. McCarthy is famous for his use of parataxis, which Mark Eaton, writing before *The Road* was published, claims to be 'the most salient feature' of McCarthy's work.[34] For large stretches of the novel, this same pattern continues, with each sentence beginning with a pronoun and a verb. The long sections of repeating form and rhythm are only occasionally broken by a minor, but unexpected deviation. Even the simple addition of an 'and' upsets the rhythmic repetition. McCarthy's use of poetic, unconventional forms is thus doled out cautiously:

> In the morning they came up out of the ravine and took to the road again. He'd carved the boy a flute from a piece of roadside cane and he took it from his coat and gave it to him. The boy took it wordlessy. After a while he fell back and after a while the man could hear him playing. A formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin. The man turned and looked back at him. He was lost in concentration. The man thought he seemed some sad and solitary changeling child announcing the arrival of a traveling spectacle in shire and village who does not know that behind him the players have all been carried off by wolves.[35]

Here the standard constructions break apart into fragments as the boy starts playing '[a] formless music for the age to come.'[36] McCarthy sometimes uses even longer series of fragments: 'Desolate country. A boarhide nailed to a barndoor. Ratty. Wisp of a tail. Inside the barn three bodies hanging from the rafters, dried and dusty among the wan slats of light.'[37] As the world is coming undone, so is the language. Instead of sentences, there are simple noun phrases. They are decontextualised objects without a defined relationship with

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[33] McCarthy, p. 91.
[34] Mark Eaton, 'Dis(Re)Memebered Bodies: Cormac McCarthy's Border Fiction', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies,* 49 (2003), (p. 167).
[35] McCarthy, p. 81.
[36] The next sentence in the passage, however, reinforces the ambiguous nature of the text. There may not be another 'age to come.' This may be 'the last music on earth'.
[37] McCarthy, p. 16.

one another, just as the apocalyptic landscape is. Like the boy's music, these sentences are formless. They are without structure or closure.

The passages of fragmentary sentences are a kind of unstructured list, and the novel often degenerates to a series of 'lists' and 'slide shows',[38] without structure or priority, suggestive of post-modernist forms that deny hierarchy. Indeed, the novel is told almost entirely in fragments, 'atomized moments that are lived through rather than being assimilated by an integrating consciousness.'[39] As explained earlier in this thesis, this questioning is at the heart of the 'the post-modern condition'.[40] Claims that McCarthy is a post-modern author are contentious,[41] but authors can engage with these concerns without being overtly post-modern in form. Whatever literary genre *The Road* belongs to (Western, Southern, Southwestern, post-modern, speculative fiction, and post-apocalyptic can all stake a claim) it still upsets the possibility of progress, or any grand narrative, by suggesting a failed ending. The novel obsesses with the search for narrative structure, while denying its existence, and this loss of structure is paralleled in the language. Unlike *Riddley Walker*, which creates an ornate post-apocalyptic language that demands the label 'post-modern', *The Road* is within the apocalyptic, liminal moment, and so is the language, as it literally disappears:[42] 'The billboards had been whited out with thin coats of paint in order to write on them and through the paint could be seen a pale palimpsest of advertisements for goods which no longer

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[38] Abell, p. 19.

[39] Grace Hellyer, 'Spring Has Lost Its Scent: Allegory, Ruination, and Suicidal Melancholia in *The Road*', in *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), pp. 45-62 (p. 47).

[40] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[41] See R.L. Jarrett, *Cormac McCarthy*, (New York; London: Twayne Publishers, 1997); Robert L. Jarrett, 'Cormac McCarthy's Sense of an Ending: Serialized Narrative and Revision in *Cities of the Plain*', in *Cormac McCarthy: New Directions,* ed. by James D. Lilley (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), pp. 313-42; Steven Shaviro, 'The Very Life of the Darkness: A Reading of *Blood Meridian*', in *Perpectives on Cormac McCarthy,* ed. by Edwin T. Arnold and Dianne C. Luce (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Linda Woodson, 'Mapping *The Road* in Post-Modernism', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 87-99.

[42] Linda Woodson, however, does call the language of *The Road* post-postmodern. Woodson, p. 90.

existed.'[43] The old world is slowly blanked out so that a new world may be written in its place. This process is not over. It still continues. The sparseness, as Ben de Bruyn suggests, is because the language disappears along with the referents.[44] As the old world has fallen out of existence, the words to describe it have also disappeared, resulting in continual confusions between the man, from one world, and the boy, who is the seed of the new world to come. Even the word 'negotiate' has slipped away, not being understood by the boy and requiring a terse and negative definition from his father: 'It means talk about it some more and come up with some other deal. There is no deal. This is it.'[45] Ultimately, as Andrew Hoberek argues in his exploration of the theme of exhaustion in the novel, '*The Road* seems exhausted at the level of style itself.'[46] Instead of a vast multiplicity of meanings birthed by *Riddley Walker*'s fractured signs, here the language disappears into dreamscape. As *Riddley Walker* displays through its constant attempts to rediscover the words of the past, a world cannot disappear until its language does. Language always points back to the dead.[47] As Kevin Kearney puts it, 'In *The Road*, language itself appears as a leftover and begins to corrode, the symbolic framework of our collective, lived world fading along with the material existence that supports it.'[48] In *The Road*, they are haunted by their ancestors, they carry the ancestral fire of meaning; and language, ultimately, can only signify its failure to signify, in this world without referents.[49]

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[43] McCarthy, p. 135.
[44] Ben De Bruyn, 'Borrowed Time, Borrowed World and Borrowed Eyes: Care, Ruin and Vision in McCarthy's *The Road* and Harrison's Ecocriticism', *English Studies,* 91 (2010), pp. 776-89.
[45] McCarthy, p. 139.
[46] Andrew Hoberek, 'Cormac McCarthy and the Aesthetics of Exhaustion', *American Literary History,* 23 (2011), pp. 482-99 (p. 487).
[47] Bruyn.
[48] Kevin Kearney, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Frontier of the Human', *L I T: Literature Interpretation Theory,* 23 (2012), pp. 160-77 (p. 171).
[49] Bruyn.

The simplification of language includes a heavy use of pronouns, often without antecedent, which causes even more confusion and deferral of the resolution of meaning. Combined with the short, sharp nature of the dialogue, long sections entail an uncertainty about who, exactly, is talking to whom:

> I think there's someone following us.
> That's what I thought.
> That's what you thought?
> Yes. That's what I thought you were going to say. What do you want to do?
> I dont know.
> What do you think?
> Let's just go. We should hide our trash.
> Because they'll think we have lots of food.[50]

The man and the boy are already reduced to generic terms, without their names ever being mentioned in the text. They are further often reduced to a pronoun, adding confusion as they both become 'he'. When even the pronouns are avoided, the speakers disappear into an absence. The utterances are disconnected from the utterer, as if there were no ultimate purpose to what is being said or meaning behind it. The phrases become authorless. The use of pronouns, and often the failure even to use them, results in the kind of short, trimmed sentences that befit the rest of the novel. However, it also creates confusion and disconnection.

The use of archaic or unusual words throughout the novel, such as 'salitter',[51] 'catamites',[52] and 'deathships',[53] also results in a sense of timelessness. This could be seen, in part, as a return to the past and of nostalgia for a simpler time. However, it also accentuates the novel's place in the time out of time, Frank Kermode's *nunc stans*, the space between the tock and the tick. The year the novel is set is unclear, which seems deliberately ambiguous. It

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[50] McCarthy, p. 205.
[51] Ibid. p. 279.
[52] Ibid. p. 96.
[53] Ibid. p. 184.

exists in structureless time, where objects from the past, present and future co-exist and coalesce.

As the world is disappearing, as referents are destroyed, so are the words used to describe them. In particular, the boy no longer has a purpose for written language, and no longer 'work[s] on his lessons',[54] evoking a sense of futurelessness, a sense of 'despair'.[55] As the despair grows, so does language fall away from the boy, leading to long periods of silence, in turn leading the man to wonder if the boy would 'ever speak again'.[56] This is part of a broader trend of the destruction of books and the destruction of literature throughout the novel. A library, for instance, is described as being 'charred ruins' with 'blackened books.'[57] Books are found in a house, but they are merely '[s]oggy volumes in a bookcase.'[58] As Thomas Carlson suggests, this is the 'story of the failure and fall of books and their possibility'.[59] Books imply a future, and the essence of the novel is the possibility that there will be no future and that there will be no rebirth.

The use of language, and its pointing to deferral and denial of closure, forms a key trope of fictions about the end of the world. The attempts to return to the past, and to understand it, are attempts to understand a forgotten language; they are also attempts to return to a prelapsarian time before the fall. Language can also be a symbol of the falling apart of the world. This has been shown in McCarthy's use of stripped back words and sentences, the use of fragments and lists, all of which point to a formless and uncertain space. The characters themselves disappear into the language, becoming pronouns and, sometimes, not

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[54] Ibid. p. 245.
[55] Thomas A. Carlson, 'With the World at Heart: Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* with Augustine and Heidegger', *Religion and Literature,* 39 (2007), pp. 47-71 (p. 60). A reworked and re-edited version of this article appears as Thomas A. Carlson, 'Thomas A. Carlson on McCarthy's Existential Themes', in *Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011), pp. 54-58.
[56] McCarthy.
[57] Ibid. p. 157.
[58] Ibid. p. 138.
[59] Carlson, p. 60.

even that. McCarthy creates a world that is both future and past, absent and present. It exists in a liminal space in time.

Many of these concepts are also suggested through the invented dialect used in *Riddley Walker* which will be turned to next in this Chapter. Language can carry with it a kind of original sin, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Riddley Walker, wherein the characters attempt to engage in acts of linguistic alchemy in order to understand their world. Riddleyspeak also offers a token of the past, and suggests a world that has a half-broken connection with it, a world that has failed to attain closure. It also, like the fragmentary sentences of McCarthy and his use of ambiguous pronouns, denies closure through its construction. Its multivalence, allusion and punning all point to a hesitation and uncertainty of meaning. These moments of hesitation defer closure.

Riddleyspeak as an Instigator of Uncertainty

While the discussion of *Riddley Walker* so far in this thesis has focused on myth, its use of an invented dialect is its most prominent feature, and is just as much a sign of failed closure as language, too, is split by a nuclear firebreak. As Christine Wilkie-Stubbs puts it:

> The language of *Riddley Walker* is a ventriloquial collage of fragments that constantly allude to misunderstood and misquoted signs, titles, and cultural texts, evoking postmodernism's displacement of signs and the collapse of meanings[.][60]

Natalie Maynor and Richard Patteson go as far as calling language 'one of the protagonists of the story',[61] a suggestion that is returned to a number of times in this thesis. This examination is split into three parts. The first, following on from Marie Maclean's suggestion that language in *Riddley Walker* is a token from a divine past, argues that the fractured linguistic

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[60] Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, 'Post-Mouse, Post-Modernist, Hoban, and the Fin De Siecle Culture of Childhood', in *Russell Hoban, Forty Years: Essays on His Writings for Children,* ed. by Alida Allison (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 165-80 (p. 166).
[61] Maynor and Patteson, p. 19.

connection with the past, as represented in language, is another way in which the denial of closure is symbolised. The second and third argue that Hoban has created a language in which meaning is deferred, once again suggesting a subversion of closure. The fragments of present day English offer a door for Riddley to another world, and this invokes a questioning of the nature of reality, and questioning is another way closure is denied. Such questioning of the characters suggests that the readers, too, should question their world. Comprehensible but difficult, Riddleyspeak points to a fractured but not quite schismatic relationship with the past, and another denial of closure.

As well as a leap to the future, the language is a return to the past, a reminder of old forms and old ideas and of the eternal cycles of history. Some of the ways that language has been altered in *Riddley Walker* include a grapholect that is phonetic in nature (centre has become *senter*, required has become *reqwirt*), changes in word order, onomatopoeic constructions (*arga warga*) and the use of verbs as nouns. J.W. Schwetman also notes the use of '[i]nverted syntax [...] yielding sentences like "Starveling wer what they wer doing" (*RW*, p. 2) and "Freezing cold they wer" (*RW*, p. 2)';[62] 'metathesis', the 'transposition of sounds', which has turned great into *girt* and struggling in *sturgling*;[63] a general simplification and stripping of sounds; the use of folk etymology to deconstruct words and reconstruct them into new meanings, such as '*vackt our wayt* and *tack ticks*';[64] and various pronunciation shifts. Schwetman sees the language as a 'likely extrapolation';[65] however, more interesting is his

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[62] J.W. Schwetman, 'Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* and the Language of the Future', *Extrapolation,* 26 (1985), pp. 212-19 (p. 215).
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid. p. 213. One of the most amusing examples of this is the word *soam poasyum*, derived from symposium and the term used to describe a kind of academic conference engaged in by the Eusa Folk:
> You ever seen a nes of snakes? [... T]hey do the same theywl get all in a tangl slyding and sqwirming and ryving to gether. Which is how we do it all teh many rubbing up to 1 a nother skin to skin and talking vantsit theary. Which is a kynd of hy telling and trantsing. Thats when the singing and the shouting come[.] Hoban, p. 107.
[65] Schwetman, p. 212.

suggestion that 'Russell Hoban has developed a language of the future that is reminiscent of the language of the past.'[66] Schwetman sees the phonetic changes as the result of 'a trend begun in Middle English times'.[67] However, he also sees many of the changes as a return to, rather than a move away from, older forms of English. Schwetman argues that, for instance, *hisper* is a return of *hwisper*.[68] The text can certainly be seen as alluding to Middle English with its quest towards Cambry reminiscent of the journey to Canterbury in *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400).[69] The punning and scatological humour also suggests a return to the mentality of that comic text. These reminders of the past talk to eternal repetition, to the possibility that a break from the past is never complete and may signal a return to an earlier time. On the other hand, Peter Stockwell sees *Riddley Walker* as 'a return to the spoken vernacular forms with grammatical patterns reminiscent of existing rural standard southern British English'.[70] Certainly, the relationship with contemporary speech and slang also runs through the text, with language derived from aspects of technology also finding its way into common currency in Riddley's time, such as *pirntowt,* which is used in a metaphorical way that displays the loss of understanding of its original meaning. The language suggests a moment that exists across the past, present and future. Words speak to a multiplicity of meanings due to their relationships with the languages of those different periods. It represents both a fracturing and a collision of time.

Much of the scholarship around *Riddley Walker* centres on questioning whether the language change is plausible and logical. For instance, R.D. Mullen's analysis, which 'is

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[66] Ibid. p. 218.
[67] Ibid. p. 213.
[68] Ibid. p. 215.
[69] A connection Russell Hoban claims not to be intentional.
[70] Peter Stockwell, 'Invented Language in Literature', in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics,* ed. by Keith Brown (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), pp. 3-10 (p. 6).

among the most detailed technical descriptions of the novel's invented language',[71] claims that *Riddley Walker* fails to consistently develop its language, and does not adequately explain the world featured within the novel.[72] However, some of the inconsistencies can be explained away by its subliterate author, who would only have limited tuition and small number of documents to anchor his spellings:

> [S]tudents of letters written in sixteenth-century England could point out that variant spellings are nothing new, and a given letter-writer might well use different variants in different – sometimes even within the same – letters. Just think about the variant spellings of the name of the Bard: Shakespear, Shakespeare, etc.[73]

The claim that he has not adequately described the world is based on an assumption that the novel is science fiction,[74] and an assumption of what that genre entails. It also ignores the fact that, as a fictional autobiographer, Riddley is more interested in understanding the world of the past than he is in describing the mundane details of his own life. Thus, Mullen's conclusions are questionable. The use of a logically consistent language was certainly not the original intention of the novel, and Hoban suggests its more haphazard development:

> In writing the vernacular that I ended up with I was not calculatedly using a linguistic technique; I began by writing straight English but the material kept moving out of it. Riddley naturally writes things down in the mode in which he perceives them. The vernacular prevents the reader from sliding through matters that have great density for Riddley; Riddley feels other and elsewhere right through the action and so must the reader. Moving out of the usual way of putting words together can refresh the mind.[75]

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[71] David Sisk, 'Ten Years After: Four Responses to R.D. Mullen', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 410-11 (p. 410).

[72] R.D. Mullen, 'Dialect, Grapholect, and Story: Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* as Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 391-417 (p. 392).

[73] Deborah D.K. Ruuskanen, 'Ten Years After: Four Responses to R.D. Mullen', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 408-10 (p. 409). David Sisk, likewise, claims that Mullen 'follows Spinrad by considering the language as the main thrust of the novel; and he works so hard to answer Spinrad's criticisms that he fails to notice their irrelevance.' Sisk, p. 410. Kenneth Andrews goes even further, stating that 'if Mullen is saying that Hoban's future English is not sufficiently "consistent," I would disagree: Mullen himself establishes Hoban's linguistic consistencies.' Kenneth Andrews, 'Ten Years After: Four Responses to R.D. Mullen', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 406-08 (p. 408).

[74] A claim denied by Hoban.

[75] Russell Hoban, 'A Littl as Plaining About *Riddley Walker*', *The Bookseller,* (1980), p. 175.

David Lake, who has developed another description of the changes that have led to Riddleyspeak, also finds it 'rather implausible', but focuses attention on the '*insufficient amount of language change over 2400 years.*'[76] Timothy Bugler concurs, simply stating, 'The most telling point against it, to my mind, is the *lack* of language change. There's simply not enough of it'.[77] If one is concerned about the novel's status as logical extrapolation, then the problem is surely not with the inconsistency of language change, but its limited nature.

The primary problem with *Riddley Walker*'s language use, then, is not its inconsistency, but its comprehensibility. However, to write a novel that is plausible in this regard would be to write one that is completely incomprehensible. A future English, as Richard Bailey notes, faces a 'problem of intelligibility. However clearly the future of English may be imagined, a contemporary audience must still find it readable'.[78] These issues may be resolved in fictions where 'short patches of the invented new English' are used 'to give its flavour',[79] but this is clearly not the case in *Riddley Walker*, which must walk 'a thin line between, on the one hand, incomprehensibility and, on the other, unrealistic similarity to standard twentieth-century English.'[80] Therefore, as Kenneth Andrews argues, 'Hoban has not really attempted to create a future English',[81] because such a language would be 'totally unrecognizable'.[82] If linguistic change is to be explored in a novel, then that change needs to be limited so that it may still be understood. As Frank Kermode suggests, a language that is truly apocalyptic, that is truly schismatic, that demonstrates a 'clean break with the past',

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[76] David J. Lake, 'Making the Two One: Language and Mysticism in *Riddley Walker*', *Extrapolation,* 25 (1984), pp. 157-70 (p. 162).
[77] Timothy Bugler, 'Ten Years After: Four Responses to R.D. Mullen', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 411-16 (p. 415).
[78] Richard W. Bailey, *Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 227-8.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Schwetman, p. 212.
[81] Mullen, p. 391.
[82] Andrews, p. 406.

would be 'noise',[83] having no external referent to define itself. While a relationship with present day English is, therefore, necessary for the sake of writing a novel, it is also another token of a past that has not truly been broken from, and an acknowledgement of the failure of rebirth, a failure of a 'clean break with the past', and a failure of closure.

The problem of insufficient language change becomes even more intriguing when the 'old spel' is considered.[84] Early in the novel, Riddley proclaims the authority of the Eusa Story, and its place as unchanging literary foundation of their language and culture, when he says, 'I bes write out the *Eusa Story* the same as it ben wrote out 1st and past on down to us. Its all ways wrote down in the old spel.'[85] While essentially maintaining the same linguistic qualities of Riddley's time, such as the phonetic nature of the text, the *old spel* is much further removed from present day English. For example, in the *old spel* the Eusa Story begins, 'Wen Mr Clevver wuz Big Man uv Inland thay had evere thing clevver. Thay had boats in the ayr & picters on the win & evere thing lyk that.'[86] Rather than a consistent shift away from present day English, the language has dipped away and then returned. This is particularly odd considering that language is anchored by literature, and therefore anchored by the *old spel* of the Eusa Story. However, this may suggest a rediscovery of documents written in present day English, which would fit well with the Ram's successes in rediscovering knowledge hidden in the past. Language may be dragged back to the past by this rediscovery. Whether or not it is logical, and whether or not its logical construction is relevant, this dipping out and return of an ancient language is yet another example of cyclical return in the novel, another example of the failure of any schismatic break with the past, and another example of the failure of closure.

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[83] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 102.
[84] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 29.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid. p. 30.

Riddley Walker posits the survival of fractured elements of language from the past that defer meaning and closure. It is this, rather than any claim to scientific rigour, that is the ultimate point of Riddleyspeak. Supporting this view, David Lake attempts an experimental translation and finds that the story is inextricably linked to its orthography, and '[t]he language and spelling of *Riddley Walker* [...] are at one with the central meanings of the novel'.[87] The language is, as already mentioned, 'one of the protagonists of the story.'[88] Or, as Christine Wilkie suggests, '[t]he language itself [...] is actantial; that is, it is as important for shaping the narrative as any particular event, or the behavior of any character.'[89] It is, ultimately, 'difficult to separate the plot events from the language in which Riddley records them.'[90] The language of *Riddley Walker* is more than just an aesthetic feature. It is core to the purpose and meaning of the novel. As David Sisk states:

> Riddley Walker presents the reader with strange orthography, run-on sentences, multifaceted puns, and a host of other linguistic difficulties that are never facile [...] Furthermore, Riddley uses several terms that have no single English referent but rather carry multiple meanings -- all of them crucial to an understanding of his culture.[91]

The language changes are meaningful. They result in a multiplicity of meanings, which are all important and, often, 'the changes [the words ...] have undergone reflect the inner nature of the things named.'[92] The fracturing and deconstruction of language may well suggest that language is, as Ferdinand de Saussure claims, 'arbitrary'.[93] However, as the words are split apart, the past is also cracked open, revealing hidden truth behind the veil of language:

[87] Lake, p. 157.
[88] Maynor and Patteson, p. 19.
[89] Christine Wilkie, *Through the Narrow Gate: The Mythological Consciousness of Russell Hoban*, (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickeson University Press, 1989), p. 58.
[90] Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, p. 138.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Jack Branscomb, 'Knowledge and Understanding in *Riddley Walker*', in *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature,* ed. by Nancy Anisfield (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), pp. 106-13 (p. 107).
[93] Saussure, Ferdinand de, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Roy Harris (London: G. Duckworth, 1983), p. 26.

> [T]he government, or "Mincery," chops as much as it administers; and the Pry Mincer spends much of his time prying into the affairs of the folk. The seat of the Mincery is the "Ram," shortened from present-day Ramsgate, but suggesting also a computer's Random Access Memory (RAM) and thus the linkage of political and technological power. More humorously, a foreign secretary becomes a "farring seakert tryer" (201) trying to get his secrets from one place to another; and "scatter my datter" (48) becomes a mild curse. The elite technocrats who controlled the computers at Canterbury are remembered as the "puter leat," and the title of their present leader, "Ardship of Cambry," reflects both man's tendency to make a religion of his own accomplishments and the bitter hardship that his technology has produced.[94]

Language in *Riddley Walker* has meaning beyond its status as arbitrary signifier. Its sounds and its suggestions of other words are all laden with meaning.

One of the roles of language in the novel is as a token of a lost past. As Marie Maclean argues, this is 'an inversion of the usual model of the other or alien invading our human here and now.'[95] In *Riddley Walker*, MacLean claims, words from the reader's Primary World exist as tokens of that world.[96] This places the novel as an inversion of the fantastic tale. The fantastic, as defined narratologically by Tzvetan Todorov,[97] takes place in a world which is the reader's own, without magic, until the protagonist encounters something fantastic.[98] The protagonist must then decide whether this fantastic event or creature is real, and therefore the world is profoundly different from what is hitherto understood, or whether it can be somehow explained. When the answer becomes clear, the fantastic ceases. These stories often contain a token, a proof that the protagonist brings back from across the threshold into mundane reality. For example, in that apocalyptic fantastic fable *The Time*

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[94] Branscomb, pp. 107-8.

[95] Marie Maclean, 'The Signifier as Token: The Textual Riddles of Russell Hoban', *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association,* 70 (1988), pp. 211-19 (p. 212). Ria Cheyne also offers an analysis of the ways in which constructed languages in science fiction are always multivalent, since they also point to meanings within and without the text, which is interesting seen alongside this discussion. Ria Cheyne, 'Created Languages in Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies,* 35 (2008), pp. 386-403.

[96] Maclean.

[97] See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

[98] Ibid. p. 24.

Machine, the traveller brings back a flower from the future.[99] In *Riddley Walker*, however, Riddley's mundane existence 'is contravened and put into question':

> [T]here are tokens present in this primitive world. These tokens come from an alien, outside, forgotten world: our own [...] *They* in the future are the norm, *we* are the aliens; our world is the fantastic, the other, theirs is reality.[100]

In *Riddley Walker*, the fantastic world is the Primary World of the reader, in which there were 'boats in the air and picters on the wind'.[101] This is a common feature throughout post-apocalyptic literature, as the story often involves attempts to make sense of the past golden age, as has been explored already in Chapter Three. *Riddley Walker* represents one of the most complex explorations of this aspect of post-apocalyptic fiction. Each word in *Riddley Walker* points in a number of directions, and has 'acquired a whole new set of connotations while remaining a token from a vanished age.'[102] Therefore, 'language at once looks back to a forgotten alien world and forward to a new and terrifying one.'[103] It also reminds the reader that, while Riddley lives in the future, he is really re-enacting the past. In this way, language functions similarly to 'the way Walter M. Miller, Jr. has used the Church in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.'[104] Language is, for Riddley, a reminder of a divine past, a disruption of the certainties of his own world and another reminder of the endless repetition of cycles. In all these ways, it suggests hesitation and uncertainty.

Language use in post-apocalyptic fiction is turned to many purposes. It represents a fractured break with the past, where it must walk a fine line between too much and too little change. It also suggests the desire to reconnect with that past, which is a continuation of the

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[99] H.G. Wells, 'The Time Machine', in *The Short Stories of H. G. Wells,* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 9-91 (p. 88).
[100] Maclean, pp. 212-13.
[101] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, pp. 19, 100. This is also mentioned, with slightly different wording, on pages 30 and 199. The recurrence of this phrase points home the importance of the image of the Primary World as a place of wonder, although doubt about the truth of this slowly occur to Riddley over time.
[102] Maclean, p. 215.
[103] Ibid. p. 216.
[104] Schwetman, p. 218.

motif of the golden age. To reconnect with the language of the past is also to reconnect with a prelapsarian state of innocence and purity, where language has a real connection with reality, and questions of meaning are resolved. The power of language is also demonstrated as nuclear weapons, and other human made modes of destruction, are ultimately the physical extensions of political texts. A society can literally be talked to death. There is danger in both misunderstanding and understanding, both of which may lead to destruction. Language, in *Riddley Walker*, also opens a door to another world. It is a world that is uncertain, and, like the mythic networks mentioned earlier in this thesis, separated from Riddley by a firebreak in history. It is the fantastic world of the reader. It demands Riddley accept an uncertainty about the world he thought he knew. This reinforces the denial of closure in the text, as it reiterates the incomplete nature of the apocalypse and the way that new worlds are built of old, even in their language. The use of a broken language results in a consistent invasion of the future by the past. Furthermore, rather than being communicative, the language obfuscates. It denies meaning, just as Riddley searches for it. The language is post-apocalyptic, and intrinsically demonstrates the qualities that have been identified so far in this thesis with the post-apocalyptic. Specifically, it defers and denies closure.

Riddleyspeak and the Deferral of Closure

Stripped of direct connection with its referent, the language of *Riddley Walker* exists in indeterminable oscillation, a space slipping between meanings that is a result and representation of the post-apocalyptic. In *Riddley Walker*, the atoms of language are split, and the result is, metaphorically, a state of quantum superposition whereby closure is deferred.[105]

Quantum superposition is the concept that a subatomic particle exists in all its possible states,

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[105] This suggestion that the language of *Riddley Walker* is a way of representing quantum physics is made by Jeffrey Porter, ''Three Quarks for Muster Mark': Quantum Wordplay and Nuclear Discourse in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*', *Contemporary Literature,* 31 (1990), pp. 448-69.

as famously lampooned in the Schrödinger's cat thought experiment. This quantum language exists in a constant hesitation of meaning and a deferral of closure. David Sisk calls *Riddley Walker* a 'fractured English narrative,'[106] but does not go far in exploring the implications of this statement. Along similar lines, J.W. Schwetman and I.F. Clarke both call it 'Post Modern English'.[107] In *Riddley Walker*, the apocalyptic firebreak has split language from its meaning, as signifier slips across signified; like a slipping tectonic plate, language is torn synchronically and diachronically, creating a polyvalence of meaning, and exploring the purely structural, self-referential nature of language. This exposes a hesitation, a moment of oscillation between meanings, and expands it. In this hesitation is an explosion of meanings, but simultaneously no meaning, for, as the work of Saussure makes clear, words are defined by their limitations, by their differences from other words.[108] Hesitation of meaning explores the limits of structuralist linguistics, similar to the way that the myths of *Riddley Walker* push structuralist mythology to its limits. Myth and language mirror each other in their deferral of closure and meaning. *Riddley Walker* is written in a way that explores the hesitation between sign and signified, and results in an expansion of Derrida's state of *différence*.[109] As James Berger claims, '[d]*ifférence* is an ongoing apocalypse, a continual revelatory destruction built into the structure of language.'[110] This is the ultimate deferral of closure. In *Riddley Walker*, the people of Inland desperately attempt to reintegrate the meanings of this shattered

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[106] Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, p. 138.
[107] Schwetman, p. 212. I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), pp. 209-10.
[108] See Saussure.
[109] This is a term that combines
> the French for "difference" and "deferral" [... and] is used to suggest both the Saussurean emphasis on meaning as the function of differences or contrasts within a network of terms, and also the endless deferral of any final fixed point or privileged, meaning-determining relationship with the extra-linguistic world. Simon Blackburn, 'Différance', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-926?rskey=asHltp&result=3&q=difference> [accessed 3 May 2013].
[110] James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 112.

language, but are always unable to do so. Language is 'the only intricate structure linking Riddley's tribe, however tenuously, with the dim past, with us,'[111] and their attempt to reconnect with that past, as explored in Chapter Three, must be mediated through that broken language. Attempts to reconnect are constantly thwarted, and this stands in the way of the quest for understanding. The language of *Riddley Walker* is, therefore, not just 'one of the protagonists of the story',[112] but also the antagonist of the story. However, as Maynor and Patteson claim, the linguistic confusion may be a blessing that stops a reoccurrence of Bad Time, since the characters are unable to understand the scientific concepts that would allow them to destroy the world.[113] This quantum language is a protagonist, an antagonist, even a benevolent antagonist.

The language of *Riddley Walker* first denies closure by simply slowing the reader down. As Peter Stockwell suggests, 'The experience of reading the whole novel is of a difficult struggle for meaning'.[114] It is clear from the beginning of *Riddley Walker* that language is somewhat *un*clear. As an example, take this phrase from the '*Hart of the Wood*' story, Inland's myth of the danger of progress: 'The man and the woman then eating ther chyld it wer black nite all roun them they made ther fire bigger and bigger trying to keap the black from moving in on them.'[115] The sentence begins normally enough, but this is a ruse. As the word 'then' appears, the phrase becomes awkward. Then it begins to run into phonetic spelling with 'ther chyld'. This is easy enough to understand, once the reader knows what is going on, and that, as Peter Schwenger makes clear, it 'is written in a phoneticized spelling, so that the reader is slowed down and often forced to speak aloud what is on the page in order

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[111] David Dowling, 'Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*: Doing the Connections', *Critique,* 29 (1988), pp. 179-87 (p. 182). They 'are searching language for a key' and others are searching language for power. Ibid. p. 183. It is the patterns of words that have meaning. Ibid.
[112] Maynor and Patteson, p. 19.
[113] Ibid. p. 23.
[114] Peter Stockwell, *The Poetics of Science Fiction: Textual Explorations*, (Harlow: Longman-Pearson, 2000).
[115] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*.

to make sense of it';[116] however, for an instant it can cause a disruption of reading. This continues as the sentence runs on and the syntax seems to break down, before returning to regular English spelling towards the end. There is nothing particularly difficult about the sentence. All of the words seem to be simply distortions of specific standard English spellings, and therefore are easily translatable in any case, or at least one assumes so. As Goodparley puts it when discussing present day English, 'some parts is easyer workit out nor others theres bits of it wewl never know vor cern just what they mean'.[117] However, the effect is still one of creating a momentary hesitation, and this is an important aspect of the novel. On this topic, Will Self opines, 'once you are able to read *Riddley Walker* fluently, you have gone beyond the world that Riddley himself experiences. The sensation of groping in the dark that you'll have while deciphering this text is exactly what it is all about.'[118] Slowing down the reader defers resolution.

This effect of the language is furthered by the punning. Many of those puns also represent the half-broken connection with the past, and some of the most prominent examples are place-names. Badlesmere has become Bad Mercy, Ashford has become Bernt Arse, Bullockstone has become Bollock Stoans, Capel-le-Ferne has become Crippel the Farn and so on.[119] Near the beginning of his tale, Riddley introduces himself: 'Walker is my name and I am the same. Riddley Walker. Walking my riddels where ever theyve took me and walking them now on this paper the same.'[120] This statement suggests the connection between myth, narrative and landscape that runs through the novel, and will be explored further in Chapter Five. Riddley is writing himself onto the landscape. It also brings attention to the notion of

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[116] Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 45.
[117] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 124.
[118] Will Self, 'Introduction', in *Riddley Walker,* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), pp. v-x (p. ix).
[119] For a complete list see *Riddley Walker Annotations*, <http://www.graphesthesia.com/rw/index.html> [accessed 13 November 2008].
[120] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 8.

riddling. A riddle implies an answer, but the language of *Riddley Walker* attempts to upset the notion of singular answers, deferring closure. Crippel the Farn both refers to the location in Riddley's world, and its precursor in space in the world of the reader, Capel-le-Ferne. While suggesting the breakdown of the physical space through the breakdown in language, which is another example of the world essentially being written into existence, this also suggests the word 'cripple', and the name becomes an imperative sentence. What 'the farn' is, however, is unclear. From puns with multiple meaning, now has come a word with no meaning, no apparent present day English cognate. Again, the language is halting, and uncertain. However, such a question can also be asked of the real world location, since most readers are unlikely to know that Capel-le-Ferne is French for 'Chapel in the Ferns', as well as referring to a village in Kent. The language of *Riddley Walker* asks not just questions of itself, but also of the world of the reader. It upsets certainties. The language slows down reading, and explicitly points to meanings and ideas beyond itself.

The punning disrupts concepts of simplistic meaning, and results in a search for multiple meanings throughout the text. The reader soon discovers the existence of multiple, hidden meanings, and this drives the quest for the discovery of more. The mythological multiplicity of the Eusa Story is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, but there is also a linguistic multiplicity caused by the ambiguity of Eusa's name. The punning and confusions of the text have led many critics to assume that Eusa could not simply be a name, but must also be a punning reference to something else. Eusa has been read as: St Eustace, which is the only explicit connection made in the text;[121] a variant of Jesus;[122] 'Good Say or Gospel';[123] a

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[121] Ibid. p. 127.
[122] Roy Arthur Swanson, 'Versions of Doublethink in *Gravity's Rainbow, Darkness Visible, Riddley Walker* and *Travels to the Enu*', *World Literature Today,* 58 (1984), pp. 203-8 (p. 206).
[123] Ibid.

phonetic rendering of a distorted pronunciation of USA,[124] possibly combined with

Europe,[125] or the USSR;[126] you sir, a cute, child-like name for the lead-role in this fairy tale;

use or user,[127] the person that uses science and others to his or her own ends; 'the words

"used to"';[128] you say,[129] which implies a placement of responsibility on the other, the alien;

us, which implies the opposite, the 'everyman';[130] Orpheus or Esau;[131] or it could even a be

strange and convoluted degradation of St Augustine of Canterbury.[132] The search for puns is

furthered by the use of phrases that offer no simple, straight forward cognate. In the phrase

'sarvering gallack seas', 'gallack seas' has a clear antecedent of 'galaxies', but the new

meaning that has attached itself to this phrase is less clear, and what exactly 'sarvering'

means is even less so. However, Hoban has provided a gloss:

> Sovereign Galaxies. Gallack Seas would suggest to Riddley's people sky—seas that might be
> crossed by boats in the air. Readers might think of galleons, carracks. 'Sarvering' is the
> participle of 'sarver,' which hints at severing, cutting off something for oneself, saving it for
> one's people, claiming a territory.[133]

This gloss is intriguing because it closes down the search for meaning. It both adds and

subtracts meaning from the text.

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[124] David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*, (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1989), p. 93; Robert Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 162; Maynor and Patteson, p. 19; Riddley Walker Annotations; Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, p. 139; Swanson, p. 206.
[125] Swanson, p. 206. Sisk suggests the European Space Agency, or Eastern Europe. Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, p. 139.
[126] Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, p. 139.
[127] *Riddley Walker Annotations*.
[128] Swanson, p. 206.
[129] Ibid.
[130] *Riddley Walker Annotations*.
[131] Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*, p. 139. The connection with Orpheus is a strong one, and one that is referred to numerous times throughout this paper. Esau is a biblical figure, who sells his birthright, Genesis 25, 27-28, 32-33.
[132] St Augustine was the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Eusa is 'the 1st Ardship of Cambry'. The process of moving from Augustine to Eusa is described by Maynor as '*AUGUSTINE*'. Maynor and Patteson, p. 19. Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 80. St Augustine of Canterbury was 'sent from Rome in 597 by Gregory the Great to convert the English peoples. 'Augustine of Canterbury, St.', in *Pears Cyclopedia,* ed. by Dr Chris Cook (London: Penguin Group, 1995), p. B5. This trivia becomes very interesting if one considers suggestions that St Augustine was possibly sent to England by Pope Gregory I (590-604) to prepare for the end of the world. Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 48.
[133] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 234.

Interestingly, Russell Hoban only intended Eusa to be a corrupted form of St Eustace, although he also says that he does not deny the existence of other meanings despite the lack of authorial intent.[134] Needless to say, claiming the permission of an author to ignore their authority is ironic, if not contradictory. However, to impose singular, authorial meaning on this text is to close it down, to close down the search for meaning. The denial of closure is one of the core purposes of the language of the novel, and thus to accept authorial intent is to destroy one of these core purposes. *Riddley Walker* is, in the terms of Roland Barthes, a writerly text, which 'make[s] the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text'.[135] It is constructed in order to deny its construction, and to demand a quest for meaning beyond what has been placed by the author. In the words of Barthes, 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.'[136] As a writerly text, the novel demands a death, or metaphorical suicide, of the author. The death of the author is also the death of the assumption of meaning, purpose and structure, again suggesting uncertainty and the possibility of the lack of closure. As Goodparley puts it before engaging in a form of linguistic alchemy, 'every now and agen youwl hear some thing it means what ever it means but youwl know theres mor in it as wel. Moren wer knowit by who ever said it.'[137] Even the author does not 'knowit' all meanings of his or her work.

The loss of the certainties of structure, even the certainties of an author, implies loss of the sense of a structure imposed upon the world by a god. The loss of structure in the novel suggests the failure of the apocalypse, with its promise of divine release. It is unsurprising that Barthes' death of the author was prefigured by almost twenty years by the high-

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[134] Personal e-mail communication with Eli Bishop, the editor of Riddley Walker Annotations. Bishop had also been in personal communication with Hoban.

[135] Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 4.

[136] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 1466-70 (p. 1470).

[137] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 128.

modernist post-apocalyptic *Ape and Essence* (1949),[138] by Aldous Huxley. A dead screenwriter's manuscript is found in a slush pile, marked 'For the Incinerator—twice underlined',[139] and its reading forms the rest of the novel, a vicious, post-apocalyptic satire that points 'to the gap between technological and ethical development, to the sophistication of the means and the imbecility of the ends.'[140] At the end of the script, the characters find the gravestone of the author of the script they are in.[141] Their author has died.

Meaning exists in a network, and the inability to fit multivalent words into a network results in another hesitation. The short phrase, 'A littl salting and no saver',[142] for instance, can suggest many interpretations. Indeed, its initially uncertain meaning demands interpretation. This is one of the 'reveals' that Riddley's father performs after one of the Eusa Shows. These, as mentioned in Chapter Three, are a kind of criticism performed by the *connexion men* of local communities, connecting various performances of the Eusa Show with the time and place of the performance, and giving it meaning for the local community. The phrase firstly leads to multiple Biblical passages: 'Salt [is] good: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned?'; 'Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.'; 'Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there [any] taste in the white of an egg?'[143] The multiple biblical passages suggested speak to the malleability of myths and stories, and the poetic passages are full of meanings in themselves. The replacement of the word 'savor' with 'saver', reminiscent of 'saviour', connects these two terms in a way that Goodparley explores in his later linguistic

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[138] Huxley.
[139] Ibid. p. 10.
[140] June Deery, 'Technology and Gender in Aldous Huxley's Alternative (?) Worlds', in *Critical Essays on Aldous Huxley,* ed. by Jerome Meckier (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), pp. 103-17 (p. 110).
[141] Huxley, p. 152.
[142] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 60.
[143] Luke 14.34, Matthew 5.13, Job 6.6.

alchemy. The word 'salt' is connected with saltpetre by Goodparley, as it is one of the constituents of gunpowder, which Riddley's world is attempting to recreate in order to build the '1 Littl 1'. 'Salt 4' is Riddley's society's name for sulphur, which is the second ingredient for gunpowder, and may suggest SALT II, the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks. It also suggests the salted bomb, a theoretical bomb that is laced with cobalt so that its deadly radiation lingers on for a civilisation-destroying period of time, as is depicted in *On the Beach*. The term salted bomb is itself a play on words, suggesting the salting of the land, when salt is placed upon fields in war or genocide to make the ground unproductive and starve a population. On the other hand, salt is one of the more important commodities for the development of civilisation, allowing the preservation of food, and salt might suggest that Riddley's culture is rising to this status, just as their use of charcoal does. When placed back into the sentence, many of these meanings make, at best, poetic sense. Language is a network, and it is impossible to fit multivalent words back into that network.

The language of *Riddley Walker* defers meaning by making itself difficult, and instigating a quest for meaning whereby the reader seeks out multiple readings. This multiplicity results in a hesitation between meaning, between certainties, and an ultimate deferral of closure. It also upsets notions of language in general, suggesting that meaning is uncertain in all language. The concept of the death of the author, and that ultimate meaning cannot or should not be found, is the first suggestion that Riddleyspeak is, essentially, a poststructuralist language, or is at least a language that immediately suggests the implications of poststructuralism.

According to Jeffrey Porter, 'Hoban's *Riddley Walker* calls attention to itself principally as a novel exploring the relation between science and language.'[144] Porter asserts that the numbers of the Master Chaynjis, through which Eusa must go, are the numbers of radioactive decay.[145] Radioactive decay is the process of an unstable atom decaying and turning into another atom, and so on until eventually a stable atom is formed. According to Porter, the numbers of the Master Chaynjis 'is an ingenious expression of this complicated process of disintegration. As applied to humans [...] the idea of the Master Changes adds a peculiar twist to the riddle of life after the bomb.'[146] These changes are presumably alterations of identity that Eusa, as a scapegoat or metaphor for humanity, must 'suffer through'.[147] Furthermore, as Maynor and Patteson suggest, uranium-235, a fissile element (meaning it can sustain an atomic chain reaction) that is used in the construction of the atomic bomb, eventually degrades, after 'eleven transmutations', to stable lead.[148] As its atomic number changes, so does the identity of the atom. These transmutations could be taken as the slow degradation of society and culture after the bomb, or as explosive cycles of destruction and loss, until eventually the flagellation is complete, when the radiation has dissipated and humanity has reverted to a stable state: simple, poisonous lead. Porter further suggests that the language is indicative of quantum physics. He claims that while in the past 'the conventions of language and the conditions of science had always matched',[149] as quantum theory developed and concepts of reality changed, physicist Werner Heisenberg began to raise questions about the relationship

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[144] Porter, p. 450. This concept, specifically the analogy of language decay and atomic decay, is one that David Seed finds 'predictable', although he does not comment on its worth. David Seed, 'The Signs of War: Walter M. Miller and Russell Hoban', in *American Science Fiction and the Cold War,* (Edinburgh: Fitzroy Dearborn Pubs., 1999), pp. 157-67 (p. 164).

[145] Porter, p. 467.

[146] Ibid. p. 468.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Maynor and Patteson, p. 467.

[149] Porter, p. 448.

between language and science. Porter posits that *Riddley Walker* explores the scientific uncertainties of quantum physics by:

> [P]laying on the slippery side of the signifier. By suspending realist notions of meaning and by breaking the common rules of discourse, these stories project verbal counterrealities wherein the values and norms of official language are criticized and ultimately disrupted.[150]

Thus, '[l]ike the atom, language too has come apart, split explosively by history, and has lost its semiotic stability. Set free, the signs of Riddley's world split and recombine to form new meanings.'[151]

Saussure's concept of general linguistics suggests that '[t]he atom of language is the sign, which is functionally split into two parts: a *signifier* (sound-image) and a *signified* (concept), brought inseparably together like the two sides of a sheet of paper'.[152] Language derives from the structure of these signs, which are all defined entirely by their difference from one another. The connections between signifier and signified are entirely arbitrary, and there is no implied connection between a sign and its final referent, which is the real world that language is generally seen to point. Language, however, is essential to meaning. As Saussure suggests:

> Psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.[153]

However, '[p]honic substances are also vague.'[154] It is only by the interrelation of signifier and signified that language forms into discrete units. Therefore language is 'a series of contiguous subdivisions marked off on both the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas [...] and the

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[150] Ibid. p. 450.
[151] Ibid. p. 453.
[152] 'Ferdinand De Saussure, 1857-1913', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), pp. 956-60 (p. 958).
[153] Ibid. pp. 966-7.
[154] Ibid. p. 967.

equally vague plane of sounds'.[155] In the twentieth century, Saussure's work became the foundation of structuralist theories that applied the same tools of investigation to other fields, including semiotic literary criticism. These endeavours attempted to study these as if they were systems of language. The post-structuralist movement, while not denying the broad assumptions of structuralism, did criticise its value and the possibility of an ultimate science of literature. Derrida's work, in particular, denies the possibility of finding meaning, because all systems of signs ultimately point outside themselves. There can be no closure and no meaning. On the notion of a sign being the 'atom of language', Derrida said 'there is no atom.'[156] Drawing on these concepts, this section argues that the language of *Riddley Walker* is essentially post-structuralist, or, at least, makes explicit the implications of post-structuralism. Splitting the atom of the material world has resulted in a splitting of the atom of language, and the result is a world in which the signifier and signified slip across one another and constantly refer outside themselves in infinite recursivity. This results in a constant deferral and denial of closure and, with it, meaning.

Across the nuclear fire-break, semiotics breaks down, and the impossibility of closure and meaning is laid bare. When Robert Jay Lifton claims that nuclear war would create a 'break in the human chain',[157] destroying, for all intents and purposes, an entire generation of humanity and disconnecting the following generation from the previous, he is also suggesting a break in social convention. In splitting the atom, words are also split, causing a chain reaction breakdown of language. The two planes, of concepts and sound-images, are loosened from one another. This is exacerbated by the destruction of the old world to which language

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[155] Ibid.

[156] Jaques Derrida, 'Dialanguages', in *Points... Interview, 1974-94,* ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 132-55 (p. 137).

[157] Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 66.

referred, and in many post-nuclear fictions a return to an oral culture. Inland, with its post-literate society, can no longer anchor its language with the written word. The new world no longer contains the referents of their language, and the language has searched for new referents, new meanings.

Christine Wilkie catalogues a number of words that have gone through the fracturing and recombining of meaning suggested by a techtonic shift of language:

> *a nother*, *a nuff*, *be low*, *as citing* (exciting), *inner fearents* (interference), *arper sit* (opposite), *vy brations* (vibrations), *suching waytion* (situation), *worded* (spoke), *talkess* (silent), *here time* (the present time), *persoon* (pretty soon), *pernear* (pretty nearly)[.][158]

More interesting terms are those that have gone through a change in meaning due to their changing form. 'Nebulae', for instance, has become the 'nebyul eye', and 'galaxies', as previously mentioned, has become 'gallack seas'.[159] Now lacking any concept of what a nebula or a galaxy is, the words have split so that they can connect with concepts that Riddley's people do understand: eyes and seas. The change is logical, nebulae can look very similar to eyes, but the result is significant change of meaning in those words.

One of the most intriguing examples of this split in language is when Goodparley interprets the phrase: '"*Wooded landscape with many small hamlets.*" Wel thats littl pigs innit[.]'[160] In a short and comic line, Hoban explodes any objective connection between signifier and signified. This could be taken to support Saussure's original claim that '[t]he bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.'[161] However, *Riddley Walker*'s use of language is more complex than that. The line is comic because it is not *entirely* arbitrary, or at least not entirely disconnected from present day English. The humour exists in the half-

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[158] Wilkie, p. 57.
[159] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 22.
[160] Ibid. p. 126.
[161] Ferdinand de Saussure, '*From* Course in General Linguistics', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), pp. 960-77 (p. 960).

torn nature of signification. Just like the myths of *Riddley Walker*, the phrase suggests a frustrated connection with the past, not a complete connection or a complete disconnection. It is easy to imagine a child who has never encountered the word '*hamlet*' making this logical assumption based upon other common words, and Inland is a child society. Saussure mentions similar phenomena, claiming, 'However bizarre such innovations may be, they do not occur haphazardly. They are attempts to make some kind of sense of an embarrassing word by connecting it with something known.'[162] Understanding the comic nature of the phrase, 'Wel thats littl pigs innit',[163] demands an understanding of the original meaning, of Riddley's language and of the function by which the (mis)interpretation may occur. According to Saussurean linguistics, the sounds of 'Wooded landscape with many small hamlets' blend from one to the next, as do the mental images brought up by it; it is by combining the thoughts and language that individual words, individual signs, come into existence. This connection is held in place by social convention. A break in the human chain caused by nuclear war has destroyed this convention; the nuclear war has destroyed the physical world to which these signs point; it has created a primarily illiterate society, destroying the literature that might maintain the *status quo* of language. Goodparley has divided the word 'hamlet' into a word he understands, 'ham', and the diminutive suffix.[164] Thus, language has split and broken.

Language, as well as myth, forms geological layers. This slipping of signifier across the signified throughout the text of *Riddley Walker* creates fissures that crack the foundations of meaning, understanding and history, and expose a multiplicity of meanings. Language has been fractured, synchronically and diachronically, exposing old meanings as well as new.

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[162] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 172.
[163] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 126.
[164] Originally, 'hamlet' was a small village, also known as a ham, where we get the word 'home' from, so the word hamlet does originally mean a little 'ham', although not the 'ham' that Goodparley is thinking of.

Disconnected from literary foundations, or of present referents, these sounds float and attach to those things they sound like they might be, they attach to words that are common to the reader. This phenomenon is sometimes known as an 'eggcorn' by linguists.[165] This term gains its name because of people who call 'acorns', 'eggcorns' since they look vaguely like eggs. It is important to note that it is wrong to assume that all meaning lies on the reader's side of the apocalyptic moment, on the reader's side of the threshold. By losing access to the original referents of their language, Riddley's people have not lost the understanding of their own words, but instead those old worlds have been detached from meaning, and have reattached themselves to new meanings. The new world of Riddley is as mysterious to the reader as the reader's world is to Riddley. The reader can have no conception of the new and post-apocalyptic referent. Just as Riddley has attached new meaning to old words, the reader may be simply attaching familiar meanings back into cognates that have long since come to mean something new. For instance, given that tea is not traditionally produced in Britain, and trade is unlikely to be as developed in Riddley's world as it is today, it is unlikely that the 'tea' drunk in Riddley's world is the same as in our own. Similarly, the dogs, obviously intellectually superior to anything in the contemporary world, could also look unlike anything that the reader would normally understand the word to mean. This reminds the reader of the uncertainty of all language, just as Riddley's engagement with history and myth reminds the reader of the uncertainty implicit in these concepts. The break in language results in a multiplicity of uncertain meanings, and these meanings are held in a moment of hesitation.

Despite their uncertainty, words still have power in the world of *Riddley Walker*. This is made clear as Goodparley engages with linguistic alchemy with the phrase, 'A littl salting

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[165] *The Eggcorn Database*, <http://eggcorns.lascribe.net/about/> [accessed 8 May 2013].

and no saver',[166] seeing it as a key to the Legend of St Eustace. The phrase leads him to see salt as a homonym of savour, and then to interpret the word '*Saviour*' in the Legend of St Eustace as referring to salty. Thus, '*the figure of the crucified Saviour*' becomes a 'salt crucified'.[167] The term 'crucified' not being in the language of Inland, its meaning lost in the past, turns him to take this as meaning salt placed in a crucible. '[F]*igure*' is taken to mean number, and due to the mythic association between Christ and the Littl Shyning Man, who is torn in two, the number is taken as two. The brazen bull into which Eustace is placed is associated with charcoal, which then leads to two of the ingredients of gunpowder: charcoal and saltpetre. Gunpowder, the '1 littl 1', is seen as the precursor to the atomic bomb, the '1 big 1'. This act of linguistic alchemy both suggests the importance of language and the impossibility of understanding. It assumes the multivalency of meaning in language, and yet it also suggests its concreteness. Language does not just describe reality, but reality is constructed of language and to break apart language is to understand reality, or even to change it. Words can 'move things'.[168] Words can 'fetch.'[169] Linguistic play is a kind alchemy, a kind of 'chemistery'.[170] It is kind of quantum physics as well.

This alchemy of language is about putting the two back into the one, first in language, by reintegrating reference and referent, and secondly in physical terms by reintegrating the ingredients of gunpowder. This is a consistent theme of *Riddley Walker*. At the core of their foundation myth, the Eusa Story, the Littl Shyning Man is torn into two. The quest Riddley engages in is to put the Little Shyning Man back together. For David Lake, the various myths are all similarly retellings of the same story,[171] and are all based on the mystical concept of

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[166] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 60.
[167] Ibid. p. 128. Emphasis in original.
[168] Ibid. p. 122.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid. p. 127.
[171] Lake, p. 166.

unity and division,[172] whereby all things are part of 'only one thing, a pure unity.'[173] The

constant punnings, derided by Norman Spinrad as being used 'for low comic effect',[174] are in

fact a core part of the meaning of the novel, as the pun 'assert[s] the mystical union of

concepts we normally keep separate.'[175] The use of the figures '1' and '2', in place of words,

asserts this importance, as a recurring concept throughout the novel is the splitting of one into

two, and the attempt to put the two back into one. Lake further cites as proof the fact that

these passages echo scripture.[176] According to Jack Branscomb, Riddley is also two in one, as

Lissener is Riddley's other half, his shadow: 'Riddley is a talker, an explainer of riddles, and

potentially an artist. Lissener is abstract, a seeker of power, a descendent of Eusa and the

"puter leat" (computer elite) before Bad Time.'[177] However, to put language back together is

equivalent to putting atoms back together. This path can only, ultimately, end in destruction,

as to implode atoms is to build an atomic bomb.

Riddley Walker demands a quest for meaning, but, like its use of myth, finding an

ultimate meaning can be dangerous:

> Hoban suggests that interpretations can vary in worth, and what distinguishes helpful
> interpretations from destructive ones is the motivation of the teller. Stories which come to the
> storyteller of themselves are likely to contain at least some of the essence of true meaning.
> Interpreters like Goodparley, greedy to make use of the instrumental power of words, are apt
> to go wrong. "Words!" he says to Riddley, "Theywl move things you know theywl do things.
> Theywl fetch" (122). But what they fetch for power-seekers is violence and death.[178]

The eternal hesitation created by the atomic splitting of language represents the failure of

closure in the post-apocalyptic, and the attempts to put the two back into one represent the

desperate attempt to find closure, meaning and purpose for the world. The lack of clarity of

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[172] Ibid.
[173] Walter T. Stace, cited in ibid. p. 164.
[174] Norman Spinrad, *Science Fiction in the Real World*, (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois UP, 1990), p. 38.
[175] Lake, p. 157.
[176] Ibid. p. 167.
[177] Jack Branscomb, 'The Quest for Wholeness in the Fiction of Russell Hoban', *Critique,* 28 (1986), pp. 29-38 (p. 34).
[178] Branscomb, p. 109.

the language in *Riddley Walker* and constant punning creates an uncertainty and a hesitation of meaning and closure. It demands a search for multiple meanings, which open up like the mythic allusions examined in Chapter Three. This uncertainty, since it is one of the points of the novel, similarly demands the denial of authorship, and with it the comfort of a meaningful and ordered narrative, even while the novel is highly organised towards this goal. This hesitation of meaning expands as multivalent words must be fitted into networks of meaning that cannot hold them, for the multiplicity of meanings of multiple words often exist in contradiction to one another. Words have been split from their referents, due to the breaks in social convention, the firebreak of history, the destruction of the canon and the destruction of the physical world. Yet these words still have power. They describe the hidden nature of the world, and the playing with words becomes a way of playing with reality. The characters engage in linguistic alchemy, trying to put language and the world back together. However, just as with the myths explored in Chapter Three, to put the world back together may result in destruction. Finding the ultimate final meaning is a dangerous proposition. Riddley is looking for 'some thing in us it dont have no name.'[179] He is searching for the nameless, the ineffable. He must accept its namelessness, and accept the denial of closure. Riddley must live within the moment of hesitation.

Conclusion

In the post-apocalyptic world, the language contains the failure of an ending, both by pointing back to the half-forgotten past, and by obfuscating meaning. The first three chapters of this thesis focused on a traditional, narratological view of closure, though coloured by apocalypse and myth. In following the argument through to language, the similarities between these systems and the way they defer and deny closure is also apparent. The structures of language

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[179] Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, p. 6.

in *Riddley Walker*, for instance, parallel the structures of myth. Both obfuscate meaning. Both point to the future and the past. Both connect themselves with an infinite structural network that makes final closure difficult. They all highlight Henry James's observation about closure, that it involves the reflection of the world in a way that pretends that connections are finite and ordered.[180] These texts deny closure by pointing to infinitely expanding connections outside of themselves. They remind the reader of the reality 'that relations stop nowhere'.[181] This, as James Berger suggests, demonstrates a connection between the post-apocalyptic and the post-structural.[182] While the failure of structure to provide meaning is most apparent in narrative, it is also paralleled in these texts by their use of myth and language.

The languages of post-apocalyptic worlds are born of this failure to represent. They point back always to a half-forgotten past, which carries on a ghost existence in the words of the characters. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the language is symbolic of confusion, and of a half broken connection with this past. It is steeped in reference to Biblical myth, as the confusions of language allude to Babel, and the desire to reconnect with the language of the past alludes to the prelapsarian language of Eden. It also encapsulates within it the power of language, including its destructive potential. *The Road*, on the other hand, attempts to represent the liminal dream space of apocalypse by cutting language back. Language is reduced to its simplest forms, and disappears along with its referents.

Riddley Walker uses a much more overt and complicated strategy. There are three main ways in which the language of *Riddley Walker* denies or defers closure. It first, in a similar way to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, instigates doubt and uncertainty. Riddley discovers

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[180] Henry James, 'Preface to "Roderick Hudson"', in *The Art of the Novel,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 3-19 (p. 5).
[181] Ibid.
[182] Berger, p. 110.

fragments of the past within language. This leads to a questioning of the world he lives in. It secondly defers closure by slowing down reading and complicating it. It finally denies closure by pointing outwards, as with myth, to an infinite network of signs.

5 Finding an Ending: *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*

The film *Miracle Mile* (1988),[1] an apocalyptic thriller *cum* romantic comedy, portrays the desperate search of a man, Harry, for a woman he has only just met, Julie, after he discovers that the nuclear holocaust will break out in less than seventy minutes. His search and attempt to escape is constantly thwarted due to a series of mix-ups and confusions. In the end, the couple almost make it out of Los Angeles on a helicopter, only to crash land in the La Brea Tar Pits and die together. They are fossilised forever in each other's arms as the world ends and, at least in their final imaginings, they are crystalized to diamonds by the atomic explosion. The film takes its name from a stretch of road in Los Angeles that the story revolves around. Roads are structures along which a narrative can take place, with their beginning, middle and end, and this short stretch implies the inevitability of an ending. It also suggests the frustrated attempts to escape, to get off the road.

This chapter and the next primarily explore the various ways Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) both institutes and denies closure.[2] These chapters engage in a close reading of *The Road*, integrating comparative readings of *Riddley Walker* (1980) and other texts of the end-of-the-world.[3] While introducing concepts such as the use of landscape as structuring element, and also of the liminal moments between worlds that deny closure, this close reading also draws in the various ideas around the failure of closure and its representation suggested in earlier chapters, and contextualises *The Road* within the genre of end-of-the-world fictions.

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[1] Steve De Jarnatt, dir., *Miracle Mile*. US: Hemdale Film, 1988.
[2] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (London: Picador, 2007).
[3] Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

The discussion begins with the concept of the threshold between one world and the next, as a tool in apocalyptic myth and in literature. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* exists in a liminal state between one world and another, in which this moment of transition is stretched out. One world has ceased to exist, but the next world has not yet come to fruition. It is the destruction of one that allows another world to be born. *The Road* does not exist on either side of this state, but instead within the apocalyptic moment. Earlier chapters have focussed on the way this apocalyptic moment is incomplete or unfulfilled; this chapter, on the other hand, explores this liminal moment stretched out, as the characters try to impose meaning upon the absence. This chapter first argues that *The Road* creates a space of ambiguity, hesitating between absence and meaning, and between one world and another. More than this, however, this chapter argues that McCarthy collides traditional apocalyptic hopes with holocaust fears; the horrific reality of the ending destroys hope and meaning in life, it destroys narrative, and leaves the man and the boy desperately trying to structure their lives around a new narrative.

One of the ways meaning may be imposed upon such an absence is through landscape. The man and the boy give this absence meaning and purpose by creating a narrative, and by laying it down the road. This is not unusual, and the characters of apocalyptic fictions often create meaning in the new world by finding structures from the past along which they can lay their story. Roads, in particular, have an inherent structure and ability to survive apocalyptic destruction. The characters may also find meaning through acts of naming, of placing their own, new meanings on the absence and bringing the new world into existence, just as order is imposed on chaos in the Biblical story of Genesis. These patterns are found in *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*. This discussion draws on aspects of

David Seed's analysis of cultural geography in the post-apocalyptic landscape,[4] Mircea Eliade's views of cyclical time,[5] the death ritual of the Western genre,[6] and discussion of the journey narrative, in order to understand the way in which the characters attempt to give their lives structure, closure and meaning in the wasteland.

Placing Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* in the Apocalyptic Landscape

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* follows the journey of a man and a boy,[7] father and son who are never named, through an America destroyed by an unknown catastrophe, filled with 'that sour smell he'd come to know',[8] the smell of human bodies rotting. The boy's mother has committed suicide in despair. Their only goal is to head south, which the man imagines as warmer and more able to sustain life.[9] The man's only goal beyond this is to protect his son at all costs, whether those costs are physical or moral. Indeed, the man treats the survival of the boy as a moral imperative. This leads to a survivalist mentality, where the man denies help to others. He justifies his actions with the repeated statement that they are carrying the 'fire',[10] and are therefore more morally worthy than others; yet, what makes them so superior, beyond the reader's assumed sympathies for the protagonist, is often uncertain. However, in simple narrative terms this may be enough:

> We do not know where [they ...] are from, nor are we informed of their age, their ethnicity, or other pertinent details, [...] as readers we feel intimately connected to their plight. That *the*

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[4] David Seed, 'Mapping the Post-Nuclear Landscape', *Foundation: the International Review of Science Fiction,* (2003), pp. 65-75.

[5] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).

[6] As laid out by Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[7] McCarthy.

[8] Ibid. p. 48.

[9] The exact route of their journey is explored by Wesley Morgan, 'The Route and Roots of *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 39-47.

[10] McCarthy, p. 4. Daniel Luttrull sees the fire as being Promethean. Daniel Luttrull, 'Prometheus Hits *The Road*: Revising the Myth', *Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 8 (2010), pp. 17-28.

man and *the* boy are always accompanied by the definite article grants the figures at once specificity and universality.[11]

The juxtaposition between the realities of their condition, the uncertainties and hopelessness, and the sense of purpose and meaning provided by narrative convention and structure, is one that will be explored throughout this discussion of *The Road*. The shattered landscape seems inhabited only by those brutal enough to survive, with roads trafficked by 'bloodcults',[12] and cellars used for storing meals for cannibals. Meanwhile, the man carries a pistol with two bullets: one for himself and one for the boy.[13]

McCarthy's tenth novel, *The Road* has possibly been his most lauded text and won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. This prize is awarded to contemporary literature 'preferably dealing with American life'.[14] While the word 'preferably' may indicate that, in this case, an exception was made, the suggestion that a novel set in an apocalyptic wasteland is indicative of the contemporary American experience is one that warrants further discussion. While fictions of the end of the world have been written fairly consistently throughout the twentieth century, the peaks and troughs in the numbers of published fictions in the genre coincide with the concerns of the era.[15] Those that have received popular acclaim, too, have generally dealt with popular concerns. *On the Beach* (1959) and *Riddley Walker* (1980) both coincide with a particularly high level of concern around the issue of nuclear weapons, for instance.

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[11] Kevin Kearney, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Frontier of the Human', *L I T: Literature Interpretation Theory,* 23 (2012), pp. 160-77 (p. 164).

[12] McCarthy, p. 14.

[13] The symbolic function of the bullets is quite thoroughly explored by Jamie Crosswhite, '"Carry the Fire": McCarthy's Bullets as Shells of Life in a Post-Apocalyptic World', *The Explicator,* 69 (2011), pp. 146-49.

[14] *The Pulitzer Prizes*, <http://www.pulitzer.org> [accessed 18 October 2007]. Possibly more indicative of its relationship with contemporary American life is its being selected for Oprah's Book Club. An exploration of the way in which *The Road* represents a post-American landscape is offered by Paul Sheehan, 'Road, Fire, Trees: Cormac McCarthy's Post-America', in *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), pp. 89-109.

[15] The number of fictions published about nuclear war can be loosely correlated with the number of nuclear weapons, with a few explainable discrepancies. Paul Brians, *Chart of Trends in Nuclear War Fiction*, <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nukepop/chart.html> [accessed 3 May 2013]; Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, 'Global Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945–2006', in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* (2006), pp. 64-66.

Similarly, the glut of environmental fictions and films in the 1960s and 70s comes on the tails of environmental concerns and a general sense of distrust in authority.[16] *The Road* arrived fifteen years after the end of the Cold War and, while the fear of nuclear weapons remains as horizontal nuclear proliferation continues, the widespread fear of a world ending nuclear apocalypse is currently a thing of the past. This has not stopped a number of critics from assuming that the novel is anti-nuclear. Concerns over global warming similarly have led to a number of eco-critical readings of the novel as well. While these readings are available to *The Road*, this thesis argues that McCarthy's scope and aims are much broader. *The Road* explores a general trend of the human condition in the twenty first century, and is part of the continued undercurrent of interest in the apocalypse. Ultimately, as with the other texts explored in this thesis, the novel demonstrates a quest for closure in a world where closure seems uncertain or deferred.

The Road is only part of a recent extension of an old literary tradition. According to Douglas Robinson, America has always been a land of the apocalypse.[17] John Dewey further claims that 'since its very beginnings, America has been curiously fascinated by the power and the myth of the apocalypse.'[18] Certainly, the apocalypse was present in the very founding of America:

> [It] was highly influential among Christians in America. The Puritans saw themselves in terms of the apocalypse, escaping what they saw as the demonic forces of the Catholic and established Churches. The New World of the Americas offered them the chance of creating

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[16] See, for instance, John Boorman, dir., *Zardoz*. USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1974; John Brunner, *Stand on Zanzibar*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1968); Michael Campus, dir., *Z.P.G.* United Kingdom: Sagittarius Productions Inc., 1972; Harry Harrison, *Make Room! Make Room!*, (New York: Ace Science Fiction, 1980); Robert Silverberg, *The World Inside*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971); Douglas Trumbull, dir., *Silent Running*: Universal Pictures, 1972.

[17] For an overview of American millennialism, see Catherine L. Albanese, *American Religions and Religion*, (Belmost, CA: Wadsworth, 1992). See also Douglas Robinson, *American Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[18] John Dewey, *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper of the American Novel of the Nuclear Age*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1990), p. 10.

the millennium kingdom in a "virgin" land, it was the New Jerusalem, the city on the hill that was a beacon to all people who pursued the righteousness of God.[19]

The Puritan migration to the New World was seen as a fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecy and the continuation of a frustrated belief in Britain's eschatological promise, and a number of other European movements towards colonisation also had apocalyptic undercurrents.[20] Millenarians have variously seen the continent as Eden or Armageddon,[21] and have often seen the indigenous inhabitants as the lost tribe of Israel. Utopian myths of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny can similarly be linked to an eschatological sensibility, and the American War of Independence was also given apocalyptic overtones. William Blake's *America a Prophecy* (1793),[22] for instance, relates the Revolution to Revelation, with the image of the defeated dragon of oppression mimicking the dragon of Apocalypse.[23] This was the ever present flipside of the utopic elements of American culture, and was finally made all the stronger after World War Two as, '[u]nderlying America's euphoric prosperity […] loomed the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.'[24]

Apocalypticism has been widely represented in American literature. According to John R. May, 'A distinctively literary strand of American apocalypse developed during the nineteenth century'.[25] In May's view, there are three 'historical phases of American literary

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[19] Mervyn F. Bendle, 'The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture,* 11 (2005) <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA147624534&v=2.1&u=flinders&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w> [accessed 12 May 2013].
[20] See Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Zakai's text offers a long argument in favour of the apocalyptic interpretation of Puritan settlement, while the second chapter focuses on other movements for American settlement and conquest and their often apocalyptic underpinnings.
[21] Dewey, p. 6.
[22] William Blake and G. E. Bentley, *America, a Prophecy*, (Normal, Ill.: American Blake Foundation, 1974).
[23] The link between the apocalypticism of Blake and the Beats can be found in Tony Trigilio, *Strange Prophecies Anew : Rereading Apocalypse in Blake, H.D., and Ginsberg*, (Madison, N.J.; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 2000).
[24] Thomas R. Bierowski, *Kerouac in Ecstasy: Shamanic Expression in the Writings*, (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), p. 9.
[25] John R. May, *Toward a New Earth : Apocalypse in the American Novel*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p. 32.

apocalypse'.[26] The first is the work of writers such as Hawthorne, Melville and Twain, whose 'apocalypse represents primarily a reaction against the romanticism and liberalism of nineteenth-century American thought'.[27] The second is exemplified by Faulkner, West and O'Connor, who reflect 'introversion' and expose 'the perennial weaknesses of man'.[28] The third phase comes into the atomic age, and includes, according to May, a large number of African-American novelists and apocalyptic humourists, for whom:

> The genuine loss of world that their novels reflect is both national and universal in scope; it is a reaction against the ineffectual gradualism of social change, the faceless horror of technological society, and the myths perpetrated to distract us from the reality of impending universal cataclysm. In this latter period almost all American literature has an apocalyptic tone; the contemporary literary world seems genuinely to reflect a cultural climate that is itself universally apocalyptic. The climate, however, is turbulent; the literary processes are still no doubt in flux.[29]

This development is:

> [A] poignant response to the succession of global hot and cold wars. It reflects as well the process of secularization that began in the nineteenth century and blossomed into the anomie of the century of unrestrained technology.[30]

That the apocalyptic trend in American literature would continue after the end of the Cold War, a fourth age, is unsurprising when it has such a long tradition before the possibility of imminent nuclear destruction. The possibility of the bomb merely literalised an impulse that was already present in fiction. This literal image of the already present bomb was then reintegrated into literature. In *The Road*, the apocalypse maintains its literal and concrete nature, but the bomb has been removed.

The apocalyptic vision of *The Road* is not alone in the twenty-first century. The cinema and television screens remain replete with images of destruction, all the more grand

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[26] Ibid. p. 201.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid. p. 202.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid. pp. 32-3.

in an age of relatively cheap visual effects. *Sunshine* (2007) returns to Lord Byron's premise

of a dying sun and depicts a suicidal attempt to stop it,[31] while *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-

2009) depicts a battle between cyclical and linear models of time in a post-apocalyptic

future.[32] A particularly prominent form of apocalyptic vision in the new millennium is the

zombie apocalypse. Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006) may be the most notable account,[33]

while the television series *Walking Dead* (2010-) follows a plotline with similarities to *The*

Road,[34] as it features a father trying to protect his son from both physical and moral

corruption. Indeed, the cannibalism and consumerism of *The Road* suggests a strong thematic

connection with the genre of zombie apocalypses. In literature, the apocalypse also remains

prominent. Heather J. Hicks notes that there has been a 'recent outpouring of apocalyptic

narratives by major literary figures', citing Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and

Year of the Flood (2009), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Michel Houllebecq's *The*

Possibility of an Island (2005), Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) and Douglas

Coupland's *Player One* (2010).[35] Whether these are merely vestiges of a continual

apocalyptic impulse or a particular response to the post-9/11 world is not entirely clear,

although *The Road*, in particular, has been seen by many as an example of the latter.

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[31] Danny Boyle, dir., *Sunshine*. UK; USA: Fox Searchlight, 2007.
[32] *Battlestar Galactica*. US: Sci-Fi, 2004-2009.
[33] Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, (New York: Crown, 2006).
[34] *The Walking Dead*. USA: AMC Studios, 2010-.
[35] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Douglas Coupland, *Player One*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2010); Heather J. Hicks, '"This Time Round": David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and the Apocalyptic Problem of Historicism', *Postmodern Culture,* 20 (2010) <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/pmc/v020/20.3.hicks.html> [accessed 3 May 2013]; Michel Houellebecq, *The Possibility of an Island*, trans. by Gavin Bowd (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (London: Sceptre, 2004); Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007). Hicks is, presumably, using the word 'apocalyptic fictions' to refer to fictions of the end of the world.

There has been a great deal of scholarly discussion about *The Road* and its placement within the genre of end of the world fictions has been noted.[36] However, as a literary work, it has most often been compared to McCarthy's other works and to the genres of the Western and its companions, the Southern and Southwestern.[37] Despite its prominence, scholars have yet to contextualise the novel within the canon of end of the world fiction. However, it is replete with the imagery and motifs of the genre. Indeed, its use of almost cliché imagery could lead McCarthy to be seen as something of an interloper, as R.D. Mullen seems to suggest of Russell Hoban.[38] As with *Riddley Walker*, however, an understanding of the genre is apparent in *The Road*, and used for the purpose of developing its own unique vision. McCarthy's use of the post-apocalyptic genre is similar to his use of the Western. It allows a shorthand, with *The Road*'s world needing little description, as it can rely on the images of apocalypse that have swamped television screens for generations. The dark world, survivors

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[36] Michael Chabon, in particular, contextualises it within this genre, with comparisons to films such as *Planet of the Apes*. Michael Chabon, 'Dark Adventure: On Cormac McCarthy's *the Road*', in *Maps and Legends* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2008), pp. 107-20. The number of articles, both in journals and in collections, about *The Road* seems to be increasing exponentially. It receives a short discussion in John Cant, *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Routledge, 2008). The one book length study that investigates *The Road* in detail is Lydia R. Cooper's *no More Heroes*, which uses an approach borrowing elements from linguistics and from moral philosophy. Lydia R. Cooper, *No More Heroes : Narrative Perspective and Morality in Cormac McCarthy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011). The most significant body of work on *The Road* is an issue of *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* devoted almost entirely to *The Road* (issue 6), and a number of essay collections. Many of the articles for this issue were originally presented at the Cormac McCarthy conference in 2007, and copies of papers and videos can be found here: *The Road Home: McCarthy's Imaginative Return to the South*, <http://www.newfoundpress.utk.edu/pubs/mccarthy/mccarthy3.html> [accessed 3 May 2013]. A collection of articles entirely focused on *The Road* has also recently been published as Julian Murphet and Mark Steven, *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012). Many of the key articles used in this thesis have been reprinted, in an edited and condensed form, in Harold Bloom, *Cormac McCarthy's The Road* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011). Dianne C. Luce's excellent bibliography of work on McCarthy was only last updated in 2011. Dianne C. Luce, *Cormac McCarthy: A Bibliography*, The Cormac McCarthy Society, <http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/wp-content/uploads/McCarthyEnglishBib_20111026.pdf> [accessed 22 April 2013]. For more recent scholarship, one might turn to the reference list for this thesis. There are, of course, a large number of texts written about McCarthy's work in general, but these are not engaged with here where the focus is on *The Road* and contextualising it within the genre of visions of the end of the world.
[37] In this thesis, due to the difficulty of constantly maintaining the subtle distinctions between Southern, Southwestern and Western, the term 'Western' is used loosely as a kind of catch-all term.
[38] See R.D. Mullen, 'Dialect, Grapholect, and Story: Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* as Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies,* 27 (2000), pp. 391-417.

with dust masks, and roving bands, with trucks and 'catamites', need little further description these days. They are straight out of *Mad Max 2* (1981),[39] or any of the legion imitators of that film. The images of cannibalism are also a feature of the genre, as are the shopping spree consumer culture mentalities. The novel collides genre expectations with literary fiction, and the setting, too, is a collision. The genre elements, the bloodcults for instance, are juxtaposed with a setting that was once peaceful and entirely normal. Elements that seem fantastic are alluded to, but rarely explored in detail. They are props from a movie set, wheeled into this heretofore domestic environment. It is as if the post-apocalyptic genre has been unleashed upon a normal world.

There is a connection between imminent danger and need to express it in apocalyptic visions, but this connection need not be direct. Stories of the end 'both inform and are informed by our philosophical episteme as well, one that has been defined by a post-Nietzschean incredulity towards the transcendental (or, more plainly, the belief that "God is dead").'[40] That is, apocalypse can represent imminent threat, or it can represent a broader cultural mood. Apocalypse can also be inspired by a need to work through fears and anxieties, to express or to psychologically resolve them. Fictional representations of apocalypse might express the fear of the coming apocalypse, or it may use the apocalypse as a way to resolve other, deep-seated and seemingly unresolvable fears. While fear of imminent destruction has waned, the fear of future destruction, the fear of a corrupt society, the fear of constant tragedy made clear by 9/11 and its responses might still inspire apocalyptic visions. These may be of either hopeful images of a final resolution or fearful ones of the failure of an ending. The twenty-first century is not a time of imminent apocalypse, but it is a time of slow burn anxieties. It is a time of acts of sensationalised violence and political repressions in

[39] George Miller, dir., *Mad Max 2*. Australia: Warner Bros, 1981.
[40] Kearney, p. 163.

response to that violence. It is a time when a predicted environmental apocalypse looms sometime ahead, far enough away to allow the constant deferral of action, but close enough to create uncertainties about the future – and uncertainties about a society that allows such a future. Perhaps, then, rather than a 'prophesied future[, ...] the barren wasteland of *The Road* is simply McCarthy's rendering of modernity.'[41] Kenneth Lincoln more broadly suggests that McCarthy's work engages with post-9/11 America, in which the right wing is, more than ever, willing to face down apocalypse, whether it be environmental, nuclear, or other.[42] Shelley Rambo concurs.[43] She sees the novel as a continuation of the themes of American exceptionalism and apocalypticism, whereby America was seen as a possible Eden.[44] Rambo sees political relevance to these beliefs, that they have informed American foreign policy in the post-9/11 environment, and that the man and the boy in *The Road* are using similar justifications. They claim that they are 'carrying the fire',[45] that good must come out of their actions, however questionable those actions must be, and that they are the 'good guys' for reasons that are disconnected from their actions and instead intrinsic to their being. The ends justify the means, but the ends are unknown.

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[41] Matthew Mullins, 'Hunger and the Apocalypse of Modernity in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *symploke,* 19 (2011), pp. 75-93 (p. 76).

[42] Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac McCarthy*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Tim Edwards also claims that 'a storyline that just a few short years ago would have seemed more naturally suited to the Cold War era has taken on a greater urgency in a post-9/11 world.' Tim Edwards, 'The End of the Road: Pastoralism and the Post-Apocalyptic Waste Land of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 59-61 (p. 60). Chris Walsh goes further, suggesting that the novel addresses 'the dystopian sensibility which has informed the nation's imaginative consciousness in the aftermath of September 11th, the sorry mess of a war in Iraq which constitutes a grim episode in the history of American exceptionalism, the specter of global warming and ecological disaster, and the implications of economic globalization and trans-nationalism.' Chris Walsh, 'The Post-Southern Sense of Place in *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 48-54 (p. 48).

[43] Shelly L. Rambo, 'Beyond Redemption?: Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* after the End of the World', *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* 41 (2008). This article also appears as Shelly Rambo, 'Shelly Rambo on the Theme of Redemption', in *Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011), pp. 78-91.

[44] The concept of American exceptionalism in relation to McCarthy's work is more fully explored in Cant.

[45] McCarthy, p. 87.

For the most part, critical discussion about the novel has revolved around its sparseness, its questioning of meaning, and its place within McCarthy's canon of work. Mark Holcomb calls *The Road* McCarthy's 'purest fable yet',[46] suggesting that it is a continuation of his previous work. Michael Madsen claims the book lacks 'action or plot movement', but suggests that this is 'important for the story' and that the novel is the apotheosis of McCarthy's earlier texts: the southwards journey of the characters is a 'homecoming',[47] and *The Road* is 'drenched in mythological motif and allegorical sensibility'.[48] Cormac McCarthy first rose to prominence as a 'Southern' writer,[49] later moving into the 'southwestern' genre with *Blood Meridian*,[50] and followed this trend with the Border Trilogy,[51] about:

> [T]wo men of a dying breed of American cowboy. They have chosen to ignore the modernity of America, but they are capable neither of sinking into nor ignoring the past [...]. As they live beside and cross over the border between America and Mexico, these characters attempt to exist in a narrow gap between a past and a future that is closing upon them.[52]

In *The Road*, the futile quest south mirrors that in McCarthy's Border Trilogy, which constantly toys with this barrier between the civilised and uncivilised world. In the Border Trilogy, this border is represented by that of Mexico and the United States, but Kimberly Lewis's suggestion that the characters 'exist in a narrow gap between a past and a future'

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[46] Mark Holcomb, 'End of the Line', *Village Voice,* <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-08-29/books/end-of-the-line/> [accessed 29 August 2006].

[47] See Michael Madsen, '*The Road*', *Southwestern American Literature,* 32 (2006), pp. 129-32. Susan J. Tyburski sees the novel as a reflection of the other work McCarthy published the same year, *Sunset Limited*, as they are both 'about the viability of faith in the face of an apparently Godless world.' Susan J. Tyburski, '"The Lingering Scent of Divinity" in *The Sunset Limited* and *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 121-28 (p. 121). Cormac McCarthy, *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form*, (New York: Vintage, 2006).

[48] Lydia Cooper, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative', *Studies in the Novel,* 43 (2011), pp. 218-36 (p. 221).

[49] He can therefore be seen alongside 'William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Flannery O'Conner.' Kimberley Lewis, 'McCarthy, Cormac', in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature* <http://www.oxfordreference.com.rp.nla.gov.au:2048/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t197.e0180> [accessed 7 July 2009]. His first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, was published with the help of Albert Erskine, who was William Faulkner's editor. Cormac McCarthy, *The Orchard Keeper*, (New York: Ecco Press, 1982).

[50] Lewis. Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, or, the Evening Redness in the West*, (London: Picador, 1990).

[51] Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, (London: Picador, 1993). Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*, (London: Picador, 1994). Cormac McCarthy, *Cities of the Plain*, (London: Picador, 1998).

[52] Lewis.

places them in a similar position of the man and the boy in *The Road* who are also caught in such a gap. Alan Warner sees *The Road* as a final rung on the ladder of McCarthy's work as a writer of Westerns, 'shorn of history and context',[53] and all the more pure for it. Euan Gallivan similarly sees *The Road* as sharing with *Blood Meridian* 'much of its imagery and many of its thematic concerns'.[54] However, Ashley Kunsa denies that *The Road* is such a clear continuation of McCarthy's other work because it is too sparse, and the focus is on the 'good guys', while his previous works focussed on the bad.[55] This view is supported by Rune Graulund, who claims that it departs from the Western tradition for there is no frontier, no 'adventure' and no 'nostalgia'.[56] However, there is a frontier in *The Road*, between one world and another, and there is nostalgia for a forgotten and disappearing past.

The Road as a Liminal Space

The Road opens up a liminal space, between one world and another, 'between substantial fact and surreal dream'.[57] While generally considered post-apocalyptic, the setting does not properly occur after the apocalypse, but instead in the threshold between an old world ceasing to be and the new world coming into existence. It is a space of absence, lacking structure, and lacking closure. McCarthy's work has generally focused on the frontier. In *The Road*, indeed

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[53] Alan Warner, 'The Road to Hell', *The Guardian,* (2006) <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,,1938954,00.html> [accessed 3 May 2013]. Jay Ellis also argues for *The Road* as a continuation of the themes of McCarthy's earlier work, focusing particularly on his placement of the father and the son. See Jay Ellis, 'Another Sense of Ending: The Keynote Address to the Knoxville Conference', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 22-38.

[54] Euan Gallivan, 'Compassionate McCarthy?: *The Road* and Schopenhauerian Ethics', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 98-106 (p. 98).

[55] Ashley Kunsa, 'Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Journal of Modern Literature,* 33 (2009), pp. 57-74. A shortened version of this article appears as Ashley Kunsa, 'Ashley Kunsa on Style in *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011), pp. 91-108.

[56] Rune Graulund, 'Fulcrums and Borderlands: A Desert Reading of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Orbis Litterarum,* 65 (2010), pp. 57-78 (p. 66). An edited version of this article appears as Rune Graulund, 'Rune Graulund on the Desert Setting', in *Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011), pp. 113-32.

[57] Richard Gray, 'Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis', *American Literary History,* 21 (2009), p. 128.

in all apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature, there is also a frontier. However, this frontier is in time rather than space. It is the apocalyptic moment that wipes clear the slate and allows the new world to come into existence. In *The Road*, this liminal space is stretched out in time, a time of absence between worlds.

By stretching out this liminal moment, *The Road* denies any sense of closure, as the world is held in suspension. Indeed, 'it is absence—of place, of name, and ultimately of meaning—that makes the text so terrifying.'[58] This absence is not merely physical, but also constitutes a lack of meaning, of faith and of God. As Linda Woodson puts it:

> Although the story contains images and references to religion and spirituality, these [...] are largely signifiers without signs in the existing world, empty like the holes in the mantle of the father's childhood home where tacks had formerly held the stockings as the family celebrated Christmas[.][59]

However, none of these concepts are entirely destroyed. A clear denial would imply closure. Instead, these concepts are held in suspension, instituted only to be denied, over and over again. The character of Ely, for instance, consistently implies godhood and prophet-hood, only to admit to lies and uncertainty. 'If he is a prophet, a post-apocalyptic Elijah,' writes Donovan Gwinner, 'he is an anti-prophet'.[60] In the end, Ely dissolves into a secular literary prophet, through an allusion to *Moby-Dick* (1851).[61] This does not, however, completely deny his status as prophet. Instead it merely holds it, once again, in suspension. This suspension continues, as the man claims that his son is a god. Once again, there is a sense that the boy may be a kind of prophet, as the world fades from sight. Similarly, the man, too, figures as a kind of god, with both the man and the boy placing their faith in each other. Ultimately, they

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[58] Kearney, p. 167.

[59] Linda Woodson, 'Mapping *The Road* in Post-Modernism', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 87-99 (p. 93).

[60] Donovan Gwinner, '"Everything Uncoupled from Its Shoring": Quandaries of Epistemology and Ethics in *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road,* ed. by Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Continuum Books, 2011), pp. 137-56 (p. 149).

[61] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or the Whale*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1992).

both find faith and meaning in the objective fact of the other's existence. Yet this still revolves around ambiguity and uncertainty, and this oscillation, this hesitation between possibilities, is yet another form of deferred closure.

In *The Road*, the frontier between civilisation and uncivilisation is a boundary in time rather than space. As argued above, in post-apocalyptic literature the apocalypse is often used as a literary tool to bring a new world into being that is in some way incongruous with the world of the reader's experience. In *The Road*, however, this moment is stretched out, denying rebirth or closure. All literature, in a way, may be said to exhibit these characteristics. Like Todorov's fantastic stories,[62] which exist in the liminal space between one world and another, most literature exists in a liminal state between a complication and resolution. This suggests that speculative fictions, such as post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic literature, can literalise structure, by turning structure into content and building a world that implicitly, recursively contains its own narrative structure. It is the disjunction between the structures implicit in post-apocalyptic worlds and the narrative fiction that contains them that has driven much of this thesis.

In religious myths, the apocalypse is the threshold between the old world and the new millennial kingdom. Apocalyptic myths are driven by the same need to explain great change as speculative fiction is. Apocalyptic myths must explain how the mundane world can be turned to utopia, while speculative fiction needs explain the transition into a world that is alien. In many religious apocalyptic beliefs, there is also a period of transition that is stretched out, a moment between the old and the new. In Judeo-Christian myth, there is a Reign of the Beast, as mentioned in Revelation. This period has been popularly represented in

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[62] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

the fictional *Left Behind* (1995) series, with its many sequels, prequels and adaptations.[63] This series follows the Evangelical interpretation of Revelation, with its depiction of the Rapture and the Tribulation. While following a different tradition (McCarthy was raised Catholic)[64] *The Road* does seem to take place in essentially the same liminal moment. It is a moment of hesitation. It defers closure and resolution into either meaningless destruction or meaningful rebirth. Unlike in *Left Behind*, it is uncertain in *The Road* whether the world will be reborn, and the text is also stripped of the simplistic, black and white morality.

While *The Road* is generally considered post-apocalyptic,[65] it actually exists within the liminal apocalyptic moment, which is a moment of absent, or possibly negative, time. The novel at first appears to begin *in media res*, but rather than taking place between a beginning and an end, it actually takes place between an end and a beginning, in the middle of nothing. As mentioned above, Frank Kermode suggests that we humanise time by imagining that the 'tick, tick, tick' of a clock is actually a 'tick, tock'. From this, Kermode takes it that '[w]e can perceive a duration only when it is organized.'[66] In this model, *The Road* takes place between the tock and the tick, in the non-humanised, unstructured time. The characters are caught between one world and another; they are trapped between traditional apocalyptic desires, of a

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[63] The series depicts those who are left behind by the Rapture (in the Evangelical tradition, this is the time at which the faithful will be taken off to Heaven) due to not having lived a life quite pure enough, at least in the terms of Conservative Evangelical Christian values. They must battle the anti-Christ to save their souls, and institute the millennial kingdom. John Layman, Tim F. LaHaye, and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001). For a discussion and contextualisation of *Left Behind*, see Wesley J. Bergen, 'The New Apocalyptic: Modern American Apocalyptic Fiction and Its Ancient and Modern Cousins', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture,* 20 (2008) <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/itx/start.do?prodId=EAIM> [accessed 10 May 2013]; Gill Partington, 'Postfictional Genres: The Christian Apocalyptic Thriller', *Dandelion,* 1 (2010); Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast : The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005). The ever expanding series has reportedly sold over sixty million copies. *Left Behind: General FAQ*, <http://www.leftbehind.com/channelhelpinfo.asp?pageid=186&channelID=93> [accessed 28 August 2008].
[64] Marty Priola, *Cormac McCarthy: A Biography*, Cormac McCarthy Society, <http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/biography/> [accessed 7 July 2009].
[65] See David Kushner, 'Cormac McCarthy's Apocalypse', in *Rolling Stone,* (27 December 2007); Woodson.
[66] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 45.

new world reborn, and apocalyptic realities, of horror and destruction.[67] Texts such as *The Road* take place in this liminal moment and manage to stretch this period back out. Since this is a period between the presence of one world and the presence of the next, the focus of *The Road* is the absence in between.[68] Indeed '[t]he nothing of the landscape is all consuming.'[69] There is no past, no future, no calendar.[70] There are no real ruins, as old buildings merely stand empty, not collapsed. Ultimately, even to remember is to forget.[71] The boy imagines his mirror, another child, who is also absent; indeed, this other child's 'existence haunts the novel with its very absence.'[72] According to Rune Graulund, McCarthy's works are obsessed with the geographical space of the desert, and the word desert comes from *deserta*, meaning 'absence'.[73] The word 'desert' is used only once in *The Road*,[74] but it is implied throughout the novel. Deserts are defined by what they are not rather than what they are. *The Road*, too, is defined by an absence in this liminal space. This space is stripped from the past, detached from history and place.[75] It is timeless and placeless. Therefore, Graulund argues, meaninglessness might be the final meaning of *The Road*.[76] Within this liminal space there is no narrative, no structure, no conclusion, and thus no meaning. This sparseness, as argued in Chapter Four, is also seen through the use of language. The past has been swept clear ('There is no past'),[77] but a new world is yet to be built in its place. Even the people themselves, as

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[67] The desires suggested in religious apocalypses; the realities suggested by the human inventions of nuclear weaponry and environmental degradation.
[68] As argued by Graulund.
[69] Madsen, p. 129.
[70] 'He hadnt kept a calendar for years.' McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 2.
[71] Ben De Bruyn, 'Borrowed Time, Borrowed World and Borrowed Eyes: Care, Ruin and Vision in McCarthy's *The Road* and Harrison's Ecocriticism', *English Studies,* 91 (2010), pp. 776-89.
[72] Cooper, p. 232.
[73] Graulund.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid. p. 59.
[76] Ibid. p. 69.
[77] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 55.

Donovan Gwinner claims, seem to disappear into nothing, as the impossibility of knowing who anybody is becomes reinforced over and again.[78]

The novel suggests not only an absence in space, but also an absence in belief due to its uncertain juxtaposition of theism and atheism. The novel hovers between faith and its lack, which once again hangs suspended without closure, in a landscape 'seemingly abandoned by god.'[79] In Stephen Abell's review of *The Road* he decries what he calls the 'religious pomp' of the novel, suggesting that it is over the top and unnatural.[80] However, the use of religious imagery is at least deeper than this dismissal suggests. The novel is almost a theological *roman à clef*,[81] except that these biblical references are constantly put into doubt. The Revelation of John, in particular, is suggested by the 'subtle allusion to the fabled Beast' of Revelation on the first page,[82] unexplained natural events,[83] the allusion to Revelations 1:17 in the timing of the event,[84] and the Biblical language.[85] Despite these theological references, God's existence is consistently instated only to be denied, as the couple are driven by 'secular winds' full of 'howling clouds of ash'.[86] For instance, the statement that humanity is '[a] creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end' prefaces the secular term 'evolved' with the theist concept of 'creation'.[87] The man says of his son, 'If he is not the word of God God

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[78] Gwinner, p. 142.

[79] Kearney, p. 163.

[80] Stephen Abell, 'Another Terra Damnata: Cormac McCarthy Covers a Post-Nuclear Terrain.', *TLS. Times Literary Supplement,* (2006), pp. 19-20.

[81] As argued by Carl James Grindley, 'The Setting of McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Explicator,* 67 (2008), pp. 11-13. A version of this article also appears as Carl James Grindley, 'Carl James Grindley on the Novel's Setting', in *Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011), pp. 69-71.

[82] Anna Cates, 'Secular Winds: Disrupted Natural Revelation & the Journey toward God in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Internet Review of Science Fiction,* (2010).

[83] Grindley, p. 12.

[84] The time of the event is 1:17, and Revelation 1.17 depicts the appearance of Christ, followed by the beginning of the eschatological prophecy. Ibid.

[85] Ibid. Grindley also suggests that the blind man encountered is a representation of St Paul.

[86] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 188.

[87] Ibid. p. 61.

never spoke',[88] but on the preceding page McCarthy has already described the landscape as 'godless'.[89] Faith is also described as inherently transient, as Ely claims that the boy will 'get over it'.[90] The Eucharistic image of '[a] single grey flake […] like the last host of Christendom' implies that God has departed.[91] The boy's suggestion that God 'couldn't see [...] very far,' implies a distant God. Finally, when McCarthy describes survivors as '[t]attered gods slouching in their rags across the waste',[92] humans become gods, and gods become bruised, battered and worn down. Even the sun, traditionally symbolic of God, is almost entirely absent.[93] Because of this, the novel lacks the 'prospect of transcendence' that is promised by the 'theme of universal destruction' that '[t]he novel shares' with 'the most famous Judeo-Christian apocalyptic narratives, namely those of Daniel and Revelation.'[94]

The clearest example of this uncertain space between faith and its absence comes in the form of Ely, the strange, old man met along the road. As the only named character, Ely's name is surely important.[95] This becomes clear on realising that Ely may be short for Elijah,[96] the Old Testament apocalyptic prophet, who, it is claimed, will return again before 'the great and terrible day of the Lord.'[97] That the old man 'knew this was coming' implies that Ely is a

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[88] Ibid. p. 3.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid. p. 13.
[92] Ibid. p. 54.
[93] This is noted by Tim Edwards:
> The sun—variously described as "alien," "lost," and "banished"—is notable chiefly for its absence. The theological implications of a sunless sky are underscored by the man's frequently looking to the heavens and finding "there was nothing to see" (87). Not only the landscape, then, but the very heavens themselves seem expunged of all referent and meaning. Edwards, p. 57.

This image of the lost sun is apparent on the first page, the man 'looked toward the east for any light but there was none.' McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 1.
[94] Kearney, p. 163.
[95] Kunsa also mentions that in Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* the gang leader claims that people in hell do not have names. Thus, for Kunsa, the search for Ely's name is a search for a way out of Hell. But Ely, eventually, denies that it really is his name, and thus by hiding his own name he has denied responsibility. Kunsa.
[96] Grindley. Erik J. Wielenberg similarly sees Ely as Elijah, and offers a clear summary of evidence to that effect. Erik J. Wielenberg, 'God, Morality, and Meaning in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 8 (2010), pp. 1-16 pp. 1-2). It is also noted by Gwinner, p. 149.
[97] Malachi 3.19.

prophet, and the claim that he has always been on the road assures his status as some kind of eternal wanderer. He claims to be 'ninety', only for it to be dismissed.[98] Although this is taken to imply that he is younger by the man and the boy, it could instead imply that he is much, much older. In the Old Testament, Elijah brought down fire from the sky to defeat the followers of Ba'al, similar to the fires that have destroyed the world in *The Road*.[99] Like the savages from *The Road*, the followers of Ba'al are accused of sacrificing children,[100] and Elijah is driven on a journey of horror and despair, and asks to die.[101] In *The Road*, Ely thinks his death wish has come, and that the boy, who feeds him, is 'an angel'.[102] The Biblical Elijah *is* raised from his death-wish sleep by an angel, who feeds him.[103] Thus, the character of Ely seems to be a prophet of destruction, awaiting the end. He is a symbol that the end has not come, a deferral of apocalyptic closure, but as an apocalyptic prophet his existence ensures that the end will, eventually, arrive.

However, Ely's denial of his name casts all previous assertions about him into doubt.[104] The statement that he is not Ely likely means that he is simply a liar, as does the statement that he is not ninety. Similarly, the comment that 'we are [...] prophets' is prefaced by the statement that '[t]here is no God'.[105] Ely's claim that he 'didn't know what would

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[98] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 173.

[99] 1 Kings 18.38-40. The character of Ely may also suggest the Wandering Jew, a mythological character who is doomed to walk the Earth until the end of time, See George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965). The Wandering Jew may be a sign of the perseverance of humanity, or of the failure of apocalypse. If this had been the real end of times, then the Wandering Jew would have ceased wandering. The Wandering Jew is also an important symbol in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, as discussed in Chapter Three. Supporting this assertion is that he is an eternal wanderer, since before cataclysm, hoping for death, and talking in riddles. John Cant makes the Wandering Jew connection in John Cant, 'Appendix Two: *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism,* (New York & London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 266-80. Cant's article is reprinted as John Cant, '*The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy,* ed. by H. Bloom (New York, NY: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), pp. 183-200.

[100] Jeremiah 32.35. According to some translations, this passage specifically mentions fire, which would be an even closer description of what occurs in *The Road*. Revelation 9.20.

[101] 1 Kings 19.4

[102] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 183.

[103] 1 Kings 19.5.

[104] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 182.

[105] Ibid. p. 181. This statement also displays the dichotomy of atheism and faith in the text.

happen' (casting doubt on his prophet-hood) upon seeing a child is given disturbing implications when considered next to its preceding sentence: 'You don't want to know the things I've eaten.'[106] This places him alongside the baby eaters of Ba'al, rather than against them. Rather than being fed by an angel, this Ely may well have fed on an angel, given the chance. The character of Ely maintains ambiguity and uncertainty, between good and evil, divine and mundane. He haunts the liminal space.

Furthermore, rather than Biblical prophet and prophecy, Ely dissolves further into a secular literary allusion to that other great American apocalyptic novel, *Moby-Dick*.[107] The character Elijah appears in the section entitled *'The Prophet'*, in a similar fashion to Ely.[108] The connection is unsurprising: Cormac McCarthy's favourite novel is, reportedly, *Moby-Dick*.[109] In *Moby-Dick*, Elijah attempts to persuade the characters not to follow Ahab, reprising the role of the Biblical Elijah in defeating King Ahab. Despite Elijah's forceful attitude in *Moby-Dick*, which is unlike Ely's apathy, there is a striking similarity in their appearance, or at least their level of ugliness.[110] Similar to Ely, Elijah is also a type of atheistic prophet, calling souls 'a sort of a fifth wheel to a wagon.'[111] The parallels to *Moby-Dick*, with its single-minded quest and atheistic prophet named Ely/Elijah, suggests that there are may be other parallels. It suggests that this prophet figure is correct. It suggests that the man is an Ahab-figure, and that the southward quest will fail, which it ultimately does as

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[106] Ibid. p. 183.

[107] While he does not make this connection, Thomas H. Schaub does offer an otherwise exhaustive account of literary references in *The Road*. Thomas H. Schaub, 'Secular Scripture and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Renascence,* 61 (2009), pp. 153-68. Jan Nordby Gretlund, meanwhile, does discuss the connection with *Moby Dick*, but does not mention Elijah. Jan Nordby Gretlund, 'Cormac McCarthy and the American Literary Tradition: Wording the End', in *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy : Borders and Crossings,* ed. by Nicholas Monk (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 41-51.

[108] Melville, pp. 100-03.

[109] Richard B. Woodward, 'Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction', *The New York Times,* (1992) <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/mccarthy-venom.html> [accessed 19 April 2011].

[110] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 172. Melville, p. 100.

[111] Melville, p. 100. Elijah in effect suggests the logical repercussions of dualist philosophies, particularly epiphenomenalism and parallelism.

there is no hope in the South. It suggests that the characters should leave their journey, and

that they should get off the road. It is a secular prophecy that replaces religious prophecy with

a foresight offered by literature. As one of his many, twisting, prophecies, the old man, Ely,

claims that '[t]here's other people on the road',[112] only to strip away that hope by claiming he

'just made that up'.[113] This claim also turns out to be ambiguously true and false. There are

bands of blood-cults, which are described as '[p]eople on the road.'[114] However, these are

surely not what is meant by the statement. If taken to mean people like the man and the boy,

then the only ones found for certain are not on the road but off of it. This stands in an odd

opposition to Ely's claim.

These religious allusions combined with secular explanation reach their peak when

the man claims that his own son is not just the 'word of God',[115] but actually is a god. Ely

sees being the last god as an onerous possibility. He claims, 'Where men cant live gods fare

no better.'[116] This places God as merely a human construction, but simultaneously Ely does

not dispute the existence of a humanly created God. God and Godlessness coexist. When the

old man claims, 'When you die it's the same as if everybody else did too,'[117] this solipsistic

view denies the importance of the apocalypse, both in its fearful and hopeful aspects. It also

denies the psychological effect of a feared '[b]reak in the Human Chain',[118] by stripping

down the loss of a future beyond oneself to irrelevance. The possibility that the boy is a god

culminates at the end of the novel, after the man is dead, and the boy is saved. The boy is told

to pray to God, but all he can pray to is his father. This ties the novel directly to Christian

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[112] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 181.
[113] Ibid. p. 182.
[114] Ibid. p. 94.
[115] Ibid. p. 3.
[116] Ibid. p. 183.
[117] Ibid. p. 180.
[118] Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 66.

myth, with God the father and the son. Yet they simultaneously cannot truly be gods in that same literal sense, and the novel once again slips into ambiguity. The need for faith and the absence of faith remain knotted together, and in tension, with the closure in deferral. The novel suggests that '[h]uman beings create God [...] in the sense that they create what there is of meaning and morality.'[119]

The boy's place as God, prophet, or messiah figure is displayed through his ability to see in a dark world. On the very first page, the world is described as having 'the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world.'[120] This image (or lack of image) is brought back again and again: the man looked around and 'spoke into a blackness without dimension';[121] Ely also 'cant see';[122] and, the boy remarks that any ships on the sea 'wouldn't be able to see very far.'[123] The nights are 'sightless and impenetrable', so dense as to go beyond mere sight and affect other senses. It is '[a] blackness to hurt your ears with listening,'[124] 'a blackness without depth or dimension.'[125] Most telling, when the boy's mother states that she will commit suicide, the man tells her, 'You can't even see.'[126] This is both literal, as it is dark, but also metaphorical. She cannot see the possibility for survival. Thus the sense of sight, of seeing a future and of having faith in it, is important for the novel. However, the boy can see. In fact, he can see better, it seems, than any other character. In this world that is disappearing, the boy maintains his sight for the future. When pondering whether the house they are staying in would be found by anyone else, the boy claims that

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[119] Cooper, p. 229.
[120] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 1.
[121] Ibid. p. 70.
[122] Ibid. p. 177.
[123] Ibid. p. 231.
[124] Ibid. p. 13.
[125] Ibid. p. 70.
[126] Ibid. p. 60.

someone would because, 'We saw it'.[127] His father counters, reminding his son, 'You saw it.'[128] The implication is that the boy's eyesight is far superior to anyone else's whom they are likely to encounter. This suggestion is reinforced as the boy is the one who sees traces of sand that lead to the thief.[129] Furthermore, when the man looks through the binoculars, he sees '[n]othing.'[130] However, the very next moment the boy looks and sees 'smoke'.[131] It is this subtle ability, simply of undamaged eyesight, that makes the boy into a prophet figure. While this is never made explicit, and never explained, it pervades the text. *The Road* engages with the 'longstanding association of vision with truth'.[132] Meanwhile, the world of the man is limited, as he lives with '[b]orrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it'.[133]

The dark world without sight suggests a slow death of that world, as it fades from view into the liminal absence. The boy's question 'Can I see?' is one that cuts to the heart of the novel. The boy can see, but there is 'nothing' to look at.[134] It is not simply dark, but also dusty and 'colorless',[135] and covered in death. The beast that appears in the cave dream at the beginning of the novel stares 'into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of

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[127] Ibid. p. 221.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid. p. 272.
[130] Ibid. p. 82.
[131] Ibid.
[132] This is particularly made apparent through the allusion 'Plato's famous allegory of the cave' on the first page. Alex Hunt and Martin M. Jacobsen, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Plato's Simile of the Sun', *The Explicator,* 66 (2008), pp. 155-58; Carole Juge, 'The Road to the Sun They Cannot See: Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Oblivion, and Guidance in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 7 (2009), pp. 16-30; Kearney; Woodson. Hunt and Jacobsen's article is reprinted as Alex Hunt and Martin M. Jacobsen, 'Alex Hunt and Martin M. Jacobsen on the Image of the Sun', in *Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2011), pp. 72-5. While widely noted, along with the possible image of the Beast of Revelation, described here as 'pale and naked and translucent', (McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 2.) the purpose of the allegory is uncertain. Indeed, that 'the child led him by the hand' into the cave, rather than out of it, seems to contradict the later images of the child as leader or messiah figure. Ibid. p. 1.
[133] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 138.
[134] Ibid. p. 7.
[135] Ibid. p. 123.

spiders.'[136] The seas are also no longer blue,[137] and the pine forests are 'raw and black.'[138]

The man first wakes 'in the dark and cold of the night',[139] and describes his plight as analogous to that of a 'newly blind' person.[140] The world he inhabits lives on only in his memories, and is 'slowly fading'.[141] He dreams the 'perfect day of his childhood'.[142] This is the condition of living in the liminal absence between worlds. The world that was exists only as a reflection, as an old, fading black and white photo. There is nothing new to replace these old memories, there is simply nothing. It is as if the real world exists only in dreams, as it is in his dreams that the man sees 'in color.'[143] As the man comes closer to his own ending, to his own death, he dreams more, and the dreams even brighten.[144] As the ending becomes clear, so do beginnings and middles. This also connects with another thought, a concern, of the man's as he wonders whether 'each memory recalled must do some violence to its origins.'[145] As he dreams more often, the old world is slowly wiped clean, slowly lost until he dies along with it at the end of the novel.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* exists in a liminal space, an apocalyptic threshold, between two worlds. The apocalyptic threshold is a common trope of post-apocalyptic literature and of mythology, allowing new worlds to come into being, disconnected from the old. In *The Road*, this liminal space is stretched out in time, creating ambiguity and a lack of

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[136] Ibid. p. 2.
[137] Ibid. p. 230.
[138] Ibid. p. 213.
[139] Ibid. p. 1.
[140] Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971), p. 17.
[141] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 17.
[142] Ibid. p. 12.
[143] Ibid. p. 20. He is moved to remember when he does see colour, the colour of fire. Ibid. p. 31. The constant presence of greyness in the novel is explored by Chris Danta, who sees the novel in relation to Samuel Beckett's post-apocalyptic play, *Endgame* (1957). Chris Danta, '"The Cold Illucid World": The Poetics of Gray in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', in *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), pp. 9-24. The relationship with *Endgame* is also explored by Matthew Ryan, 'Hope Is Critical', *Arena Journal,* (2008), pp. 151-62. Samuel Beckett and S. E. Gontarski, *Endgame : With a Revised Text*, (New York: Grove Press, 1992).
[144] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 199.
[145] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 139.

closure. The novel suggests an absence of space, scorched of its past. It also suggests absence, or ambiguity in theological space. The novel represents an uncertainty between theism and atheism, between faith and its absence. Ely personifies these uncertainties, through his cryptic language, and the ambiguous allusions to both the Biblical Elijah and Elijah from *Moby-Dick*. Ely also puts faith at the end of the road, only to then deny it. This ambiguous theological space is also suggested by the claim that both the boy and the man are gods, reinforced by the ambiguous suggestions that the boy is, at least, a prophet. There is no ultimate assertion of faith, or its wholesale denial; rather, this is a deferral of closure. In order to find meaning, to find closure, the man and the boy place their lives on the road, giving structure and narrative to the absent world in an attempt to bring it into being. Their journey represents a hope in the redemptive power of narrative rather than God.

Mapping the Apocalypse in *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*

In the apocalyptic absence, the man and the boy of *The Road* attempt to find purpose and meaning. As argued throughout this thesis, meaning can be created through the building of a narrative, with its ultimate sense of closure, which is generally denied or problematised in fictional representations of the end-of-the-world. To find meaning, the characters of *The Road* stretch their personal narrative along the only structure they have left. They place their lives along the road.[146] This may be a forlorn hope, however, for, as Rune Graulund claims, being on the road is irrelevant and movement is irrelevant because 'everywhere is nowhere.'[147] The road is a structure that lacks meaning for it lacks the cultural connections that once gave it meaning. Landscape is not just a passively existing entity, but writes itself

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[146] Linda Woodson places the novel alongside *The Grapes of* Wrath as a journey narrative, and claims that 'its principal journey is the journey into the heart.' Woodson, p. 88.
[147] Graulund.

onto humanity, as humanity writes itself onto it.[148] Geography is transformed and given meaning through landscaping, division, marking and naming. After catastrophe, landscape must be re-appropriated. The mythic significance of landscape, suggested by Mircea Eliade, is imposed in post-apocalyptic worlds, and notably inverted in *Riddley Walker*. *The Road* embarks on a similar mythic reappropriation of landscape, but modelled more closely on that of the Western with its rituals of violence. Most importantly, it demonstrates the inherent need for narrative to give meaning and purpose, and the characters place their narrative along the only surviving structure: the road. However, ultimately, the hope of the redemptive power of this narrative remains forlorn.

The movement through the liminal space of *The Road* represents a movement into absence and chaos that must be appropriated and ordered. According to Greek mythology, the universe was originally chaos, which was given form. In Christian tradition, the Apocalypse is the final, destructive resolution of the world into order. In this tradition, the ocean is representative of chaos, and in Revelation the final sign that the Universe has been resolved into perfection is the disappearance of the oceans.[149] In *The Road*, the ocean is finally reached, and it is cold, grey and dark. It lacks the colour of life that the man had told his son it would bear. It is dead, which is suggestive of an earlier passage of Revelation.[150] However, it has not disappeared. The Apocalypse may be taking place, but its final resolution has not occurred. The man and the boy still exist in the liminal space. This liminal space, the Reign of the Beast, is a dip back into chaos in order to wipe clean those structures that are unable to change by themselves, and to allow the final resolution into order to occur. For this final

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[148] John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 40.

[149] 'Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.' Revelation 21. 1.

[150] 'The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.' Revelation 16. 3.

resolution, the chaos must be ordered, it must also be given form and, as in Genesis, be named.[151]

The concept of giving order to apocalyptic absence in fiction is most fully explored in David Seed's 'Mapping the Post-Nuclear Landscape'. Seed uses concepts of cultural geography to explore the way that, '[f]ollowing the massive rupture of war, the landscape has to be re-explored or re-appropriated',[152] with Peter Jackson's *Maps of Meaning* as its theoretical basis.[153] Seed finds the post-apocalyptic space to be a 'strangely empty but still recognisable landscape',[154] with characters who must then set out to survey in processes of divisions, naming and building new social structures. Seed relates the desire to re-explore with reappropriating and controlling the landscape. These explorations are often journeys through time as much as through space, as the protagonist explores a landscape that is a palimpsest of eras.[155] The liminal space is one that must be ordered in order to give it meaning, to build a new world, and to complete the apocalyptic promise of rebirth.

The appropriation of landscape also has mythic significance. Writing in regard to cultures that engage in rituals of mythic and cyclical time, Mircea Eliade suggests that landscape is formed into an emulation of mythic space. For Eliade, and as suggested above, unexplored lands are chaos, and '[t]his is why, when possession is taken of a territory – that is, when its exploitation begins – rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of Creation: the uncultivated zone is first "cosmicized," then inhabited.'[156] This concept

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[151] Such is suggested by Ashley Kunsa who sees *The Road* as a quest to find prelapsarian names, the original names given by Adam. Kunsa.
[152] Seed, p. 65.
[153] Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning : An Introduction to Cultural Geography*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).
[154] Seed, p. 65.
[155] Seed picks out *Riddley Walker* as an example of this, the '[t]he landscape of [which...] is "riddled" with the traces of the past that he tries to decipher. Ibid. p. 73. This concept in relation to *Riddley Walker* was explored, to some extent, in Chapter Three, and will be explored further in the discussion of geography below.
[156] Eliade, pp. 9-10.

continues from Eliade's thesis that certain cultures attempt to find meaning through contacting a sacred space and time outside their own: often a golden, divine past. In particular, Eliade places a great deal of importance, and prestige, at the centre of landscape, where the divine world touches mundane reality. 'The Sacred Mountain' is at the centre of the world where heaven, earth, and hell meet, and, in constructing new spaces, '[e]very temple or palace [...] is a Sacred Mountain,'[157] around which new lands are structured. For instance, 'The map of Babylon shows the city at the center of a vast circular territory bordered by a river, precisely as the Sumerians envisioned Paradise.'[158]

However, in the post-nuclear story, this pattern is inverted. At the centre is Ground Zero, which, throughout post-nuclear fiction, 'is described negatively as an absence'.[159] This connection is made explicitly in *Riddley Walker*. The culture of Inland rotates around a centre, at Cambry, and re-enacts Inland's mythic tales upon the land. Outside of this small circle is undefined and undescribed chaos, just as Eliade suggests. For instance, one of the myths used to structure the world of Inland is The Fools Circel 9wys, a song that lays out its geography through naming:

> Horny Boy rung Widders Bel
> Stoal his Fathers Ham as wel
> Bernt his Arse and Forkt a Stoan
> Done It Over broak a boan
> Out of Good Shoar vackt his wayt
> Scracht Sams Itch for No. 8
> Gone to senter Nex to see
> Cambry coming 3 times 3
> Sharna pac and get the Poal
> When the Ardship of Cambry comes out of the hoal[160]

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[157] Ibid. p. 12.
[158] Ibid. p. 10.
[159] Seed, p. 69. See also Peter Schwenger, 'Circling Ground Zero', *PMLA,* 106 (1991), pp. 251-61. Later republished as part of Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992).
[160] Hoban, p. 5.

This song lays out the path on which the Eusa Shows are performed.[161] This path is a vortex heading towards Cambry, at the centre of their culture. When the centre is reached, the Ardship of Cambry, symbolic representation of Eusa, 'comes out of the hoal' to be killed. This is a way of ritually enacting the 'master Chaynjis' that must be gone through in order to symbolically cleanse Inland of the original sin of building the atomic bomb, and to reconnect with the mythic space at the centre of their culture.[162] This forms a contrast with *The Road*, where naming has failed, and maps have failed with it as the world falls apart.

Inland orbits around Cambry, as if it were a great absent cultural black hole. As Riddley makes clear, 'any part of Inland you myt be in youwl feal that pul to Cambry in the senter.'[163] As Peter Schwenger suggests in his detailed Derridean analysis of *Riddley Walker*, Inland is 'not so much a world without end as a world that is always ending [...] Circularity provides both structure and theme in *Riddley Walker*.'[164] This, once again, suggests the post-modern world of the post-apocalyptic. Meaning, purpose, a grand narrative are all literally centred, only to be denied, and to be found empty and meaningless. It is at Cambry that Riddley's historical time touches mythic time, and it is by constantly repeating and reliving mythic events through the Fools Circl, through the Eusa Shows and through their quest to reattain the '1 Big 1', that their lives are given meaning. Meaning is given by connecting the characters with a mythic time when there were 'ships in the air' and 'picters on the wind'.[165] At this mythic centre is 'the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry'.[166] Cambry sits amidst the concentric circles of the Fools Circel and the Power Ring. It is also Ground Zero. It is a great absence, but its description as a *woom* suggests that something may be born from

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[161] It therefore hints at medieval notions of geography, where boundaries were walked and maps often written as a kind of narrative.
[162] Hoban, p. 35.
[163] Ibid. p. 106.
[164] Peter Schwenger, 'Writing the Unthinkable', *Critical Inquiry,* 13 (1986), pp. 33-48 (p. 45).
[165] Hoban, p. 46.
[166] Ibid. p. 161.

it. However, the mythic time that the centre of Cambry connects with is not mythic at all; it is simply the time of the reader. It is a normal time, made meaningless by its eventual self-destruction. The only meaning this non-mythic time can have is to teach a lesson not to repeat the mistakes of the past, not to engage in a rebuilding of the past, not to rebuild this mythic space and mythic time. The world that the centre connects with is dead and, at best, the journey towards the centre is a journey into the underworld, in the model of the myth of Orpheus that many of *Riddley Walker*'s own myths are founded on. The only life this womb can birth is stillborn.

The characters of *The Road* similarly demonstrate a futile attempt to find meaning for their lives through the ritual reappropriation of landscape. It has already been argued that *The Road* is not simply apocalyptic, but also a Western, and this genre offers its own myths of purification and appropriation.[167] In *The Road*, the frontier of the Western, between East and West, between the civilised and the uncivilised, between past and future, becomes the apocalyptic moment for which it was always a metaphor. In the Western, characters engage in a blood-ritual, which purifies the chaos of the West, extending the frontier by incorporating and organising the uncivilised into the civilised. The point of contact between the Western and the post-apocalyptic is best summarised by Jane Tompkins, who states simply that to go west is to die.[168] The Western takes place along the frontier between civilisation and wilderness. Beyond the frontier, the landscape is pure space, 'defined by absence'.[169] It is a pre-Genesis world yet to be spoken into existence. Parallels can be seen with Eliade's view of mythic appropriation. As Tompkins makes clear, to cross over the frontier is the symbolic death of the self, as defined by social and geographical connections; it is the birth of the pure

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[167] Linda Woodson, however, places the novel somewhere between the post-apocalyptic, the post-post-modern and the journey narrative, which is not too far from how it is placed in this thesis. Woodson.
[168] Tompkins, p. 71.
[169] Ibid.

self.[170] By reverting to a naturalistic state, the Western becomes about genuine experience and authenticity,[171] eventually evolving into a death ritual, a ritual expunging of bad spirits: of corruption, greed and barbarism. Thus, the 'West functions as a symbol of freedom, and of the opportunity for conquest' as well as 'self-transformation' through symbolic, or real, death:[172]

> Death […] is the mother of beauty […]. Death brings dignity as well as horror, and its terrifying presence in the long run comforts and reassures. For death is the great escape as well as that from which one longs to be delivered.[173]

The parallels between this model and that of the apocalyptic novel are clear. Societal constraints are similarly destroyed. This may lead to a fantasy in which the darkest desires of the characters are explored. However, this destruction also allows the development of the genuine self, one constructed without these constraints. Following on from this, it allows the development of a new, more authentic society. In the traditional Western, the heroes often fight to civilise the frontier, yet they are also stripped from it. The futility of the Western and of the apocalyptic is that the heroes often cannot return to the civilisation they have created. They have had to engage in the uncivilised death ritual. They take upon themself the sins required for the death ritual of building civilization, which will irrevocably uncivilise them and deny the possibility of their own return.

Similarly, in *The Road*, the man fights for the same civilisation that led to this destruction, and he seems to be the final token of that civilisation. He also takes upon himself the sins of the inevitable death ritual, while allowing his son to remain purer than survival would generally allow. As the frontier west expands, it must inevitably hit the ocean, the limit of its expansion and the end of the Western along with the liminal space it plays along. While

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[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid. p. 3.
[172] Ibid. p. 4.
[173] Ibid. p. 27.

The Road navigates a path south, following McCarthy's Southern writing, the man and the boy do finally hit the ocean, and find only a glimmer of hope in a few supplies, which are then stolen.

Placing Lives Down *The Road*

The Road demonstrates, within the apocalyptic absence, a need to narrativise time and give it meaning. The man and the boy try to give structure to their world in which the apocalypse seems to have failed. This is done through the repetition of ritual, the telling of stories, and the attempt by the characters to map their lives along the landscape. As Linda Woodson notes, the man and the boy in *The Road* engage in ritual re-enactments of the past.[174] When sitting down to dinner, for instance, they attempt to make sense of their lives through repeating domestic rituals. Even when washing out his son's hair, covered in blood, this is made into a ritual: 'All of this like some ancient anointing. So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them.'[175] This, as with many attempts of the man to make sense of the world, gives meaning through reference to a past world that no longer exists.

The man and the boy also attempt to give structure to their lives through the telling of 'stories'.[176] They are '[o]ld stories of courage and justice as he [the man] remembered them'.[177] However, courage and justice have long disappeared, and must be plucked out of

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[174] The ritualistic elements of the text are noted in John Vanderheide, 'Sighting Leviathan: Ritualism, Daemonism and the Book of Job in McCarthy's Latest Works', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 107-20; Woodson, p. 92.

[175] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 78.

[176] Ibid. p. 6. Francisco Collado-Rodriguez explores the novel through the lens of trauma theory, seeing it as an example of a society scarred by post-traumatic stress disorder: 'The resulting life in the post-apocalyptic world described in The Road is so utterly frightening that for the protagonists, as happens to traumatized victims, only the recourse of storytelling can offer some glimpses of optimism for the future.' Francisco Collado-Rodriguez, 'Trauma and Storytelling in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*', *Papers on Language & Literature,* 48 (2012), pp. 45-70.

[177] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 42.

his memory. Over time, though, the boy becomes more and more sceptical of the stories and of their value in general. The man tells the boy stories about themselves, but the boy recognises the obvious deception: 'in the stories we're always helping people and we dont help people.'[178] This fiction, that they are helping people, lies behind the claim that they are the 'good guys'. The boy understands that stories are supposed to be 'happy',[179] that they do not have to be 'true',[180] but ultimately fails to understand the point of this narrativisation when it does not in any way represent the world. The boy thus engages with the distinction in literature between *mimesis* and fantasy, yet the purpose of either is questioned. The attempt to narrativise their lives through story telling is ultimately futile, particularly as the boy slowly falls towards muteness. He becomes uninterested in these tales of a past that no longer have relevance.

Another way of finding a narrative, meaning and therefore closure is through placing one's life down the road. One of the most standard forms of narrative, as Kai Mikkonen argues, is the journey:

> The journey is universally recognized as a narrative in our culture. The narrative potential of travel lies in the fact that we recognize in it temporal and spatial structures that call for narration. The different stages of travel—departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return—provide any story with a temporal structure that raises certain expectations of things to happen.[181]

The road, particularly, is a possible structure, and Mikhail Bakhtin points to the road as an important chronotope,[182] or structuring element of fiction, for the way that the road

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[178] Ibid. p. 287.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid. p. 286.
[181] Kai Mikkonen, 'The "Narrative Is Travel" Metaphor: Between Spatial Sequence and Open Consequence', *Narrative,* 15 (2007), pp. 286-305 (p. 286).
[182] M.M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin,* ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 84-258. The chronotope relates to 'the intrinsic connectedness of time and space and their central role in constituting literary genres'. 'Mikhail M. Bakhtin', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and*

compresses time. The road shortens the distance between two locations, and allows meetings and occurrences to occur along its stretch. A road is a structure leading from a beginning to an end, and, for this reason, the road becomes an easy way to structure a narrative. More importantly for fictions that depict the end of the world, the road may be the only structure left. After the end of civilisation, after the world is scorched by the fire of the nuclear holocaust, all that remains is the road. The roads in *Riddley Walker*, for instance, are palimpsestic. The A2, which can be found under its contemporary name on the map at the beginning of *Riddley Walker*, is an ancient road, called *Wæcelinga Stræt* in Old English, and was used by the Romans and likely much earlier again.[183] The slowly changing road has snaked through history. This road forms a constant structuring presence that remains even as time changes. The myths of *Riddley Walker*, for instance, follow the old roads that ring around Cambry, and survived the devastation of Bad Time. The structures of the past now control their culture. Roads are structures; they are forms, without content. They are clearings, absences, but clearings that point somewhere and, hopefully, to something. Roads are nothings, but nothings with purpose and meaning given them by virtue of being nothing. And nothing is left after the atomic purge. This structure, by being all that is left from civilisation, becomes a structure around which the post-apocalyptic world can be written. A road, with a beginning and a goal, becomes a narrative structure: a beginning, middle and an end. There are things before the beginning and after the end, and on either side. These are the *nunc stans*, the time out of time, that Frank Kermode discusses in his theory of endings.

Criticism, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), (p. 1187). 'Time, as it were, fuses together space and flows in it (forming the road);' Bakhtin, p. 98.
[183] The non-constructed landscape, also, demonstrates a return to the past. Ramsgate, or The Ram as the Inlanders call it, is separated from Kent by a body of water, just as it was in Roman maps.

In *The Road*, the man and the boy attempt to make a narrative by mapping their world, and placing their lives down the road. Mapping of the world is also an indication of the need to narrativise, to find meaning, to find purpose and even to be '[j]ustified':

> He thought he knew what that was about. He'd pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory. Themselves among others, everything it its place. Justified in the world.[184]

This is an attempt to reconstruct both the physical landscape and the human geography, to find a structured place within a community. Yet this is consistently obfuscated. *The Road* 'shows a preoccupation with landscape and place. The novel presents a world of human maps, divisions, and boundaries fraying into total obscurity, replaced by endless vistas of grey.'[185] The goal the man and the boy give to their lives is simply movement along that landscape: 'They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here'.[186] Further to the image of the road as a structuring element, the man in *The Road* literally lays his memories along it:

> He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood and they went on.[187]

He lays his life on the road to give it structure and narrative. The suggestion of gaming cards, however, evokes the possibility that this is one final, great gamble. It is also abandonment, primarily of the final image of the boy's mother. If this is some final record of the narrative of his life, it is one that is left to be destroyed by the wind and the rain. While the man and the boy attempt to give meaning to their lives through the structures of the past, these structures are ultimately meaningless. The old world has fallen apart, as made most apparent by '[t]he tattered oilcompany roadmap' that 'had once been taped together but now [...] was just sorted

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[184] McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 153-4.
[185] Kearney, p. 164.
[186] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 4.
[187] Ibid. p. 53.

into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners for their assembly.'[188] While roads continue to exist, the human connections that gave purpose to them are gone. There may be 'state roads', but there are no states.[189] The boy does not even know what a state is. Arbitrary divisions have disappeared as the cultural connections that gave them meaning have disappeared. The map no longer represents either those arbitrary distinctions or any reflection of the world as it exists, yet 'the roads are still there', which the man and the boy use in a futile attempt to give their lives purpose.[190] A similar failure can also be found in *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* where the ancient 'broken roadway' is 'a road from nowhere, leading nowhere'.[191]

Conclusion

The hope provided by the structure of the road is a forlorn one. The beginning and the end of the road are both nothingness. It, truly, goes nowhere. At the beginning is the destruction of the past, and at the end is death. The hopeful ending of *The Road* that the man and the boy try to find in the south is constantly deferred. Many road stories involve journeys through the wilderness, with a civilisation re-found and re-joined on the other side of the journey. However, when, early in the text, the characters reach the first unnamed city, they find only more destruction, as it is 'mostly burned.'[192] As noted by Susan Kollin, this subverts the nature of the journey narrative as a quest towards utopia.[193]

The road is also an image of progress, possibly towards destruction. As discussed in Chapter One, the predetermined goal of universal destruction intrigued Jacques Derrida, who,

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[188] Ibid. p. 43.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid. p. 44.
[191] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, pp. 1, 2.
[192] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 11.
[193] Susan Kollin, '"Barren, Silent, Godless": Ecodisaster and the Post-Abundant Landscape in *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road,* ed. by Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Continuum Books, 2011), pp. 157-71.

in his 'No Apocalypse, Not Now', claims that nuclear war is a speed race.[194] The concept of a speed race is interesting as it supposes a finishing line, with each party trying to outrun the other towards death. Derrida demands that we slow down. The ending of *The Road* will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six, but the novel certainly demands that one gets off the road. This is in keeping with Derrida's claims. In their desire to drive forward, the man and the boy in *The Road* replace meaningful conclusion with constant movement and deferral, and one that can only end in death. In travelling down the road, they run towards a goal that they know likely does not exist. As the father checks his maps, he always thinks that they are further along than they really are,[195] and the end of the road stretches out before them like Zeno's Paradox.[196] The infinite is fractioned out, time and time again. In *Riddley Walker*, the ineffable, nameless quantity that Riddley seeks out 'aint ben beartht it never does get beartht its all ways in the woom of things its all ways on the road.'[197] The *woom* is related to the road, as it is always in a state of becoming rather than being. Roads are symbols of eternal motion and transition, of something about to occur that has not yet come into being.

Post-apocalyptic fictions are defined by an absence of landscape. There is thus a need to construct space, to give it meaning and purpose. One way of constructing space in *The Road* is the use of the model of the Western, whereby new frontiers are opened up through a ritual of death. This frontier is analogous to the schism in time, through which the boy and the man have moved. The reappropriation of landscape along the frontier is a feature of myth, of the Western genre and also of fictions of the end of the world. However, in the latter death always lays at the heart, at Ground Zero. The only real structure that can be found in the

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[194] Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter, and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 20-31.
[195] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 208.
[196] Jay Ellis, while he does not discuss *The Road*, suggests similarly of McCarthy's earlier works. See Jay Ellis, *No Place for Home : Spatial Constraint and Character Flight in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy*, (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[197] Hoban, p. 7.

wasteland, then, is the road. The man and the boy in *The Road*, as well as the entire culture of *Riddley Walker*, stretch their lives along old roads and old paths. This continues the role of the road as a structuring presence in literature. However, without anything else to give the road meaning, without any content to fit into that structure, the hope and meaning that the road implies is forlorn. The progress that it points towards is always destruction. While the road demonstrates the inherent need for structure and narrative, closure can only be found by getting off the road.

This attempt to find meaning along the road is then a futile one. However, through the deferral of apocalyptic ending, there still remains some hope for the future. The next chapter turns to the concept of futurelessness and the hope for creating a future through the boy in *The Road*. In an endless world, this sense of hope for simple existence and continuation is possibly all that is possible.

6 Finding a Future: *The Road, Riddley Walker* and Other Fictions of the End of the World

Although fictions of the end of the world deny simple closure, perhaps they can at least offer hope for a future. While Frank Kermode's theory of endings suggests that meaning is provided by rendering things finite, Robert Jay Lifton's psychological studies suggest the possibility of the opposite. According to Lifton, it is important to feel connected to something that will continue. It is psychologically significant to connect to the infinite. Lifton sees meaning as being offered not by closure but by hope for a future. Whatever inconsistency there may be between these two theories, it is certainly true that the disruption of apocalyptic closure can destroy both possibilities. This disruption subverts the possibility of meaningful closure, while also denying a continuation of culture or family. These failed endings simultaneously disrupt both the sense of being finite and of being infinite. A person facing these failed endings not only sees a lack of transcendent closure, but also the lack of a future. These texts confront the possibility of futurelessness.

Chapter Two of this thesis argues that *On the Beach* (1957) is a nuclear tragedy.[1] Tragedy, eliciting *pathos* and fear, and confronting the human condition exposed to fate, can serve as a warning about that fate. Pity and fear are 'central components of the classical definition of tragedy.'[2] They are also 'two of the most potently persuasive emotions',[3] and can therefore, as Patrick Mannix suggests, be used in rhetorical appeals to emotion. The nuclear holocaust story often serves as a warning through such an appeal. It evokes pity for the characters, and fear for oneself, as the same fate that has befallen the characters might

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[1] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach*, (Adelaide: Heinemann, 1958).
[2] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, (Lewisburg; London; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 132.
[3] Ibid.

also befall the reader. Chapter Two suggests that *On the Beach* offers three avenues for hope. However, the novel's action as a warning offers a fourth, extra-textual hope. One of Shute's mentors, Sir Dennison Burney, believed:

> [T]here is a great danger that the world will not understand what science has given to it, and, just as a child may play with danger, not realising and not understanding what he is doing, so the world may play with war and unloose such forces as will produce another dark age.[4]

On the Beach serves as an education about the horrors that await humanity if it continues on its path. This is made explicit when the characters lament that nothing can be done to stop the radiation and Peter Holmes suggests that '[t]he only possible hope would have been to educate them out of their silliness'.[5] Of course, now it is too late for the characters, as signalled by the words 'would have been'. This is now no hope at all, then. It is, however, not too late for the readers of the novel, and this knowing wink ('them' might metafictionally refer to the reader) suggests, quite plainly, that one purpose of the novel is to turn people away from the path of nuclear war. In the 1959 film adaptation, the final camera shot lingers on a banner for the Salvation Army that reads, 'There is still time, brother!'[6] This final image is a call to action, a symbol of hope in juxtaposition with the hopelessness of the characters for whom there is no time. The random electronic beeps of a radio transmission suggest the meaninglessness of this potential future, and the necessity of avoiding it, but also the hope that we *can* avoid it. A similar point is made in other fictions of the end:

> [U]ltimately, if modern man is like X-127 [from *Level 7*]—imprisoned in the nightmare of the nuclear age—he is also like Riddley [Walker]—possessed of the power to escape that nightmare. Like Riddley, the people of the world can discover in fiction the horror of their

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[4] Julian Smith, *Nevil Shute*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 127.
[5] Shute, p. 301. That the core purpose of the novel is to argue that nuclear war is everyone's responsibility and that an educated population would have avoided it is similarly claimed by C.W. Sullivan III, '*Alas, Babylon* and *On the Beach*: Antiphons of the Apocalypse', in *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World,* ed. by Carl B. Yoke (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987).
[6] Stanley Kramer, dir., *On the Beach*. US: United Artists, 1959.

technology of destruction and the hope—and the sense of moral purpose—that will help them overcome that technology.[7]

Fictions may offer the hope of a future to the reader through this function as a warning; they may determine the reader to act against nuclear proliferation. Ironically, this type of hope is enhanced by the representation of a meaningless, hopeless failed ending; the fictional is martyred so that the real can be saved. This call to action may be seen as a kind of closure. Alternatively, it may be seen as meaning and purpose being provided by the failure of closure.

The suggestion that meaning in *On the Beach* is found through its rhetorical function may be made of all the other fictions given detailed discussion in this thesis. *The Road* (2006) is also commonly seen as a jeremiad, a call away from nuclear war or environmental degradation. Along with other fictions of the end of the world, it explores the notion of futurelessness by representing a literal consumption of the future, through the imagery of cannibalism. While the lack of an explicit cause for the disaster makes it difficult to find closure in a simple warning, the novel does entail a suggestion of a failure of stewardship and a call to a simplification of values. It also offers another resolution to the sense of futurelessness it engenders: *The Road* finally finds resolution through the discovery of a future in the body of the boy. In *The Road*, apocalyptic rebirth becomes a metaphor for the transition between one generation and the next. The new world is the world of the boy, and it can only come into existence with the death of the man. He must let go. In this way, *The Road* offers a very traditional form of closure, which it integrates with the apocalyptic space.

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[7] Mannix, p. 177.

The Road may function as a jeremiad, as a warning, but a warning against *what* exactly is not

so clear. *The Road* is a confrontation with 'radical futurelessness',[8] a term used by Robert Jay

Lifton in his study of the Civil Defence generation. Lifton suggests that there was a kind of

pre-traumatic stress during the Cold War.[9] Metaphorical immortality had been lost due to a

fear of imminent nuclear obliteration. While a human life is finite, one way of dealing with

life and death is to imagine an importance beyond oneself, a continuation, an immortality.

According to Lifton, this might mean imagining continuation through children, through

accomplishments or through a faith in a higher power. Intrinsic to the age of nuclear terror is

a sense that not only will humans die, but humanity will die (as will, according to Derrida, the

Humanities). This is the sense that no children will live to carry the 'fire', as McCarthy calls

it. Apocalypse would also cleanse the physical world, leaving no accomplishments, no art and

no buildings. It is this sense of futurelessness that the characters of *On the Beach* futilely

attempt to defer by placing historical records in the bunker at Kosciusko, and that, in *Level 7*,

leads X-127 to leave a looped tape of classical music playing as he dies: 'But let the tape

revolve, let the music last. I do not know why, but I want *something* to last.'[10] The possibility

of a higher power, and of transcendent immortality, is also questioned by the mere possibility

that humanity might be able to destroy itself.[11] Furthermore, '[i]f we lose our future we

question our past.'[12] The meaningless end of the world by scientific method questions all of

human history back to the Enlightenment.[13] In the twenty-first century, Civil Defence is no

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[8] Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 66.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Mordecai Roshwald, *Level 7*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 139. Emphasis in original.
[11] Lifton and Falk, pp. 67-69.
[12] Ibid. p. 68.
[13] As explored in Chapter One of this thesis.

more, but surely some sense of futurelessness remains, for humanity has turned towards self-destruction many times.

The confrontation with radical futurelessness in *The Road* was inspired by many apocalyptic possibilities. For the past twenty years, Cormac McCarthy had been a research fellow at the Santa Fe Institute, which David Kushner calls 'a sort of Justice League of renegade geeks'.[14] The science-oriented institute provided McCarthy with access to leading minds in a number of fields related to the final destruction of humanity. Kushner's interview with McCarthy strongly suggests that *The Road* is influenced by climate change and possible asteroid impacts with Earth. Therefore, it may be a warning, a jeremiad. Jeremiads are religious writings that are broadly similar in form to apocalypses, as they describe destruction and punishment of the wicked. However, they include as a vital component a call away from the actions that will lead to destruction. Jeremiads are warnings rather than prophecies. The nature of end-of-the-world fictions as jeremiads is discussed at length by David Seed in his study of science fiction produced during the Cold War. Seed claims that '[a]ll the narratives examined in this volume are warnings, envisaging a future whose imaginative representations, it is hoped, will prevent it from materialising.'[15] He talks specifically about the works of Philip Wylie as:

> [A]n example of the jeremiad genre which by the modern period had become inverted into an "anti-jeremiad", which deploys a "doomsday vision" through the "denunciation of all ideals, sacred and secular, on the grounds that America is a lie"[.][16]

Detailed coverage of Wylie's *Triumph* – a novel of nuclear war often verging on didacticism – as the vessel for an argument against nuclear war is also offered by Patrick Mannix, in his

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[14] David Kushner, 'Cormac McCarthy's Apocalypse', *Rolling Stone,* 27 December 2007.
[15] David Seed, 'Postwar Jeremiads: Philip Wylie and Leo Szilard', in *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 14-27 (p. 14).
[16] Ibid. Seed here cites Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 194, 91.

The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction. Mannix furthermore provides lengthy coverage of *Riddley Walker* (1980), *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and *On the Beach*.[17] Mannix engages in a focused and clear investigation of these fictions using Aristotle's modes of appeal in rhetoric as a guide. He begins by assuming that they are all attempts to convince their audience to act against nuclear war. He then explores their use of ethical, emotional and rational arguments towards this purpose.[18] This concept of fiction and criticism as a tool against nuclear war is a foundation of nuclear criticism. Indeed, all fictions of the end of the world studied in this thesis may also be considered warnings, if not jeremiads. *On the Beach*, as a nuclear tragedy, forms an explicit warning against the path that leads to nuclear war. Similarly, both *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, in their depiction of post-nuclear landscapes, offer horrific reminders of the possibilities of nuclear destruction. *The World Set Free* (1914) also offers a warning, but not a warning against atomic weapons. In fact, it embraces destruction via atomic bombs as necessary in order to change the corrupt society that it warns against.

This trend may have continued well after the Cold War, and Tim Edwards calls *The Road* 'an American jeremiad more terrifying than even the Puritan imagination could conjure.'[19] If it is a jeremiad, a warning, then the deferral or denial of narrative closure actually reinforces another, more important purpose. The lack of a meaningful, purposeful

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[17] It also covers the *Fail-Safe* (1964), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)*, The Day After* (1983), *War Day* (1984)*, Testament* (1983) and *Threads* (1984). Eugene Burdick and Harry Wheeler, *Fail-Safe*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962); Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Mike Jackson, dir., *Threads*. UK: BBC, 1984; Stanley Kubrik, dir., *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. US: Columbia Pictures, 1964; Lynne Littman, dir., *Testament*. US: Paramount Pictures, 1983; Mannix; Nicholas Meyer, dir., *The Day After*. USA: ABC, 1983; Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971); Shute; Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday: And the Journey Onward*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984).

[18] The categories of emotional and rational rhetoric are somewhat self-explanatory, but ethical rhetoric is actually a kind of argument by authority. It relies on the character of the speaker to create trust, which is complicated in the case of fiction by the distinctions between author, narrator and character.

[19] Tim Edwards, 'The End of the Road: Pastoralism and the Post-Apocalyptic Waste Land of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 59-61 (p. 60).

ending is part of its warning against continuing on a path that may lead to a failed ending. The purpose of the novel is not to release the reader from apocalyptic anxiety, but to instil anxiety and prompt action to turn away from the path that will lead to destruction. It is in this turning away that the novel may find closure.

However, this implies a call to a specific action. In *The Road*, it is uncertain what, precisely, that action is, as the novel is the only one studied extensively in this thesis that does not make the cause of its apocalyptic event clear. Despite its post-Cold War appearance, many critics see *The Road* as a warning against nuclear war, including Anna Cates, Stephen Abell and Tim Blackmore.[20] Therefore, *The Road* could be seen as a warning in the mould of nuclear criticism. The novel could represent the post-nuclear environmental catastrophe that was popularly imagined in the 1980s, and summarised by Mannix:

> [I]t might damage [... the ecosystem] beyond repair [...] the firestorms generated by nuclear attacks on cities [... could] throw up a cloud of smoke and dust thick enough to block out the sun and cause a so-called "nuclear winter," which would destroy crops and produce a worldwide famine. In 1986 a Defense Department report confirmed the general validity of this theory.[21]

However, the assumption that *The Road* is a latter-day work of nuclear criticism has been criticised by Richard Gray, Kevin Kearney and Carl James Grindley,[22] for there is little specific evidence of a nuclear event in the novel; there are, for instance, no radiation meters and no signs of radiation disease.

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[20] Anna Cates, 'Secular Winds: Disrupted Natural Revelation & the Journey toward God in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Internet Review of Science Fiction,* (2010); Stephen Abell, 'Another Terra Damnata: Cormac McCarthy Covers a Post-Nuclear Terrain.', *TLS. Times Literary Supplement,* (2006), pp. 19-20 (p. 19); Tim Blackmore, 'Life of War, Death of the Rest: The Shining Path of Cormac McCarthy's Thermonuclear America', *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society,* 29 (2009), pp. 18-36.
[21] Mannix, p. 79. Mannix cites Sharon Begley and John Barry, 'A Milder Nuclear Winter', in *Newsweek,* (1986), p. 65; Paul R. Ehrlich, Carl Sagan, and Donald Kennedy, *The Cold and the Dark*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), pp. xiii-xiv.
[22] Richard Gray, 'Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis', *American Literary History,* 21 (2009), p. 128 pp. 136-7).

More commonly, the novel is seen as a warning against environmental degradation.[23] The novel has been written in a time, and read into a time, in which concerns about climate change have a prominent position in public discourse. Given these concerns and the ambiguous nature of the text, an eco-critical reading is inevitable, just as a nuclear-critical reading would have been inevitable twenty years ago. When Cormac McCarthy was chosen as one of *The Guardian*'s '50 People Who Could Save the Planet', environmentalist George Monbiot wrote that *The Road* 'could be the most important environmental book ever. It is a thought experiment that imagines a world without a biosphere, and shows that everything we value depends on the ecosystem.'[24] This collapse is almost entirely complete, with 'no fish, no flies, no rats, not even cockroaches, which by most popular accounts are capable of surviving nearly any kind of destruction, certainly much more so than a man or a woman.'[25] Once again, there is no specific explanation of how such a tragedy would have occurred. This is certainly not simply the result of climate change, for instance, or pollution. While the exact cause of the collapse is uncertain, the result is certainly the collapse of the environment and the natural order, with 'gray [snow ...] falling out of' the sky,[26] and 'burnt' landscapes.[27] This uncertain ecological parable could, as Ben De Bruyn makes clear,[28] make the novel an inversion of Alan Weisman's *World Without Us* (2007),[29] which is a utopic view of a world in which humanity has disappeared.

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[23] For example, in Rebecca Giggs, 'The Green Afterword: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Ecological Uncanny', in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk,* ed. by Paul Crosthwaite (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 201-17.

[24] George Monbiot, cited in *50 People Who Could Save the Planet*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jan/05/activists.ethicalliving> [accessed 25 Oct 2008].

[25] Kevin Kearney, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Frontier of the Human', *L I T: Literature Interpretation Theory,* 23 (2012), pp. 160-77 (p. 165).

[26] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (London: Picador, 2007), p. 15.

[27] Ibid. p. 13.

[28] Ben De Bruyn, 'Borrowed Time, Borrowed World and Borrowed Eyes: Care, Ruin and Vision in McCarthy's *The Road* and Harrison's Ecocriticism', *English Studies,* 91 (2010), pp. 776-89 (p. 778).

[29] Alan Weisman, *World without Us*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 2007).

However, as Kearney notes, taking an eco-critical approach is difficult because it assumes a direct and imminent warning in the text, which would require that there be some firm signal of the specific nature of the collapse in *The Road* in order that the collapse may be avoided in the real world. Ben De Bruyn, in embarking on an eco-critical reading, finds that the exact nature of the message of *The Road* is 'hard to interpret […] as it remains tight-lipped about the cause of the cataclysm [… and] its long-term effects'.[30] This does not entirely dismiss the possibility of an eco-critical reading, and Bruyn undertakes such a project, but it does complicate it. McCarthy has even stated that there was no environmentalist intention in the novel, and that the story is merely about a man and his boy, although he leaves audiences room to read it according to their 'taste'.[31]

The question as to whether the novel depicts nuclear war or environmental degradation may invoke a false dichotomy, for each may be a metaphorical reflection of the other. Both are the result of a society willing to race towards obliteration. The connection between nuclear criticism and eco-criticism is clear, with Ken Ruthven writing at the end of his *Nuclear Criticism* that, as nuclear criticism passed, it may be subsumed into eco-criticism.[32] More recently, Andrew Milner makes a similar connection between the literary responses to nuclear war and to climate change.[33] Eco-criticism, like nuclear criticism, is founded on the premise that '[e]ither we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to

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[30] Bruyn, p. 776. Bruyn still assumes an environmental message and analyses the text using the ecocriticism of Robert Harrison as guidebook.
[31] Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac McCarthy*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 163.
[32] Ken Ruthven, *Nuclear Criticism*, (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1993).
[33] Andrew Milner, 'Changing the Climate', in *Changing the Climate: Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe,* ed. by Andrew Milner, Simon Sellars, and Verity Burgmann (North Carlton, Australia: Arena Publications, 2011), pp. 1-7.

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apocalypse.'[34] From the dawn of the Cold War, the nuclear industry, with its capability to create environmental disaster, was tied to the military, with the destructive force of the bomb behind it. This connection is apparent even in Aldous Huxley's 1949 post-apocalyptic novel, *Ape and Essence*. In this novel, the genetic damage caused by the bomb is seen as inevitable and already in action well before the bomb is dropped, due to the nuclear industry.[35] Similarly, in *Riddley Walker* environmental and nuclear apocalypses are combined as it is unclear whether the degradation of their world is due only to radioactive poisoning or also damage to 'the O Zoan.'[36] The Power Ring, presumably some type of nuclear power station, is also conflated with the bomb and nuclear war in their myths.[37]

The lack of detail about the cause of the collapse in *The Road* still makes the type of 'symbolic resolution' afforded by eco and nuclear criticism unfulfilling. Kevin Kearney argues that:

> [While] critics [...] in a search to present the novel as either an environmentally didactic text, cautioning us against abusing the globe by illustrating the collapse of the biosphere, or as a deterrent against nuclear proliferation, tend to "fill in the blanks," so to speak, in order to provide symbolic resolution.[38]

Kearney cogently argues against a literal analysis of the text as eco-critical or nuclear critical:

> Critics who fail to see the collapse as hyperbolic and thus allegorical often read the text as a forewarning of man's environmental or political transgressions, but it is highly unlikely that even the planet's entire nuclear arsenal could completely eradicate life on earth.[39]

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[34] Cheryll Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. xv-xxxvi (p. xx).
[35] Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence: A Novel*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), p. 63.
[36] Hoban, p. 125.
[37] There are also a number of films about the nuclear industry that explore the relationship between that industry, nuclear weapons, and environmentalism, although these are rarely apocalyptic. See Mike Nichols, dir., *Silkwood*. USA: ABC Motion Pictures, 1983; James Bridges, dir., *The China Syndrome*. United States: Columbia Pictures, 1979; Martin Campbell, dir., *Edge of Darkness*. United Kingdom: BBC, 1985; Martin Campbell, dir., *Edge of Darkness*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010.
[38] Kearney, p. 164.
[39] Ibid. p. 165.

While the premise of complete nuclear obliteration may be 'highly unlikely', this has not stopped novelists (such as Nevil Shute) from representing it. There is, as Mannix reminds us, a difference between realism and plausibility, and only plausibility is necessary for fiction.[40] However, Kearney is still right to be sceptical about nuclear war being the primary subject of the novel. *The Road* does not depict one specific type of disaster. While it is open to specific eco-critical readings, the novel is broader than this, or any one particular environmental, scientific or political concern. However, it does demonstrate a concern for the future, and explores the possible failure of that future.

It may well be a broader warning, a call to a simplification of values. Derrida's speed race, the Cold War, ended without the destructive finish line being crossed. However, the possibility of human-made apocalypse remains. The mere fact that humanity has skirted its own self-destruction has left a scar on the psyche of Western culture. Moreover, there still may be reason to heed Derrida's warning, and to get off the road. One of the most interesting phrases in *The Road* is said by the boy's rescuer: 'If you stay, you need to keep out of the road. I don't know how you made it this far.'[41] This statement is heavily laden with irony, as the man has constantly implored his son to keep travelling down the road, as if movement assures safety, and as if the road gives a final purpose and goal. The goal, of going south, may have given them a temporary narrative or a sense of meaning, but this is ultimately an illusion. As Susan Kollin suggests, 'while stasis is not an option for the two characters because life cannot be sustained in the devastated ecologies of this new world, the journey

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[40] Mannix, pp. 78-9.
[41] McCarthy, p. 283. As suggested by David Seed, the association with the image of the road and danger is also found in Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon*, (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1959). The danger of the road symbolises the importance of the return to community and the redevelopment of a simpler world. David Seed, 'Mapping the Post-Nuclear Landscape', *Foundation: the International Review of Science Fiction,* (2003), pp. 65-75 (p. 68).

itself provides no guarantee that a future exists.'[42] The purpose of moving down the road is ultimately movement for its own sake. At the end of the road there can be only death. While they lay their narrative, their story, along that road, the man also begs, 'Please dont tell me how the story ends.'[43] The man is caught between a desire for hopeful closure, and a fear of the closure that seems inevitable: death. The man and the boy attempt to race to the end while also hoping never to reach it.

The Failure of Stewardship in *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*

While a narrow eco-critical reading is unclear due to the unspecified nature of the catastrophe in *The Road*, the novel still depicts a failure of stewardship, and may still find closure as a warning. Rather than a call to a specific action, the novel makes a broader call to a responsibility to the future and to a simplification of values. As discussed above, nature has departed the world of *The Road*. On the man and the boy's long journey, the only thing offered by nature are morels,[44] and a few rotting apples, '[h]ard and brown and shriveled.'[45] However, these latter items are not really an offering of nature, but instead come from 'the ruins of an old apple orchard'.[46] Gardens are symbolic of the attempt to take nature and make out of it an ordered landscape, a structure, like Eden is structured out of chaos. As Bruyn, quoting Francis Bacon, reminds us, it is unsurprising that in Genesis 'God Almighty first planted a garden.'[47] The orchard, as a garden made for commercial production, makes the image of the apple an ironic allusion to the common depiction of the biblical fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as an apple. This forms a corrupted mirror image bookend of

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[42] Susan Kollin, '"Barren, Silent, Godless": Ecodisaster and the Post-Abundant Landscape in *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road,* ed. by Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Continuum Books, 2011), pp. 157-71 (p. 167).
[43] McCarthy, p. 78.
[44] Ibid. p. 41.
[45] Ibid. p. 127.
[46] Ibid. p. 125.
[47] Cited in Bruyn.

the world, in which the garden made by humanity in replication of Eden has also failed. As is depicted in Lord Byron's 'Darkness', the world is coming undone as it was made, with the man as an 'anti-Adam, who literally sees his world being uncreated before his eyes, a process rendered in terms of language, or more properly, the loss of language'.[48]

The eating of these apples, which are '[d]ry and almost tasteless',[49] is reminiscent of the way that the fruit turns to 'bitter ashes' in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[50] In *The Road*, as in Pandaemonium, the attempt to replicate the work of God has failed. These images of an Eden lost are reiterated by the man's dream of snakes being burnt.[51] Bruyn suggests this is a depiction of a world where 'man is not seduced by the snake but the snake burned by man'.[52] Where this thought leads, however, or how it concords with the rest of the novel, is unclear. It seems more likely that the snakes form an image of a failure to fulfil the hope for this world. The burning of the snakes is part of a broader allusion to the attempt to regain the prelapsarian state of innocence. A comparable image is also displayed in the first few pages of *A Canticle for Leibowtiz*, as Benjamin '[d]ispassionately [...] killed [a ...] snake with his staff and flipped the still-wriggling carcass aside.'[53] It is also suggested throughout that novel in the search for a prelapsarian language. In *The Road*, the boy, as it is argued below, is a symbol of this prelapsarian innocence, and the attempts to maintain his purity are a way of maintaining some small hope for the future. This violent image of snake burning suggests a brutal attempt to do the same. The image suggests a desperate attempt to undo Original Sin by burning it away, as one might dispose of a weed. This destruction is misguided, the product of a people who have 'no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they

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[48] Edwards, p. 59.
[49] McCarthy, p. 127.
[50] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (England: Penguin Classics, 2000). Book 10, l. 566.
[51] McCarthy, p. 159.
[52] Bruyn, p. 780.
[53] Miller, p. 3.

conceived it to be'.[54] Externalising evil to purify it ignores the reality that evil is part of

humanity.[55] To truly destroy evil is to destroy oneself. This early, failed attempt to expunge

evil is repeated on a grand scale, with the burning of the Earth and all that walk on it. The

destruction of the world in *The Road* may finally be a purifying 'cauteriz[ation]',[56] in order to

allow rebirth.

The failure of stewardship is part of a general criticism of consumption throughout the

novel. As Brian Donnelly suggests, the bottle of Coke given to the boy signifies a collision of

post and pre-apocalyptic.[57] The supermarket from which it comes is a ruin of the past,[58] a past

that has consumed itself, as the man and the boy wander through 'the devastated landscape

[...] littered with the accumulated debris of twenty-first-century consumer culture, a reminder

of the excess and waste that marks daily life for many Americans.'[59] Debris is 'scattered by

the side of the road. Electrical appliances, furniture. Tools.'[60] The boy is oddly drawn to this

past, but without their final referents the items are useless in this liminal state, and the boy

slowly grows out of his fascination as he grows into the new world. There was a time when

he would 'sometimes pick up something and carry it with him for a while but he didnt do that

any more.'[61] Nevertheless, the man and the boy still carry their entire lives in a 'shopping cart

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[54] McCarthy, p. 159.
[55] This claim is suggestive of Berger's analysis of the Apocalypse of Repression. These are fictional apocalypses in which the oppressed destroys the oppressor and thus the world is purified, but Berger notes that the more intelligent works of such fiction acknowledge the interrelation of oppressor and oppressed. To destroy the oppressor is to also take away part of the oppressed. See James Berger, 'Introduction: Twentieth-Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 46 (2000), pp. 387-95.
[56] McCarthy, p. 13.
[57] Brian Donnelly, '"Coke Is It!": Placing Coca-Cola in McCarthy's The Road', *The Explicator,* 68 (2010), pp. 70-73.
[58] McCarthy, pp. 21-3.
[59] Kollin, p. 160.
[60] McCarthy, p. 213.
[61] Ibid.

[which] symbolizes the materialism and consumerism of contemporary society',[62] made all the more ironic because, for them, this society is long gone. This imagery abounds in post-apocalyptic film and literature,[63] and is emblematic of a world in which production has died and only consumption remains. After the end, the whole world becomes a supermarket, but no one is filling the shelves. The philosophy of consumption is doomed, with the bloodcults the final practitioners and their eventual end prophesied as the man 'thought the bloodcults must have all consumed one another.'[64] In a world where names are so important,[65] the only proper nouns used in the text are Coke, Ely and God:[66] God, the absent, lost overwatcher; Ely, the falsely named prophet of ambiguity and uncertainty; and Coke, the final symbol of a lost age of consumerism. This is a trinity of ambiguity and loss.

When the boy is given a Coke, Brian Donnelly argues that the boy's question – 'What is it?'[67] – is more than just a suggestion of the gap of meaning between the boy and his father, but also a wry allusion to Coke's advertising campaign, which claimed that 'Coke is it.'[68] Coke, according to Donnelly, offers the failed promise of 'community'.[69] More broadly, the use of the word 'it' is here a signifier of pure capitalist promise: this product will fulfil one's needs, will fill whatever gap exists in one's life, no matter how ineffable. Without antecedent, the pronoun 'it' becomes a signifier with an absent referent; 'it' is nothing and everything. 'It' exists in a hesitation of meaning. In that other great, apocalyptic road story, *On the Road*,

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[62] Linda Woodson, 'Mapping *The Road* in Post-Modernism', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 87-99 (p. 89). Susan Kollin sees the use of the shopping cart as an ironic inversion of the American road story, in which the car is the dominant form of transport. Kollin, p. 168.

[63] Likely the most notable instance is in George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, a zombie film which actually takes place within a mall. George A. Romero, dir., *Dawn of the Dead*. United States: United Film Distribution Company, 1979. The genre, however, is replete with shopping sprees.

[64] McCarthy, p. 15.

[65] As Ely makes clear when he talks about trusting people with his name. Ibid. p. 182.

[66] Donnelly. However, the reference to 'Rock City' may well be another proper noun.

[67] McCarthy, p. 23.

[68] Donnelly, p. 71.

[69] Ibid. p. 72.

Dean Moriarty also searches for 'IT!'[70] 'It' is the American dream, the final goal towards which both these endless road stories search. In the image of the Coke bottle, the wanderlust, the freedom, the spiritual quest to find meaning, God, and the American dream has been bottled, packaged, sold and consumed. There is nothing left, not even the dreams that fade in the man's mind, not even the drink that the man gives to his boy in the hope that the vague memory of some former distilled happiness might survive. On drinking this alien token from the past, the boy must 'sit there thinking about it',[71] seemingly unable to understand the significance of the 'bubbly' drink from another age.[72] All he can finally offer is a muted, 'It's really good'.[73] When the drink has fulfilled its purpose, it is gone. 'It' is gone. The boy 'wont ever get to drink another one'.[74] All that is left is another absence, a deferral, and a symbol of a quest for the ineffable.

The dangers of consumption are also suggested in *Riddley Walker*, wherein the *chardcoal burners* are held as abject symbols of progress. As Riddley kills his boar, claims it is possibly the last one, and talks about the 'las littl scrump of woodling with the forms all roun,'[75] the reader must wonder what has happened to the implied great forests of the past. The answer comes soon, when Riddley sees:

> [B]lue smoak hanging in be twean the black trees and the stumps pink and red where they ben
> lopt off. Aulder trees in there and chard coal berners in amongst them working ther harts.[76]

The forests have been cut down and burned to produce charcoal, and inevitable progress has destroyed the old methods of foraging. In their stead is farming, or, as Riddley calls it, 'forming', which will allow a development of community and industry. As Riddley says, the

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[70] Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, (England: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 115.
[71] McCarthy, p. 23.
[72] Ibid. p. 22.
[73] Ibid. p. 23.
[74] Ibid. Or, at least, he can never expect it again. Coke is also drunk in the bunker.
[75] Hoban, p. 1.
[76] Ibid. pp. 1-2.

chard coal burners are 'making chard coal for the iron';[77] and as the Clevver Looking Bloak puts it, 'The iron wil come back agen' when they 'bern chard coal'.[78] Iron is a symbol of both progress and destruction, as cold iron is used to beat Eusa to death. By burning wood to create charcoal, the *chard coal burners* destroy in order to create, and consume the future in order to bring about progress. Charcoal is the symbol of incomplete destruction, of destroying in order to destroy again, for the production of charcoal requires a controlled burning of wood with limited oxygen so that it is condensed and dried rather than consumed.[79] Charcoal is, therefore, a symbol of the incomplete rebirth of the world. The connection between the *chard coal burners* and the societal fear of progress has made them social outcasts, which is apparent when '[e]very 1 made the Bad Luck go a way syn when' they pass them.[80] The novel suggests the danger of progress, but this danger is ignored. The responsibility to the future is scapegoated onto the *chard coal burners*, even as the entire culture moves towards progress and may be inevitably destroyed by it.[81]

In *The Road*, the final image is of a world that can never again be attained, that has been lost because of the failures of stewardship. This is the vision of 'trout in the streams in the mountains.'[82] This is the sixth time that fish or fishing is mentioned,[83] (although one of those mentions is merely of 'ribs of fishes in their millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see')[84] and seems to stand for the man's memory of a perfect time in the past, but a time that is long gone. In particular, the vision of trout reiterates the earlier dialogue between the man and the boy when the boy asks, 'Do you think there could be fish in the lake?' and

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[77] Ibid. p. 2.
[78] Ibid. p. 4.
[79] See Peter J. F. Harris, 'On Charcoal', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews,* 24 (1999), pp. 301-6.
[80] Hoban, p. 2.
[81] The eternal, apocalyptic consumption of the past may well be most notably depicted in Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things*, (New York: Viking, 1987).
[82] McCarthy, p. 306.
[83] Ibid. pp. 11-12, 19, 30, 42, 237.
[84] Ibid. p. 237.

the man replies, 'No. There is nothing in the lake.'[85] The trout stand for all nature, signified

by the 'vermiculate patterns' '[o]n their backs' 'that were maps of the world in its

becoming.'[86] As Dianne C. Luce notes, 'these maps recall the boy's desire to locate himself

on the roadmap',[87] a map that has crumbled. This suggests that 'nature herself offers a

guiding chart to those who can read her properly.'[88] However, '[t]he trout's speckles suggest

not only maps but mazes—a pattern that confuses and disorients but may be navigated with

trial and error'.[89] The lost nature, merely a dream, is 'an enigmatic but pastoral image' that

'of Nature as sacred text, a book to be interpreted, a hieroglyphic'.[90] The phrase 'in its

becoming' may briefly suggest prophetic vision, that this is a revelation of nature and a

beginning of the new world. It has therefore been debated whether this ending is

redemptive,[91] or contains 'the seeds of a new beginning.'[92] Richard Gray, for instance, sees

this ending with a memory as showing a crisis with ultimate continuity.[93] However, the use of

the word '[o]nce' at the beginning of the passage places it not as prophetic revelation,[94] but a

lament for a past long gone. This natural order, *The Road* reminds us, can never 'be put back'

together,[95] can never be recreated. Eden can never be revisited. The 'passage is not only

pastoral but elegiac, for those brook trout are gone.'[96] As Dana Phillips puts it:

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[85] Ibid. p. 19.
[86] Ibid. p. 307.
[87] Dianne C. Luce, 'The Painterly Eye: Waterscapes in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', in *Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cormac McCarthy: Borders and Crossings,* ed. by Nicholas Monk (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012), pp. 68-89 (p. 82).
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Edwards, p. 55.
[91] See Shelly L. Rambo, 'Beyond Redemption?: Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* after the End of the World', *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* 41 (2008).
[92] Rune Graulund, 'Fulcrums and Borderlands: A Desert Reading of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Orbis Litterarum,* 65 (2010), pp. 57-78 (p. 71). See also Rambo.
[93] See Gray.
[94] McCarthy, p. 306.
[95] Ibid. p. 307.
[96] Edwards, p. 55.

> While this may be the most beautifully written passage in the book, it is also the most damning (which is saying a lot). Once there were brook trout, and now there are not. You could see them, and now you cannot. They smelled of moss, and now not even moss smells of moss anymore. Maps of the world in its becoming are indecipherable in a world that has come and gone, that cannot be put back or made right again.[97]

Philips, highlighting Frank Kermode's discussion of endings in *The Sense of an Ending*, suggests that this final passage is often read as redemptive simply because it is the ending, and that is what is expected.[98] Thus, hope for redemption in its conclusion is merely hope. The image of being unable to put a trout back in the river once it is caught is, as Bruyn claims, a final suggestion of the failure of cultivation and stewardship.[99] The novel shows humanity's dependence on nature, the fragility of nature, and the irreparability of nature. Whatever damage humanity causes can never be undone. The fish cannot be put back. The prelapsarian state cannot be re-achieved.

While this thesis has engaged with the ways meaning has been found in fictions of the end of the world, and has attempted to explore the subject from a different perspective than the culturo-historical view often afforded speculative fiction, the motif of responsibility and the need for action outside of the text continues throughout fictions of the genre. It is seen in the references to guilt and sin throughout *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, through the calls to education in *On the Beach*, the radical call to change in H.G. Well's *A World Set Free* and the image of the abject *chard coal burners* in *Riddley Walker*. As Kevin Kearney argues, such a reading may 'provide symbolic resolution.'[100] However, Kearney's suggestion is based on reading a specific cause of the catastrophe and, therefore, a specific response. *The Road*, unlike many of its predecessors, leaves the cause ambiguous, therefore the response

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[97] Dana Phillips, '"He Ought Not Have Done It": McCarthy and Apocalypse', in *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road,* ed. by Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Coninuum Books, 2011), pp. 172-88 (p. 186).
[98] Ibid.
[99] See Bruyn.
[100] Kearney, p. 164.

and therefore the resolution. In this sense, it is a much more open work, but possibly more powerful for it. *The Road* does suggest a general 'radical futurelessness' and, therefore, a concern for the future. It depicts a failure of stewardship, in which the world has fallen, either via physical or moral corruption, and depicts the failure of life without an environment, without a biosphere, with tokens of the broken past of consumption scattered across the landscape. This palimpsestic landscape is also offered by *Riddley Walker*, which reinforces the images of consumption through the figures of the *chard coal burners*.

Developing upon the concepts of radical futurelessness, failure of stewardship and concern for the future, *The Road* does find a conclusion. Rather than any specific environmental cataclysm, *The Road* is ultimately about a man and his son. While certainly inspired by his residence at the Santa Fe Institute:

> *The Road* had its genesis in a very specific moment, when McCarthy had checked into an old hotel in El Paso with his young son, John [...], and stood looking at the still city at two or three in the morning from the window of their room, hearing the lonesome sound of trains and imagining what El Paso "might look like in fifty or a hundred years." "I just had this image of these fires up on the hill and everything being laid waste and I thought a lot about my little boy. And so I wrote those pages and that was the end of it." [...] Then a few years later, in Ireland, he "woke up one morning and ... realized" that it was indeed a novel, "and that it was about that man and that little boy"[.][101]

The novel is not primarily about nuclear conflagration, global warming or meteor impact, even while those readings are available. Nor is it primarily about religious Apocalypse, the specific reading that has the most evidence supporting it. It is instead about a man and his love for his boy, signalled by the epigraphic dedication to McCarthy's son. This extends the notion of stewardship for the future, and turns the novel and the genre into a parable of generational change. The novel expresses the fear 'that after your death your son

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[101] Dianne C. Luce, 'Beyond the Border: Cormac McCarthy in the New Millennium', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6, pp. 6-13 (p. 9). Jay Ellis sees in the ending a similar autobiographical image of McCarthy. Given his relatively late movement into the state of fatherhood, Ellis sees it as an 'autobiographical depiction of a man who cannot live long enough to fully teach his son to survive the forces of darkness gathering around them.' Jay Ellis, 'Another Sense of Ending: The Keynote Address to the Knoxville Conference', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 22-38 (p. 28).

will be left without enough to get by.'[102] This fear, and the rebirth through the letting go of past generations and the allowing of a new generation to come into existence, is represented in many works of the genre. This metaphor offers a sense of an ending in a very traditional form.

Consuming the Future

In *The World Set Free* there are only 'rumours of cannibalism',[103] but in Wells' first novel, *The Time Machine* (1895), cannibalism forms part of the central premise.[104] Cannibalism is an image of capitalist consumption, ironically inverted. In an intersection of Wells' Fabian ideals and his understanding of evolutionary science, the descendants of those who were metaphorically consumed by capitalist enterprise, the Morlocks, turn to literally consuming the descendants of their oppressors, the Eloi. Robert A. Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (1964) uses cannibalism as a metaphor for racial oppression,[105] as light- skinned slaves are consumed as meat in a similar inversion. Cannibalism appears throughout fictions of the end-times, where it figures as a symbol of consumption. Child cannibalism, in particular, suggests a society literally willing to consume its own future. The society is not only futureless, but is deliberately heading down the path of futurelessness. The broader act of child murder also finds a prominent place in Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence*, which depicts a world where mutation is commonplace. As Loola says:

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[102] Ellis, p. 25. Ellis sees this as a continuation of the theme in McCarthy's work of the father image, and specifically as an expression of the single father:

      [McCarthy] has finally fully addressed the concerns of the domestic novel. Or at least that of the single father—and the relatively quick, if not painless, "divorce" that occurs in *The Road*. But he has done so by also accomplishing another step through the theological darkness that has troubled—alongside the son and father trouble—the ten novels that preceded this one.

[103] H.G. Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001), p. 77.
[104] H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine: An Invention*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996).
[105] Robert A. Heinlein, *Farnham's Freehold*, (United States: G. P. Putnam, 1964).

> I've got an extra pair of nipples [...] Even the best people have them. It's perfectly legal. They allow you up to three pairs. And seven toes and fingers. Anything over that gets liquidated at the Purification.[106]

The 'Purification' is the 'Purification of the Race', where babies deformed by gamma radiation are killed.[107] Similar suggestions of the murder of mutant children are also made in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Continuing the themes of death, murder and the eating of children, possibly the most memorable image of post-apocalyptic horror comes from the final shot of the post-apocalyptic British soap opera, *Threads* (1984):[108] the screen freezes as an almost mute,[109] traumatised mother drops her new-born, deformed child. Similarly, *On the Beach* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* both depict the euthanasia of children beset with radiation disease, and in *Warday* (1984) it is mandated. While the acts are treated sympathetically, surely this is an indictment of the historical and political developments that have led to such an act being a mercy. As Mannix, speaking specifically of nuclear war fictions, suggests:

> Of course, depictions of youthful victims to arouse emotions of pity are legion. We think of children as innocents, especially in the ways of international politics. Of all the potential victims of the horrors of war, children are the most poignant. So [...] writers have paraded suffering children through both the nonfictional and the fictional literature of nuclear war in an attempt to arouse their audience's emotions.[110]

Child death and cannibalism resonate throughout fictions of the end of the world as a symbol of short sightedness.

Images of cannibalism are peppered throughout *The Road*, and this is the only sin to which the man will not stoop. This is the only moral absolute, a sign that they are 'the good guys' and they are 'carrying the fire.'[111] Indeed, the boy's acceptance of his new family at the

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[106] Huxley, p. 63.
[107] Ibid. p. 18.
[108] Jackson.
[109] The mother's pronunciation of 'baby' as 'babby' seems lifted directly out of *Riddley Walker*.
[110] Mannix, pp. 61-2.
[111] McCarthy, p. 136.

end of the novel is founded primarily on the fact that they 'dont eat people.'[112] Throughout the novel, the most horrific images are those of cannibalism, which Jay Ellis reminds us are a reiteration of the hints of cannibalism in McCarthy's earlier *Outer Dark* (1968).[113] In *The Road*, a 'charred human infant' is found 'headless and gutted and blackening on the spit.'[114] A meat cellar is full of 'naked people', and 'a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt.'[115] The victim is consumed piecemeal, not even afforded the empathy given to beef cattle in the pre-apocalyptic world. As Byron puts it in 'Darkness', 'The meagre by the meagre were devoured'.[116]

After discovering the charred infant, the boy is unfazed, and even wonders what they could have done if they had found the baby alive: 'If we had that little baby it could go with us.'[117] Continuing the thought, he asks, 'Where did they find it?'[118] The man 'didnt answer', yet his silence alludes to the sight seen earlier, of 'women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant'.[119] At best these women are farmed for their children. At worst, hidden in the unspoken words is the possibility that the woman ate her own baby. The eating of children, in particular, is an image that fictions of the end of the world often turn to. The possibility of the boy being eaten is one that haunts *The Road*. It is alluded to in the sequence with Ely. It is also suggested in the dialogue with the member of the bloodcult who, when asked, 'What are you eating', looks at the boy and says, 'Whatever we can find.'[120] Avoiding

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[112] Ibid. p. 304.
[113] Ellis, p. 23; Cormac McCarthy, *Outer Dark*, (London: Picador, 1994).
[114] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 213.
[115] Ibid. p. 116.
[116] Lord Byron, 'Darkness', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* ed. by M. H. Abrams (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), pp. 510-12. l. 46.
[117] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 213.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid. p. 96.
[120] Ibid. p. 66.

being eaten is also one of the reasons the boy's mother suggests a joint suicide,[121] as if the defiling of one's lifeless body is a particularly horrific fate. If the boy is taken as a Christ figure, as is argued below, then cannibalistic consumption of the child becomes a horrific eucharist. It is yet another subversion of religious symbolry. The eating of children is also a reversion of the natural order, and a horrific and self-destructive consumption of one's own future. According the Robert Jay Lifton, the children of the civil defense generation suffered numerous psychological effects: The 'equation of death with grotesque, absurd annihilation [… as t]hey – we – are divested of our individual deaths';[122] The feeling that 'nothing can be depended on to last', creating doubts about the worth of any type of achievement; the 'perception of craziness', leading to absurdity, mockery, distrust and doubts about the ability of adults to keep the world alive;[123] identification with the bomb, joining the craziness of it and becoming fascinated with the spectacle of it, and embracing an end to worrying about it; and, the living of a double life. Metaphorically, society had decided to consume its own children. That is, it had decided to continue down a path that could lead to the destruction of the future, and torment in the present. While nuclear criticism is, for the most part, over, a more literal consumption of the future is seen in the path towards possible environmental collapse, as short term profits take precedence over long term impact. Therefore, through the image of cannibalism, '*The Road* is explicitly concerned with questions of human futurity and furthermore elicits great anxieties over a lack of human regeneration.'[124]

This may be why images of child cannibalism, whereby '[a] child is reduced to nothing but ghastly sustenance,'[125] are found throughout post-apocalyptic fiction. In *Riddley*

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[121] Ibid. p. 58.
[122] Lifton and Falk, p. 50.
[123] Ibid. p. 51.
[124] Kearney, p. 161.
[125] Ibid.

Walker, the antipathy towards the *chard coal burners* is codified in the myth of the '*Hart of the Wood*', which is a story of the Bad Times in which a starving man and woman exchange their baby for the secret to making fire. Together, they 'kilt the chyld and drunk its blood and cut up the meat for cooking'.[126] However, the same fire they have bought with the child finally consumes both the parents. The clevver looking man leaves with the warning:

> Clevverness is gone now but little by littl itwl come back. The iron wil come back agen 1 day and when the iron comes back they will bern chard coal in the hart of the wood. And when they bern the chard coal ther stack wil be the shape of the hart of the chyld.[127]

This vital step towards progress, the creation of charcoal, is turned into a metaphor for the burning and eating of children, and the destruction of humanity, with some of the instructions for making charcoal even hidden in this myth of destructive consumption of the future. Similarly, images of child murder are also suggested in the Punch and Pooty shows, where Punch will 'all ways kil the babby if he can'.[128] Both the inevitability and absurdity of this consumption of the future is made clear as Riddley ponders the unanswerable question of Why?: 'Why is Punch crookit? Why wil he all ways kil the babby if he can? Parbly I wont never know its just on me to think on it.'[129]

Child death and cannibalism are the most vivid metaphors for abandonment of children by their parents. However, in *The Road* there is a very literal abandonment of the son by his mother, and the mother is associated with death through her suicide, her desire to put her child out of his misery, and also the dream the man has of her in which he sees 'the call of languor and death.'[130] The boy's desire to be with his mother is transfigured into a desire for

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126 Hoban, p. 3.
127 Ibid. p. 4.
128 Ibid. p. 220.
129 Ibid. p. 214.
130 McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 17.

death.[131] Riddley Walker also has an absent mother, but the role of mother as symbol of fertility is further subverted by 'Aunty', their grim reaper figure replete with 'iron tits' and a vagina dentata.[132] Aunty figures as both symbol of death and sex as well as male and female, with 'a iron willy for the ladys it gets red hot.'[133] The emasculating sexual power of Aunty and her sister, Arga Warga, which place them as anti-fertility symbols, is made clear through the story of *'The Bloak as Got on Top of Aunty'*.[134] All symbols of motherliness and fertility are turned to destruction. Similarly, as argued in Chapter Five, Cambry, Ground Zero, is the location of 'the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry'.[135] The 'woom' is a place of death. This forms an ironic mimickry of fertility rites and myths, as Cambry is the home of an infertile mother goddess at the heart of their society.[136]

In *The Road*, motherly abandonment is highlighted by those moments of nurturing that do occur in the novel. The 'quart jars' full of '[g]reen beans [... s]lices of red pepper [... t]omatoes [... c]orn [... n]ew potatoes [... o]kra' discovered in the house only the boy could see, for instance, display a symbol of preserved motherly love and nurturing hitherto denied

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[131] Ibid. p. 56.
[132] Hoban, p. 24.
[133] Ibid. pp. 190-1.
[134] Ibid. pp. 90-3.
[135] Ibid. p. 161.
[136] The sexual imagery of apocalypse, particularly of the bomb and nuclear war, has often been critically engaged with, although generally with an assumption of its masculinist, phallic nature. Such is made clear in *Dr. Strangelove*, Mannix reminds us, by images such as 'when Major Kong takes his ride on the bomb at the end of the film [... . H]e sits astride it, and it stretches out from his groin like a giant penis.' Mannix, p. 153. The phallic nature of the bomb is made most clear in Helen Caldicott's strongly gendered, anti-nuclear polemic, *Missile Envy*. Helen Caldicott, *Missile Envy : The Arms Race and Nuclear War*, Rev. edn (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1986). This sexual nature of death and apocalypse is highlighted in *The Road* as the mother calls death a lover, and says, 'You can think of me as a faithless slut.' McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 59. See Paul Brians, *Nuke Pop*, <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nukepop/index.html> [accessed 14 November 2008]. Jane Caputi, 'Psychic Numbing, Radical Futurelessness, and Sexual Violence in the Nuclear Film', in *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature,* ed. by Nancy Anisfield (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), pp. 58-70; Jacqueline R. Smetak, 'Sex and Death in Nuclear Holocaust Literature of the 1950s', in *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature,* ed. by Nancy Anisfield (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1991), pp. 15-26; Zoe Sofia, 'Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-Semiotics of Extraterrestrialism', *Diacritics,* 14 (1984), pp. 47-59.

the boy. It is most apparent, however, in the image of the bunker. Deep within the barren earth, the bunker forms a womb of Gaia, filled with:

> Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten gallon plastic jerry jugs. Paper towels, toiletpaper, paper plates. Plastic trashbags stuffed with blankets.[137]

With food and comfort, the bunker forms a space that is finally, briefly, nourishing, nurturing and protective. Even the image of 'Coca Cola' is once again reiterated,[138] as a bottled joy from this long gone past, subverting the earlier claim that the boy would never drink it again. Filled with the kindness of a long absent protector, the boy is '[w]arm at last.'[139] The almost spiritual nature of the event is made clear as the boy says a kind of prayer, a prelude to the prayers he offers his father:

> Dear people, thank you for all this food and stuff. We know that you saved it for yourself and if you were here we wouldnt eat it no matter how hungry we were and we're sorry that you didnt get to eat it and we hope that you're safe in heaven with God.[140]

However, this nurturing is short lived. There is no fertility here, no replacement for the mother figure. It is a 'concrete' womb,[141] unable to truly sustain life, just like the *woom* in Cambry in *Riddley Walker*. Still an archive of a long gone past, the bunker even includes a 'handful of gold krugerrands',[142] worthless signifiers of an absent referent: the commercial systems and values of the past. What is missing is the one thing of real value, a 'gun' with its power to kill.[143] Finally, this small respite is destroyed. They do not 'know how to use the toilet but would use it anyway.'[144] After eating, they dump 'paper plates and plastic tableware

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[137] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 147.
[138] Ibid. p. 157.
[139] Ibid. p. 155.
[140] Ibid. pp. 154-5.
[141] Ibid. p. 146.
[142] Ibid. p. 151.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid. p. 153.

[...] in a trash-bag.'[145] After clearing the bunker of its goods, using its warmth, and finally filling it with their waste, the concrete womb is abandoned. This was not a place of fertility, but a final holdout awaiting the pillaging of consumption. It is not a womb, but 'a grave yawning at judgment day in some old apocalyptic painting.'[146] Bunkers, as is also made clear in *Level 7* and Harlan Ellison's 'A Boy and His Dog' (1969),[147] are not places for rebirth or fertility, but slow death.

Child death and cannibalism are therefore symbols of futurelessness. Specifically, they are symbols of an active consumption of the future by the present, and the most radical failure of stewardship over the world. The possibilities of future destruction, and the rush towards this destruction, suggest a society willing to consume its own future, metaphorically portrayed in these texts as the consumption of children. This consumption is part of a broader trend of representing the abandonment of children by their parents, just as the future is abandoned by the present. In this way, these texts suggest a failure of the natural order and a problematising of generational change. Instead of consuming the future in order to maintain the past, *The Road* finally enacts a rather standard form of literary closure as the man sacrifices the present (in the form of himself) in order to release the future from its shackles. The novel, indeed the genre, suggests generational change and the allowance of a future to grow unfettered by the past. In this way, *The Road* offers hope for a future.

The Apocalypse as Metaphor for Generational Change

The hope for the future, and for resolution and closure, lies ultimately in the son. Final closure is found in *The Road* through its turning the apocalypse into a metaphor for generational change. This is a very traditional type of literary closure. This section

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[145] Ibid. p. 162.
[146] Ibid. p. 165.
[147] Harlan Ellison, *Vic and Blood*, (New York: Edgeworks Abbey, 2009).

contextualises *The Road* back into the broader genre of fictions of the end-of-the-world, to suggest that this theme of generational change is common throughout those works. The boy and the father both exist in this transitional state. This brings with it the hope of rebirth into purity. In 'striking contrast to the sociopathic relationships between father figures and sons in McCarthy's earlier works',[148] the son's purity is maintained by the father, who takes upon himself the sins required to survive in order that the son does not have to sin.

The man in *The Road* places the hope for humanity in himself and his son, for they are 'carrying the fire', yet what the fire is, is unclear. Kevin Kearney suggests:

> It could be read to signify the spark of civilization, or the life breath of god, or the promise of regeneration (or his "seed" more crudely), none of these being mutually exclusive. Throughout the text, this "fire" seems to carry transcendental implications: despite the fallenness of the world that surrounds him and the encroaching abyss of death, death to seemingly every living creature, the father repeatedly promises that the fire is held somewhere within the boy, an everlasting fire, almost akin to a soul.[149]

The concept of carrying the fire suggests that they are more pure or more able to fulfil the function of the rebuilding of civilisation and society than others. There is an implication that they carry some kind of moral imperative, and the man claims that they are simply the 'good guys' in contrast with the 'bad guys'.[150] However, this is consistently brought into doubt. After killing one of the bloodcultists, for instance, the boy asks, 'Are we still the good guys?'[151] The ambiguity of their situation is made clear as they 'came upon themselves in a mirror and he almost raised the pistol. It's us, Papa, the boy whispered. It's us'.[152] Even the man is, briefly, unable to ascertain the difference between themselves and the bloodcults they are escaping from. He also tells the boy that they do not steal. When they take food that

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[148] Lydia Cooper, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative', *Studies in the Novel,* 43 (2011), pp. 218-36 (p. 228).
[149] Kearney, p. 162.
[150] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 97.
[151] Ibid. p. 81.
[152] Ibid. p. 111.

someone has left behind, he tells the boy that those people 'would want' the man and boy to have it.[153] Yet, when they leave supplies seemingly abandoned and the supplies are taken by a thief, they leave him naked and defenceless, despite his pleas: 'I'm starving, man. You'd have done the same'.[154] When the man suggests their moral superiority by claiming that they did not kill him, the boy rightly claims, '[W]e did kill him.'[155] In a world after production, survival is a zero sum game, and to survive, to eat, is to deny the survival of others.

To be the good guys may simply imply survival. The good guys 'keep trying'.[156] Furthermore, it may involve preparedness, and therefore being able to survive without taking from others. For instance, the builders of the bunker in which the man and the son find a brief moment of solace are assumed to be 'good guys'.[157] As Donovan Gwinner puts it, 'the guys with goods were good guys'.[158] Possibly, survivalism and self-sufficiency are implied as part of being the good guys. However, this still leaves the man and the boy in an ambiguous space. Indeed, it is unclear whether they are survivors at all. Both the boy's mother and Ely claim that they are not 'survivors'.[159] Shelley Rambo analyses the text using the Derridean concept of 'survival, *survivre*, translated, literally, over-living or living on' to suggest that 'life is defined in terms of an excess, or remainder':

> [D]eath is implicit in the definition [...] surviving in not a state in which one "gets beyond" death; instead, death remains in the experience of survival, and life is reshaped in light of death—not in light of its finality but its persistence.[160]

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[153] Ibid. p. 148.
[154] Ibid. p. 275.
[155] Ibid. p. 278.
[156] Ibid. p. 116. The ethics of their survivorship is thoroughly explored in Donovan Gwinner, '"Everything Uncoupled from Its Shoring": Quandaries of Epistemology and Ethics in *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road,* ed. by Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Continuum Books, 2011), pp. 137-56.
[157] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 148.
[158] Gwinner, p. 145.
[159] McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 57, 182.
[160] Rambo, p. 101.

What the difference is between being a 'survivor' and being the 'walking dead', as the boy's

mother suggests, is not entirely clear, but she does claim:

> [Y]ou wont survive for yourself. [...] A person who had no one would be well advised to
> cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of
> love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body[.][161]

Survivorship is founded on the need to survive for something or someone, whereas to live for

oneself is merely to exist.

The man, therefore, survives for the boy. John Cant suggests that the novel is

'structured by the oedipal paradigm' of McCarthy's earlier works,[162] but reversed, as '[t]he

entire novel is devoted to a journey motivated by the father's heroic quest for a place in

which his young son can survive.'[163] If the boy died, the man 'would want to die too',[164] as

'the boy was all that stood between him and death.'[165] Indeed, 'part of him always wished it

to be over.'[166] The very first sentence demonstrates his compassion for the boy: 'When he

woke in the woods [...] he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him.'[167] Rather than

a description of an individual moment, this is a statement of intent or predisposition.

Whenever he wakes, he reaches for the child:[168]

> [His] first instinct [...] is to reach out and touch the boy, to make sure he [the boy] is still
> breathing. He is reassured when he feels "each precious breath" (3), and counts "each frail
> breath in the blackness" (12)[.][169]

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[161] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 59.

[162] John Cant, 'Appendix Two: *The Road*', in *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism,* (New York & London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 266-80 (p. 266).

[163] Ibid. p. 271.

[164] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 9.

[165] Ibid. p. 29. In his dreams, the father also seems to wish that he could also look after the mother, and that that would give him another reason for survival. Ibid. p. 32.

[166] Ibid. p. 163.

[167] Ibid. p. 1.

[168] As suggested by Sean Pryor, 'McCarthy's Rythm', in *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road,* ed. by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), pp. 27-45 (p. 27).

[169] Susan J. Tyburski, '"The Lingering Scent of Divinity" in *The Sunset Limited* and *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 121-28 (p. 125).

The man finds meaning and purpose in his life by placing the 'boy as his warrant (*TR* 4),

which sanctions the man's use of violence to defend the boy.'[170] In this, *The Road* locates

'the basis for meaning in the father's love for his son, and [... suggests] that this meaning

transcends the father's efforts to affirm and protect his son's life.'[171] Lydia Cooper goes as far

as suggesting that the boy forms a bearer of the grail in what she argues is a grail narrative,[172]

pointing specifically to the passage in *The Road* where the boy is 'glowing in that waste like

a tabernacle',[173] with the tabernacle being 'the tent that housed the presence of God in ancient

Israel':[174] 'The boy, like the grail, thus becomes the object that brings the essence of divinity

back to a corrupted world.'[175] Like a tabernacle, the boy's golden hair is 'good enough to

house a god.'[176] The fire they carry is 'inside' the boy, 'God's own firedrake'.[177] The boy is,

ultimately, a messiah figure. As Tyburski notes:

> The man refers to the boy as "the word of God" (4), which [...] is how Christ is described in
> the New Testament (John 1.1-3; Heb. 4.12-13; II Pet. 3.5; I John 1.1-3; 5.7), and how the
> Messiah is described in the Old Testament (Ps. 138.2).[178]

This suggests the possibility that, like Rachel in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*,[179] the boy may

have been born without original sin, born as he was after the conflagration and thus after the

half-completed cleansing of the world. In his purity, the boy functions as a messiah.[180]

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[170] Ibid.
[171] Thomas H. Schaub, 'Secular Scripture and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Renascence,* 61 (2009), pp. 153-68.
[172] Cooper, pp. 223-4.
[173] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 230.
[174] Cooper, p. 224. The same connection is made by Tyburski, p. 125.
[175] Cooper, p. 224.
[176] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 78.
[177] Ibid. p. 31.
[178] Tyburski, p. 126.
[179] Miller.
[180] As argued by Ashley Kunsa, 'Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Journal of Modern Literature,* 33 (2009), pp. 57-74. Made most clear when the boy attempts to pray to God, but can only pray to his father. The moral distinction between father and son, it could well be argued, are also allusions to the relationship between God and Christ in the Bible.

However, the world, or fading image of it, is not made for a messiah. Throughout the novel there is a battle between the father's 'utilitarian version of morality' and the son's 'idealism that seems at times both juvenile and self-destructive; his chivalric ethics require him to act out compassion and generosity regardless of the risk to himself.'[181] The father attempts to communicate with the idealism of his son by claiming some type of moral absolute, as 'the man attempts to negate the boy's empathy as a threat to their survival'.[182] However, over time, 'the boy's dialogues demonstrate an increasing awareness of and distress over the problem of morality.'[183] When the father engages in morally uncertain acts, such as limiting the amount of food for Ely, or taking the clothes of the thief on the road, the son is allowed to dispute within limits.[184] However, ultimately, the father takes control and imposes his utilitarianism, maintaining their survival while allowing the son to maintain his own moral purity. It is because of this duality that the son is able to truly be claimed to be carrying the fire of civilisation. Civilisation requires trust, community and a willingness to help others that cannot survive unfettered in the tribulation of the road. It is ultimately true when the man says to his son, 'You're the best guy.'[185] He is the best guy because he has, as far as possible, been protected from the need to sin. The disjunction between the father's utilitarian morality, his claims of absolute morality, and the son's turning of the other cheek, is justified by the father saying to the boy, 'You're not the one who has to worry about everything.'[186] However, the boy replies, 'Yes I am.' He follows this with, 'I am the one',[187]

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[181] Cooper, p. 232. A Derridean deconstruction of the notion of hospitality, which discusses the relationship between the father and son in regard to notions of helping and offering hospitality, is offered by Phillip A. Snyder, 'Hospitality in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 69-86. Euan Gallivan argues that the father's ethics are along Schopenhaurian lines, based on the idea that to act ethically is simply not to impose upon the will of another individual. Euan Gallivan, 'Compassionate McCarthy?: *The Road* and Schopenhauerian Ethics', *The Cormac McCarthy Journal,* 6 (2008), pp. 98-106.
[182] Tyburski, p. 126.
[183] Cooper, p. 231.
[184] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 35.
[185] Ibid. p. 298.
[186] Ibid. p. 218.

in what Ashley Kunsa notes is Christlike fashion.[188] He carries the hope of civilisation, and that means that he must remain civilised. The new world, the one coming into existence, is the world of children. The boy constantly desires to see other children and to meet them. He imagines children in the south,[189] he imagines them across the ocean, he wonders what he would do if he found a baby, he sees a phantom 'boy, about his age, wrapped in an outsized wool coat with sleeves turned back'.[190] Hope finally arises with the discovery of other children. The new world is for children.

In order that rebirth may truly occur, the old world must finally come to an end. The ultimate hope for closure comes with the death of the man. While the boy and the man are 'each the other's world entire',[191] really they are from different worlds:

> Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect.[192]

Their 'world entire' is actually a liminal space between their two worlds. It is a cross-over period. As suggested by Bruyn, while in the father's childhood home, the boy sees only ruins.[193] Moreover, they fill him with fear. The boy does not want to see where his father lived. He is 'scared.'[194] The house the boy grew up in is also seen as 'scary.'[195] It may be true that '[t]here is no past',[196] only haunting fragments of one, but there are also only haunting fragments of a future. The past has gone out of existence, the future has not yet arrived, and all that is left is the horrific now. In order to provide a final sense of closure through the rebirth of the world into the hands of the boy, the man must die. Such a notion is suggested

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[187] Ibid.
[188] Kunsa.
[189] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 55.
[190] Ibid. p. 88.
[191] Ibid. p. 4.
[192] Ibid. p. 163.
[193] Bruyn.
[194] McCarthy, *The Road*, p. 25.
[195] Ibid. p. 37.
[196] Ibid. p. 55.

when the father thinks, 'The last instance of a thing takes the class with it.'[197] The old world will die when he does. While the world undergoes apocalypse, the story itself is one of personal eschatology, of personal revelation, of personal birth, life, death and rebirth. As with the nuclear tragedy of *On the Beach*, this is a personal eschatology heightened through a parallel of cosmic eschatology, the end of the world. There is also not yet a future. However, unlike *On the Beach* there is *hope* of a future.

Images of generational change are common throughout fictions of the end of the world, with apocalypse and generational change both being used as metaphors for each other. *Riddley Walker* begins with Riddley coming of age, and with his father's death. Hoban writes that '[f]athers and sons come into my [his] work a lot', and that the Legend of St Eustace, in which St Eustace is separated from his children, may have inspired him since he was 'separated from the children of [... his] first marriage.' [198] The society in the novel is at a time of transition, and it is a child society, where one becomes an adult at twelve, with the language of a child and a tortured oedipal relationship with its parent: the society of the reader. Natalie Maynor and Richard Patteson make clear the childlike nature of the language, arguing that it has a 'heavy reliance upon the concrete', the place names are as children might mishear them and the language of the novel displays six of the seven 'phonological processes common in young children.'[199] Indeed, the society parallels that of the schoolyard, where '[c]hildren have their part phonetic, part mutated language, their variable yet basically unchanging formulae handed down through the centuries, and their savage rituals.'[200] As with children lacking parental guidance, Riddley's society desires to grow up while failing to

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[197] Ibid. p. 28.
[198] Edward Myers, 'An Interview with Russell Hoban', *Literary Review,* 28 (1984), pp. 5-16 (p. 13).
[199] Natalie Maynor and Richard F. Patteson, 'Language as Protagonist in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*', *Critique,* 26 (1984), pp. 18-27 pp. 20-21).
[200] Marie Maclean, 'The Signifier as Token: The Textual Riddles of Russell Hoban', *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association,* 70 (1988), pp. 211-19 (p. 214).

understand what growing up means. For them, it seems to imply the building of bombs and weaponry. *Riddley Walker* is not the only novel of a post-apocalyptic future to feature a child. Denis Jonson's *Fiskadoro* (1985) follows a thirteen year old protagonist, which makes both protagonists and both novels relative contemporaries. Like Riddley's, Fiskadoro's father has died in a senseless accident and, while his mother is not entirely absent, she is stricken with cancer. Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) similarly functions as a post-nuclear *Bildungsroman*.[201] While not protagonists, the children in the film *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) similarly feature as a hope for the future to be shepherded to a new land of promise (here the ruins of Sydney).[202] The new world to be brought into existence after the apocalypse is the world of children, and of youthful innocence.

One of the more detailed depictions of apocalyptic generational change is George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949);[203] in this novel, the process is stretched out much, much further than in *The Road*. The novel follows Isherwood 'Ish' Williams, who finds himself to have survived a pandemic that has wiped out almost all life on Earth. It begins as a last human novel. However, as Ish founds a new community, the novel moves into a *Walden*-esque territory, focussing on the great simplification of American values and a return to the frontier lifestyle.[204] Ish's hope to rebuild a world of culture dies along with Joey, his favourite son and the chosen vessel of his leadership, and a new culture is born. This new culture is finally separated from the old with an apocalyptic, fiery conflagration of their community, and a last minute eating of now ancient canned goods that have become tasteless (as in *The Road*, these symbolise the irrevocable consumption of the past). When Ish dies, the title of

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[201] Leigh Brackett, *The Long Tomorrow*, (Rockville, MD: Phoenix Pick, 1983).
[202] George Miller and George Ogilvie, dir., *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Australia: Warner Bros., 1985. In a seeming direct allusion to *Riddley Walker*, they speak in almost an identical kind of broken, child-like English, despite being separated by nowhere near the temporal distance from the past.
[203] George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides*, (London: Gollancz, 1999).
[204] In this sense, it is similar to *Alas, Babylon*. Frank.

the final chapter ('The Last American')[205] makes it clear that his world has died with him. His final hope is for true rebirth, and a civilisation that is not founded on the past. Thus, while beginning as a last human novel, *Earth Abides*, like *The Road*, crosses the apocalyptic liminal moment and into a time of rebirth, and a time of generational change.

Generational transition is therefore a tortured process in *Earth Abides*, as Ish attempts to hold on to the past and, only after there is no alternative, lets go. The oedipal nature of transition is more explicitly portrayed in *Riddley Walker*, wherein Granser organises a sexual assault of the young Goodparley. This horrific abuse is intended to maintain Goodparley stop his attainment of manhood on his twelfth birthday, and therefore remain a child under the protection of Granser. The past maintains a grip on the future, a grip that is very difficult to let go.

Conclusion

The two consistent narrative threads through *The Road* are the futile quest southwards and the imminent death of the man, as he counts down the days. The quest south is an attempt to outrun death, or at least defer it until he can teach his child to survive. However, the resolution comes with a final acceptance, and a handing over of his child to other, more able caretakers. That this is a parallel to standard generational change is suggested by the memories the man has of his own father.[206] *The Road* ultimately offers a standard type of literary closure with the death of the man.

Hope lies in the acceptance of the father's death, as is signalled by the fact that the man's advice is often ill-conceived. He suggests that '[t]here are other good guys' but they

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[205] Also the name of a post-apocalyptic comic series which sees America as a decaying wasteland. John Wagner, Alan Grant, and Mike McMahon, *The Last American*, (US: Epic Comics, 1990-1991).
[206] McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 33-4.

are 'hiding [...] from each other.'[207] However, knowing this, he is always too scared to try to make contact. He knows that they are not 'likely to meet any good guys on the road.'[208] He also knows that there are communes.[209] Yet he continues his desperate attempt to shelter and protect his son by himself. Even as his breath gives out, he tells the boy not to trust anyone, and says, 'Do everything the way we did it.'[210] It is only by ignoring this advice that the boy finds hope and a saviour. The boy always knew what was best. He 'always want[ed] to stop.'[211] He always wanted to get off the road. The end of the world finally gains narrative closure by becoming a metaphor for letting go, for giving over to the next generation and accepting the loss of influence, and the loss of the old world. Death and generational change, both very traditional forms of closure, are found. The apocalyptic death of the old world once again brings the hope of rebirth.

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[207] Ibid. p. 196.
[208] Ibid. p. 160.
[209] Ibid. p. 8.
[210] Ibid. p. 297.
[211] Ibid. p. 98.

This thesis began with the humorous observations of a King and a Water-rat in two famous children's stories; it ends with the murder of children, an apocalyptic wasteland, and the death of a father as his son watches. The long thread that connects the beginning and the end, and weaves throughout the middle, is the concept of closure: the failure of closure and the quest for closure. All exists in the immanent shadow of the ending. The fictions studied in this thesis obsess about endings. They centre them, they rotate around them, and yet, through this centring, they deny the possibility of endings. These fictions construct new worlds in which narrative structures have become concrete, written onto the world by fire and death. However, by depicting a narrative that runs past the end, there is a disjunction between the narrative structure of the novel and the structure of the world depicted therein. Even if the two are aligned, these endings are meaningless and horrific. Closure is necessary to create a sense of finiteness and purpose, yet these fictions suggest the importance of closure while denying its possibility. The failure of the ending invokes a quest for closure and meaning, and this can be seen in these fictions through their narrative structure, their content, their use of language and their use of landscape. Their characters desperately search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world, in which closure is deferred and denied.

The desperate search for an ending leads to the most haunting images of the genre, those that depict characters desperately longing for an ending through death. Robert Jay Lifton, in his exploration of nuclear psychology, notes the wish of many in the Civil Defence Generation to push the button and end the nuclear confrontation.[1] This desire for the end of suffering is notably represented in Harlan Ellison's 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream'

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[1] Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 51.

(1968),[2] in which the final survivors of a nuclear holocaust are given immortality, but then tortured eternally, and left hoping for death. This is a science fictional, apocalyptic reiteration of the myth of Prometheus, who was bound to a rock where an eagle would peck out his liver each day, only for it to grow back. Prometheus's punishment, as with the punishment of the characters in 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream', is doled out for the act of giving humans the power of the gods. In the former case, this is the power of fire, in the latter atomic fire. That immortality is a curse is suggested through the weariness of Benjamin in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and Ely – if indeed he is an immortal prophet – in *The Road* (2006).[3] It leads to the wish for death of the immortals in *Zardoz* (1974),[4] and the odd stories of post-nuclear immortality and perpetual youth that are Martin Amis's 'The Immortals' (1987) and 'The Time Disease' (1987).[5] The theme, of a desperate desire for death, of *thanatos*, is found throughout the genre. This is the motif of suicide, the longing to join with the ending that one has, somehow, lived past. The long debate about suicide found in Walter M. Miller Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, for instance, runs opposite to its quiet acceptance in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957),[6] but both cases are different iterations of this same motif. Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka's *Warday* (1984) offers another contrast with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, wherein the Pope has declared euthanasia no longer to be a sin in that post-apocalyptic world.[7] In that novel, the acceptance of euthanasia is partly due to 'the triage', which denies medical care to the hopeless due to the scarcity of medical equipment. A similar depiction of the failure of post-apocalyptic healthcare leads to a notorious instance of euthanasia in *The*

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[2] Harlan Ellison, 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream', in *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream,* (New York: Edgeworks Abbey, 2009), pp. 11-28.

[3] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (London: Picador, 2007); Walter M. Miller, Jr, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, (London: Corgi, 1971).

[4] John Boorman, dir., *Zardoz*. USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1974.

[5] Martin Amis, 'The Immortals', in *Einstein's Monsters,* (London: Cape, 1987), pp. 115-27; Martin Amis, 'The Time Disease', in *Einstein's Monsters,* (London: Cape, 1987), pp. 69-84.

[6] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach*, (Adelaide: Heinemann, 1958).

[7] Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday: And the Journey Onward*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984).

War Game (1965),[8] as British police officers, normally unarmed, use revolvers to euthanize victims of radiation in the street. The motif of suicide is also prominent in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, wherein the man's desire for death is only quenched by his desire to protect his son. Ely, too, wishes for death only to be stopped by his fear of taking his own life. He wants the choice to be taken out of his hands. He wants death to be given to him as a gift. The only character in *The Road* to act upon *thanatos* is the mother, who takes her own life. However, the wish for death, for a final ending in the liminal space, is clear throughout the novel. This is a desire for finality, for a personal eschatology to somehow make up for the failure of cosmic eschatology.

Eschatologies, myths of the end of the world, have changed considerably over the last two centuries. They have lost their promise of closure, their promise of a meaningful ending, and have become secularised. They look to mere destruction. From divine, transcendent goal, the apocalypse has become a random destructive event within history. The developing, scientific view of the world has sown doubt in regard to the possibility of religious endings, but has also led to an understanding of other, secular eschatological possibilities. This includes extinction, heat death and celestial impact. In the twentieth century, the most prominent end-of-the-world scenario was atomic warfare. While earlier secular possibilities were generally horrific and meaningless, the possibility of atomic warfare added an extra element. Humanity was now in charge of its own demise. Humanity built the tools of its own destruction. The race towards the destruction signalled by the bomb suggests an impulse towards collective suicide of the human species. The personal eschatological visions of suicide mirror a collective suicide: the wiping out of humanity by humanity. Humanity attained the power of a god, but not the wisdom. The species may be doomed to self-

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[8] Peter Watkins, dir., *The War Game*. UK: BBC, 1965.

destruction and, in a way, may even deserve it. The devastation of the atomic bomb could also be witnessed in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and it even became a key element of international relations. Atomic apocalypse gained an element of physical reality and a prominent position in culture that most previous scenarios had not attained. It is the pre-traumatic nightmare of western civilisation. It is the gun in one's mouth.

Such an ending is meaningless and purposeless. It lacks the closure and fulfilment that eschatological visions are intended to provide. According to the placards placed around the 'comfort stations' in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, to rush towards death is to abandon hope. However, it may seem that hope is already lost in a world on a course to nuclear obliteration. The 'hoap of a tree' suggested in *Riddley Walker* (1980) is subverted by the impossibility of pure rebirth.[9] The dawn of a new era will be tainted by the old, and doomed to the same cycles. Where can hope be found? Cosmic eschatologies can no longer be relied on, but the sense of ending and structure provided by literature may still provide solace. In fiction, the world is reflected in a way that suggests meaning and purpose. The possibility of failed, secular apocalypses demands literary attention. It demands the narrativisation that literature can provide.

However, end-of-the-world fictions narrativise the failure of narrativisation. *On the Beach* and *The World Set Free* (1914) confront this problematic nature of closure in fictions that represent the end of the world.[10] For the most part, *The World Set Free* re-instates the meaning and purpose of Apocalypse into the secular apocalypse. It models itself on the religious apocalypse. It rewrites history so that it may sit in concord with its ending, and chastises the social, political, educational and military structures of the world. It then shows

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[9] Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
[10] H.G. Wells, *The Last War: The World Set Free*, (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001).

them turned to self-destruction when faced with the power of science. Wells suggests a world that will inevitably implode, and that should implode in order to make way for a new world set free from the restraints of the past. Therefore, Wells's novel does suggest a solution to the problem of representing the secular apocalypse in fiction, which is to turn it into a fulfilled and meaningful ending. However, the text remains problematic. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is certainly difficult to accept the bomb as a utopian tool, and it is difficult to accept the collateral damage of millions of lives as necessary to bring about a utopia. Moreover, the utopian section of the novel suggests a time after narrative, and therefore the difficulty of writing on after the end. *On the Beach* (1957) further highlights this problematic nature. It follows a model similar to the tragedy – what is called here a nuclear tragedy – with an ending that is horrific, meaningless, but complete. There can be nothing after the nuclear end. *On the Beach* aligns its literary ending with the end of the world, and finds such an ending wanting. What meaning there is, is found through a sense of catharsis, through a representation of all life in miniature, and through a warning. Both these texts demonstrate the difficulties of closure in fictions that depict the secular end of the world.

The fictions that demonstrate the failure of the ending most thoroughly, however, are those that do run past the end. The post-apocalyptic narratives of *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* both begin well after the failed ending of nuclear conflagration, and they point always back to that failure through their reversion to mythic time. In mythic time, the present mirrors the past. This may provide a sense of meaning and purpose if that past is a golden age. In this instance, the present gains import for being even a pale reflection of that world. In both *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the characters attempt to find meaning in this way, by mimicking and replicating the past. What they do not realise, or avoid accepting, is that the past they are mimicking is one that was corrupt and doomed to

destruction. When destruction appears inevitable, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* points to the possibility of redemption through a return to a linear model of time with a final, spiritual release. This demands a return to the faith that has been problematised by the failure of the end. As such, it can certainly not be considered a universal solution. *Riddley Walker* problematises the return to mythic time even more. It depicts a complex network of mythemes that expands infinitely, constantly deferring meaning and closure. It suggests a failure of history, narrative, and closure.

As well as through their narrative structure, *The Road*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *Riddley Walker* also demonstrate a failure of closure through their language. The language of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* suggests a failed break with the past and a desire to understand that past. The language in *The Road* is stripped back just as the world it represents is. The most extreme example of post-apocalyptic language, though, is in *Riddley Walker*. Language forms a token from the lost past, upsetting notions of understanding. The language of *Riddley Walker* also slows down reading, deferring understanding, and it constantly refers outside of itself. It demonstrates a failure of linguistic closure, and a momentary sidestepping of the full-stop.

The characters of these self-destructing worlds attempt to find whatever structures they can to give meaning to their lives amid the absence. In *The Road* and *Riddley Walker*, characters use the remains of landscape to try to create meaning. They place their lives down the road. The road is the only structure to survive the apocalyptic destruction. This attempt, however, is constantly frustrated. In both novels, the roads represent structures that have failed. In *Riddley Walker*, the road cycles back to death at Cambry, at the heart of their culture. In *The Road* the attempt to find meaning through movement is equally problematic. Thoughtless, unfettered progress can lead only to destruction, and closure comes only by

getting off the road. However, *The Road* does offer closure through its function as a warning, as in *On the Beach*. It is a warning against unfettered progress. It demonstrates a failure of stewardship and a consumption of the future, particularly through the image of child cannibalism. This is connected with the concerns of protecting the boy and the relationship of father and son. Finally, closure is gained through the acceptance of death and allowing the next generation to live.

Failure of and search for closure is implicit in the scholarship surrounding fictions of the end-of-the-world. This scholarship consistently refers to Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, which makes the connection between closure and apocalypse explicit.[11] Writers such as Elizabeth K. Rosen further suggest that a modern apocalyptic sensibility, which she refers to as neo-apocalyptic, denies the rebirth and moralism of religious Apocalypse and instead expresses the sense of apocalyptic failure facing the world. The neo-apocalyptic, she claims, does not include the New Jerusalem, which is the Heaven on Earth depicted in the Apocalypse of John. New Jerusalem is the biblical expression of rebirth into utopia. This Rosen sees as a possible repercussion of the development of the atomic bomb, the spread of H.I.V. and the possibility of coming climate change. She also sees neo-apocalypse as related to the change in the meaning of the word 'apocalypse', which can now refer to any great destruction. Neo-apocalypse, she claims, has much in common with the jeremiad, and also suggests the same failure of the grand narrative that concerns post-modernism. Denial of the grand narrative, Rosen proposes, is also a return to older forms of cyclical apocalypse. It must already be apparent that this thesis also suggests similar connections between closure, the failure of apocalypse, the atomic bomb (and other end-world anxieties), the jeremiad, the failure of the grand narrative and cyclical time. Rosen's study, which looks to the social

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[11] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

criticism engaged with through post-modern works via their apocalypticism, follows quite directly from other recent scholarship in the field.[12] James Berger's *After the Apocalypse*, for instance, also investigates the post-modern and post-structural implications of apocalypse, and relates them to recent political developments.[13] Other recent scholarship therefore begins from similar premises as this thesis. These parallels are unintentional, and this study develops in a very different direction from that of Rosen, Berger, or other recent scholars in the field, but they suggest the validity of these underlying premises. The extensive study of closure in end-of-the-world fictions found in this thesis leads on directly from this, by renegotiating the relationship between closure and apocalypse in a world where apocalypse no longer implies a fulfilled and meaningful ending.

The World Set Free, *On the Beach*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and *Riddley Walker* all receive obligatory mentions in any serious discussion of the field. *The World Set Free* is, in particular, discussed in any historical account, for its importance in the nuclear story as predictor and possible catalyst of the development of the atomic bomb. *On the Beach*, a breakout popular novel appearing during a time of nuclear stress, finds coverage in culturo-historical accounts, such as Paul Brians *Nuclear Holocausts*,[14] although the film receives more attention, as is clear in Patrick Mannix's *The Rhetoric of Anti-Nuclear Fiction*.[15] The straightforward, genre or popular nature of these two texts has led to historical and cultural engagements that include little in the way of close textual analysis, and the present study uses narratological ideas of closure to open them up to new critical approaches. *A Canticle for*

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[12] See Elizabeth K. Rosen, 'Introduction', in *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination,* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. xi-xxxiv.

[13] James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[14] Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/nuclear/1chap.htm> [accessed 3 May 2013].

[15] Patrick Mannix, *The Rhetoric of Antinuclear Fiction : Persuasive Strategies in Novels and Films*, (Lewisburg; London; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press; Associated University Presses, 1992).

Leibowitz and *Riddley Walker* both receive much more detailed attention in the field, and are generally considered exemplary novels of the genre, as David Cowart suggests.[16] Their similar themes, due in part to *A Canticle for Leibowitz* inspiring Russell Hoban, has often led to the novels being studied alongside one another, as they are by David J. Leigh,[17] by David Seed,[18] by Charles E. Gannon,[19] and again here in this thesis. *Riddley Walker*, in particular, is considered a breakout literary novel with an appeal that goes well beyond the genre or the period. This thesis builds on this extensive discourse, particularly related to the use of myth and language in these novels, while opening them to new engagement through the exploration of closure.

While *The Road* has yet to be integrated into the canon of end-of-the-world fictions, indeed there has yet to be an extensive published study of the novel that contextualises it within that genre, it surely will be. Here it offers a post-Cold War vision, unfettered by the fear of imminent nuclear destruction. The exploration of these archetypal texts suggests the possibility of future research into the use of closure in other fictions of the end-of-the-world, which would develop a broader and more representational examination of the genre. Of particular interest is the exploration of other subgenres of end-of-the-world literature. This could include satirical works (such as *Dr. Strangelove* [1964] and *Level 7* [1959]), nihilistic fantasies (such as *The Purple Cloud* [1901] and *Mad Max* [1979]) or explicitly post-modern and metafictional apocalypses (such as *Ape and Essence* [1949], *Dhalgren* [1975] and *In the*

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[16] David Cowart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*, (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1989).

[17] David J. Leigh, *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

[18] David Seed, 'The Signs of War: Walter M. Miller and Russell Hoban', in *American Science Fiction and the Cold War,* (Edinburgh: Fitzroy Dearborn Pubs., 1999), pp. 157-67.

[19] Charles E. Gannon, 'They Speak in Mangled 'Memberment': Miller's, Muir's, and Hoban's Recollective Journeys to the Edge of Incomprehensibility', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies,* 1 (2003), pp. 26-36.

Country of Last Things [1987]).[20] Surely, these subgenres respond to the failure of closure in different and intriguing ways.

The discussion here suggests the post-modern nature of post-apocalyptic fictions. Both post-modernism and post-apocalypticism are responses to some of the same concerns, including the failure of the grand narrative, the commodification of history and the destructive end of Enlightenment values. This concept is developed through an extrapolation of Linda Hutcheon's claim, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, that *Riddley Walker* is an example of historiographic metafiction, the archetypal genre of post-modern literature.[21] A broader connection between post-modernism and apocalypse is claimed by Berger, Rosen, Teresa Heffernan,[22] Fredric Jameson,[23] Daniel Cordle,[24] and Richard Dellamora.[25] Post-modernism, it has been shown, suggests post-apocalypticism rather than apocalypticism, since post-apocalypticism is the failure of a narrative while apocalypticism is the completion of it. However, this represents a subtle difference in the definition of apocalypse rather than any genuine disagreement. While the broad connection between apocalypse and post-modernism is clear, investigation of explicitly post-apocalyptic visions in a post-modern context is rare. The post-modern nature of *Riddley Walker* is often mentioned in the critical scholarship, although more rarely explored in detail, and much the same could be said of *The*

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[20] Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things*, (New York: Viking, 1987); Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren*, (Toronto; New York; London: Bantam Books, 1975); Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence: A Novel*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949); Stanley Kubrik, dir., *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. US: Columbia Pictures, 1964; George Miller, dir., *Mad Max*. Australia: Village Roadshow Pictures, 1979; Mordecai Roshwald, *Level 7*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959); M.P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/11229> [accessed 30 April 2013].
[21] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, (Cambridge: Routledge, 1988).
[22] Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
[23] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London; New York: Verso, 1991).
[24] Daniel Cordle, 'Beyond the Apocalypse of Closure: Nuclear Anxiety in Postmodern Literature of the United States', in *Cold War Literature,* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 63-77.
[25] Richard Dellamora, *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

Road. This represents another field open to future research, which could build on the work of scholars mentioned above, as well as the discussion of *Riddley Walker* in this thesis. Rosen does explore the apocalyptic works of Kurt Vonnegut in this light, with a focus on *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *Galápagos* (1985) and *Slapstick, or Lonesome No More!* (1976) and the shift in these works from the neo-apocalyptic paradigm of *Cat's Cradle* and *Slapstick* to the apocalyptic paradigm of *Galápagos* (that is, the former denies the building of a metaphorical New Jerusalem, while the latter embraces it).[26] This builds on a body of work analysing Vonnegut as a writer of both apocalypse and post-modernism, such as John Dewey's excellent dissection of *Cat's Cradle* as caught between apocalyptic desire and reality, represented through the metafictional use of the character of John/Jonah.[27] Writers such as Rosen and Dewey demonstrate that further research in the field of post-apocalyptic post-modernism would be a fruitful one.

The discussion here of *Riddley Walker* also points to the possibility of further research into the post-structural post-apocalypse, hinted at through the use of Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller and Roland Barthes. The apocalyptic nature of post-structuralism and Derridean absence is explored by Berger, and Peter Schwenger engages in a lengthy Derridean reading of *Riddley Walker* in his *Letter Bomb*.[28] These could be used to build on the discussions of narrative and language in *Riddley Walker* in this thesis, developing further the concept of the post-structural post-apocalypse through other works in the genre.

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[26] Rosen; Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, (Hammondsmith: Penguin Books Ltd, 1988); Kurt Vonnegut, *Galápagos*, (New York: Dial Press, 2006); Kurt Vonnegut, *Slapstick, or, Lonesome No More!*, (New York: Dial Press, 2006).

[27] John Dewey, *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper of the American Novel of the Nuclear Age*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1990).

[28] Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

A question was asked above: Where can hope be found? In *On the Beach*, Moira finally takes her own life. She 'put the tablets in her mouth and swallowed them down with a mouthful of brandy'.[29] Faith in the cosmic eschatology is lost, finally, through the horrific and slow nature of radiation poisoning. The cosmic eschatology is avoided and, instead, Moira takes her life into her own hands, and enacts her own, personal eschatology. She retains a faith in an afterlife, and her last words are, 'Dwight, if you're on your way already, wait for me.'[30] However, this hope for a personal eschatology is diminished in that it is merely a hope for a return to the joys of life. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* also offers a personal eschatological vision, but rather than a hope in the taking of one's own life, the novel suggests hope in the acceptance of a divine plan, and the redemptive power of suffering. The power of these crumbs of hope is limited by the requirement of faith in a higher power, a faith that, as Lifton suggests, has been damaged simply by the possibility of nuclear obliteration. Closure is not offered in these novels, but instead simply pointed to. They point outside themselves towards a possible meaning, which is yet another sign of the failure of closure. Similarly, *The Road* suggests the possibility of faith as an answer, particularly as the boy finds safety in a Christian commune and prays to his father. However, the fact that he can only pray to his father and not to God suggests that faith, while important, may simply be a human construct.

While these endings suggest a failure of closure, there might still be left the possibility of rebirth. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* ends as a 'shark swam out to his deepest waters and brooded in the cold clean currents. He was very hungry that season.'[31] The cycles of human civilisation are subsumed within biological cycles of evolution. However, this hope

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[29] Shute, p. 312.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, p. 278.

is a slight one. The return to mythic cycles of destruction may simply lead to further suffering. Yet some possibility of continuation at least brings the possibility of joy, and the possibility of final closure. These possibilities are lost in the final and absolute, yet horrific, ending of *On the Beach*. *The Road* suggests the possibility of hope in a new world created by a new generation, unspoiled by the sin of the past. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* also offers the possibility of the rebirth of a new generation, as children board the space ship built by the Catholic Church. *The World Set Free* ends as the father of the new, scientific utopia, Karenin, dies as 'a blood clot detached itself [...] and travelled to his heart'.[32] Here, too, the new world, untainted by the old, begins with a death. *Riddley Walker* also symbolises this generational transition, taking place, as it does, between the death of Riddley's father and Riddley's final acceptance of his new position as instigator of a new world. These grand eschatologies may therefore be symbolic of modest, personal eschatology, and singular rebirth.

These novels may finally find closure in their educational nature. *On the Beach* makes this claim explicitly, and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* also suggests the stupidity of heading towards nuclear war when the results are so well known. *Warday*, a work of fictional reportage that follows journey through a devastated America, goes further with its blurb: 'WARDAY takes you into a world you couldn't imagine... and gives you a chance to change the future.[33] While the lack of an explicit cause in *The Road* makes it difficult to claim the novel as a simple warning, it still suggests a hope in children and the coming generation, and this cautions against rampant abuse of the world. *The World Set Free* is not necessarily a warning against nuclear war, but may be a warning against the social systems that lead to it. On the other hand, it is the corruption of those systems, and the atomic war that results, that allows the new, scientific utopia to come into existence. Its position on this front, then, is

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[32] Wells, p. 166.
[33] Strieber and Kunetka.

ambiguous. *Riddley Walker*, however, might not only be considered a work of extra-textual education, but could also contain the real possibility of rebirth founded on that new understanding. Riddley journeys through Inland with his new show, which is imbued with a new understanding of the world. He has come to accept the possibility of multiple narrative truths, and has accepted Drop John (symbolic of guilt). His new narrative speaks the possibility of a rebirth with understanding and responsibility. These fictions find hope by pointing forwards, backwards and outside of themselves, by pointing beyond the failed ending. They point to faith in an afterlife, to education of their readers, or to hope in a new generation not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Unable to find meaning and closure within themselves, they point to some modest, ambiguous hope beyond. The hope of hope, the hope of closure, the hope of rebirth, may be all that is possible in the apocalyptic landscape. These stories begin with the failure of the end. They end not with closure, but *in mediis rebus*, which is the best that can be offered in a world that might destroy itself. But then, '[e]very good story-teller nowadays starts with the end, and then goes on to the beginning, and concludes with the middle.'[34]

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[34] Oscar Wilde, 'The Devoted Friend', in *Complete Short Fiction,* ed. by Ian Small (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 24-34 (p. 27).

50 People Who Could Save the Planet, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jan/05/activists.ethicalliving> [accessed 25 Oct 2008].

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