

[The Human, Nonhuman, Inhuman in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*]

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[Abstract] *Cormac McCarthy's summoned gothic realm of terrorizing darkness and bestial hunger in his Pulitzer Prize winning novel The Road (2006) is a spectacle defined by a sweeping sense of loss and a charred landscape. The interplay of the human, the nonhuman, and the inhuman molds the contours of the lived experience in this grey world of dwindling resources. Although this harrowing hell plays quite nicely into our fears of ecological apocalypse, manifesting our anxiety about our total dependency on the natural environment, The Road seems to be mainly preoccupied with the human, good and bad, taking the insolvent earth almost as a donnée. Ultimately, with almost no convincing sign of environmental rejuvenation, humanity's sole saving grace seems to be the divinity within us; this manifests itself most clearly in the character of the boy, whose status as an archetypal savior figure in the story ties him very closely with the central issues of food and the subsequent moral choice.*

[Keywords] *eco-apocalypse; food; cannibalism; eco-phobia*

[1] It Is a Disastrous Night When Mankind Sees the Truth: Introduction

Cormac McCarthy's summoned apocalyptic realm of terrorizing darkness and bestial hunger in his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road* (2006) is a spectacle defined by a sweeping sense of loss and a charred landscape. An unnamed father and son journey their way "slumped and cowed and shivering in their rags like mendicant friars" (McCarthy 126) from the now emaciated Appalachian East Tennessee to the derelict Atlantic coastal south, desperately foraging for food while being hunted by cannibals. The lost past, of which the son has never directly been a part, weighs heavily on the traumatized, paranoid father as they push an old, rusty shopping cart full of their anemic supplies through the "[d]esolate country" (McCarthy 17). The mother of the boy, who has taken her own life in post-apocalyptic despair years before the start of the story, haunts the memory of the reticent man, evoking painful nostalgic longings and aggravating his existential angst. Brushing shoulders with absolute nothingness, and risking losing their soul to the Mephistophelian hunger, the main characters of the novel push back tottering against utter hopelessness and malevolence in the "cold autistic dark" (McCarthy 15) of post-apocalyptic America. The diseased father eventually succumbs to death, instructing the boy to "carry the fire" on his own (McCarthy 278). In just "three days", (McCarthy 281) the boy miraculously finds sanctuary with a family who are described as the "good guys" (McCarthy 282). The novel seems to be, on one level, preoccupied with answering the Hamletian question of "[t]o be, or not to be" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1.56), as reflected in the opposing choices made by the father and the mother. However, McCarthy's own question, "Are you one of the good guys?" (McCarthy 282), lies at the heart of the novel, which deliberates the value of survival if it entails the loss of what it means to be truly human in a context of an antagonistic, post-eco-apocalyptic world. This monstrous Cerberus of a world has three gullets. First of all, god is blatantly taken out of the equation as "salitter", the essence of god, is "drying from the earth" (McCarthy 261). Second, to make the already rigged game more unfair, ecophobically¹ the benevolent side of the natural environment is thoroughly stamped out, stripping the world down to a level of vicious enmity with no palpable sign of renewal. And third, this ruined nonhuman environment drags the vilest part of humanity out into the open, rendering the category of "bad guys" in itself the worst threat possible.

Therefore, the interplay of the human (the good guys), the nonhuman (the natural environment), and the inhuman (the bad guys) molds the contours of the lived experience in this gray world of dwindling resources. Pared-down life seems to be a godless battlefield, which has the good guys on one side and the bad guys and the complicitly penurious earth on the other side. However, the ultimate battle seems to be fought between good and evil humans. Thus, although a grave threat and the apparent source of current human misery, the inimical nonhuman is an immutable fact of existence against which the father and son do not wage war. Instead, McCarthy finds his apotheosis of dilemmat-

ic moral choice in human cannibalism and the manner of food procurement regardless of the hostile environment. Ultimately, with almost no convincing sign of environmental rejuvenation, humans' sole saving grace seems to be the divinity within us; this manifests itself best in the character of the boy, whose status as an archetypal savior figure in the story ties him very closely with the central issue of food and the subsequent moral choice.

[2] I Will Show You Fear in a Handful of Dust: Eco-apocalyptic² Landscape as Battlefield

The *fons et origo* of earth's atrophy is that for some unnamed reason, the "eye of heaven... in his gold complexion" has been "dimm'd" (Shakespeare, "Sonnet 18" 5–6): "By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp" (McCarthy 32). We trudge, alongside of the main characters, through an infernal "cauterized terrain" (McCarthy 14) that is not only uncharitably bereft of nature, but also abominably destitute of civilization. The "feelings of loss", as Keller Estes avers, permeate the world of the novel in terms of "loss for personal relationships (the man's dead wife), society (now reduced to good and bad guys) and the natural world" (Keller Estes 190). The collapse of familial and societal structures, needless to say, ensues from the downfall of the natural environment, and the restoration of any sense of order is inevitably entangled with nature's regenerative capacities, which seem to have been lost forever.

Although the human stands tall, in both a good and a bad light, at the heart of *The Road*, the story is deeply grounded in its "[b]arren, silent, godless" (McCarthy 4) terrain. The environment of *The Road* is a "tableau of the slain and devoured" (McCarthy 91). Except for a small colony of "shrunken, dried and wrinkled" mushrooms (McCarthy 40), a dog the boy thinks he saw (McCarthy 82), and a bunch of shriveled apples (McCarthy 120–121), the planet seems to be divorced from any form of vegetation and animal life. In this colorless world (McCarthy 4), the rivers are grey (McCarthy 6), the weeds are falling to dust (McCarthy 6), the air is "grainy" (McCarthy 20), and the "[c]harred and limbless trunks" of trees are falling one after another (McCarthy 8, 35). The lingering odor of cows in a barn is just there to remind the man once more that cows are extinct now (McCarthy 120), as are the flocks of migratory birds he used to hear in the early years of the eco-apocalypse (McCarthy 53). The blasted, post-apocalyptic "wasted country" (McCarthy 6) is now just a grotesque ghost of the world it used to be. The morels the pair find in the ground are "alien-looking" (McCarthy 40), as is the sun that commences its "cold transit" at dawn every day (McCarthy 178).

This harrowing hell plays very nicely into our fears of ecological apocalypse, manifesting our anxiety about our total dependency on the natural environment to survive and, of course, to thrive. Writing for *The Guardian* in 2007, George Monbiot, the British environmentalist and political activist, describes the novel as "the most important environmental book ever written". The environmental aspect of such a book, written

and published in the early years of a century that has been dubbed “The Century of the Environment” (Wilson 23), was inexorably destined to enjoy the warm embrace of eco-minded coterie. *The Road*, Keller Estes contends, is “incontestably McCarthy’s most well-known text to date and it is no coincidence... that this latest novel is also the one which most plays into the fears of ecological apocalypse that have become front-page news” (33). However, surely the archetypal nature of the story, and the fundamental philosophical questions it poses regarding the nature of existence, have played a part in the novel’s warm reception. One should wonder if the “absolute truth of the world” which is revealed to the man “for a brief moment” refers solely to a post-eco-apocalyptic world or the world in general:

The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it. (McCarthy 130)

[3] A Man Cannot Be Too Careful in the Choice of His Enemies: Man Vs. Nature/God/Man

A cloud of uncertainty surrounds the origin of the apocalyptic event that has left the world in smoldering ruins in the novel. This ambiguity has preoccupied many critics hunting for the source of the world’s devastation. Carl Grindley believes that the time of the apocalypse is “an allusion to Revelation 1.17, which introduces Christ’s theophany to John the Divine” (12). He also argues that the description of the ravaged landscape aligns with the effects of the Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, Seven Thunders, and Seven Vials in the Book of Revelation (11–12). Tim Blackmore reads *The Road* as “a kind of warning that might remind us where our technological trajectory will land us” (18). He believes that the “undetermined human-created global spasm of destruction” is very likely, though not necessarily, a result of a nuclear disaster (18). With an eye to the contemporary “anxieties about extreme weather events, deforestation, species’ extinction, and food shortages,” Hannah Stark identifies the cataclysmic event as “an allegorical projection of the anxieties present in the cultural Zeitgeist, filtered through climate-change discourse” (73).

David Kushner, in a *Rolling Stone* article, seeks to end the debate over this issue. He claims that McCarthy once visited his friend Doug Erwin, a senior scientist at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and asked him about “extinction – the Cretaceous-Tertiary meteorite that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.” Erwin, Kushner continues, then told “McCarthy about the likely aftermath of the deadly meteorite: the magnitude of the desolation, the collapse of ecosystems, the fallout of debris and gases.” Steven Frye aptly explains the tendency of most critics to categorize the event either as a nuclear disaster or a meteor strike: “A nuclear holocaust would be the result of human evil, and the meteor or asteroid the outcome of

natural evil” (196). What underlines this academic quest is a search for where the blame can be put. Is this suffering divinely inflicted if the events in the novel are tied to the Book of Revelation? Is it directly caused by human beings due to our unchecked technological advances? Or are humans being victimized by nature if it was indeed a meteorite strike? The human relationship with divinity, with himself, and with nature lies at the center of these queries about the source of the apocalypse.

Although the novel inspired such extensive investigations into the mysterious origin of the apocalypse, unlike the above-mentioned critics, it does not seem to largely preoccupy itself with the cause of the cursed hell-on-earth. Man's relationship with god, himself and the natural environment is primarily explored through the aftermath of the apocalypse. The human seems to be this world's seven-headed Hydran guard as well as its latent countercharm. The natural environment, arbitrarily or not, has unveiled its wanton, vicious face after the eco-apocalyptic event. Now it is for the human to decide if he is going to be a hero or a villain, if he is going to alleviate the suffering or aggravate it. The hostility of the post-apocalyptic environment, in effect, is marginalized by the inhumanity of the cannibals. The places of the wild and the man-made are swapped in the story. King Lear is robbed of the safety of his palaces by his daughters, and is left in the untamed world of nature to fend for himself. That is enough for him to cast arguably one of the cruelest possible curses upon his daughter. In *The Road*, ironically, the opposite is true. The pair seldom stay in a man-made structure, and usually take refuge in the cold, dark bosom of the devastated nature, as the danger cannibals pose is far greater than that of the natural world. They have to leave the bunker sanctuary behind just because of the threat of humans: “Anyone could see the hatch lying in the yard and they would know at once what it was... This was not hiding in the woods” (McCarthy 144). It is not particularly death (by starvation) that they fear the most; it is the suffering and the malevolence they have to await and then endure that most terrifies them. The truly terrorizing, evil agents prove to be the humans with their murderous intent, their slaves, and their appetites (McCarthy 92, 106). That is exactly why the mother chooses to commit suicide (McCarthy 56), and the man agonizingly contemplates if he has what it takes to kill his own child if the alternative is being captured by cannibals (McCarthy 114).

Contrary to the ironically comfortless man-built structures, there is life-sustaining, processed, human-transformed food with all its health and ecological side-effects. What is paradoxical in the novel is that (except for the shriveled apples and morels), the man and the boy mainly survive on canned food, a remnant of the fallen civilization. In the “tiny paradise” of the bunker (McCarthy 150), the pair find the “richness of a vanished world” (McCarthy 139) which includes “[c]rate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef” (McCarthy 138). The relics of the toppled civilization, including its “[o]ld stories of courage and justice” (McCarthy 41), and the oil that is used to light their “little slutlamp” to fight the darkness of “long gray dusks” and “long gray dawns” (McCarthy 7), seem to be still their saving grace. That is probably why, in a world in which nature has fallen, the man tells his son that the human-made, concrete dam is probably going to be there for “hundreds of years. Thousands,

even” (McCarthy 20). However, thousands of years will pass too. Similarly, the processed, canned foods have an expiration date, and already the starving pair have been forced to reject some of them. The boy is also suspicious that the stories might not be “true” because they are not always helping people in the real world (McCarthy 268). Although the canned food is not going to last forever, and the duo sometimes get caught up in practicality of certain situations, it seems that the man-made food and their imperfect attempt at goodness put them on the right path, which ends with the boy finding a surrogate family. That, apparently, is the best deal that they can get out of this miserable situation. Nonetheless, the issue of food, canned or not, is put under a magnifying glass to resolve the pivotal query of the story, which is: Are you one of the good guys?

[4] We Are What We Eat: Cannibalism, Deprivation, and Depravity

Cannibalism, the ultimate taboo (at least to a Western mind), is surprisingly common and appallingly titillating. On one hand, nature is rife with animal cannibalism, i.e. a kind of cannibalism that makes perfect evolutionary sense, and is considered to be free from gray areas, guilt, and deception: “There is only a fascinating variety of innocent... responses to an almost equally variable set of environmental conditions: too many kids, not enough space, too many males, not enough food” (Schutt 287). On the other hand, as far as human beings are concerned, necessity, hatred and devotion historically have been the main reasons for cannibalistic conduct. In *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, Cătălin Avramescu explains that “the anthropophagy that historians recount is more often than not particular, the product of extreme circumstances: hunger, fury, religious enthusiasm” (85). In *The Road*, it is necessity that dictates the practice of cannibalism.

One of the most horrifyingly memorable scenes of the novel is when the man and the boy find the remains of a cannibalistic feast of a new-born infant victim (McCarthy 198). To shake away any shroud of doubt that infant cannibalism at trying times is not too far a stretch for our modern, civilized world, we may consider the USSR just about a hundred years ago. During the Holodomor,³ a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine, people’s desperation in the face of hunger escalated so far that the Soviets began to print posters with the following warning: “To eat your own children is a barbarian act” (Várdy and Várdy 225). And this happened in the same Europe where people, according to the biblical text, are “presumed to differ from beasts at creation, and dietary prescriptions distinguish not only between domestic and wild animals but among different kinds of domestic animals, setting up in the process categories of edibility that by implication exclude cannibalism” (Sutton 152). This division is probably the reason why the boy is concerned about whether they are going to kill and eat the dog, “man’s best friend” (Sutton 152), that he believes he has seen. The father promises him that they will not “hurt the dog” (McCarthy 82). However, on the other hand, the same boy does not have any problem with eating ham, eggs and milk (McCarthy 145).

To make matters even worse, historically, it has actually taken much less than a famine of biblical proportions (or any other “extreme circumstances”) for the thin veneer of human civilization to be stripped away. The contemporary practice of “[a]borting innocent and healthy unborn children and eating them to boost one’s stamina and sexual health” in China is a poignant example of this (Dale). Epicurean cannibalism was practiced to such an extent that Key Ray Chong, the historian and Chinese cannibalism expert, in his *Cannibalism in China*, devoted a 13-page chapter to “Methods of Cooking Human Flesh” with a subheading entitled “Baking, Roasting, Broiling, Smoke-drying, and Sun-drying” (qtd. in Schutt 202). Therefore, I believe it is safe to assume that McCarthy has taken a rather charitable (and Western) position by only sticking to survival cannibalism in his novel. The choice, of course, seems reasonable given the context of the blighted landscape. He weaves his apotheosis of dilemmatic moral choice around the issue of human cannibalism in extreme circumstances because this choice needs to be a rather difficult one to make. His angle, in his ecological apocalyptic vision, is the imagined environmental degradation, the subsequent human depravity embodied in the cannibals, and the emergence of a Promethean hero to combat the inhumanity. In other words, the ecological collapse leads to food scarcity, which in turn allows the best and the worst of humanity to come out. The humans now must decide in which direction they need to head.

Simon Estok, in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*, contends that “food security is often central” to apocalyptic and dystopian narratives from the past two decades that deal with environmental problems, climate change, and end of humanity (96). Michael Pollan, in his *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, draws attention to this interconnection between humans, food, and the environment: “[F]ood chains are systems for doing more or less the same thing: linking us, through what we eat, to the fertility of the earth and the energy of the sun” (7). The world of *The Road* is defined by loss (of the sun and the natural environment), scarcity (of food), hunger and appetite. The journey of the father and son, in the first place, is impelled by hunger: “Mostly he [the man] worried about their shoes. That and food. Always food” (McCarthy 17). On the road, the man and the boy are “hungry all the time” (McCarthy 32) except for the time when they find temporary respite in a backyard fallout shelter (McCarthy 138). The man is hard-pressed into highly risky and ill-thought-out situations just because they are “starving” (McCarthy 110). The hopelessness of existence, and the embedded cruelty in the blasted landscape, is keenly entangled with the difficulty of securing the next meal. The ethical is ultimately overrun, as human beings become a desperate resource in a degenerately diseased and deprived environment.

The survival cannibalism in the text, Casey Jergenson explains, can be read “as a representation of humanity’s reversion to its animal instincts in reaction to extremity” – especially because “McCarthy’s corpus is very preoccupied with the atavism and primitivism of human nature” (125). In the novel, Manuel Broncano argues, the regression to this very animal condition, and the complete surrender to Darwinian strife, drives human beings “by a will to survive that supersedes any ethical value and turns each individual into a potential source of food for the other” (126). The cannibal the pair meet is described as

“an animal inside a skull looking out the eyeholes” (McCarthy 63). However, the logic behind survival cannibalism is ultimately turned on its head. The human-turned-animal, at the final analysis, is also doomed. Faced with the remnants of the depopulated space, the man concludes that “bloodcults must have all consumed one another. No one traveled this road. No roadagents, no marauders” (McCarthy 16). Disturbingly and quite ironically, the human offspring, meant to perpetuate the species, are also “served as fodder for the men-turned-beasts, thus eventually completing its own annihilation” (Broncano 126). In other words, as Sean Hermanson puts it, humanity is so reduced that it literally starts to consume “its own future” (9). This is exactly where the painful human dependency on the natural environment reveals itself. The earth needs to restart the process of rejuvenation for the human race to have a chance at survival and propagation. However, *The Road* is preponderantly and stubbornly preoccupied with the human, good and bad, taking the insolvent earth almost as a *donnée*. Ely, described as “the starved and threadbare Buddha” (McCarthy 168), imparts wisdom to the father and son regarding the relationship of man with this physical world. He tells them that if not this apocalyptic event, “something like it” would have come their way anyway. This deterministic inevitability renders moot any effort for preparation: “People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didn’t believe in that. Tomorrow wasn’t getting ready for them. It didn’t even know they were there” (McCarthy 168). If not this, then some other catastrophe would have visited them. It is not the calamity, ecological or otherwise, that matters. What matters is how humans respond to it when it arrives. Therefore, agency and intent seem to be lying with the starving humans for all intents and purposes in the post-eco-apocalyptic world.

In contrast to the cannibals, the boy represents the humane and graceful response to these kind of adversities in the novel. The satiation of hunger answers “fundamental questions about what it means to be human, and, perhaps more importantly, what it means to be human alongside other humans,” revealing the “impossibility of separating the physical need to satisfy hunger from the metaphysical considerations that must be taken into account in doing so” (Mullins 76, 91). A “new moral code of consumption involving the taboo of cannibalism,” Jennifer Martin contends, needs to be navigated by father and son (67). Aversion to cannibalism becomes the ultimate litmus test that separates the wheat from the chaff, asserting the humanity of the good guys versus the inhumanity of the bad guys. McCarthy’s choice to find his apotheosis of dilemmatic moral choice in “barbaric” act of cannibalism seems astute, especially with a Western audience. John Hillcoat, the director who brought McCarthy’s story to the silver screen, faced some challenges when shooting the Coca-Cola scene. He initially could not obtain “corporate clearance” because, as a family brand, they did not want “any association with cannibalism.”

However, the boy does not stop by rejecting the consumption of human flesh. He has a much more sophisticated approach to forbidden nourishments. First, in contrast to the short-term practicality of the father, he insists they should share food with other people. Food sharing is universally practiced by human beings, and it has been a “central facilitator and feature of hominid evolution” (Feinman 695). The boy is playing the long game in his ethical stance. Furthermore, he extends his ethical eating to not stealing oth-

er people's food. In the bunker, where we get a glimpse of human-like, pleasurable dining experience for the first time in the novel (Martin 77), the boy offers a "Thanksgiving" prayer to the people who have left the food there (McCarthy 146). Therefore, as Laura Wright explains, it seems that "goodness is entirely dependent on what one eats; all other forms and acts of goodness that existed prior to the apocalypse are reduced to a singular ethical imperative about food: to be good is not to eat certain things, humans and food that belong to other people" (8).

It is through this ethical stance that the boy secures his place in the story as the savior figure for humanity. After their first encounter with a cannibal, while the father sits beside the boy stroking his pale and tangled hair, he comes to see the potential of divinity within the boy, who is a "[g]olden chalice, good to house a god" (McCarthy 75). The man even conveys his suspicion that his son may be "a god" to Ely (McCarthy 172). As the story draws to a close and the father is in his final hours, the blooming divinity of the boy is highlighted. On the verge of death, while coughing up blood, the man raises his weeping eyes and sees his son "standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle" (McCarthy 273). When the father reaches the point at which he knows he can no longer continue walking, he looks at his son and sees "light all about" the boy, moving with him (McCarthy 277). Near the conclusion of the story, the father comes to the realization that his divine son's judgement, in contrast to his own practicality, was indeed truthful from the very beginning: "There is no prophet in the earth's long chronicle who's not honored here today," the man announces to his son, "Whatever form you spoke of you were right" (McCarthy 277). The savior stature of the boy is specifically reinforced through his association with two elements, namely fire and Logos. These two have close ties to the issue of food which underpins the central dilemma of the story.

More than anything, the father insists throughout the novel that his son is the one who is carrying the fire, a symbol of civilization. On his deathbed, he emphatically reassures the boy that the fire he needs to carry is "real", and that it is "inside" him (McCarthy 278–279). In one instance, the miracle boy is described as "[g]od's own fire-drake" while he is stoking the flames of a fire they have made: "The sparks rushed upward and died in the starless dark. Not all dying words are true and this blessing is no less real for being shorn of its ground" (McCarthy 31). Furthermore, Ely associates fire, eating good food, and being human when he is invited to eat with the father and the son: "I've not seen a fire in a long time, that's all. I live like an animal. You don't want to know the things I've eaten. When I saw that boy I thought that I had died" (McCarthy 172). The suggestion is that regaining their lost humanity and civilization can become a possibility if they keep this fire going. In *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*, the renowned primatologist Richard Wrangham argues that "[w]e humans are the cooking apes, the creatures of the flame" (14). He contends that humanity began when our hominid ancestors learned to use fire and started to cook their food. As a consequence, the human digestive tract shrank and the brain grew. Eating cooked food became the basis for pair bonding and marriage, created the household, and even led to the male and female division of labor. In this sense, the boy is carry-

ing the fire that cooked our meals and permitted us eventually to become *Homo Sapiens*. At the same time, we know that the world has perished in firestorms. So, it seems, a tuning of our conduct to this fire that cooks our food is indispensable. As goodness is so closely tied with food in the novel, what the boy does with his carefully mapped-out ethical eating is that he defines what truly *being human* (with big brains and consciousness) means.

The fire-carrying, Promethean hero also has strong connections with another prominent archetypal hero, Jesus Christ. The father declares: “If he is not the word of God God never spoke” (McCarthy 5), equating his son with the figure of Christ, who is Logos: Jesus is the Word that was “made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1: 14). Broncano argues that the novel “is McCarthy’s apocryphal version of the Second Coming, in which Jesus... returns to the world as a child, to shed celestial light in the darkness that has shrouded the earth” leading “humankind to a second rebirth, to build a new world on the ashes of the biblical book that has finally been closed forever” (127). Northrop Frye explains the connection between Christ and food. This connection ranges from the miraculous provision of food, when Christ would feed large multitudes with very small amounts of food, to the “institution of the Eucharist”, where “Christ’s body is an unfailing source of food and drink” on both “physical and spiritual levels” (221). The father has faith that they always will “find something to eat” regardless of the paucity of resources in the environment (McCarthy 128), and they somehow always manage to do so. At the same time, due to constant starvation, the boy’s physicality is diminished to the bare minimum, and the father is a pained witness to the physical exiguity of his beloved son (McCarthy 102, 112). When he looks at his boy, his cheeks are “sunken” (McCarthy 96), and when he holds him, his ribs are “laddered” (McCarthy 250). However, this skeletonized, starved boy readily sacrifices his already meager portion to feed the people they meet on the road. On their journey, the boy once stops to look at the snowy sky. He manages to catch a “single gray flake” in his hand, and watches it “expire there like the last host of Christendom” (McCarthy 16). It is not hard to see the doctrine of transubstantiation in this description. The boy escapes becoming literal food for the cannibals, although he comes close, so that he can become spiritual food for the good guys. Through his “goodness” and “beauty” (McCarthy 129) and his principled navigation of the post-apocalyptic terrain, the boy is elevated to the status of a god who sets the standards for others to follow. He has what it takes to bring the apocalyptic triad of “Destruction, Judgement and Regeneration” (Fortunati 83) full circle. At the end of the story, although there is no evident sign of renewal in nature, the boy manages to regain a family, thereby keeping the possibility of recovering what has been lost in the wake of the apocalypse alive.

[5] Behold, Now Is the Day of Salvation: Conclusion

In this novel, the starving father and son are left to scavenge what few resources remain while keeping their eyes peeled for roving cannibalistic bloodcults and marauders in an

ecophobically godless hellscape of the post-apocalyptic world. The charred earth, the blackened sun, the ash-choked air, and the tea-colored, poisonous waters of *The Road* do not provide particularly good odds for its heroic (or non-heroic) players to survive, let alone thrive. Although the story is built upon an ecological collapse, the parsimonious natural environment does not seem to be the ultimate foe to be reckoned with: the stars in the leading role are the bad guys. On the other hand, the only redeeming, propitious quality of this grey world of dwindling resources and evil cannibals seems to be the loving relationship between the man and his Promethean boy. The duo's external and internal battle to stay alive and to stay human revolves around the question of food and anthropophagy. Now that the inevitable has come to pass, the fire-carrying son combats the regressive process of devolution in the context of a charred landscape, as mere survival is not good enough if humanity is to be sacrificed in the process.

[Notes]

- 1 As a recognizable discourse and one of the hallmarks of human progress, Simon Estok, in "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness," explains that ecophobia is "an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism" (208). Estok argues that imagining and marketing "badness" in nature, or rather "writing ecophobia," is a complex affair that has inevitably legitimized our hostile and destructive treatment of the natural world (209). Shakespeare wrote about an unhoused king who is victimized by harsh weather for Elizabethans who were familiar with life-threatening problems such as "grain shortages, bad harvests, cold weather, and profound storms" (209). In modern times, for an audience familiar with environmental issues such as Hurricane Katrina and climate change, nature is written as "a hostile opponent who is responding angrily to our incursions and actions, an opponent to be feared and, with any luck, controlled" (210).
- 2 The term apocalypse derives from the Greek noun "ἀποκάλυψις" which means "unveiling" or "revelation" of some sort, and "from a second and narrower use of the word" it describes "literary compositions which resemble the book of Revelation" (Moore 78). An eco-apocalyptic narrative specifically deals with scenarios that recount the global destruction of the earth's environment and its subsequent impact on humanity.
- 3 In Ukrainian, Holodomor means killing by starvation. From 1932 to 1933, several million Ukrainians perished in a famine which was not the result of a natural disaster or drought but part of a deliberate policy of the Communist regime.

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