At What Cost:

Survival Ideologies in Post-Apocalyptic Novels of the Nuclear Era and Today

By Courtney Lane Rottgering

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Auburn University Montgomery in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Liberal Arts

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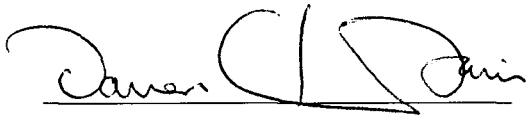

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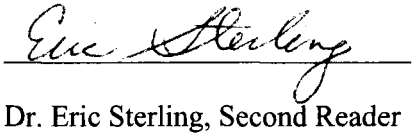

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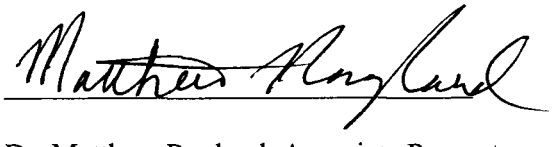

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Introduction

The concept of post-apocalyptic survival has infiltrated society through books, film, and other media. Often spurred by the threat of war or disaster, such as the nuclear scares of the Cold War or the 9/11 attacks of 2001, survivalism has grown into a mainstream concept, lived by many and depicted in popular and critical literature. This thesis explores the concept of survival in a post-apocalyptic world through two novels from the nuclear/Cold War era—*On the Beach* by Nevil Shute and *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank—and two twenty-first century novels—Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games.*

Post-Apocalyptic Literature as a Genre

This thesis will begin by looking at post-apocalyptic fiction as a genre, generally classified as a subset of science fiction. This thesis will track the historical progression of the apocalyptic genre from biblical times as it grows and transforms throughout the Atomic Age and Cold War years and through the present.

Apocalyptic literature, while originally having a characterization specific to ancient Jewish and Christian texts, has been more recently defined in a secular manner befitting its adoption as a science fiction trope. Taken from the Greek word meaning "unveiling" or "revealing," early apocalyptic works were coded reassurances to believers, written in times of oppression, affirming that God's justice would deliver them from persecution ("Apocalypse," *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*). As a theme in science fiction, the apocalypse is an event that ends or severely impacts the world as we know it; its means are varied and include nuclear war, climate change, asteroids, and any number of other scenarios. Post-apocalyptic literature must therefore be a description of the

continuation of life after the apocalyptic event. In this thesis, unless specifically referencing early apocalypse texts in recounting the history of the genre, the words "apocalyptic" and "post-apocalyptic" are used interchangeably.

The rise of the science fiction genre in the late 1800s and early 1900s took the apocalypse out of the hands of religion and placed it into the hands of man. No longer would the world be ended by a divine judgment which rewarded the good and punished the evil; now fallible man, through the technology of weaponry and biologic agents, could foment an apocalypse, either intentionally or accidentally.

The nuclear proliferation and worldwide tensions of the Cold War led to a resurgence of apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic tales, many dealing with the probability of a devastating nuclear war between superpowers. This is the epoch that spawned Shute's *On The Beach* and Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, two of the works studied within this thesis and excellent examples of the post-apocalyptic literature of that era.

The current iteration of post-apocalyptic literature, which includes McCarthy's *The Road* and Collins's *The Hunger Games*, is influenced by a variety of events, including the Y2K scare and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as continuing concerns about nuclear armament and growing fear of ecological disaster prompted by climate change.

Although the spectrum of post-apocalyptic literature may vary widely in its core aspects, researcher Alan Clardy notes:

> The common theme to all these accounts is the implosion of society as we know it and its reversion to more primitive conditions. The triggering event may occur rapidly, perhaps with little or no warning, and culminate

> in the destruction of the economic and/or environmental infrastructure and a severe reduction in the population (either directly from war or plague or indirectly by eventual starvation, for example). In the aftermath, the norms of civil society are abandoned and new, often simpler institutions emerge from the daily dramas of Hobbesian nature. The state becomes meaningless, and the foundation of the past society's way of life simply collapses as its productive infrastructure is significantly—and to all intents and purposes, irretrievably—reduced. (43)

In such a state, characters in post-apocalyptic texts must build a new society and determine whether the trappings of their previous lives are still relevant and valid.

The Ideologies of Survival

A chapter in this thesis will explore survival ideologies, both as a concept and in the context of the works discussed in this thesis. Survival is an integral concept in post-apocalyptic fiction firstly and most obviously because if there were no survivors, there would be no story to tell and no one to tell it. Survivalism in American science fiction rose to prominence with the deploying of the atomic bomb in World War II (Bishop 928), ushering in the Atomic Age and creating a backdrop for the novels *On the Beach* and *Alas, Babylon.*

Periods of renewed interest in both pragmatic survival skills and the overarching concept of human survival in general tend to follow the same timeline as the genre of post-apocalyptic literature, with upswings corresponding to biblical millennialism, the Cold War and nuclear era, and the current era informed by such events as Y2K, 9/11, ongoing nuclear armament fears, and the possibility of disastrous climate change.

Survival has its own psychology, and cannot always accurately predict individual reactions to life-threatening situations. Post-apocalyptic literature must explore the psychological capacity needed not just to survive the initial apocalyptic event, but to continue to survive and function in a world that has fundamentally changed. Survival has a profound transformative effect on the psyche: the act of surviving can often mean a complete adjustment to new circumstances and can considerably change the nature of the person involved, whether for better (ennobling him/her and making him/her more connected and empathetic to those around him/her) or for worse (man becoming a savage).

The Books

Chapters in this thesis will be devoted to each of the four works being discussed, in chronological order of their publication: *On the Beach* (1957), *Alas, Babylon* (1959), *The Road* (2006), and *The Hunger Games* (2008). These chapters will include biographical information about the authors, brief overviews of the stories and characters, and detailed analysis of the role of survival in each work.

***On the Beach* by Nevil Shute (1957)**

On the 2009 reissuing of Nevil Shute Norway's novels, the London *Telegraph* published a profile of the author, who dropped his last name and went by "Nevil Shute." Shute spent his youth as an aircraft engineer in England before moving to Australia, the setting of many of his works, in 1950 (Hensher). A 1960 *Time* magazine obituary notes that Shute took the rank of lieutenant commander in the British Admiralty and worked on top-secret weapons commissions. Writing was a relaxing pastime for the engineer, one

which proved successful and lucrative. *On the Beach* was published in 1957 and remains one of his best-known works.

The novel focuses on the lives of four major characters faced with certain death from encroaching radiation spreading from the nuclear destruction of much of the northern hemisphere. In this example, survival is interpreted not as how to escape death from radiation, but how to make life worth living when death is inevitable, and how to make a dignified, meaningful death on one's own terms. *On the Beach*'s survival complexities include moral decisions between suicide and natural death, ethical ones regarding faithfulness and adultery, and questions of honor regarding military service.

***Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank (1959)**

Alas, Babylon author Pat Frank's life is summed up neatly in a 2009 article in the *Florida Times-Union*, which celebrated the 50th anniversary of the book's publishing:

> In his 57 years, Pat Frank went from *Jacksonville Journal* cub reporter to international war correspondent, from novelist to government official... It's his novel *Alas, Babylon*, though, that is Frank's lasting legacy--a harrowing, human story published...in 1959. The novel...was an instant hit. It's been reprinted many times; it's found on high school reading lists; and it's invariably put high on lists of the best post-apocalyptic fiction. (Soergel)

Harry Hart Frank ("Pat" was a pen name) began his career not as a novelist but as a journalist, observing and commenting on the government, military, and nuclear proliferation, all of which figure prominently in *Alas, Babylon*. After the acclaim of publishing the novel passed, Frank wrote mainly for journals and magazines, as well as

consulting with agencies such as the National Aeronautics and Space Council and the Department of Defense. He died in 1964 of complications from alcoholism (Soergel).

Alas, Babylon is generally classified as post-apocalyptic, although the book's action includes events before, during, and after a Russian nuclear attack on the United States. The book's protagonist, Korean War veteran-turned-layabout Randy Bragg, must take charge of what is left of his family and community to ensure their continued survival. Challenges that threaten his band include disease, marauders, hunger, looting and theft, and general isolation from larger surviving societies and any form of government.

***The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2006)**

Cormac McCarthy has enjoyed a much-decorated career as a novelist, spanning from his 1965 novel *The Orchard Keeper* to his most current work, Pulitzer Prize winner *The Road*, published in 2006.

The Road is a bleak post-apocalyptic chronicle of a father and son who trudge through the wasteland of an America destroyed by an unnamed disaster, as they try to survive each day and reach the temperate coast. The dangers of the road include looters and marauders, blood cults, cannibals, and other people competing for resources as they try to survive. The unnamed characters are "carrying the fire:" that is, trying to keep alive the spark of humanity in a ruined world.

***The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)**

Although her career has been in writing for children's television, Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games Trilogy captured the attention of children and adults alike, leading the bestseller lists and adapted into a successful film franchise.

The Hunger Games, the first book in the trilogy, takes place in a dystopian future in what once was the United States, now called Panem. The lavish Capitol, seat of government and politics, mandates an annual sacrifice of two young adults from each of Panem's districts, in punishment for the rebellion of the districts. The candidates are placed in a vast outdoor arena and forced to kill each other off until only one remains. The victor's district is then showered with food and goods, a mighty incentive for some of the poorer areas. Katniss Everdeen, unable to stand by as her frail younger sister is selected for the trial, steps up in her place, and must survive the politics of the Capitol, the capriciousness of the viewing audience, and the threat of twenty-three other young adults all vying to be the last one standing. The key to survival in the games seems to be mercenary, but Katniss is able to find allies and maintain humanity even as she struggles for her life.

Collins, in interviews, has cited a number of influences that impacted her development of the trilogy, including the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, her father's military service, coverage of the American fighting in the Middle East, and reality television (Margolis 30).

Conclusion

This thesis will explore the concept and portrayal of survival in post-apocalyptic literature, focusing on two novels representing the Cold War/nuclear era and two novels that have been published since 2000. In order to set each novel against the appropriate sociological and historical backdrops, the thesis will define and explore the evolution of post-apocalyptic literature as a genre, from its earliest beginnings in the Christian world and in ancient Israel to its current incarnation. The sensibility of survival, both in general

and as it relates to and is displayed in each work, is explored, and the culture of the survivalist is defined with reference to historical influence and psychological profile. Each book will be extensively analyzed with reference to its post-apocalyptic characteristics and the role and means its characters take to survive.

Chapter One: The Emergence and Evolution of Post-Apocalyptic Literature as a Genre

On its surface, "post-apocalyptic" seems an easy word to dissect: "post" meaning "after" and "apocalyptic," defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "of the nature of a revelation or disclosure; revelatory, prophetic." ("Apocalypse," www.oed.com) Taken together, the word parts combine to describe something—a society, a nation, a world—after some revelation or prophecy has been fulfilled, whether the prophecy is the coming of God or the coming of impending doom.

In its earliest Greek usage, the term generally referred to Jewish and Christian texts which depicted occurrences of divine revelation (of which the Bible's book of Revelation is the most commonly identified). These texts became generally known as "apocalyptics." Because such texts generally dealt with the ideation and prognostication of the end of the world via tribulations and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ, the word "apocalypse" came to be associated with the concept of an event that would destroy or profoundly alter the world as we know it.

It is a term with which we are familiar, living as we do in an era plagued by the threat of disasters, man-made or natural. It is a concept that has evolved with society, taking on different implications and cultural shadings reflecting war, religion, pestilence, or other conditions affecting the human race. The post-apocalyptic imaginings of today are not the same as they were fifty, one hundred, or a thousand years ago, nor is our concept of apocalypse itself.

The Naming of a Genre

The apocalyptic genre peaked between 200 BCE and 200 CE, coinciding partially with the spread of Christianity (McKenzie 123). Bible scholar Steven McKenzie notes that books of this period generally went untitled, known instead by their first few words. "It is not certain whether this word at the beginning of the book of Revelation was intended as a title or was simply a description of the book's contents, but it quickly became popular as the title for an entire genre of literature" (121). The genre was at first repudiated by scholars in a desire to correlate Jewish and Christian writings with their "purer" roots, dismissing disturbing images of destruction and world-ending prophecy. Nearly all such apocalyptic texts were barred from Jewish and Christian canonical literature (DiTommaso 236).

Although the apocalyptic genre was well-defined and recognizable (though denigrated) early on the Judeo-Christian timeline, evidence for a correlating term for "apocalypse" within the Hebrew and Aramaic languages is scant. Historian Alexander Kulik, writing in *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, notes:

> The apocalypse is one of the best represented genres in early Jewish literature. Even though, like most pseudepigraphic texts, the apocalypses survived mainly in translation, at least some of these popular works must have had Hebrew and Aramaic originals. This fact contrasts strikingly with the absence of a Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic term for the genre or type of revelatory experience, a term which would correspond also to the one used as a title of some of these books. (540-41)

Little is known about this lack of correlation between languages. Kulik posits that Hebrew and Syriac words meaning "book or scroll" and "revelation" may have served to classify the apocalyptics until the genre acquired its Greek-based name.

Characteristics of Apocalyptics

The apocalyptic writings of the Judeo-Christian era shared traits that helped to define the genre. One of the most prominent characteristics concerns a duality in beliefs. Apocalyptic writings assume that both good and evil exist, in a constant conflict with each other which may or may not be resolved by the end of the text. This duality also gives rise to an "us versus them" mentality: that is, one's own society is desirable, while other groups are dangerous or evil (Strozier and Boyd 279). Another linking characteristic between texts is the presence of the supernatural and its effect on human affairs. Apocalyptic texts feature various angels, demons, oracles, and alien creatures that serve to guide or repel their human charges (DiTommaso 240-41).

The concept of time, in many incarnations, is also prevalent in apocalyptica. Some time frames represented are literal historical timelines, with which readers would be familiar and comfortable. Richard Landes argues for the existence of "apocalyptic time," in which believers would see signs of the end times and consider the progression of the apocalypse, with its tradition of tribulation, salvation, and paradise (335, 345). This view of time also includes those fundamentalists who believe that certain requirements that must be met on Earth before the apocalypse can occur.

Apocalyptic literature is, by its nature, largely concerned with death and violence. Instead of focusing on their individual deaths, readers imagine a collective death, which meaning is greater and more transcendent than the death of one person. This reorientation

of thought also applies to the theme of violence. Drastic acts are framed within the ideology of the apocalypse, and thus become more acceptable. This rationalization empowers those who believe that certain sects or denominations must be eradicated before the coming of revelation and salvation.

Apocalyptic texts transcend cultural and socioeconomic strata, representing everyone from the rich and powerful to the poor and dispossessed. DiTommaso postulates that the wide appeal of the texts stems from the vein of hope that crosses all human boundaries. Salvation is available not only for the powerful, but also for the powerless (282).

Apocalyptics as Literature of Oppression

Apocalyptics often served as coded messages to their readers, assuring them that God was with them through their trials and would bring them safely through to a new world. DiTommaso calls them "underground texts of crisis and consolation" (251). The texts featured a variety of symbols, numbers, and images that readers of the time would recognize and correlate to historical and current events (Sheler and Tharp 64). Such use denotes that apocalyptic writers were generally learned and conversant with cultural idioms, enabling them to disseminate their coded messages of support.

McKenzie summarizes the purpose of apocalyptic texts, specifically referencing Revelation, saying, "Its purpose is to encourage Christians undergoing cultural and religious persecution to remain faithful by assuring them that God is in charge, that right will eventually triumph over evil, and that they will be rewarded for their perseverance" (146). Taking this view, it is easy to see why apocalyptics captivated the audiences of the time, and why they continue to appeal to readers: there is the reassurance that the virtuous

will win out over the villains and that there is a benevolent and omniscient force that oversees and enforces the reward of good and punishment of evil.

Apocalyptic Works in the Bible

While apocalyptic episodes or tales appear throughout the Old and New Testaments, biblical scholars generally cite three books that define and embody the genre:

> Of the three biblical apocalypses most influential today, two are in Old Testament books--Ezekiel and Daniel--dating from the sixth and second centuries B.C., when Israel was vanquished and occupied by enemies. Revelation, in the New Testament, was written late in the first century A.D., a time when Christians in Asia Minor faced persecution at the hands of the Roman emperor. (Sheler and Tharp 64-65)

These books exemplify the apocalyptic text, as they (especially when examined in accordance with their historical background) seek to comfort and encourage oppressed believers. The books are linked across their respective historical periods and backgrounds by common apocalyptic themes:

> This type of communication from the future was flourishing in the Mediterranean basin and Near East in the first and second centuries, and it exhibits a similar taste for magic and miracles, charged with a will to power, a belief in curses, a drive for mastery, and a thirst for revenge. Of all the material in the New Testament, Revelation most resembles the Old, resonating with "little apocalypses" from the Book of Daniel, the vision of

> Ezekiel, and other passages in which railing, burning, and smiting make up the business of heaven. (Warner 18)

Since many later books of the Bible reference the prophecies of earlier chapters, it makes sense that apocalyptic characteristics would be noted in chapters other than Revelation, which would in turn allude back to them. Apocalyptics of this period are also delineated by their use of the supernatural, featuring either a beyond-human narrator, such as an angel, or an otherworldly journey by a human narrator (DiTommaso 240). These ventures into mystical realms help set the stage for the transition of apocalyptics from religious writings into science fiction.

Science Fiction Genre Growth

In the early twentieth century, ancient apocalyptics laid the foundation for a new genre—post-apocalyptic fiction (generally considered a sub-genre within the more general framework of science fiction). Science fiction is characterized by its speculative nature regarding the future, whether imagining advances in science, in human development, or in the supernatural (a direction which can evolve into the related genre of fantasy). Well-known science fiction writer and observer Darko Suvin says, "Significant modern [science fiction]...discusses primarily the political, psychological, and anthropological use and effect of knowledge" (15). Thus, although science fiction views the world through the speculation of what could be, it also addresses the sociological, scientific, and political climate of the period in which it was written. The genre has predicted such events as manned space travel, gender equality/the rise of feminism, and the integration and equality of all races. The speculative nature of science fiction allowed post-apocalyptic fiction to secure a foothold in the readership's

imagination, and in the last century that foothold has flourished into an active and thriving genre.

Science fiction captivates its audience with its hypothetical nature of how the world may end. Such examples serve to open readers to the possibility of change. Tymn says. "Science fiction is a literature which prepares us to accept change, to view change as both natural and inevitable. And since change is fast becoming one of the few constants in our society, the attractiveness of this genre is both understandable and encouraging" (41). In their 1977 book *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision,* Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin concur with Tymn's characterization of science fiction as a literature of change. They note, "The history of science fiction is also the history of humanity's changing attitudes toward space and time. It is the history of our growing understanding of the universe and the position of our species in that universe" (3). From its inception, science fiction has speculated about worlds different from the current era, and one of the most popular and enduring speculations is that of the end of the world and its aftermath. An apocalypse necessarily foments change—in individuals, in societies, in governments, across the world. No one remains untouched.

David Ketterer, in his book *New Worlds for Old*, notes that not only does science fiction prepare its audience for change, the genre itself is a reaction to changing cultural and political environments: "In general terms, the proliferation of science fiction is a response to abruptly changing social conditions. During times of stability, when change neither happens nor is expected, or happens so gradually as to be barely noticeable, writers are unlikely to spend time describing the future condition of society, because there is no reason to expect any significant difference" (23). In this way, science fiction

in general, and post-apocalyptic fiction in particular, harken back to the apocalyptics, born of changing times and carrying messages of a possible future.

Science fiction after World War II saw a shift in the genre that advanced the post-apocalyptic imaginings of its writers. "While pre-war science fiction had concentrated on the technical wonders suggested by scientific advances, writers in the post-World War II period began to examine the human consequences of these advances and the fear that we might become the victims of our own creations. Science fiction experienced a new direction of growth as the social sciences became important subjects for writers in the 1950s and 1960s" (Tymn 46). This shift in focus produced works that explored issues such as race, gender, humanity, and emotion rather than technological advancement. It is from this era that *On the Beach* and *Alas, Babylon* derive, with their emphasis on the quality and worth of human life and achievement in the wake of worldwide nuclear holocaust.

The Appeal of Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction

In her short essay "After the End—Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction," Irene Sywenky notes, "The idea of apocalypse, in its different variations, is perhaps one of the most common themes in twentieth-century science fiction and beyond" (438). Its prevalence stems from what it represents: fears of death, the end of civilization, loneliness, "the most common collective angst of the human race" (Sywenky 438). The genre also supplies the secret, guilty thrill of danger and survival, experienced vicariously by the reader. In his introduction to *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse*, John Joseph Adams says, "The appeal of post-apocalyptic [science fiction] is obvious: it fulfills our taste for adventure, the thrill of discovery, the desire for a new frontier. It also allows us

to start over from scratch, to wipe the slate clean and see what the world may have been like if we had known then what we know now" (2). In this way, readers of post-apocalyptic fiction are voyeurs, spying from their comfortable existences on a world that the future may bring to pass. Robert Jay Lifton describes the readers of post-apocalyptic fiction as "meaning-hungry creatures" who "seek a place for our deaths in the cosmic order" (61). We all want to think that we have made a difference, however small, in this world, and that our deaths will bear out our legacy; it is human nature to search for meaning even in that which may be meaningless.

Sywenky's essay title is apt: what happens after the end of the world as we know it? Post-apocalyptic literature is not merely about the end of a way of life; it generally heralds the birth of a new one. Michael Shermer, writing in *New Scientist*, says, "Emotionally, the end of the world is actually a renewal, a transition to a new beginning and a better life to come. In religious narratives, God smites sinners and resurrects the virtuous. For secularists, the sins of humanity are atoned through a change in our political, economic or ideological system" (30). Post-apocalyptic fiction explores the actions of man after devastation: how does he react? How does he survive, and even thrive, again? What ideological changes will society undergo?

The theme of apocalypse as renewal or rebirth of the world, as a sort of slate-wiping, presupposes that the world has gone irretrievably down the wrong path and cannot be corrected. Critic Mervyn Bendel, writing about the perception of the apocalypse in popular culture, acknowledges this view:

> The principal notion in all these works is that the present world is provisional and contingent, awaiting the Apocalypse. It is represented as

> an inherently sinful world, liable to slide into anarchy and violence at any moment, from which will emerge resourceful and determined individuals and groups who will engage in bloody and prolonged battles with the forces of evil for the future of humanity. There is no sense that the present everyday world has value in itself; instead it has little purpose other than as the battleground for Armageddon...This worldview, although originally religious, has become increasingly influential in secular popular culture...(7)

The four books studied in this thesis also exemplify this theme, in different ways: *On the Beach* and *Alas, Babylon* see worldwide destruction resulting from unintentional but devastating nuclear strikes; *The Road* occurs in the wake of an unnamed apocalypse that decimates the population and the landscape; and *The Hunger Games* references a failed revolutionary uprising and the consequences that the districts face under oppression from the capitol. In each book, characters believe that their pre-apocalyptic world has gone too far down a path to destruction to be redeemed.

Chapter Two:

The Concept, Psychology, and Ideologies of Survival

Kyle William Bishop, writing in *Sense of Wonder: A Century of Science Fiction*, notes, "Survivalism exists across the literary spectrum...we as a society love stories of perseverance, struggle, and survival" (930). Survival ideologies attract a wide variety of readers, appealing to both hubris and weakness, and exploiting both. Kathy McMahon, writing about the resilience of the human condition in disaster settings, notes, "...the disaster environment provides an active and ongoing opportunity to reframe, reorganize and construct new meaning in a compressed timeline" ("The Psychology of Disaster," resilience.org). Post-apocalyptic situations force people to examine their own motives and construct new societies within a short period of time, in order to survive both bodily and as an ideological group.

Panic, or the Lack Thereof, in Survival Situations

Think of any recent or popular disaster movie, and what do you see? Crowds of people fleeing cities, ruthlessly cutting down anyone who gets in their way and refusing to assist others in their single-minded pursuit of a safe haven. In other words, panic and hysteria. However, recent studies have shown that mindless group panic as a reaction to disaster is largely a myth.

With the rise of global terrorism, pandemics of new and evolving diseases, and natural disasters, researchers have had multiple opportunities to study the presence and characteristics of panic following these events. One such study notes:

> The typical response to a variety of physical threats is neither "fight nor flight" but affiliation—that is, of seeking the proximity

> of familiar persons and places, even though this may involve approaching or remaining in a situation of danger...Such observations can be explained by an alternative, 'social attachment' model of collective behavior under threat, a model that recognizes the fundamentally social nature human beings and the primacy of attachments. (Mawson 96)

This theory of affinity negates the popular concept of "every man or woman for himself or herself" and shows that even in crisis, people are likely to form groups bound by common ideologies or values, and begin thinking and acting in a thoughtful and deliberate fashion, rather than giving way to utter panic and chaos. Writing in *Professional Safety*, Paul and Ron Gantt identify three non-panic actions that groups and individuals tend to take in extreme circumstances: risk identification, risk assessment, and risk reduction (45-6). Whether alone or in groups, these are the actions that persons in crisis appear to take, rather than succumbing to blind panic.

What is "Human Nature" and How Does it Influence Survival?

Entire books have been written on human nature by august personalities such as Sigmund Freud and E.O. Wilson, and while the subject could constitute a thesis of its own, it is not my intention to delve very deeply into it here. However, the subject must be touched on, as various human behaviors can impact a character's chances and desire for survival, as well as other characteristics, methods, and decisions in the quest to stay alive.

There seem to be three major ideas about human nature: 1. That people are inherently good and seek to maintain societal bonds; 2. That people are inherently savage, and are generally kept in check by societal norms; and 3. That "human nature"

cannot be quantified, as every person will hold different values and react to disaster in different ways.

Although studies are increasingly showing that the first and third tenets hold true, society's subconscious still clings to the second. Popular media can be blamed in part for this. As a society, we are inundated with news stories, television broadcasts, and feature films that depict men and women in post-apocalyptic or disaster situations as bellicose, narcissistic, and unconcerned about their fellow humans. Why the constant barrage of disaster footage and information? The answer is simple: disaster, like sex, sells. "I think that these collective disasters serve a variety of different functions. They allay individual fears of human mortality… [because] it's not going to happen at the same time. We're not all going to die at the same time," University of Kansas sociologist John Hoopes explains ("Why We Love Disaster Movies," livescience.com). Disaster coverage draws increased viewership to a program, station, or motion picture, allowing for increased ad or ticket sales, and possibly securing the viewer for a longer-term commitment. At the same time, constant repetition of disaster news and footage dulls viewers to the horror, requiring ever more shocking and titillating stories to retain their attention. It's a feedback loop that any drug addict would recognize, and in this case, the drug is adrenaline.

The panic portrayal has become so ingrained in our culture that we tend to consider it true, despite much evidence to the contrary. Filip Arnberg and Lennart Melin, psychology professors in Uppsala, Sweden, studied post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms in more than 3,500 survivors of the 2004 Asian tsunami. They found that survivors who had access to social support (whether organically occurring from shared experiences or supplied by psychological intervention and treatment) were better able to

process the event and work through their PTS symptoms in a healthy way. Arnberg and Melin say, "Social relationships have long been known to be associated with health. Loneliness and perceptions of social isolation increase the risk for a range of adverse outcomes, including all-cause mortality...With support from friends and family, the survivors have opportunities to engage with reminders of the event, leading to the weakening of associations between contextual cues for traumatic content and feelings of extreme fear or anxiety" (1-2). Their study suggests that humans actively (if perhaps unconsciously) seek the company of other humans after catastrophic events, rather than turning on each other in a predatory fight for individual survival.

Author Rebecca Solnit, in her 2009 book *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*, notes, "The study of disasters makes it clear that there are plural and contingent [human] natures—but the prevalent human nature in disaster is resilient, resourceful, generous, empathic, and brave" (8). She calls the fear of human beings devolving to a baser nature during disaster a "common myth" (78). In her experience of studying disasters such as the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina, she has found that "we remain ourselves for the most part, but freed to act on, most often, not the worst but the best within" (78). Such a view goes far to explain the influx of volunteers and supplies in major disaster situations, and the anecdotes of selfless assistance by absolute strangers, as well as within the local community.

Why Strive for Survival?

Is it possible to quantify survival as a goal? Why do people do almost anything to survive in conditions of war, disaster, and disease? Is survival in these circumstances the

highest goal of mankind? Although individual desires for survival exist, Annalee Newitz, in her book *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction*, reduces the desire for survival to what may be its most basic, if unconscious, level: "Most of us want humanity to survive for a simple reason: We hope there's a chance for our families and civilizations to endure and improve over the long term" (147-48). While survivors of various disasters might not phrase their survival impetus in such a manner, the concept of the endurance and evolution of the human race seems to be the bedrock foundation of the human survival instinct.

The Holocaust remains the ultimate symbol of survival in the minds of the general population. Holocaust stories often raise questions regarding the ultimate worth of survival as a goal, and the roles that people play in their own survival simply by deciding to give up hope or find the strength to stay alive. Newitz believes, "It is an act of tremendous strength to choose life and an uncertain future, rather than death in war" (119). Holocaust survivors often admit that it would be easier to give up and succumb to death, but that something within them, or the support of others, urged them to strive to live. Elie Wiesel, in his iconic Holocaust memoir *Night*, recounts an episode where he longed for death, and was urged on to live by his father. On a forced death march to another camp, Wiesel's father senses Elie's fading spirit and says, "Don't let yourself be overcome by sleep, Eliezer. It's dangerous to fall asleep in snow. One falls asleep forever. Come, my son, come. . . Get up."

Elie's response: Get up? How could I? How was I to leave this warm blanket? (punctuation is Wiesel's.) (88). Urged on by his father, Elie continued the march and ultimately survived the march, life in the camps, and their ultimate liberation, although

his father did not. His father ultimately sacrificed his own life to encourage his son to survive.

In many cases, survival seems to hinge on a conscious decision of a person to struggle onward or to capitulate and die. Ernie Hazard, a swordfisherman interviewed for Sebastian Junger's non-fiction bestseller *The Perfect Storm*, found himself in the middle of the Atlantic, working on a fishing vessel when a storm with hundred-knot winds blew up. A huge, breaking wave drove the boat under and Hazard was trapped below deck as the boat capsized. Able to snatch only a short breath inside a pocket of air, he had to make the decision of which way to swim to find his way out. "It was very matter-of-fact," Hazard says. "I was at a fork in the road and there was work to do—swim or die…People always think you have to go for life, but you don't. You can quit" (Junger 176-77). So what is it that makes the majority of people strive for survival, against all odds and pains? Perhaps the answer is different for every person. Some may do it for love of their families, or to defy their circumstances. Whatever its motivation, the decision to survive is a one to commit to the future and believe that one has a place in it.

History of Survival: There's Always Something Left

Survival is an instinct as old as the Earth itself, and as ingrained. Long before humans made it into the scene, the planet endured almost total destruction by asteroid strikes, climate and atmospheric changes, volcanoes, and other natural disasters. Newitz says, "Whether…disaster is caused by humans or by nature, it is inevitable. But our doom is not. How can I say that with so much certainty? Because the world has been almost completely destroyed at least half a dozen times already in Earth's 4.5-billion-year history, and every single time there have been survivors" (1). She references what

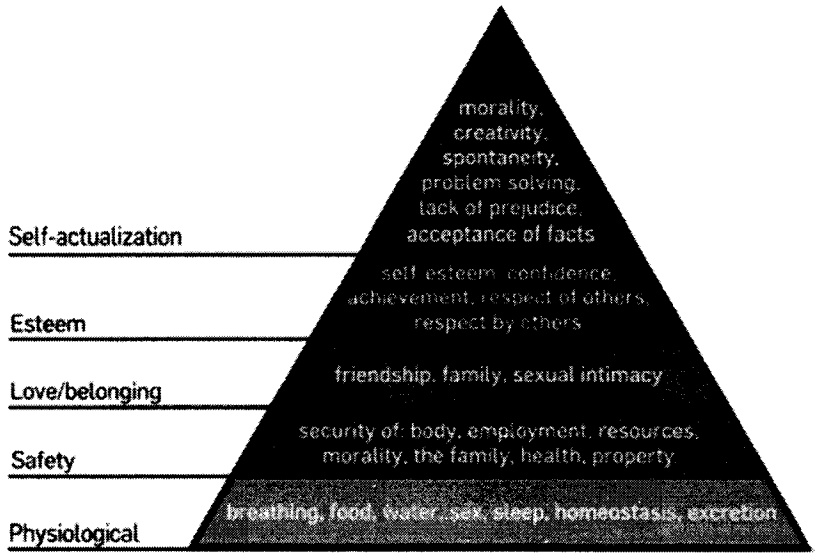
scientists call "The Great Dying," a period wherein 90-95% of life on Earth died out. Even in this extreme survival situation, enough plants and animals remained to repopulate the world, although it took 30 million years to do it (Newitz, io9.com).

This type of analysis gets to the core of apocalyptic survival tales: it may seem to the characters that the whole world is not destroyed, but it is not; there are living things left to carry on and tell their part of history (whether in the fossil record or, if human, by art, oral tradition, or writing). Even in science fiction tales of colonizing other planets or space stations due to Earth's destruction, civilization carries on.

The Intangible Needs for Survival

Abraham Maslow disseminated his eponymous Hierarchy of Need in 1943 (Burton 1). The pyramid explores five levels of actualization needed for humans to survive and thrive physically and emotionally.

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (Burton 1)



The most basic level is physiological: the bare necessities that keep the body working. This level is the lowest common denominator of survival: the continued existence of the corporeal. Above that is safety, both of the body and of the mind. The top three tiers deal with health of emotion and the psyche. These are the intangible needs for human survival, and in many cases foment the desire to survive beyond just the physical body. Solnit refers to psychiatrist and Auschwitz survivor Victor Frankl as she notes: "The evolutionary argument for altruism could draw from Frankl to argue that we need meaning and purpose in order to survive, and need them so profoundly we sometimes choose them over survival" (97). Maslow and Frankl support each other in this: survival is more than the continuation of life in the body, but life in the mind and in the community, and a desire to participate in that life.

Cultural continuation is an important part of survival as well. "To live, we need food and shelter. To live autonomously, we must remember who we are and where we

came from" (Newitz 102). Our history as a people is important to survival in many ways. Pragmatically, we can reach back to the cruder, yet less technology dependent, tools of our ancestors, and their knowledge of growing and hunting food, building shelter, and protecting themselves and their communities. Societally, we can review historical systems of politics, trade, and warfare, to remind ourselves of what worked and what didn't. And culturally, we can take pride anew in the human race's creation of art, music, storytelling, and other skills, and know that they will carry on into the future.

Disaster, Change, and Adaptation

Throughout history, disasters (whether man-made or natural) have served as impetus to revise society. The 9/11 attacks ushered in a new world of Homeland Security, tightened airport regulations, and a general heightened fear and awareness in the public. Various natural disasters around the world have prompted changes in environmental or building policies. And whether we realize it or not, disaster survival can ultimately change us. Laurence Gonzales, author of the survival psychology tomes *Deep Survival* and *Surviving Survival*, says, "Survivors are willing to do anything to survive. They take a kind of action that is both bold and cautious. Its audacity shocks normal people. And yet survivors retain a level of precision and control that holds them back, if just barely, from death" (44). People in survival situations take actions they never dreamed possible: killing, forming alliances, leading. Survival can be likened to a crucible, out of which comes a changed (often purified and stronger) material.

Adaptation often goes hand in hand with survival. With the changes in us come changes in the world we inhabit, and vice versa:

> Survival is one triumph, but living through that ordeal delivers us into the next stage of the journey. Adaptation means adjusting the self to a particular environment. If the environment changes, as it does through the experience of trauma, you are lost and must adapt once more. The bigger the trauma, the more dramatic the requirement for change. In many cases, the necessary adaptation is so extreme that an entirely new self emerges from the experience. (Gonzales 5)

The four books studied in this thesis each exemplify this theory of survival and adaptation. *Alas, Babylon* and *The Road* see their characters learning to cope with the aftermath of nuclear holocaust: learning new ways of feeding and protecting themselves, carrying on culture and civilization, and planning for the future. *On the Beach* deals with a future shortened by worldwide nuclear war, wherein the characters must decide how to live their final weeks and choosing to die with dignity or with fear. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss survives the competition and brings prosperity to her district, but remains under the watchful and resentful eye of the Capitol.

These books would be less powerful, less meaningful, less relevant without the tension of survival and adaptation. Solnit notes, "We cannot welcome disaster, but we can value the responses, both practical and psychological" (5). No one wishes for a hurricane or a Holocaust, but the effects of such disasters can produce a society that is stronger and more empathetic.

In essence, survival covers all three instances of time: the past, the present, and the future. The past dictates the evolution of the ideals we hold, the present is the struggle

to survive and either use or discard those ideals, and the future is the people we become after coming through our survival event.

> We cannot ever hope to reach a future where the scars of history completely vanish, nor can we expect that we won't be wounded again in the future. The key is to understand those injuries in the context of a much longer story about the great transformation known as survival. (Newitz 150)

Survival is a story that begins with the first life on Earth, and will continue through a future unknown.

Chapter Three:

Survival Ideologies in Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957)

On the Beach is something of an aberration when it comes to the common story line of post-apocalyptic tales in that its human population is fated to perish with no hope of survival, as opposed to a core group surviving an apocalypse and carrying the human race into the future. Since the death of the characters is inevitable, survival ideologies in this case refer both to the short span of time between the war and death by radiation and to psychosocial aspects of accepting or precipitating that death.

The inevitable death of humankind depicted in the book stems from a swirling, inescapable layer of radioactive fallout from a combination of cobalt and nuclear bombs lobbed during the "short, bewildering war" (2). The players in this war and their motivations are somewhat nebulous: a dispute between Russia and China over ports, a series of mistaken bombs dropped, the U.S. and England entering the fray, and the final volley of bombs that ended on the thirty-seventh day (3).

Nevil Shute: The Reluctant Writer

Nevil Shute's life was a series of unfulfilled dreams and thwarted desires, from which he somehow drew *On the Beach*, which is most often construed as a novel of faith in humanity. Born in England in 1899, he evinced an early interest in the mechanics and physics of flying machines, presaging his later career as an engineer. He and his older brother Fred attended a prestigious public school which, during the first World War, fostered a "patriotic cult of death" (Haigh 3) as students rushed to join the military and, in Fred's case, to die very soon thereafter. In his 2007 article celebrating the 50th anniversary of the book's publishing, Gideon Haigh quotes Shute regarding the sudden

deluge of death that the war provided: "I was born to one end, which was to go into the army and do the best I could before getting killed" (Haigh 3). Service in World War I was considered to be the apex of one's life, from which (if one survived) all other experiences were descended. Shute wanted desperately to give himself to the cause, to the point that he expected death and made no plans beyond military service.

His military expectations were derailed by his speech defect, a stammer, which barred him from a commissioned post; he enlisted as a regular infantryman with only months left in the war. Perplexed by a life that he had not expected to live, he took an engineering degree and joined the aviation infantry, drawing on his early interest in flying. He proved to be adept in the field, designing new planes, founding airplane clubs, and starting a very prosperous business in the aerospace industry.

All along the way, Shute had been writing. He never expected this turn in his career; his brother Fred had been the classicist, the one more likely to write. Shute said, "If Fred had lived we might have had some real books one day, not the sort of stuff that I turn out. For he had more literature in his little finger than I have in my whole body" (Shute, quoted in Haigh 1). Nevertheless, he published 21 novels before 1957's *On the Beach*, which was one of his last books. As World War II loomed, he turned his tales toward the exploration of war and its aftermath. If he hoped to achieve the glory that had been denied him in WWI, Shute was to be disappointed again. He joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, but spent his time in the Department of Miscellaneous Weapons Development, helping to develop experimental weapons, many of which did not work. With *No Highway* (1948), Shute made the shift from a reluctant writer to a dedicated one. His novels written during WWII had enjoyed commercial success, but *No Highway* and

its movie adaptation, starring Jimmy Stewart and Marlene Dietrich, catapulted him into the ranks of literary stars. Taking time to enjoy his success and wealth, both from publishing and from his private company, Shute took his plane and went hopping across the globe. When he reached Australia, it was love at first sight. He settled there in 1950 and wrote the remainder of his novels from that country, adopting it as his own.

The People on the Beach

On the Beach focuses on a small cast of main characters, the better to develop and explore their personalities and the various ways that impending and inescapable death affect the remainder of their lives. By not flooding the book with characters and following the way different people will deal with death, Shute narrows the focus, allowing the reader to invest care and concern over a smaller cast.

The book opens with a domestic scene in the home of Lt. Cdr. Peter Holmes of the Royal Australian Navy, his wife Mary, and their infant daughter Jennifer. Peter is a level-headed, mild man who simultaneously recognizes the implications of the nuclear situation and gently accommodates his wife's staunch belief that some unknown force will stop the flow of nuclear fallout and grant them a reprieve from death. Mary stubbornly insists on planting flowers that will bloom long after everyone is dead, planning a vegetable garden, and getting trees cut for firewood. Periodically we get glimmers that indicate she knows that her fate is inevitable, but she resolutely pushes them out of her mind.

Moira Davidson, a friend of the Holmeses, allays her fears about the coming nuclear cloud by frantically drinking herself into oblivion every night. She is a mainstay at parties, where she entertains with her brash, cynical jokes. Her plans to visit England

and Paris are thwarted by the nuclear war, and she deeply resents what she sees as the loss of her chance to gain culture and polish. Restless since the announcement of impending and inexorable death, she drinks to give herself something to do and to dull her fear.

Commander Dwight Towers, late of the U.S. Navy, commandeers the only submarine left in the American fleet, taking it further and further south to avoid radiation until he lands in Australia, where he places the ship and himself under Royal Australian Navy command. The Australian Navy, seeing a chance to use the sub to explore the upper reaches of Australia and then the United States, assign Peter Holmes as a liaison. Towers left his wife and two children in Connecticut, and while he knows logically that they are dead, he keeps them alive in his heart, buying gifts to "take back" to them when he returns (i.e., dies). His belief that he will see his family again is not cast in the light of an afterlife in the traditional Christian understanding. Rather, he chooses to think of them as an escape from the looming death cloud, behaving as he would as if they were still alive and waiting for him to get home from a normal deployment. He becomes good friends with the Holmeses and through them meets Moira. He sees through her frantic gaiety and the two become friends; Moira would like a romantic entanglement, but she comes to respect and understand Towers's devotion to his family.

John Osborne is a civilian scientific officer assigned to Towers's sub for its run up the American coast. He monitors radiation levels and assesses the health of the crew. An avid fan of car racing, he sees the opportunity to buy a Ferrari and uses his scientific knowledge to distill an alcohol-based fuel to run it. His dream is to race in the Australian Grand Prix, formerly open to professional drivers only, but with the impending nuclear

cloud, thrown open to any avid driver with a vehicle. The qualifiers and Grand Prix prove deadly for many of the drivers, clearing the way for Osborne to win the once-coveted prize.

Establishing the Time Period of *On the Beach*

The book makes no reference to actual historical events upon which to hinge the story, but there are clues as to the setting's time period. The first indication of the temporal setting is on the second page, when Peter notes that he and Mary married in 1961, "six months before the war" (2) and that he sailed shortly after, putting him at sea for the "short, bewildering war...that had flared all round the northern hemisphere and had died away with the last seismic record of explosion on the thirty-seventh day" (2). Peter returns home at the end of what he references as the "third month," but it is unclear whether he means the third month of the voyage or the third month following the end of the war. Judging by these markers, the book seems to take place in 1961-63.

Dwight Towers muses that he is going back to his family "in September..less than nine months' time" (40), potentially pushing the timeline of the book into 1963. Shop windows are cited as looking "more in the style of 1890 than of 1963" (61). On the sub voyage to America, a crewman notes that "it's autumn there [Australia]" (175), which would fall near the end of a year, due to weather variations in the Southern Hemisphere. From the middle of the book on, most characters reference September as the timeframe in which the radiation will reach them.

As *On the Beach* was published in 1957, the referenced dates are speculation on the future on Shute's part. If he expected, in 1957, that in only a few years the world

would be destroyed by nuclear war, the nuclear and Cold War situation must have been quite grim.

Australia in the Nuclear Era

Australia's position during the burgeoning nuclear race leading up to the Cold War was very different from America's. Australia's outlook and perceptions were shaped by British imperialism, as it was maintained as a British colony until 1901. Due to its distance from England and America and its sheer size, the country pursued an isolationist policy during international conflict. Australia resented its WWI casualties, feeling like it had been embroiled in the conflicts of a country it no longer owed allegiance to. However, as Asian countries grew in size and power, Australia could not remain neutral on the world stage. Its proximity to Asia required it to formulate a plan to protect its borders and people and to deter attack. An examination of Australia's post-Cold War security by Robyn Lim notes, "From the 1930s until the late 1960s, Australia's isolationist impulse was submerged by the appearance of palpable threats, first from Japan, and later from Asian communism" (3). An alliance with some stronger country was necessary to maintain a defense against both ideological and physical threats: "While Australia's support for the United States in the early Cold War was grounded in common values, this policy also reflected a hardheaded reckoning of interests. In the 1950s and 1960s, Australia felt a threat from revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia" (Lim 3). Its alliance with the United States brought an increase in deterrent force and reputation; in return, the U.S. gained access to Australia's resources to increase its global flexibility and maneuvering.

Survival Ideologies Explored in *On the Beach*

Carrying On: Denial and Acceptance

Anticipating an inevitable death and knowing its relative time frame places the mind in a curious position. Patients with terminal conditions know that their death is coming inevitably and most likely have a time frame of when to expect it. However, they know that despite their death, the lives of others in the world will continue. The people in *On the Beac*h are placed in the unprecedented position of knowing that not only will they die, but all human life on the planet will die. There is no frame of reference for the mind to fully comprehend and accept this. Peter expresses this in a conversation with John Osborne: "'I suppose I haven't got any imagination,' said Peter thoughtfully. 'It's—it's the end of the world. I've never had to imagine anything like that before'" (80). Osborne, the scientist, is of a more practical bent: "John Osborne laughed. 'It's not the end of the world at all,' he said. 'It's only the end of us. The world will go on just the same, only we shan't be in it. I dare say it will get along all right without us'" (80). For most humans, the definition of "the world" is human-centric: without us things would grind to a halt. But Osborne points out the reality that while human populations have certainly affected the world in many ways, the loss of that population will in no way destroy the Earth. In several areas of the book, it is pointed out that certain animals will likely survive the radiation longer than humans will, so in a way the Earth is reverting to the simpler ecosystems of its past.

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published *On Death and Dying*, the precepts of which have laid a groundwork on which to evaluate and move beyond the debilitating effects of grief. Commonly called the five stages of grief, they are comprised

of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (acronym DABDA). Kübler-Ross cautioned that these stages do not represent all possible emotions available during grief, and that the stages may be experienced in any order, and some stages not at all. Recent critical publications have examined and refined or debunked the five stages, but it is helpful to refer to them in the evaluation of the actions and motives in *On the Beach.*

1. Denial

Whether overtly or subconsciously, most characters in *On the Beach* exhibit a denial that their death is forthcoming and inevitable. In many instances, characters speak of plans for the future: for example, Mary and Peter plan next year's garden and go so far as to purchase a decorative bench on which to sit and enjoy the flowers. Moira brings this instance up to Dwight, citing it as an inability to face facts.

> "Maybe they don't believe it. Maybe they think that they can take it all with them and have it where they're going to, some place. I wouldn't know." He paused. "The thing is, they just kind of like to plan a garden. Don't you go and spoil it for them, telling them they're crazy."
>
> "I wouldn't do that." She stood in silence for a minute. "None of us really believe it's ever going to happen—not to us," she said at last. "Everybody's crazy on that point, one way or another." (102)

2. Anger

Moira, the disillusioned drunk, who seems to fatalistically accept the idea of inevitable death, is also the character who expresses the most anger at the situation: "Why should we have to die because other countries nine or ten thousand miles away

from us wanted to have a war? It's so bloody unfair" (36). Her anger stems in part from the thwarting of her desires to better herself, to travel, to become cultured.

> There was a pause, and then she said angrily, "It's not that I'm afraid of dying, Dwight. We've all got to do that some time. It's all the things I'm going to have to miss ..." She turned to him in the starlight. "I'm never going to get outside Australia. All my life I've wanted to see the Rue de Rivoli. I suppose it's the romantic name. It's silly, because I suppose it's just a street like any other street. But that's what I've wanted, and I'm never going to see it. Because there isn't any Paris now, or London, or New York." (36)

3. Bargaining

Because the point of view of the book's narrative makes us privy to the thoughts of only a few characters, it can be hard to judge whether others in the population are frantically bargaining in hopes of buying time or avoiding death altogether. Peter is the main character who comes closest to passing through the bargaining phase. After he and Mary begin to show symptoms, Peter goes to town to secure a decorative bench for the garden and begins to feel better, almost normal. He seeks out Osborne to see if recovery is possible after all.

> "Look, John, Mary and I both started giving at both ends on Tuesday. She's pretty bad. But on Thursday, yesterday, I began picking up. I didn't tell her, but I'm feeling as fit as a flea now, and bloody hungry. I stopped at a café on the way up and had breakfast—bacon and fried eggs and all the trimmings, and I'm

> still hungry. I believe I'm getting well. Look—can that happen?" The scientist shook his head. "Not permanently. You can recover for a bit, but then you get it again." "How long is a bit?" "You might get ten days. Then you'll get it again. I don't think there's a second recovery...."
>
> "Look, John. I take it that I get a week or ten days' health, but there's no chance for me at all after that?" "Not a hope, old boy," the scientist said. "Nobody survives this thing. It makes a clean sweep." "Well, that's nice to know," said Peter. "No good hanging on to any illusions." (263-64).

After his hopeful bargaining against radiation sickness, Peter quickly shifts to acceptance.

4. Depression

While other characters in *On the Beach* express a general sadness about what might have been, it is the fiery Moira who vacillates from righteous anger into depression. It is she who seems to give in to a deeper despair than others. From the start of the book, her hard-partying persona seeks to hide a fatalism underneath. When chastised for her excessive drinking and late nights, she says, "'I can keep it up as long as I've got to, and that's not so long now. I mean, why waste time in sleeping?' She laughed, a little shrilly. 'Just doesn't make sense'" (23-24). When her late nights are brought up again a few pages later, she gives much the same response: "What's the use? What's the use of anything now?" (33)

Osborne, despite his scientific detachment regarding the mechanics of death, also feels a creeping desolation. In procuring and racing his Ferrari, he has experienced feelings that he cannot quantify by science.

> The car fulfilled a useful purpose in his life. His had been the life of a scientist, a man whose time was spent in theorising in an office or, at best, in a laboratory. Not for him had been the life of action. He was not very well accustomed to taking personal risks, to endangering his life, and his life had been the poorer for it. (144)

In sticking strictly to science and never leaving himself vulnerable to the gamut of feelings from joy to sorrow, he realizes that even though he may have contributed to society scientifically, he himself has never really lived.

5. Acceptance

For most of the book's characters, acceptance of death seems to come quickly and without much spiritual wrestling. Peter Schwenger in "Writing the Unthinkable" says, "The condition of postponement which underlies the whole novel is utilized by the characters not to achieve a new sense of meaning, but to canonize the old patterns. Death becomes a duty to be performed by the characters with no more and no less of a sense of ritual than has attended all the duties of their lives." (44). The characters in *On the Beach* come to no new or astute conclusions about the nature of life and death; their certain death does not imbue them with otherworldly perspective on death and the possibility of an afterlife. Although the characters' deaths are unusual (state-assisted suicide, radiation poisoning, etc.), the rituals performed are as old as the world.

By the end of the book, as the inevitable death cloud begins to wreak its insidious havoc, people become almost relaxed about their deaths. Gallows humor abounds. Osborne, in procuring the death pills from his pharmacy, jokes with the girl at the counter. He says, "'I like mine chocolate coated.' 'So do I,' she said. 'But I don't think they make them like that. I'm going to take mine with an ice-cream soda'" (258).

Perhaps it is Moira's father, a cattle farmer, who best explains the easy acceptance of their coming death:

> We've all got to die one day, some sooner and some later. The trouble always has been that you're never ready, because you don't know when it's coming. Well, now we do know, and there's nothing to be done about it. I kind of like that. I kind of like the thought that I'll be fit and well up till the end of August and then—home. I'd rather have it that way than go on as a sick man from when I'm seventy to when I'm ninety. (119)

A "Good Death": State-Sponsored Death Pills and Dying with Dignity

One of the most common worries expressed by the doomed population in *On the Beach* is the fear of a death that is messy and painful. Many of the characters reference a desire to die "with dignity," avoiding the inherent filth and discomfort of dying from radiation poisoning. To this end, the government issues a gratis supply of euthanasia pills and injections, so that residents may make the decision to end their lives while they are still physically able (i.e., not disabled by the effects of radiation poisoning) and on their own terms. By the end of the book's narrative, with many people already suffering

radiation effects, the main thrust of conversation is who ends their lives, and where, and how.

Although there will be no one left to see the states of their houses or bodies, people wish to leave things in order for their own peace of mind and reconciliation to death. This desire is not limited to the Australian continent; during the Scorpion's cruise to the Northern Hemisphere, "They learned nothing, save for the inference that when the end had come the people had died tidily. 'It's what animals do,' John Osborne said. 'Creep away into holes to die. They're probably all in bed'" (72). The observation is apt, in that one's bed is generally where one feels the safest and most comfortable, and those qualities would likely carry much weight when one makes the decision to discontinue living. The alien quality of making such a decision can be mitigated by surrounding oneself with familiar objects.

The rock music band Metallica, in a song from their 2003 *St. Anger* album, incorporates an Eastern philosophy called *samsara*, which references the repeating cycle of life and death. The band distills this into a lyric in the song "Frantic": "My lifestyle determines my deathstyle" (azlyrics.com). Each character in *On the Beach* chooses when and where to end their lives, in styles consistent with their lives and values. Peter, Mary, and daughter Jennifer go together in the familial comfort of their home. Dwight Towers, following the military rulebook to the end, commands his submarine to international waters and founders her, going down with the ship and its crew. John Osborne, after winning the Grand Prix motor race, lovingly dismantles and stores the Ferrari's parts and hunkers down into its wheel-less chassis. And Moira, in her own classic fashion, goes down with a bottle in her hand.

Radiation Sickness: Bowing to the Inevitable?

The driving force of *On the Beach*'s narrative is the inevitable death of all human beings due to a blanket of radioactive fallout from a combination of cobalt, fusion, and hydrogen bombs exploded in the Northern Hemisphere during the book's nebulous, off-stage war. The effects of radiation cause an insidious, uncomfortable death: depending on length of exposure and type of radioactive element, symptoms include hair loss, leukemia, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting, and eventual failure of the organic system (Pandey 618).

Although terrifying, scientific studies have shown that death by radiation poisoning is actually rare, and that Shute's "drifting radiation" scenario is invalid. A scant three years after the publication of *On the Beach*, an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* dissects Shute's science of "technically false assumptions" (Alsop 10). The first assumption that Shute makes is that humans cannot be protected from radioactivity. Alsop posits that even a modicum of preparation, including a basic shelter and supply of food, would be sufficient to sustain life until radiation levels fall. Jonathan Fielding, Los Angeles County Health Director, agrees. "Shelter in place. That's the single biggest message. That's the best way to save lives and prevent radiation-related illnesses. It runs counter to your basic instinct to get away and reunite with family members" (Sternberg 13a). Thus the world's population could easily survive Shute's purported apocalypse simply by remaining in their homes for the short period it would take for radiation to become survivable.

This correlates with Shute's second false assumption: "that radioactive fallout remains lethal indefinitely" (Alsop 10). In fact, most radioactive particles decay quickly,

and as *On the Beach* is set a year after the nuclear war, truly damaging fallout would have been limited. Studies as current as 2010 confirm this. An article in *USA Today* describes Operation Golden Phoenix, a preparedness exercise executed in Los Angeles. Even a significant detonation in a heavily populated urban area is highly survivable. Health physicist Brooke Buddemeier of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory says, "The greatest danger passes in six to 24 hours as fallout's radioactivity dwindles...You can't outrun a fallout cloud, and fatalities from fallout are 100% preventable" (Sternberg 13a). Again, patience and even a modicum of preparedness win the day.

The survivability of nuclear radiation is exemplified by real world events, including the meltdown at Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant in March 2011. Ed Hiserodt, writing in *The New American* only two months after the event, notes, "Fear of radiation is a learned behavior. Moreover, it's not something we learn from personal experience or observation. We have no way to sense it and must be told by others that we are in danger" (11). A study cited in the article implies that media involvement overemphasizes the danger without understanding the science.

Professor Bernard Cohen of the University of Pittsburgh looked at the *New York Times* Information Bank, which allows access to numerous publications, and found over the period 1974 to 1978 that there were about 120 stories per year on automobile accidents that killed some 200,000 people. "But there were 200 stories per year on radiation that killed no one" (Hiserodt 11).

Even the World Health Organization has noted only a "slightly higher risk of developing certain cancers" in the worst affected areas of Fukushima (Nebehay, Reuters).

Conclusion

Despite what has recently been proved as the "bad science" on which Shute based his book, it remains an authentic portrait of a community coming to terms with inescapable death. The fates and actions of the characters interest us as readers because we recognize ourselves in them. With his post-apocalyptic fable, Nevil Shute has opened our minds to our own acceptance of eventual death, prompting us to ask ourselves, "What would I do if…?"

Chapter Four:

Survival Ideologies in Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959)

Alas, Babylon by Pat Frank became one of the first novels to take the prospect of nuclear apocalypse out of the speculative realm and into the plausible. The novel was able to transcend earlier science fiction apocalyptic epics because, at the time it was written, nuclear holocaust was no longer hypothetical: it was a factual and terrifying prospect. Scientists had designed and detonated nuclear bombs, including those that ended World War II in 1945, and the United States was teetering on the brink of various conflicts in which there was a possibility of nuclear deployment within its own borders.

The general population was beginning to understand the consequences of a nuclear war. "In this new era ordinary citizens as well as military planners and politicians could, for the first time, contemplate the destruction of the entire human race as a plausible, short-term scenario for humanity" (Schwartz 406). Such understanding led to a variety of reactions on the home front, from the ineffective (duck and cover drills wherein students crouched under their desks for protection) to some that would still be safe and appropriate even in a more modern society (well-constructed bomb shelters stocked with provisions). Frank incorporates this "new era" into his narrative, exploring the war-conditioned attitude of the younger generation:

> Helen said, "You see, all their lives, ever since they've known anything, they've lived under the shadow of war— atomic war. For them the abnormal has become normal. All their lives they have heard nothing else, and they expect it." "They're conditioned,"

> Randy said. "A child of the nineteenth century would quickly go mad with fear, I think, in the world of today." (85)

Such conditioning of this second generation under nuclear threat is perhaps one of the factors that led to the gradual cessation of mutual suspicion between the United States and other countries with nuclear capabilities.

After the bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American nuclear concerns turned toward the Soviet Union, which was actively pursuing nuclear and space capabilities at a slightly faster rate than the United States, exemplifying the concept of brinkmanship: pushing a conflict to the very brink of war without engaging in it ("Brinkmanship," oed.com). The problem with the brinkmanship doctrine was that a dance so close to the line of war could very easily, with any mistake or misunderstanding between the parties, cross into an actual war, whether intended or not. The Russian nuclear strike featured in *Alas, Babylon* begins with just such a misunderstanding: an errant rocket from an inexperienced fighter pilot destroys a tactically valuable port city on the Mediterranean, which the Russians take to be a deliberate attack requiring swift and terrible retaliation.

The Russian nuclear strike which cripples America in the book is a calculated strike that lands missiles in a time-on-target manner, in which the missiles are fired to land on all targets at the same time, destroying all major cities and tactical air bases at once to disrupt government and increase casualties. The book's setting of Fort Repose, Florida, is a small town girded by large cities and bases: Orlando, Tampa (MacDill AFB), Miami, Homestead AFB, St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, Tallahassee—all destroyed and burning with nuclear fallout. Only a strong east wind and the fact that test base Patrick,

directly to the west of Fort Repose, was not hit saves the town from the danger of nuclear fallout.

In the case of *Alas, Babylon*, the Russians are able to take advantage of the "missile gap," described in the book as the brief period in which America lags behind the Soviet Union in missile and space capabilities. Another well-known post-apocalyptic author, David Brin, says in his foreword to the book that the missile gap "was more figment than reality, based partly on an inflated notion of Soviet competence and eagerness for war—a mistake that was easy enough to make at a time when secrecy exacerbated every nightmare" (ix). Such evaluation is easy to make in looking back at the era, but the missile gap would have been well understood and feared by the contemporaries of the '50s and '60s.

Setting the Stage: The People of *Alas, Babylon*

Nominally, *Alas, Babylon* is the story of Randy Bragg, descendant of a distinguished and wealthy family who helped found the town of Fort Repose, Florida. The book's third-person, limited omniscient point of view is based largely on Randy's experience and thoughts, which appear to be a reliable source of information, as opposed to unreliable narrators such as *The Great Gatsby*'s Nick Caraway. A Korean War veteran-turned-lawyer, he endures a disastrous failure in a run at local politics and turns embittered and lazy, relying on his citrus crop for income, dating the local Minorcan trash, and generally bringing shame down on the Bragg name (in the view of the townspeople).

Randy's older brother Mark, in contrast, is a rising star in the Air Force Strategic Air Command (SAC) in Omaha with a wife, Helen, and two children: daughter Peyton

and son Ben Franklin. Although the brothers favor each other in looks, "it was apparent Mark was the older, harder, and probably wiser man" (29).

The Bragg family estate lies along the Timucuan River in central Florida, and their neighbors are a black family named the Henrys. The patriarch, called Preacher (after his profession), farms his four acres with mule and plow, eschewing modern technology. His sons, Two-Tone and Malachai, work the citrus groves and do odd jobs for Randy. Two-Tone's wife Missouri cleans for several local families, and their son Caleb helps around the farm.

Further up the river lives retired Navy Rear Admiral Sam Hazzard, a former aircraft carrier commander whose hobby of following military news and listening to shortwave radio makes him an indispensable part of the community after the nuclear attack comes.

Florence Wechek and Alice Cooksey are both single, working women: Florence is the Western Union operator and Alice the town librarian. Before the war, Florence's profession is the most viable: in the absence of widespread telephone usage and decades away from the instant contact of the internet, telegrams were the quickest and most reliable way to send messages. Alice struggles to update and expand the library to lure local children away from the mindless programming of television but is hamstrung by local politics and lack of funding. After the war, however, the relevance of their roles is inverted: with communication lines from all major cities disrupted, there are no more telegrams to be sent or received, whereas Alice's library holds vital information for instructing children, provides information on radiation and nuclear fallout, and educates residents about identifying edible plants when the local stores are cleaned out of food.

The McGoverns are transplants from Cleveland who build a mansion on the Timucuan. Bill McGovern endures forced retirement from the machining company he founded, his wife Lavinia is a delicate hypochondriac, and his daughter Lib dates Randy, much to her parents' disapproval.

Fort Repose's doctor, Dan Gunn, is trained in epidemiology but stymied from his calling by support payments to his dissolute ex-wife. A sort of circuit-riding doctor, he makes house calls and treats snowbird residents of the Riverside Inn. A good friend of Randy, his knowledge becomes indispensable after war begins.

Dating the Story Line

Alas, Babylon was published in 1959, which means that Frank wrote it at least a year before that. However, the date of the story itself is never specified in the text. Some sources cite it as occurring in 1959, others in 1960. Either date would mean that Frank was writing the book in a somewhat speculative fashion, imposing the values and fears of his own time onto a story occurring in the future, though only by a few years.

There are a few clues in the text that help to establish a general time frame, if not a specific year. On the second page of the book, timid Florence Wechek hears on the television news that Sputnik 23 has been launched. which occurred in November 1962 ("Mars 1," Mihos). Randy Bragg has fought and returned from the Korean War, which began in 1950 and ran through 1953 ("Korean War," www.history.com). Frank also references similar threats of Cold War conflict: "He had heard it all before, in almost the same words, back in '57 and '58" (22). In this case, the hostilities abounded between Russia, Syria, Israel, and other Middle Eastern countries, as well as threats to American bases overseas.

After the nuclear strike, the acting president is Josephine Vanbruuker-Brown, a fictional entity but one who symbolizes the emerging yet junior status of women in government positions: "Some of you may have guessed how it happens that I, the head of the most junior of government departments and a woman, have been forced to assume the duties and responsibilities of Chief Executive on this, the most terrible day in our history," she says in her address to the nation following the strikes (127). It is likely that Vanbruuker-Brown is based on Oveta Culp Hobby, who became the first woman to serve as the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (the Cabinet position that Vanbruuker-Brown holds in *Alas, Babylon*). Hobby served under President Dwight D. Eisenhower in this capacity from April 1953 to July 1955, having risen through the ranks of the Women's Army Corps ("Oveta Culp Hobby," Rice University Library).

Another potentially accurate dating event would be the launch of the Russian Sputnik, referenced in *Alas, Babylon* as number 23. In reality, the first Sputnik was launched in October 1957 ("Sputnik," www.nasa.gov). As *Alas, Babylon* was published in 1959, only two years into the Sputnik program and a single year from the United States' launch of its own satellite, Explorer I ("Sputnik," www.nasa.gov), Frank most likely extrapolated the likelihood of Russia's continued use of the Sputnik program, and possibly used the number 23 to project how rapidly the Soviet space program was evolving.

Various other events logically follow the assumption of a November opening of the book: Randy references the Orlando traffic "less than three weeks before Christmas" (20); he speaks of his citrus crop proceeds coming at the first of the year (42); Mark Bragg's family flies to Florida, to the children's delight, as they "were getting out of

school a week early, and...spending Christmas vacation in Florida" (66), and Helen wears a winter coat and carries a fur cape, bespeaking the cold Omaha winter from which she has come; Randy notes the amount of heating oil in his tank and notes that the winter thus far has been mild (68); several references are made to the snowbirds who spend their winters in Florida; as the story passes into spring, the local churches plan an Easter ceremony in April.

Brin, in his foreword, notes, "At one level, then, *Alas, Babylon* is highly specific to an era of just a few years" (x). And that is perhaps the best way it should be read: as a representation of the social, racial, and military attitudes of an era, rather than as a precise history associated with a specific date span.

Racial Tensions in *Alas, Babylon*

Even with certain events tied to specific historical dates, it is likely that Frank meant the story to be read in the context of the general Cold War and racial attitudes of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In this era, not long before the Civil Rights movement began to evolve, racial divisions were still prominent in the South, less so in the North. Randy himself is progressive for a Southerner on the topic of race, having served in equal capacity with a black man in the Korean War and quietly espousing the integration of Southern schools: "The truth was that Randolph Bragg himself was torn by the problem, recognizing its dangers and complexities...He believed integration should start in Florida, but it must begin in the nursery schools and kindergartens and would take a generation" (8-9). The Bragg children's school in Omaha has been integrated for some time, and Peyton and Ben Franklin see the Henry children as playmates and equals. Randy muses on this when Caleb comes to the makeshift school that the town has

instituted: "When Caleb Henry arrived to attend classes with Peyton and Ben Franklin, Randy was a little surprised. He saw that Peyton and Ben expected it, and then he recalled that in Omaha—and indeed in two thirds of America's cities—white and Negro children had sat side by side for many years without fuss or trouble" (300). Randy himself sees the Henrys as equals, if not superior to him in many ways. Malachai reminds him of the black man he served with in Korea, and the two work side by side to ensure the survival of their community. Preacher Henry knows the best fishing spots on the river, as well as the almost-defunct arts of farming with mule and plow. Even Two-Tone, generally deemed lazy and worthless, shrewdly comes up with the idea of cultivating sugar cane and corn to make whiskey for trading.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the McGoverns, who refer to blacks as "dinges," "darkies," and "niggers." Their speech and attitudes make it obvious that they agree with a local real estate agent who laments that the presence of the "nigger" Henrys, whom Randy's forebears allowed to buy riverfront property, have supposedly lowered property values for all those along the river.

Another minority of note in Fort Repose is a community of Minorcans, "who spread inland from New Smyrna in the eighteenth century" (200). Of an obviously lower social and economic class than the white citizens of the town, the Minorcan community consists of "shanties and three-room bungalows of Pistolville" (8), a slang word for the bad side of town. Town banker Edgar Quisenberry laments Randy Bragg's denigration of his "old" family's good name and considers him as no better than the Minorcans: "People called the Braggs 'old family.' Well, so were the Minorcans old family—older, the descendants of Mediterranean islanders who had settled on the coast centuries ago. The

Minorcans were shiftless no-goods and the Braggs no better" (40). Randy's past includes a relationship with Rita Hernandez, considered part of the Minorcan "trash" that crowded the town. While the Minorcans do not encounter the discrimination that Fort Repose black citizens do (probably because, despite their origins, they are considered white), they are still looked down upon and avoided.

A "Fable of Survival": Pastoralism and Frontierism

Jeffrey L. Porter, writing in the *Journal of American Culture*, references *Alas, Babylon*, along with other nuclear age books and films, as a "fable of survival." He posits that the struggles in *Alas, Babylon* do not truly reflect a set of survival ideologies but instead seek to reassure readers that middle-class amenities can be maintained even in a nuclear crisis. "What concerns Randy Bragg's community the most...is not the terrifying loss of life or demise of culture but the disappearance of such middle-class durables as gasoline, whisky, steak, honey, salt, first aid, and razor blades" (42). Porter attributes this to what he deems the "pragmatic" approach to apocalypse (as opposed to the fatalistic view, such as that taken in Shute's *On the Beach*) (42). This pragmatic approach implies a hope that there will be a future, and a reason to survive and work toward it.

Porter notes that Frank comes close to glamorizing his post-apocalyptic world, implying that responding to the crisis improves the strength of character and moral fiber of Fort Repose's inhabitants. He also advocates, through the action and characters of the story, the benefits of pastoralism, characterized by a return to nature, withdrawal from political and military interests, and belief that simplicity is virtuous (44).

While Frank's characters, on the surface, seem like they have been forced into this pastoralism, the book subtly interweaves a distrust of large cities as decadent blights

that people believe, either tacitly or subconsciously, should be destroyed. Martha Bartter notes in *Science Fiction Studies* that "cities represent the aspects of 'ourselves' that we dislike: emotionally unstable, subject to the influence of others, and forced to rely on a network of interdependent forces we can neither fully understand nor control" (Bartter 153). Preacher Henry, whose grim apocalyptic rantings inspire the code words "Alas, Babylon" for Mark and Randy Bragg, "made Babylon sound like Miami, and sometimes like Tampa, for he condemned not only fornication—he read the word right out of the Bible—but also horse racing and the dog tracks" (Frank 14). Following a news dispatch of rising tensions in the Mediterranean, the radio plays "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," which Randy characterizes as "tinny and in poor taste, but Miami's entertainment was usually in poor taste" (86). Though the town of Fort Repose is dependent on delivery of goods from larger cities, the town is removed from their excesses, unsullied by their decadence.

Alas, Babylon is also informed by a spirit of frontierism: that is, the longing to discover, to migrate, to leave behind the moribund and familiar for a new world. In the nuclear age, the last available frontier is space (a sobriquet that has become ingrained in popular culture due to its use in the *Star Trek* television series), yet space is inaccessible to all but an elite sliver of the population. The era of American expansion is over; there is no part of the country that has not been explored and introduced into the culture. Bartter notes:

> Unlike the pioneer, who sets out to create a community in the wilderness, the frontiersman sees the city as pure evil: it represents physical pollution of the landscape and moral pollution of its

> inhabitants...Our spiritual kinship with the frontiersman leads us to adopt his values, at least *in* part; like him, we treat the city with respectful dislike. (149)

People yearn for the experience and feeling of frontierism: the ability to impose culture and mores on a land free from the corrupting influence of established civilization; the facing of heretofore unknown thrills and dangers; the measuring of one's response to new experiences. Frank uses nuclear attack to remake America into a new frontier, a post-apocalyptic one, which will require all of the bravery and adaptation as the adaptation of frontiers past.

Survivalism Techniques in *Alas, Babylon*

The assurance of the survival of *Alas, Babylon*'s characters takes four ideological directions: back-to-the-land pastoralism, militaristic command and social structure, family/community group integrity, and deus ex machina elements.

Pastoralism: A Return to Simpler Times

Alas, Babylon, as with many post-apocalyptic works, utilizes the concept of pastoralism: a necessary return to simpler times, forgotten skills, and closeness to the land and its resources. The most evident example of this pastoralism is the actions of the Henrys, who still farm with mule and plow, raise chickens and hogs, and lack electricity. Randy observes Preacher Henry, the family patriarch, "hitching his mule, Balaam—the last mule in Timucuan County so far as anyone knew—to the disk. In this month Preacher harrowed for his yam and corn planting, while his wife, Hannah, picked and sold tomatoes and put up kumquat preserves" (12). The Henrys have an obvious practical connection to the land and have the skills to extract its resources. Their production helps

to feed the entire River Road community, and their ingenuity spawns the manufacture of moonshine, which is invaluable as a trade good and as "an excellent bug repellent, liniment, and preoperative skin antiseptic" (286).

It is the ingenuity and knowledge of the old ways of farming that essentially sustains the community. The only thing that Randy and the others are able to offer them in return is their assistance in their labors:

> Randy was conscious that the Henrys supplied more than their own share of food for the benefit of all. When Preacher's corn crop ripened in June, the disparity would be even greater. And it had been Two-Tone, of all people, who had suggested that they grow sugar cane and then had explored the river banks in the Henrys' leaky, flat-bottomed skiff until he had found wild cane. He had sprigged, planted, and cultivated it. Because of the Henrys, they could all look forward, one day, to a breakfast of corn bread, cane syrup, and bacon. (184)

The Henrys are not the only characters with a connection to the land, although theirs is the strongest and most integral to keeping the community fed. Randy and Sam Hazzard both possess citrus groves, which supply juice and fruit to help keep the community healthy: "Whatever else they might lack, there was always citrus. Yet even orange juice would eventually disappear. In late June or early July they would squeeze the last of the Valencias and use the last grapefruit. From then until the new crop of early oranges ripened in October, citrus would be absent from their diet" (183). Almost all of the River Road residents are proficient at fishing in the Timucuan, turning a once-

pleasant diversion into a vital source of food: "Fishing was not only recreation but the necessary daily harvest of a crop providentially swimming at their feet" (224). The message board in Fort Repose offers an array of specialty jigs and lures for trade, causing Randy to note that "Sports fishing no longer existed. There were only meat fishermen now" (192). The setting's fertile area, established crops, and other natural resources such as river fish, deer, and armadillo play some of the largest roles in sustaining the community more comfortably and successfully than their peers in other areas.

Militarism and Martial Law

It is not surprising, in the time period in which *Alas, Babylon* is set, that there is a marked militaristic presence. Several of the characters served in the Korean War, including Randy and Malachai Henry, who worked as an Air Force Reserve mechanic, honing his skills in machine knowledge that would prove integral after the war. Neighbor Sam Hazzard served as a Rear Admiral in the Navy, retired after uncomfortable disagreements with his colleagues about the value of submarines versus aircraft carriers. Mark Bragg, on his way to becoming a general in the Air Force, shares his military intelligence with Randy to prepare him for the upcoming war. "Even Bragg's relation to his fiancée is warlike. Randy observes to himself: 'She was like a fine sword, slender and flexible, but steel: a woman of courage'" (Porter 46, quoting Frank 155). Symbolically, even the names of major characters have a militaristic tone (Hazzard, Gunn), and Randy's family is descended from the Navy lieutenant who founded Fort Repose.

The entire book has a militaristic base: countries at war with each other; armed forces attacking and retaliating; and the institution of martial law within the existing civilizations of the U.S. The institution of martial law has great implications for the town

of Fort Repose. Randy has to pull his gun to recruit volunteers to carry a neighbor's radioactive body and belongings to the cemetery. He is later able to justify his actions within the bounds of martial law. He builds on this action in response to highwaymen beating and robbing Dr. Gunn: "I'm going to try to form a provisional company...A company under martial law. So far as I know I'm the only active Army Reserve officer in town so I guess it's up to me" (254).

The company is formed, at first informally with the River Road men to track down the highwaymen and execute them legally, and then officially with other men from the town:

> ORDER NO. I— TOWN OF FORT REPOSE
>
> 1. In accordance with the proclamation of Mrs. Josephine Vanbruuker-Brown, Acting President of the United States, and the declaration of Martial Law, I am assuming command of the Town of Fort Repose and its environs.
>
> 2. All Army, Navy, and Air Force reservists and all members of the National Guard, together with any others with military experience who will volunteer, will meet at the bandstand at 1200 hours, Wednesday, 20 April. I propose to form a composite company to protect this town. (256)

On the day that the surviving highwayman is officially executed, Randy accepts recruits to join his martial company, informally known as "Bragg's Troop," and including a few military men or cadets who had been in Fort Repose during the nuclear blast. The troop becomes both a deterrent force against crime and a force to help rebuild the town.

The Family Unit

Although not all of them are related by blood, the River Road community that bands together function as a family unit. Frank references it as the "tiny community bound together by the water pipes leading from the artesian well" (169). The concept of the family unit as integral to survival plays on the very basic desire for the family to survive, or at least leave a legacy or future generation in death. According to Porter, the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) invoked "the oldest American tradition—that every man will protect his family" (45). He continues: "This appeal to the hearth, which often found its way into televised ads of idyllic families at play in private bomb shelters, was calculated to strike home since the prospect of maintaining the basic structure of national life was seen by most as an inalienable right" (45). This line of thinking evolved into the type of family-community seen in *Alas, Babylon*, where "the 'nucleation' of the American family meant the dispersal of the home and the reorganization of society under military strictures" (Porter 45), exactly as it occurs in the novel.

The survival of the family unit is evident especially in the characters of Mark Bragg's family. Mark admonishes his wife Helen that "your job is to survive because if you don't the children won't survive. That is your job. There is no other" (66). Mark also philosophizes, "When a man dies, and his children die with him, then he is dead entirely, leaving nothing to show" (16). Helen's determination to keep her children alive and safe is expressed both in her conscious actions, like feeding and overseeing the children and household, and subconsciously by jealously trying to safeguard Randy and his resources against the addition of Bill and Lib McGovern, two more mouths to feed. Dan Gunn

explains Helen's unenthusiastic reaction to the McGoverns' move to the Bragg house: "Helen is a fiercely protective woman— protective of her children. With Mark gone, you and the house are her security and the children's security. She doesn't want to share you and your protection. Matter of self-preservation, not infatuation" (168). Helen extends the protection of her children with her marriage to Dr. Gunn, which she only acquiesces to after discovering with absolute certainty that Mark is dead.

With each person in the River Road family-community playing his or her part—the doctor, the librarian, the military specialist, the farmer—the whole group is able to survive and, indeed, thrive.

Survival Via Deus Ex Machina

Much of the survival of Fort Repose's inhabitants in *Alas, Babylon* hinges not upon the skills and fortitude of its characters, but on inherent plot machinations that Frank institutes. To some degree, this is true of any novel or story: the author sets the stage and determines what obstacles or advantages the characters may come across. Porter notes, "Frank sets nothing in the path of his heroes to suggest this fantasy [idealized survival] cannot be lived out" (46). The entire book is based upon various deus ex machina circumstances that essentially ensure the survival of it characters.

Perhaps the most fundamental lucky circumstance ensuring the survival of Fort Repose is its location. Despite being ringed with air force bases, the one facility that would have ensured that deadly fallout carried is on the prevailing east wind is not bombed, as it is only a test base. Mark Bragg, on discussing the dangers of nuclear war, admits that "With fallout and radiation, it'll be luck—the size of configuration of the weapons, altitude of the fireball, direction of the wind" (17). Frank stresses again and

again the lucky nature of Fort Repose's location: "They had been extraordinarily fortunate in Fort Repose. The wind had favored them. They had received only a residue of fallout from Tampa and Orlando, and none at all from Miami and Jacksonville. Even a reasonably clean weapon on Patrick would have rained radioactive particles on Fort Repose, but the enemy had not bothered to hit Patrick" (163-64). With the danger of fallout conveniently mitigated, the community can move onto other issues of survival.

Water, one of the foundations necessary for all life, is also saved from contamination in the same way that the town is saved: by luck. The river remains clean and full of healthy fish. Frank never explains how the Timucuan could remain unpolluted when its headwaters existed in a place where fallout was heavy, but the lack of explanation is another instance of the unlikely salvation of the town. In addition to clean river water, the River Road community just happens to have a pipe network of artesian water in its various groves. Malachai Henry, in another instance that proves how valuable the Henry family is to the community's survival, says, "We've got one thing hardly anybody else has got...Water. Running water. Artesian water that can't be contaminated" (50). Randy, in privileged disdain, discounts the water, saying he'd never get used to the taste. However, the water proves invaluable for flushing toilets, bathing, and cooking, once it is piped into the homes on River Road (aided by the ever-present, ever-handy Malachai).

Even a seemingly insignificant item such as salt is generously provided by Frank. Although the bioavailability of salt within a regular diet is generally plenty to sustain the body's needs, in the book salt is also used for saline solutions, brushing teeth, and tanning leather (287). The lack of salt prompts Randy to reflect, "Now he understood the craving

of animals for salt, understood why a cougar and a deer would share the same salt lick in the enforced truce of salt starvation" (289). In a happy coincidence, Dr. Gunn remembers reading in the diary of Randy's ancestor about a beach of pure white salt up the Timucuan River. A day's sail brings them to the spot, and they return with all the salt they need, in addition to succulent blue crabs that live in the simulated ocean environment.

And finally there are the characters themselves. Conveniently, the River Road community boasts a doctor, a farming family, several people with knowledge of engineering and mechanics, and a Navy man with a functioning short-wave radio. Dr. Gunn is able to deliver babies, inoculate against typhoid, and perform surgery after hypnotizing his patients. His skills help to keep the River Road community safe and healthy, including removing an inflamed appendix from Ben Franklin Bragg. The Henrys have already been discussed at length, but it is not an overestimation to say that without their various skills, the community would have struggled much more. Preacher Henry knows the skills of farming the land without modern equipment and possesses the mule-power to do so. Two-Tone, despite being characterized as drunk and lazy, cultivates sugar cane and helps to make moonshine for trading. Malachai has mechanical expertise that he uses to help pipe artesian water to the River Road houses and figure out how to use car parts to distill moonshine. Rear Admiral San Hazzard finesses the tuning of his short-wave radio in order to bring news broadcasts and word of the war. Had any of these characters or skills been absent, *Alas, Babylon* might be a very different survival tale, and likely a darker one.

Conclusion

While the hardships portrayed in *Alas, Babylon* are mitigated somewhat by the contrivances in the plot, the theme that runs through the book is one of hope and faith. Hope and faith transcend disaster and death. Randy reflects, on seeing a notice for a post-bomb church service, "If Man retained faith in God, he might also retain faith in Man. He remembered words which for four months he had not heard, read, or uttered, the most beautiful words in the language—faith and hope" (193). The desire and struggle for survival hinges on the belief that there is something worth surviving for, and in *Alas, Babylon*, that belief is the hope in the future of humanity.

Chapter Five: Survival Ideologies in *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2006)

Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* was published to critical acclaim in 2006. The lyrical density of its prose, its spare but compelling description of a post-apocalyptic world, and its ambiguous ending both enchanted and repelled critics and readers. Something in the book touches a chord that resonates strongly with its audience, something which polarizes readers into camps of "I loved it" or "I hated it."

Perhaps the book's power stems from its visceral depiction of the bond between a father and son, and the lengths to which a parent will go to protect a child, even in the most hellish conditions imaginable. There is no narrative detachment from the characters: they are viewed not from a dispassionate distance but up close and personal—most of the book consists of direct dialogue between the father and son, with limited description or observation that does not come directly from the characters. Readers, especially parents, identify with the father's struggle to protect his son at all costs.

The book was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2007, and a movie version was released in 2009. The book has rocketed into various lists proclaiming it as one of "The 100 Best Reads from 1983-2008" (*Entertainment Weekly*) and onto Oprah Winfrey's influential reading list, which gave the novel wide exposure to readers possibly unfamiliar with McCarthy's work.

McCarthy: South and Southwest

Readers of McCarthy's previous works tend to be a dedicated breed, as his prose has been compared to that of William Faulkner, dense with ideas and divergences. A long-established writer before *The Road* garnered such widespread acclaim, he is best

known for his novels of the West, most notably the Border trilogy: *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), and *Cities of the Plain* (1998). His other well-known Western novels include the standalone works *Blood Meridian* (1985) and *No Country for Old Men* (2005). All these works were informed by McCarthy's life in the West, first in El Paso, Texas and then in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he resides today. However, his earliest novels trace their roots further East: for almost forty years he lived in Tennessee (both during his childhood and as an adult), and his first writing reflects the landscape and attitudes of the South.

His given name, at his birth in 1933, was Charles; he eventually had it legally changed to Cormac, after an Irish king. While his family lived in Tennessee, McCarthy spent a year at the University of Tennessee (1951-52), then served in the Air Force for four years. He returned to the university from 1957 to 1959, and published two short stories in the student magazine, also winning the Ingram-Merrill Award for creative writing in both 1959 and 1960 ("Biography," www.cormacmccarthy.com).

McCarthy continued to garner fellowships and awards for his writing: a travelling fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which he used in 1965 to visit Ireland; a 1966 Rockefeller Foundation Grant; a Guggenheim Fellowship for Creative Writing in 1969; and a MacArthur Fellowship "genius grant" in 1981 (Brosi 11). McCarthy immerses himself in the culture and history of the places he lived. His Tennessee, Texas, and New Mexico stints each produced literature that reflected the nature and philosophies of those places. Although he currently lives in New Mexico, *The Road* circles back to his Tennessee roots, albeit only vaguely: the book never specifies any location, only devastated cities, mountain passes, and a sea coast.

The Road: Where Does It Lead and Who Follows It?

The Road, on the surface, seems like a straightforward, even uncomplicated, story of a father and son's survival of an apocalyptic event and their struggle to reach safety. There is no hearty band of survivors working together to establish a new reality as in *Alas, Babylon*, nor a somber group of friends facing their own deaths as in *On the Beach*. *The Road* is post-apocalypticism writ small, focusing not on big-picture ideas such as rebuilding and reestablishing the world, but on merely surviving every step, every day.

The main characters are never named, but are identified as father and son, and referred to this way, as well as by "man" and "boy." Other characters elicit similarly spare identification, the word "man" qualified with the descriptor "old" or "armed." There is only one character name given in the book, and the man who gives it admits freely that it is a false name. The man and boy are following "the road" (a single symbolic representation of the multiple roads they physically tread) south to outrace the coming winter, headed to the coast in hopes that the weather will be milder.

The Unnamed Disaster

The story's post-apocalyptic setting is an interesting one. The disaster that has laid waste to the United States is never named; the man describes it as "a long shear of light and then a series of low concussions… A dull rose glow in the windowglass" (54). There is much to suggest some kind of nuclear blast and its ensuing chaos: increasingly harsh winters in formerly temperate areas, swirls of ash and dust in the air, firestorms that leave pavement buckled and forests decimated. Earlier drafts of McCarthy's manuscript give more specific credence to the possibility of a nuclear attack; hand-written and typed manuscript notes mention Muslim terrorism, conflicts over fossil fuel dependence, and

Islamic fundamentalism (Witliff Collection, Box 87 Folder 5). He does not overtly describe a nuclear attack associated with any of these factors, but the political ramifications of these associations would certainly not rule out the possibility of a nuclear attack. However, these items did not appear in the finished book, leaving the origination and type of disaster ambiguous and open to interpretation. Possibly McCarthy did not want to tie to book's disaster to any particular political ideology which could polarize or discourage readers.

Some critics have argued that the disaster event could have been a massive meteor strike, which would certainly disrupt the world climatically and could also account for the condition of the land: aside from a few people and a dog, all other wildlife has perished. There are no birds in the sky or fish in the streams, and it appears that no vegetation is regenerating. Certainly the weather indicates a dramatic climate change: smoke and ashes obscure the sun to the point that it has become but a memory (the boy asks his father, if he were a crow would he be able to fly high enough to see the sun? "That would be really neat" [168]). With the lack of sunlight, radiant heating and photosynthesis both grind to a halt, rendering the world cold and sterile. Despite the passing of at least eight years, ashes continue to rain from the sky and clog up the air, implying that the entire atmosphere has been saturated with contamination. Whether nuclear or earthly, fire has also played a role in decimating the landscape. At times and in places fires have raged so fiercely and quickly that people on the road could not reach safety (if, indeed, there were any to be reached) and have been burned and trapped in the melted asphalt:

> Figures half mired in the blacktop, clutching themselves, mouths howling...

> They were trying to get away werent they Papa?
>
> Yes. They were.
>
> Why didnt they leave the road?
>
> They couldnt. Everything was on fire.
>
> They picked their way among the mummied figures. The black skin stretched upon the bones and their faces split and shrunken on their skulls. Like victims of some ghastly envacuuming. Passing them in silence down that silent corridor through the drifting ash where they struggled forever in the road's cold coagulate. (203-04)

The father and son encounter such a fire themselves, although they are following at a distance and do not get swept up in the flames. The road becomes hot and sticky, requiring them to halt their journey for a few hours. The snowfall they encounter is just as deadly, falling much more quickly and further to the south than it should.

Human reaction to the disaster event seems to be mixed. In some areas, there is evidence of mass evacuation: "Along the interstate in the distance long lines of charred and rusting cars. The raw rims of the wheels sitting in a stiff gray sludge of melted rubber, in blackened rings of wire. The incinerate corpses shrunk to the size of a child and propped on the bare springs of the seats" (292). Yet the roads the man and boy travel are only occasionally marked by abandoned vehicles. If people were fleeing desperately, one would expect any avenue to be a solid stream of cars. Possibly this inconsistency results from McCarthy's edits, which removed some of the more specific details regarding the disaster and its aftermath.

McCarthy's earlier edits clarify what he has left unclear in the book's final form. In notes made on various pages of earlier drafts, he sketches a picture of the first years after the disaster. The loss of humanity and the insularity of traveling the road did not occur right away, but waxed as food supplies dwindled, and cannibalism appeared frighteningly early. Cults and communes sprung up almost immediately. These are mentioned briefly in the final text, but, again, explicated in earlier versions, in which McCarthy mentions mass suicides of cult members and the oppressive nature of the communes, which force people with relevant skills, like doctors, into their confines to work as slaves (Witliff Collection, Box 87 Folder 3). In the final version, the morality of the communes remains shrouded in mystery, but they are apparently well-fortified—"If it's a commune they'll have barricades," the father warns as they approach a plume of cooking fire smoke (82)—and adhere to a strict code of conduct that, when breached, results in casting out and maiming the right hand as a warning to others. The thief on the coast who tries to steal their provisions is marked as an "outcast from one of the communes and the fingers of his right hand had been cut away" (273). These incidents correspond with the idea that the communes may offer safety, but at the price of obedience and service, voluntary or forced.

The land and its inhabitants are not regenerating. "By the end of probably the fifth year there were no animals anywhere," an earlier draft notes (Witliff Collection, Box 87 Folder 3). During this time, traffic on the road has peaked and begun to trail off, as people presumably succumb to disease, human predation, and starvation. McCarthy describes the road travelers as "bent upon deranged journeys to imaginary destinations" and "bound each for the land of the other's abandoning" (Witliff Collection, Box 87

Folder 3). These poignant phrases bring to mind the aimless, fruitless flutter of caged birds. The father recognizes this in his single-minded push for the coast; he never voices any hope or belief that life there will be any improvement on what they have now, except perhaps warmer. Glenna Andrade, in a paper presented to the Popular Culture Association Conference in spring 2009, says,

> One final clue to the impossibility of human survival beyond one or two generations is based upon the bleak and hostile destruction of the immediate environment that seems to preclude vegetation from recovering. Of course, the novel does not hint at pockets of survivors in other parts of the world, so one must generally deduce that these are the last "good" humans. Such a negative ending would be confirmed by the author's unwillingness to name his characters, neither the hunter and wife who rescue the orphan in the second to last paragraph, nor the father and son on their Everyman journey. (9)

The ideas of "south" and "coast," imbued with the Old World implications of warmth and relaxation, are what push him to keep moving. He knows that he is likely only prolonging the inevitable: death, of himself or the boy or both.

Doomsday Preparation

There are indications that a disaster of this magnitude was expected by some. The old man they meet in the road, who calls himself Ely (incidentally, the only character in the book given a name), says:

> I knew this was coming.

> You knew it was coming?
>
> Yeah. This or something like it. I always believed in it.
>
> Did you try to get ready for it?
>
> No. What would you do?
>
> I dont know.
>
> People were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didnt believe in that. Tomorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there.
>
> I guess not.
>
> Even if you knew what to do you wouldnt know what to do. You wouldnt know if you wanted to do it or not. (179)

Another sign of preparation for disaster is a concealed and self-reliant bunker that has been buried in the ground behind a house. It has been stocked lavishly by someone who knows what to expect from a catastrophe, with enough provisions to last quite a while. However, the old man and the unknown bunker owners may have been less prophetic than they first appear; throughout recorded history people have been predicting and preparing, physically and spiritually, for the end of the world, and it hasn't happened yet. An earlier draft has the father musing, "that which you are able to prepare yourself to face will in no way fall within the province of your control when it arrives. The preparation must be sufficient to itself" (Witliff Collection, Box 87 Folder 3, page headed "city, early dead"). This sentiment agrees with the enigmatic Ely's assessment that there is really no way to prepare for the end of the world: people either run around expecting

and planning for it every moment, or they don't try to plan at all because it will be ultimately futile.

What makes *The Road* a startling outlier in the post-apocalyptic genre is its timeline. Most post-apocalyptic books deal with human reaction to the immediate aftermath of disaster and extrapolate the future from there. When *The Road* opens, the apocalypse is already eight to ten years in the past. Thus, the changes in the climate and population are entrenched. The outlook is bleak, but even bleaker is the thought that things may have been even worse just after the apocalypse—that what we see in *The Road* represents improvement.

An indication that the situation remains dire, even eight years later, is given in a comment from the boy's mother, just before the man and boy set out for the south: "Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont face it" (58). The specificity of her fears--raping, killing, and cannibalism—suggests not just representations of random lawlessness but of specific instances that she knows have happened around them, and are still continuing.

When reading *The Road*, one must remember that this blighted world has existed already for years. There have been no congenial gatherings, no attempts to restore civilization. There is no haven, no safe place, and the people, both good and evil, drift aimlessly from place to place.

McCarthy does indicate subtly that some groups have formed in the years since the event: the man specifies several groups in the text—evangelical groups, communes, mercenary gangs, "bloodcults," marauders, and "roadagents." The lines between these

affiliations can blur easily: religious fervor transmutes to a cult of death; marauders, mercenaries, and roadagents all function mercilessly to keep themselves alive and kill anyone who gets in their way or might hold anything of value.

In the end, as the father explains to his son, there are only two types of people: the good guys and the bad guys.

The Road's Geography: Going South

The spare and refined nature of *The Road*'s prose leaves little room for the traditional nuts and bolts of setting the scene. There are only subtle textual clues that lead the reader to understand where, geographically, the book takes place. The direction of travel belabored by the father is "south." This insistence on southward travel makes more sense when the father reveals that they must travel south to escape the cold: "They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here" (2). More clarifying elements emerge: they are heading to a coast, and they must make it through a mountain gap:

> Late in the year. He hardly knew the month. He thought they had enough food to get through the mountains but there was no way to tell. The pass at the watershed was five thousand feet and it was going to be very cold. He said that everything depended on reaching the coast, yet waking in the night he knew that all of this was empty and no substance to it. There was a good chance they would die in the mountains and that would be that. (29)

These clues, though, are still vague enough that the book could take place in any state with a seacoast and a modicum of mountainous regions.

McCarthy tantalizes his readers, giving and taking back. The one concrete detail he gives us on which to pin the geography is "[a] log barn in a field with an advertisement in faded ten-foot letters across the roofslope. See Rock City" (20). Rock City is a tourist attraction featuring mountain trails and waterfalls, located in Lookout Mountain, Georgia and proximate to Chattanooga, Tennessee. These rustic painted advertisements are common across north Alabama, north Georgia, and southeast Tennessee, the areas closest to the attraction. The fact that the pair have been traveling steadily south indicates that their journey began somewhere north of Chattanooga, possibly as far north as Kentucky. The book mentions early on that they had already crossed a "high gap" (12), which could be the Cumberland Gap leading from Kentucky to Tennessee. The 5,000-foot mountain gap they must traverse is speculated by Wesley Morgan to be the Newfound Gap in the Smoky Mountain Range (Morgan 4). There is more circumstantial evidence that the pair is working its way through Tennessee toward the Atlantic coast. The man and boy "passed through the ruins of a resort town and took the road south" (29). This town is likely Pigeon Forge or Gatlinburg, both destination resorts in the foothills of Tennessee's Smoky Mountains.

Once they cross the mountain gap, their route takes them through one of three states: Georgia, South Carolina, or North Carolina. The exact route is irrelevant, although interesting to speculate upon. Scenic overlooks, waterfalls, and parking areas abound in each state's piedmont area, and the man's discovery of "a rich southern wood that once held may-apple and pipsissewa. Ginseng" (40) and morel mushrooms does not narrow down the options, as these plants would be common across all three states. The father and son encounter many plantation-style houses along their journey south, houses where

"chattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays" (112). As they approach the coast, they shelter in one of these grand homes that has survived looting by its situation out of view of the road. They dine on preserved fruits and vegetables, eating from fine china and silver.

They reach the coast, and again there are few identifiers to specify their location. It is almost certainly the Atlantic coast, with many small towns strung along it, "the mudstained shapes of flooded cities burned to the waterline" (279). The abandoned sailboat they find rolling in the swells bears a Spanish name and flag, but foreign pleasure ships could likely pull into any port along the coast, not specifically limited to large commercial ports. They begin to follow the road again, continuing to head south toward warmer climes. Another resort town crops up: "The following day they passed through the boarded ruins of a seaside resort and took the road inland through a pine wood, the long straight blacktop drifted in pineneedles, the wind in the dark trees" (290). Savannah and Charleston are likely candidates for this reference. The pair turn inland for a while, loop back to the coast briefly, and then head back inland for what appears to be the foreseeable future (which, in the father's case, is not very long).

Survival Ideologies in *The Road*

Since at its heart *The Road* is a chronicle of a father's overwhelming love for his son, many of the survival modalities take the form of the man's sacrifices (of food, shelter, and other resources) to ensure the survival of his son. However, there are other, less savory, means by which others in the book have survived, and these must be explored as well.

Self-Denial: Rationing and Restraint

Parents often proclaim that they would do anything for their children, even die for them, and this prodigious love is put to the test in the grimmest possible way in *The Road*. The father and son are beset by hardship throughout their journey south, not just in lack of food, but in sporadic shelter, inadequate clothing, untreatable illness, and the threat of dangerous groups roaming the landscape. Perhaps in no other contemporary work is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of need so starkly expressed. The man and boy rarely reach higher than the base level of physiological needs for food, rest, and shelter.

In the eight years after the unnamed disaster, food is available only by scavenging through houses and stores for canned goods. Fishing or hunting is not a possibility, as the rivers and ponds are polluted and the wildlife has died out. Farmland is similarly despoiled; no crops grow, and any that were standing have long since been eaten. Scavenging for canned goods in an already ransacked landscape yields, by its nature, unpredictable and unreliable results. McCarthy describes everything the pair eats, evoking the importance of food to their survival, even when the flavors and combination of the foods would almost certainly be repellant to readers. On the first page, with the mention of corn cakes and syrup, it might seem that the situation is not as dire as the father paints it. However, the father stresses that his worry about securing adequate food is always with him, to the point that he dreams of food: "Lying there in the dark with the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard fading in his mouth" (17). Finding food is the prime directive on the road: without it, they cannot continue their journey and will die like so many others.

The father's self-denial of sustenance gradually becomes clearer as their food supplies wane. The first time this occurs is in regards to a non-essential and uncanny treat, but it sets the tone for his attitude toward food for the rest of the book. In a ransacked store, a single can of Coke has escaped notice in the bowels of a drink dispenser. The boy has no concept of what the soft drink is, but it surely evokes powerful memories for the man, memories of the past when there was enough to eat and drink, yet he intends the whole can for the boy, only taking a sip at his insistence:

> What is it, Papa?
>
> It's a treat. For you.
>
> What is it?
>
> Here. Sit down.
>
> He slipped the boy's knapsack straps loose and set the pack on the floor behind him and he put his thumbnail under the aluminum clip on the top of the can and opened it. He leaned his nose to the slight fizz coming from the can and then handed it to the boy. Go ahead, he said.
>
> The boy took the can. It's bubbly, he said.
>
> Go ahead.
>
> He looked at his father and then tilted the can and drank. He sat there thinking about it. It's really good, he said.
>
> Yes. It is.
>
> You have some, Papa. I want you to drink it. You have some.

> He took the can and sipped it and handed it back. You drink it, he said. Let's just sit here. (22-23)

There is a point/counterpoint balance that plays out in almost all scenes related to food. The father denies himself, but the boy insists that he eat. For the father, it is a fine balance between eating enough to survive to protect the boy and making sure that the boy has enough to eat to survive. It is a zero-sum equation that will never balance to his satisfaction. Andrade notes, "He is in the most horrible situation of trying to educate his son about the best of the old world and the worst of the new, of deciding whether to kill his son mercifully to prevent a worse death, and of providing for safety, food, and shelter along their journey" (4). He swears his life to protect the boy, even to killing him if it becomes necessary to spare him from death at the hands of others, but to continue to live and protect the boy, he must take food from his son's mouth. His reluctance to do so is repeatedly pointed out and worried over by the boy:

> He poured the hot water back into the pan and took the boy's cup and poured some of the cocoa into his own and then handed it back.
>
> I have to watch you all the time, the boy said.
>
> I know.
>
> If you break little promises you'll break big ones. That's what you said.
>
> I know. But I wont. (34-35)

The father's denial of his own needs is not limited to food. He uses the best means at their disposal to ensure that the boy is as warm as possible and protected from the

elements. This includes wrapping the boy in tarps and blankets and cutting shoes from heavy plastic. In every house they scavenge, the father looks not just for food but for blankets, clothing, shoes, or tarps. "He went through the closets. He stripped back the beds and came away with two good woolen blankets and went back down the stairs" (21). It also includes positioning the boy for the greatest warmth and protection when they camp, tending the fire and watching while he sleeps. The man is determined to get them both to the coast alive, even while he suspects that there will be no more resources there than in the place they flee.

Before the man and boy set out on their journey south, another character practices a form of self-denial: the boy's mother/man's wife kills herself. She certainly has her own reasons for wishing to die: she makes a steely-eyed evaluation of the state of the world and her likelihood of survival and decides to exert control over her own death to protect herself from the atrocities that are daily increasing:

> We're survivors he told her across the flame of the lamp.
>
> Survivors? She said.
>
> Yes.
>
> What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors.
>
> We're the walking dead in a horror film. (55)

She has hardened herself against any reasons to stay alive. The man and boy no longer mean anything to her: she will give her life now, rather than lose it in what she sees as a doomed expedition into the outside world. Her resolve has struck many, especially those readers who are mothers themselves, as cowardly: how could a woman who had birthed a child do that to herself, to him? Tim Blackmore, in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology &*

Society, explains, "Where the boy's arrival saves the father and provides him with ongoing reasons to live, the same birth costs the mother her conviction that there is any merit or justice in human life" (22). Her death releases the man and boy from any ties to their home and frees them from the dragging weight of her hopelessness:

> She was gone and the coldness of it was her final gift. She would do it with a flake of obsidian. He'd taught her himself. Sharper than steel. The edge an atom thick. And she was right. There was no argument. The hundred nights they'd sat up debating the pros and cons of self destruction with the earnestness of philosophers chained to a madhouse wall. (58)

McCarthy has made a telling change in the wording here. In earlier drafts, the sentence reads, "The hundred nights they'd sat up arguing the pros and cons of self destruction with the earnestness of philosophers chained to a madhouse wall" (Witliff Collection, Box 87 Folder 1). The word "arguing" suggests that they are on different sides of the issue; the final wording, "debating," implies that each sees both sides of the issue, uninfluenced by issues of morality or emotion. In the end, the man understands her choice, perhaps recognizing that his odyssey south is just a more protracted version of suicide, fraught with the terrors that she no longer has to fear.

Self-Discipline: Knowing When to Say When

Harder, perhaps, than denying oneself food and comfort to preserve the life of another is knowing when to abandon a shelter or safe area that seems a refuge. There are two particular instances in *The Road* where the man and boy find a safe, sheltered place with plenty of food and water, yet they leave them to continue south. Even before they

reach these two oases later in the book, the man is mindful of areas on the road that might attract other people:

> We cant stay, he said. It's getting colder every day. And the waterfall is an attraction. It was for us and it will be for others and we dont know who they will be and we cant hear them coming. It's not safe.
>
> We could stay one more day.
>
> It's not safe.
>
> Well maybe we could find some other place on the river. (42-43)

Twice in their journey, the father and son encounter what appear to be safe and providential shelters. After encountering a house stocked with a larder of living human meat for the resident cannibals, the father forces himself to approach another house along the road, knowing that if it, too, harbors cannibals, or even regular people primed to shoot on sight, they will surely die. The house is deserted, and at first the man makes for the toolshed, where he scavenges a can of old gasoline and some small tools. By this time the father reckons that he is closer to death than ever: "How many days to death? Ten? Not so many more than that" (133). Starvation and his unspecified respiratory illness have weakened him physically. It is this weakness that is perhaps his salvation, as he is forced to stop and catch his breath halfway across the yard headed back to the house. It is here that he notices the ground beneath his feet seems to feel different. With a spade from the shed, he digs out a wooden door set with a padlock, eerily reminiscent of the cellar door where the cannibals kept their human fodder, except this door holds the key to their continued survival.

The bunker is everything a starving man could dream of: extensive stores of food, tools, bedding and clothing, heat and water. The man sums it up best when he says wonderingly, "I found everything. Everything" (139), which echoes Howard Carter, upon his discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb, when asked if he could see anything: "Yes: wonderful things!" (Reeves 141). The pair's time in the bunker is lavishly described by McCarthy for almost twenty pages, highlighting its discovery as a turning point in their journey, the possibility of survival. However, even in what seems to be the richest and safest haven in the world, the father recognizes that they cannot stay more than the few days it will take to thoroughly dry out, rest, and fortify themselves with good food. This realization must be wrenching, but the father is well versed in self-discipline and does not allow himself to sink into the delusion that they would be safe here forever. The boy must sense this as well:

> How long can we stay here, Papa?
>
> Not long.
>
> How long is that?
>
> I don't know. Maybe one more day. Two.
>
> Because it's dangerous.
>
> Yes. (148)

They stay in this "tiny paradise" (150) for several days, then, well-provisioned, set out again on the road. It is the abundance of food they are able to carry away that allows the father to accede to the boy's pleas to give food to the man, Ely, whom they find on the road soon after.

Closer to the coast, again at a point when the father is perhaps days away from death, they find a second oasis. "Long before they reached the coast their stores were all but gone," McCarthy narrates (181), forcing the father to scavenge more furiously in the ravaged land. Again they find a house set well off the road, a fading antebellum beauty. The lifesaving gifts of this house are not as immediately apparent as those in the bunker; the father does find home-canned food in the pantry that has not been disturbed, and they build a fire in the fireplace. They could have interpreted the opulence of the house—chandeliers, silver, china—as mocking their joyless plight, but they take it as a refuge and as an antiquated link to a world gone by. They stay there for four days (211), refreshing themselves with food and rest and hygiene as they did in the bunker, then continue their inexorable trek to the coast. By this time the father acknowledges to himself that the coast is unlikely to be their salvation. "He knew that he was placing hopes where he'd no reason to. He hoped it would be brighter where for all he knew the world grew darker daily" (213). While the two safe and stocked houses have salutary effects on the man and boy, they cannot stay and enjoy the safety and comfort for a longer time. The boy questions why they must leave what seems like such a perfect place; the man recognizes that no place is entirely safe, that they must take what they can and move on.

Cannibalism: The Food That Dare Not Speak Its Name

The mother's fears that the remaining people of the world will resort to cannibalism comes to pass as early as a year after the disaster. Francisco Collado-Rodriguez writes, "The few characters in the book sharply fit into one of two groups: the roadrats, who eat any living matter they can find, including other people, and the non-

cannibals such as this new version of the man and his son" (61). One of McCarthy's earlier drafts explains:

> Even before they abandoned their house and set out afoot in the world they could hear screaming at night and there were places where people were hung in the woods or impaled on blackened pickets...then within a year or even less there were no more bodies but only middens of bones and severed heads where the condemned had been eaten. (Witliff Collection, Box 87 Folder 3, approximately p. 41)

There are three memorable and harrowing descriptions of cannibalism along the road. The practice is not unexpected by the man: "The world soon to be largely populated by men who would eat your children in front of your eyes" (192).

Early on, a truck convoy passes a point where the boy and man hide. A single man from the caravan stumbles upon the pair while going to the woods to relieve himself. When he threatens the boy, the father shoots him. Man and boy hurry away from the place where the body lay, but after the convoy has safely passed, the father returns to see if he can scavenge the man's clothes and some belongings that they were forced to leave behind as they fled. "Coming back he found the bones and the skin piled together with rocks over them. A pool of guts. He pushed at the bones with the toe of his shoe. They looked to have been boiled. No pieces of clothing" (73-74). This is evidence that the outlaw agents roaming the road have no loyalty even to one of their own, taking the body for food.

Further along the road, the man and boy approach a house. Inside, the man finds an abundance of clothing and supplies, indicating that people are living out of this shelter, although there is no one there at the moment. Knowing it is risky to stay long, lest the people return, he breaks the lock on a cellar door, hoping to find food supplies. He does indeed find supplies, of the most grisly and heart-rending sort:

> He started down the rough wooden steps. He ducked his head and then flicked the lighter and swung the flame out over the darkness like an offering. Coldness and damp. An ungodly stench. The boy clutched at his coat. He could see part of a stone wall. Clay floor. An old mattress darkly stained. He crouched and stepped down again and held out the light. Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous.
>
> Jesus, he whispered.
>
> Then one by one they turned and blinked in the pitiful light. Help us, they whispered. Please help us. (116)

The man and boy desperately flee from the house and hide as best they can without attracting attention. Later they hear the sounds of people being butchered: "In the night he heard hideous shrieks coming from the house and he tried to put his hands over the boy's ears and after a while the screaming stopped" (121). Again, the man and boy move

on as cautiously as they can to avoid attracting any of the cannibals who may be on watch.

Perhaps the most outrageous and heartbreaking incident they discover is after they spy a small group on the road. The man and boy hang back until the group passes on, but in the woods they scavenge for any abandoned belongings and come across the remains of their meal:

> They walked into the little clearing, the boy clutching his hand. They'd taken everything with them except whatever black thing was skewered over the coals. He was standing there checking the perimeter when the boy turned and buried his face against him. He looked quickly to see what had happened. What is it? he said. What is it? The boy shook his head. Oh Papa, he said. He turned and looked again. What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit. (211-12)

It is telling that the two incidents of the man and boy finding shelter and food in the bunker and the manor house come after two discoveries of cannibalism. This highlights that although the man will go to great lengths to keep the boy safe, he never considers stooping to cannibalism, not even when they are starving. He would kill himself and the boy first.

Remembrance of Things Past

The only other protection that the man has against the unremitting darkness of the road is in the remembrance of the old world, which he passes on to the boy in disparate episodes of storytelling. These stories serve to link the father to the world before the

apocalypse, providing examples of people who were good at heart. The boy absorbs the stories as though they are made up, since he has no memory beyond the shattered world in which they live now. However, he keeps the stories in his memory, and may use them to see hope in the world after his father's death. Collado-Rodriguez analyzes thus: "The boy's refusal to forget the memories he has of his father suggest [sic] that storytelling still has a chance at the end of the book and that the boy may eventually start to mythologize about his father and, by doing so, work through his own trauma and set the bases for collective recovery" (67).

One of the first memories the father recalls is of fishing with his uncle. "This was the perfect day of his childhood. This the day to shape the days upon" (12). He dreams of and remembers outings with his wife. On the road, when they encounter a dam above a river, the man has memories of actually having visited this place before, watching a hawk dive. Another familiar place along the way is the house in which he grew up, which he insists they stop and explore. The boy, having little experience of the typical home life before the disaster, and having never met his grandparents, has no desire to see the house or hear the man's memories.

Other memories of the woman, his family, and life before the disaster help to buoy the man's spirits and enable him to keep trekking along the road, hoping against hope that he can recreate that kind of life for the boy.

Conclusion

Since the book's publication, critics have argued as to whether the story is redemptive or irredeemably bleak. The man's death at the end seems to mock his incredible sacrifices to keep his son safe, yet the boy is adopted into a small group of

survivors who seem to follow the same tenets that the father instilled into the boy and will, presumably, keep him safe along the road. McCarthy leaves the ultimate interpretation open to the reader, and the ending we choose to believe says as much about ourselves as it does about the book

Chapter Six: Survival Ideologies in *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)

In 2008 *The Hunger Games*, the first book in a trilogy by Suzanne Collins, burst onto the market, securing readership both in the young adult and adult sectors. The post-apocalyptic tale describes a dystopian future in which the former United States is divided into districts conquered and controlled by a decadent Capitol. To remind the districts of their failed rebellion and to repress any thoughts of rising again against the Capitol, an annual tournament is held. Two young adults from each district are chosen by lot to fight to the death in an arena controlled by the Capitol. The event is broadcast throughout the districts, and those in the Capitol view it as the biggest entertainment of the year, supporting their favorite tributes and making bets on the outcome.

This modern dystopian tale inspired controversy for its plot of children pitted against each other in a fight to the death. Arguments have been made both in favor of exposing children to the book—as a way to introduce discussions about the ramifications of war, the existence of child soldiers in Africa and the Middle East, and issues of race and class—and against reading the book, mainly due to its violent premise, similar to the question of whether violent video games predispose or inure children to violence in the real world.

Suzanne Collins: Experienced Young Adult Writer

Suzanne Collins is no stranger to writing for teen audiences. She began her career as a television writer working on such shows as the Emmy-nominated *Clarissa Explains it All* and *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*. She also penned storylines for shows aimed at younger viewers: *Clifford's Puppy Days* and *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!*. *The Hunger Games* trilogy is not her first foray in the field of young adult fiction. Inspired by Lewis

Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, her five-book series *The Underland Chronicles* (2003-2006) became a *New York Times* bestseller ("Biography," www.suzannecollinsbooks.com).

Collins continued her hot streak with the Hunger Games trilogy, the first book of which, eponymously titled, was published in 2008. This series too spent time on the *New York Times* bestseller list, as well as garnering acclaim from a host of other media outlets, including *USA Today* and *Publishers Weekly*. In 2010, *Time* magazine chose Collins as one of its 100 most influential people. The book and its trilogy companions *Catching Fire* (2009) and *Mockingjay* (2010) have sold more than 36.5 million copies domestically ("Shelf Life," Lee) and are in print in 56 territories and 56 languages ("Biography," www.suzannecollinsbooks.com).

As of this writing, the first two books have been released as popular motion pictures, *The Hunger Games* in 2012, grossing $692 billion worldwide, and *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* in 2013, which grossed $865 billion ("The Hunger Games" and "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire," www.boxofficemojo.com).

The Ruined World of *The Hunger Games*

The Hunger Games blends the post-apocalyptic (the splintering of North America after a rebellion and war), and the dystopian. Gorman Beauchamp, writing about dystopian literature, calls it "a genre that projects an imaginary society that differs from the author's own, first, by being significantly worse in important respects and, second, by being worse because it attempts to rectify some utopian ideal" (Beauchamp 11). Such is the case in *The Hunger Games*.

Collins has based her fictional world, Panem, on the United States, which has been divided into districts under the supervision of a tyrannical and decadent Capitol. The book references a failed uprising of the existing districts against the Capitol, implying that some event has already fractured the country into districts and has pitted them against each other. Districts are kept strictly separated by armed forces, deadly electric fences, and wide buffer zones, lest they should communicate and try to rise again as one. As a yearly reminder/punishment for the rebellion, two "tributes" (in the poorer and more remote districts, these are forced volunteers chosen by lot; in the richer districts closer to the Capitol, it is considered an honor to fight in the Games, and candidates train intensely) from each district are brought to the Capitol to fight to the death. The winner brings a year of wealth and prosperity to his or her home district, while the deaths of the others reinforce the fear and despair the districts feel and discourage them from fighting against the Capitol. The Games are nothing but entertainment for the carefree, decadent people of the Capitol, who take pleasure in wagering on the performance of the tributes and sponsoring their favorites.

Although the book's setting does not pin the district locations specifically to existing geographic locations in the United States, there are clues in the text that allow interpretation. Amber Simmons, writing in *The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, has compiled a table showing the likely location of each district, using references from the trilogy (note: some of the descriptions of the districts are based on information from the latter two books of the series).

District	District Attributes
The Capitol	The Capitol is in the Rocky Mountains. The inhabitants of the Capitol are frivolous, shallow, and gluttonous. They are concerned with luxuries and outrageous fashions and are generally ignorant and/or uncaring of the poverty and starvation in the districts.
District 1	District 1 provides the Capitol with items such as diamonds, gems, and fine materials. This district illegally trains children, known as "careers," to participate in the games. It is thought to be near the Rocky Mountains.
District 2	District 2 provides the Capitol with many of their "Peacekeepers," and it is the source of the Capitol's weapons. Because of the Capitol's dependency, this district is favored and often given preferential treatment, which also suggests that it may border the Capitol. "Career" tributes are also trained in this district.
District 3	District 3 tributes are skilled in electronics and other elements of engineering because their industry involves technology. Wiress and Beetee, allies of Katniss in *Catching Fire*, provide a means for the tributes to destroy the arena's force field. It is assumed that District 3 is close to Silicon Valley.

District 4 Tributes from District 4 are strong swimmers and skilled with knots. That is because they are the fishing district. Finnick Odair, another ally from the Quarter Quell [a version of the Games that pits former victors against each other], comes from this district, which possibly lies near the Gulf of Mexico.

District 5 District 5's industry is power. It is unclear where this district is located. Foxface, a clever girl who dies accidentally by stealing Peeta's poisonous berries, is from this district.

District 6 District 6 provides transportation, suggesting that it is near Detroit. The two tributes from this district are "morphling" addicts, an indication that it may also produce pharmaceuticals.

District 7 District 7 produces lumber and paper. Johanna, another ally from *Catching Fire*, is dangerous with an axe and reveals that the smell of pine needles reminds her of home. These clues imply that District 7 is near Oregon and Washington.

District 8 Because the two District 8 runaways in *Catching Fire* are traveling on foot, it can be surmised that it is close to District Twelve. The district's industry is textiles and clothing.

District 9 District 9's industry is grain, which suggests that it is in the Midwest. Little else is known of this district because its tributes die early in the games.

District 10 Because the tributes from this district are dressed in cowboy costumes during the games and the tributes for the Quarter Quell wear cowbells, it is assumed that the industry is livestock. This leads one to believe that the district is close to Texas.

District 11 Rue, Katniss's young ally during the games, comes from this poor district. The industry is agriculture, and small children are forced into the highest trees to pick fruit. District 11 is thought to be in the South because growing fruit requires a warm climate [although, depending on the fruit grown, it could be tied to other regions, such as California, the Pacific Northwest, or the Atlantic Seaboard]. Because of Katniss's tenderness toward Rue, District 11 sends her a loaf of bread during the games.

District 12 Katniss and Peeta are from District Twelve, the poorest district in Panem. The industry is coal mining. Katniss illegally hunts game in the forest to feed her family, but others die of starvation. Katniss reveals that District Twelve was once called Appalachia.

> District 13 District 13 is secretly rebuilding and represents a threat to the Capitol because its industry is nuclear energy. The underground community is militant in its efficiency and is governed by President Coin. District 13 is a week away from District Twelve by foot, so it is assumed that it is close to New England. (27)

Collins's use of existing American geography to generally identify the district locations is reminiscent of McCarthy's subtle use of place in *The Road*, giving the reader a general idea of where the districts are located and how they align without destroying the narrative with unnecessary geographical detail.

The name of the new country, Panem, is an interesting play on words. The Greek word "pan" in its combining form means "all encompassing" or "across." Panem is the country that has been brought together from the ruins of North America, encompassing the old states and ruling across the land. The word, in a somewhat different etymology (from Latin down to Anglo-Norman and Middle French ["Pan-," www.oed.com]), means "bread." We see examples of this today in the words for bread in French (*pain*) and Spanish (*pan*). In *The Hunger Games*, Collins neatly ties this reference to bread into part of the selection, or "reaping," of tributes for the Games. Panem must also be viewed as a reference to ancient Roman times:

> The phrase Panem et Circenses, which literally translates as "bread and circuses," was a phrase coined by Juvenal to describe a political strategy of the Roman Empire that evolved over time—free bread and entertainment paid for by the state. In order to keep

> the people content (and not interested in their government or rising up against it), they needed to be fed (bread) and to be entertained (circuses). Caesar was famous for the organization of fighting gladiators which helped him win the favor of the Roman masses. In Panem, there is just enough bread for survival and the Hunger Games provide the entertainment as well as a reminder of who holds complete power in the land. (Skinner and McCord 110)

Life in District Twelve: The Road to the Games

The book opens in District Twelve, a poor district known mainly for its coal mining industry. Katniss Everdeen, sixteen years old, is slipping out of bed to hunt illicitly to help feed her family. Her father is dead, killed in a mine explosion, her mother is sunk into despair, and her twelve-year-old sister Primrose (Prim) is too young to contribute much, although she does tend a goat that provides milk and cheese for the family and for trading. Katniss's friend Gale has also figured out how to hunt covertly, and the pair joins forces to gather as much meat and plant food for their families as possible, with some left over for trading at the local black market or with other families.

> Starvation's not an uncommon fate in District Twelve. Who hasn't seen the victims? Older people who can't work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines. Straggling through the streets. And one day, you come upon them sitting motionless against a wall or lying in the Meadow, you hear the wails from a house, and the Peacekeepers are called in to retrieve the body. Starvation is never the cause of death officially.

> It's always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia. But that fools no one. (28)

This day is no ordinary day. It is the day of the annual "reaping," the choosing of two "tributes" (male and female, from twelve to eighteen years old) to compete in the annual Hunger Games. The Games sprung from a rebellion of districts in what used to be North America; the rebellion was quelled by the superior power of the Capitol, and to remind the districts of their defeat and discourage future uprisings, two tributes are chosen by lot (or volunteer) each year to battle to the death in a great arena near the Capitol for the amusement of the people there and to remind the districts that their lives are in the Capitol's hands.

In the poorer districts, far from the Capitol and toiling to provide for its needs, eligible tributes could receive extra grain and oil rations (tesserae) by agreeing to enter their names multiple times in the contest, providing food for their families at the increased risk of being selected for the Games. Both Gale and Katniss are forced to accept tesserae, and with it, the increased possibility of being called as tributes.

But, as random chance would have it, Katniss's sister Prim, with her name entered only once, is called as tribute. Katniss volunteers in her place, and her deadly journey to the Capitol and the Games commences. The male tribute called is Peeta Mellark, the son of the baker and thus one of the more well-fed, and to Katniss's mind, useless people in the district. However, she has a tie to him, as much as she may want to forget it. One day when she was scavenging in the trash of various businesses in a cold rain, trying to find food to take home, Peeta covertly gives her two burnt bread loaves meant to feed the pigs.

The pair travel to the decadent and luxurious Capitol, where they are bathed, buffed, polished, interviewed, trained, and finally placed in the arena for the Seventy-Fourth Hunger Games (implying that the rebellion was 74 years ago, or perhaps slightly more distant, depending on how long it took the Capitol the devise and organize the first Games). The tributes of District Twelve, always represented before in drab rags and dark colors befitting their coal-mining background, are reimagined by the stylists as a pair of exotic creatures born of flame. Katniss and Peeta, formerly the underdogs, are now the pair to watch in the Games, not only for their stylists' skillful presentation but also for their respective skills, which they demonstrated for the Gamesmakers in order to formulate their odds of survival for the Capitol's wagering.

Not only are the circumstances in the arena deadly, the shifting alliances and awakening emotions of Katniss and Peeta affect their judgment and decisions on how to survive. Before the games, Peeta declares his love for Katniss, and now that the Games have begun, she has to try to understand what that love can mean while locked in a battle to the death; she also must face the possibility that Peeta is pretending his unrequited love in order to gain favor and sponsorship from the Capitol viewers. Navigating teenage love is hard enough without having to worry that a potential lover is fabricating his or her desire strictly to manipulate and defeat.

The televised aspect and interactive nature of the Games also affects Katniss. The audience wants to see a star-crossed love story, a true love in an impossible place where one or both of them will die before the end. They must capitalize on the bright image of District Twelve that the stylists created and keep the flame burning by surviving as long as they can and banding together in their struggle to endure. Incredibly, Peeta and Katniss

are the only two tributes to survive to the end of the games; while ordinarily there may be only one victor, the Gamesmakers announce (probably in response to the popularity of their love story) that two winners may be declared, as long as they are from the same district. Since Katniss and Peeta are the only complete pair of tributes from the same district remaining, the announcement spurs their struggle to win to greater heights, and they succeed in enduring to the end.

However, seeking to heighten the drama by forcing Peeta and Katniss to turn on each other at the last moment, the Gamesmakers rescind their allowance of dual victors. Each offers to be the one to die, but Katniss comes up with a plan that will thwart the Gamesmakers and allow Katniss and Peeta to die in a way that keeps them true to themselves, rather than being manipulated by the Capitol. With a handful of the poison berries that Katniss secured during the Games, the pair prepare to swallow them in unison and die together. Their dramatic stunt earns the uproar of the watchers, demanding that both be declared winners. So Peeta and Katniss both survive the Games, but they have unwittingly set in motion a rebellion against the Capitol that will play out across the last two books in the trilogy.

Kids Killing Kids

Collins didn't set out to write a book that showed gratuitous violence by or toward children. She says that the influence on *The Hunger Games*, as well as her books for younger readers, was her father's service and return from Vietnam. She says, "My father was career military. He was a veteran, he was a doctor of political science, he taught at West Point and Air Command Staff and lectured at the War College. And when he got back from Vietnam, I was probably about six, and he, I think, felt it was his responsibility

to make sure that all his children had an understanding about war, about its cost, its consequences" (Grossman 2). The publishing of *The Hunger Games* has brought renewed interest to a Japanese novel, *Battle Royale* by Koushun Takami, published in 1999 and made into a film in 2000. *Battle Royale*'s plot is incredibly similar to that of *The Hunger Games*: in a futuristic East Asian totalitarian regime, students are forced to fight to the death in a televised battle, ostensibly as a study in military research but in reality as a way to divide the population and suppress rebellion (Yang, www.blogs.wsj.com).

The Hunger Games also has strong ties to the traditions and stories of the ancient world. Collins notes in a *Time* magazine interview:

> In terms of the initial impulse for the story, I was a Greek mythology fanatic as a child, so you'll definitely see elements of that, from Theseus and the minotaur and the oppression of Crete by Athens, the lottery and the calling of the youths and the maidens to be thrown into the labyrinth in Crete. Also Spartacus—when I was a child I was fascinated with the gladiator movies, so there was Spartacus and Demetrius and the Gladiators, but Spartacus is the top of the line, so that would have to be an influence. (Grossman 1)

Most obviously, it repurposes the idea of the gladiatorial games, pitting competitors against each other in fights to the death. This conceit is strengthened by the notion that certain districts do nothing but train their young people to fight and prevail in the games (these tributes are called "Careers"), much as gladiators were trained essentially as professional warriors. The dilettantes of the Capitol are like the elite upper class of Rome,

concerned only with pleasure and prurient enjoyment of the spectacle of human death playing out below them.

Survival Ideologies in *The Hunger Games*

The Basics: Hunting and Gathering

One of the tenets of Katniss's survival, both in her district and in the Games, is her basic knowledge of strategies for providing food for herself, her family, and her community. The book opens with her preparing to go out for the morning's (illegal) hunt. District Twelve has been enclosed in electrified mesh, but outside the barriers are woods and meadows full of edible plants and animals. Because it is one of the poorer districts, with a downtrodden populace and sparse resources, the fence's electricity rarely operates and strategic holes have been made to allow the enterprising a way to get out. Although leaving the fenced area and poaching are highly proscribed, the Peacekeepers (armed forces of the Capitol stationed in every district to keep order) turn a blind eye because they, too, benefit from this illegal hunting to augment their diets.

Because food is so scarce in the district and her mother and sister bring in few to no resources, Katniss is forced to breach the barrier and make for the woods in search of food. She is one of the lucky few in a position to do so successfully. Her father, a miner killed in an explosion, knew the art of crafting bows and arrows, and taught Katniss, also leaving her a well-made bow. He also taught her woodlore: what plants are safe to eat, how to hunt animals. Armed with knowledge and weapons, Katniss is able to augment her family's scant food resources. Although Katniss's mother is portrayed, through Katniss's eyes, as weak and ineffectual, she too has useful knowledge to pass on. She

works as a healer, a former apothecary, who knows the healing qualities of plants and how to apply them.

Katniss's friend Gale also hunts illegally to feed his brothers and sisters. The two join forces to snare and shoot meat, net fish, and gather edible and healing plants. They generally gather enough to augment their families' meals, with enough left over to trade in the Hob, the town's black market, as well as with other vendors. It is Gale who promises to help keep the Everdeen family fed while Katniss competes in the Hunger Games, with little chance of winning and returning to her family.

Katniss is determined that her family should stay fed during her absence without selling themselves to the system to accept measures of grain and oil.

> Prim is not to take any tesserae. They can get by, if they're careful, on selling Prim's goat milk and cheese and the small apothecary business my mother now runs for the people in the Seam. Gale will get her the herbs she doesn't grow herself, but she must be very careful to describe them because he's not as familiar with them as I am. He'll also bring them game—he and I made a pact about this a year or so ago—and will probably not ask for compensation, but they should thank him with some kind of trade, like milk or medicine. (34-35)

Prim's goat, like almost everything the Everdeen family has, is a result of Katniss's hunting and trading. When she and Gale manage to bring down a buck, they are able to do some trading at the Hob and Katniss lights on a small, injured goat from a herder. She buys the goat, and Prim and her mother heal the wound with their plant skills.

Katniss says, "Owning a nanny goat can change your life in District Twelve. The animals can live off almost anything, the Meadow's a perfect feeding place, and they can give four quarts of milk a day. To drink, to make into cheese, to sell. It's not even against the law" (271). The goat is a critical part of the Everdeens' diet and survival, as well as a producer of goods for trading.

Katniss's skills in hunting and gathering are vital to her survival in the Hunger Games. She knows the vital importance of finding water, what plants and animals are edible and how to harvest them, and some healing plant lore gleaned from her parents. Her comfort in the forested portion of the arena gives her some advantage over other tributes, who have been trained in combat but not necessarily in wilderness survival. However, there are some tributes, especially those from agricultural districts, with knowledge of plant lore different from Katniss's own, and she is able to learn from one of her allies to recognize plants in the arena that are unfamiliar to her, thus adding to her survival skills.

Alliances

The formation of alliances between the competitors in the early stages of the Games is de rigueur. Katniss observes, "So they're fighting in a pack. I'm not really surprised. Often alliances are formed in the early stages of the Games. The strong band together to hunt down the weak then, when the tension becomes too great, begin to turn on one another" (159). At the beginning, Peeta joins up with several of the Career tributes, ostensibly as an asset to hunt Katniss down, as they consider her one of the strongest threats to their mastery of the Games. However, Peeta is pulling a power play of his own, by directing them away from Katniss whenever possible. The Careers either

figure out his loyalty to Katniss or decide that he is no longer useful to them and injure him and leave him for dead.

Katniss makes an alliance of her own. The little girl, Rue, from District Eleven, caught Katniss's eye during the pre-Games training. Her small stature and quiet ways remind Katniss of her sister Prim, and she feels a proprietary need to help and protect her. Rue is hardly helpless, despite her small size: she can move in the treetops like a monkey, knows healing plants that Katniss does not, and devises a communication system via the mockingjays (mutant mockingbird crosses devised by the Capitol). Rue silently appears to help Katniss escape from the Career pack that has her treed by pointing out a tracker jacker nest (another mutant animal bred by the Capitol: a wasp with stings that precipitate delirium and necrosis); Katniss drops the nest on the pack below her and is able to escape, but not before being stung herself. When her delirium passes, she finds that Rue has stayed near her to make sure that Katniss recovers. Her decision is made instantly: "'You know, they're not the only ones who can form alliances,' I say. For a moment, no response. Then one of Rue's eyes edges around the trunk. 'You want me for an ally?'" (200). The two exchange healing potions for burns and stings and share their food, and talk about life in their respective districts. Katniss feels no apprehension that Rue might double-cross her:

> Rue has decided to trust me wholeheartedly. I know this because as soon as the anthem finishes she snuggles up against me and falls asleep. Nor do I have any misgivings about her, as I take no particular precautions. If she'd wanted me dead, all she would have had to do was disappear from that tree without pointing out the

> tracker jacker nest. Needling me, at the very back of my mind, is the obvious. Both of us can't win these Games. But since the odds are still against either of us surviving, I manage to ignore the thought. I realize, for the first time, how very lonely I've been in the arena...How comforting the presence of another human being can be. (208-09)

Rue's skills are a definite advantage, and they complement Katniss's. The pair plan a raid on the remaining pile of food and weapons cached by the Careers, and Rue teaches her a signal that the mockingjays can carry so the two can communicate. Working together, Rue distracts the Careers with signal fires while Katniss destroys the cache of food and weapons. However, Rue fails to rendezvous at their planned meeting point and when Katniss goes to find her, Rue has been caught in a net and killed. Katniss mourns and honors her body by covering it in flowers. For one of the first times since the Games began, Katniss begins to understand that she doesn't have to be a plaything of the Capitol: "I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I" (236-37). Her alliance with Rue saves Katniss unexpectedly near the end of the Games, when one of the tributes has her pinned down and is about to kill her. Thresh, Rue's fellow tribute from District Eleven, hears Katniss explain about how she took care of Rue and sat with her body. In honor of this, he allows Katniss to escape and turns to kill another menacing tribute.

Katniss's final alliance is with Peeta. Throughout the Games, she has been evaluating whether his declaration of love was a ruse or true. When she comes across him, injured and close to death, she cannot pass him by. As the pair hide in a cave, hoping for Peeta's wound to heal, Peeta explains more about how he has always loved her, and Katniss begins to respond, both emotionally and in order to manipulate the audience and hope for more sponsors. Internally, she is trying to determine honestly how she feels about him, but she escalates the romance angle in order to procure much-needed food and medicine. When the Gamesmakers announce a change in rules that will allow them both to survive, they head to the finals area, only to have the rules revert back to declaring only one winner. The Capitol expects high drama and excitement in watching the lovers they had so adored fight to the death. But Katniss and Peeta retain their sense of self and integrity and threaten to commit suicide together. They are united in their alliance to stay true to themselves and thwart the Capitol.

Playing the Part: Public Image and the Games

From her arrival in the Capitol and her meeting with her styling team, Katniss is groomed to play a part much different from her natural personality. Having suffered hunger and loss, she is naturally gruff, self-sufficient, and suspicious of any agenda but her own. Her team, which includes former District Twelve victor and notorious drunk Haymitch, are determined to present her to the Capitol in a way that will entice the watchers into rooting for her and sponsoring her with gifts to help her survive. Rather than pegging her as a weak competitor from a poor district, stylist Cinna transforms her into a creature of fire, breathtaking and eye-catching. In her first bid to impress the Gamesmakers, Katniss seeks to display her skills with bow and arrow, but the unfamiliar

feel of the provided bow makes her shot go awry, boring the Gamesmakers so that they ignore her despite the accuracy of her subsequent shots. Furious, she takes aim at a final target: the apple in the mouth of the roasted pig on the Gamesmakers' table. Her outrageous stunt, rather than ruining her odds, places her high in the standings of those likely to prevail in the Games.

While the tributes must have true skills to survive the Games, the publicity leading up to them is all hype. In televised interviews, Katniss has to continue her ruse of rustic girl from District Twelve. Her true character is submerged, and until she is in the arena, very little of the true Katniss is shown to the audience. Haymitch, despite his seeming incompetence and drunkenness, has the harshness needed to convince Katniss that she must play the role of her life:

> "Here's an idea. Try acting humble."
>
> "Humble," I echo.
>
> "That you can't believe a little girl from District Twelve has done this well. The whole thing's been more than you ever could have dreamed of. Talk about Cinna's clothes. How nice the people are. How the city amazes you. If you won't talk about yourself, at least compliment the audience. Just keep turning it back around, all right. Gush." (118)

During the training run-up before the Games, Katniss and Peeta work on their survival skills with a minimum of conversation about the looming potential of being killed. Katniss is disgusted by the false camaraderie she is forced to display: "It's such a joke! Peeta and I going along pretending to be friends! Talking up each other's strengths,

insisting the other take credit for their abilities. Because, in fact, at some point, we're going to have to knock it off and accept we're bitter adversaries" (92).

However disgusted Katniss is about being forced to play a role that conceals her true self, she seems unable to realize that she is sacrificing the integrity she has always prided herself on. In a conversation with Peeta before the night before the Games, he ponders:

> "I don't know how to say it exactly. Only . . . I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?" he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not."
>
> I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self. (141-42)

Already indoctrinated to squeeze every advantage she can out of the games, she replies, "No offense, but who cares, Peeta?" (142). Katniss does not realize it, but she has bargained away a piece of her true self in return for capricious and possibly non-existent advantages in a battle that she is statistically unlikely to win anyway. However, despite her acquiescence to the need to put on a show for the audience to secure sponsors and their favors, Katniss does retain a portion of her moral code. Rather than seeking out other tributes with the express intent of killing them to better her odds, she uses her survival skills to avoid them, letting them kill off each other while she flies under the radar. Her high skills ranking makes her the target of a pack of career tributes which

includes Peeta, presumably since he would be likely to know Katniss's strengths and an idea of the strategies she might use. The only two tributes that she kills during the games are a boy from District One who killed her gentle ally Rue, and Cato, a Career tribute, whom she kills from mercy as he is ravaged by savage mutated creatures introduced by the Gamesmakers.

Katniss is flummoxed by Peeta's heartfelt revelation in the pre-Games interview that he has been in love with Katniss since they were children. She has no way of knowing whether his feelings are real or if they are a ploy devised to endear himself to the audience. Haymitch provides no clarification:

> Haymitch grabs my shoulders and pins me against the wall. "Who cares? It's all a big show. It's all how you're perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you're a heartbreaker. Oh, oh, oh, how the boys back home fall longingly at your feet. Which do you think will get you more sponsors?" (135)

Now Katniss must contend not only with ingratiating herself with the audience and surviving the Games; she must assess Peeta's actions and her own conflicted feelings of what is real and what is not.

Conclusion

The Hunger Games poses very real survival issues for its characters, not only requiring skills such as hunting and gathering, but also psychological skills that allow (or force) the tributes to set aside their personal values and work together to facilitate the

killing of their competitors. The themes of personal integrity and emotional manipulation vie with each other for dominance, and by the end of the book it is not clear what path Peeta and Katniss will take to determine the validity of their feelings for each other and the future of District Twelve, themes that are explored in the final two books of the trilogy.

Conclusion

"Literature must invent multiple strategies for simultaneously confronting and deferring the possibility of its own, and humankind's, absolute and remainderless destruction."—Sara Dillon

The most current iteration of post-apocalyptic fiction is the apotheosis of an evolution that goes back for centuries. It has evolved from a religious concept with supernatural overtones, to a subset of the science fiction genre of literature, to a popular modern-day basis of entertainment (in the form of movies and novels) and a general catchphrase for the collapse of any type of establishment: social, political, or religious.

The original Greek version of the word "apocalypse" does not mean a "disaster"; rather, it means to "unveil" or "reveal." In its earliest incarnation, the word was generally used to indicate a revelation from God, such as the visions of the end of the corporeal world and the birth of the new Jerusalem seen by John in the Biblical book of Revelation. Brian Scalise, writing in *Eutheria*, describes the apocalypse as "a theology which envisages the recapitulation of all creation" (49). Even as the word moves toward a secular interpretation, this definition holds true: an apocalypse does recapitulate or rearrange the world. As in Revelation, the old world passes away and a new world is formed in its place. The characters in post-apocalyptic tales are required to adapt to this new world in order to survive.

An apocalypse, in its evolved definition as a "disaster," still retains a portion of its original meaning. A disaster reveals the true nature of people—do they have integrity, or are they selfish and cruel? Or is the distinction not that black and white? Most people

possess capacity for both kindness and cruelty, which can manifest themselves in different ways in reaction to an apocalypse.

In reading apocalyptic literature, the subject also has an effect on its audience—it makes readers speculate about how they would react in a given situation, when all they take for granted or hold dear is swept away or unalterably changed. Most people likely believe that they would react in a certain way, but when faced with the reality of an apocalypse, self-delusions are discarded in favor of action, the nature of which might surprise them.

The supernatural overtones of the apocalypse (the actions of God or other deities in transforming the world through destruction and rebuilding) made the theme a natural fit for the science fiction genre as it gained strength and popularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Science fiction is a speculative genre, anticipating the future of man and technology, and it co-opted the idea of a world-destroying event, taking it from theology or religion and giving its power to man.

The sub-genre of apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fiction gained strength in the Cold War era, when the destruction of the world by means created and controlled by man became not just a hypothetical storyline, but a very real danger. Jason Cowley writes in *The New Statesman*:

> In those days, we all lived with the threat of apocalypse. We knew that our world could end at any moment, destroyed not by natural disaster or by the intervention of a malevolent deity, but by man himself. For the first time in history, we knew that we had the capacity and the desire to enact our own mass destruction. The

> motif of those times was an acute watchfulness; narratives of spying and surveillance were what preoccupied us, and I remember pleading with my father to build a bunker in our garden. (18)

The two Cold War-era books explored in this thesis, *On the Beach* and *Alas, Babylon*, exemplify these fears, which come to pass in the form of worldwide nuclear war. These works of fiction take the worst-case scenario of the Cold War and make it true, then follow a group of survivors as they try to make their way in the new world revealed by the bombs.

Post-apocalyptic works of the twenty-first century are based on different fears. While nuclear war is still a viable mode of destruction, this era also explores apocalypse by technology malfunction (Y2K scare), terrorist action (the aftereffects of 9/11), and pervasive climate change, possibly caused by human action. Cowley notes that "the themes of so much science fiction—solitary survivors on a contaminated planet, catastrophe, genetic modification, superbugs, post-apocalyptic landscapes, bioterrorism—are becoming part of our mainstream entertainment culture" (20). *The Road* and *The Hunger Games* allude to these terrors, though each centers on somewhat vague reasons for their respective apocalypses.

One of the most important themes in post-apocalyptic literature is survival. The struggle to survive is one of the most fundamental, elemental drives in any living creature. Insects and animals often mate and breed as many offspring as possible to raise the probability that at least one or two will survive to pass on the genetic strand. Humans tend to think of survival in more elevated terms, speaking of the adaptation and survival of culture and knowledge, but in the end the results are the same. Survival hinges on

making a world habitable and hospitable to future generations, even at the expense of the current generation.

The novels studied have explored a wide range of survival strategies; even *On the Beach*, which ends with the inevitable death of the human race, explores survival-related issues such as having control over one's death and coming to terms with it. The most basic mode of survival, on the lowest tier of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is the procurement of food. In *Alas, Babylon*, this means both hunting and gathering, as well as a return to pre-technology farming techniques. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss capitalizes on her hunting and foraging skills to keep her family fed; these skills then serve her well in the Games. The father and son in *The Road* are also forced to scavenge for any food they can find, mostly in the form of canned goods. Food is fundamental to survival, and three of the books studied in this thesis take this as a base on which to build the rest of the story; again, *On the Beach* is an outlier, concentrating not on survival of the physical body but of the soul.

Though the characters of each book are products of their time and culture, they share traits that aid in their survival. They do not panic or allow themselves to succumb to the natural fears and dangers which come with apocalyptic disaster. They evaluate their needs for survival and make plans to meet those needs, whether it be procurement of food or medicine or supporting those less able to survive on their own. They adapt to the new version of reality and help to found new cultural and moral ideologies based on their changed circumstances.

Once the physical needs of survival are met, more ideological concepts come into play. Focus shifts to building a community adapted to post-apocalyptic circumstances, as

in *Alas, Babylon* and *The Hunger Games*, or in keeping alive the memories of the recent past, as in *On the Beach* and *The Road*. Whatever its motivation, the decision to survive is a one to commit to the future and believe that one has a place in it.

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