



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

The struggle for survival and aspects of (im-)mortality in
post-apocalyptic American fiction

verfasst von

Dominik Schreiner

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magister der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2015

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 333

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Deutsch

Betreut von:

emer. o. Univ. – Prof. Dr. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction	1-2
2. Post-apocalyptic fiction – Definition, Characteristics, Themes	3-11
2.1. Definition and Characteristics	4-5
2.2. The Representational Impasse	5-7
2.3. Post-apocalyptic Literature	7-11
2.3.1. <i>The Road</i> – Cormac McCarthy	8-9
2.3.2. <i>The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger</i> – Stephen King	9-10
2.3.3. <i>The Passage</i> – Justin Cronin	10-11
3. The struggle for survival	12-72
3.1. After the End – The Post-Apocalyptic World	12-26
3.1.1. “the cold illucid world” (TR 116)	13-18
3.1.2. “The world had moved on” (TDT 3)	18-21
3.1.3. Underneath the starless sky	21-26
3.2. Hope and Faith	26-38
3.2.1. “Goodness will find the little boy” (TR 281)	28-33
3.2.2. “Go then. There are other worlds than these.” (TDT 266)	33-35
3.2.3. Noah’s Arc	35-38
3.3. Human Relationships	38-53
3.3.1. Father and Son	39-44
3.3.2. Roland and Jake – Betrayal and Sacrifice	44-49
3.3.3. Recalled to Life	49-53
3.4. The virtue of human kindness	53-65
3.4.1. Carrying the fire	54-60
3.4.2. A gunslinger’s creed	60-62
3.4.3. Selling one’s soul	62-65
3.5. The Quest	65-72
3.5.1. On the Road	66-67
3.5.2. “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came”	67-69
3.5.3. “If you found her, bring her here” (TP 476)	69-72
4. Mortality – Death as an all-pervasive force	73-93
4.1. “Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it” (TR 130)	74-83

4.2.	The Man in Black – Defeating Death	83-88
4.3.	The Passage	88-93
5.	Immortality – The Tithonos Syndrome	94-103
5.1.	The End of the Road – A New Beginning	94-96
5.2.	The Dark Tower – The Key to Immortality	96-98
5.3.	Opening the Box of Pandora	98-103
6.	Conclusion	104-107
7.	Bibliography	108-110
8.	Appendix	111-115
8.1.	Abstract (English)	111-112
8.2.	Abstract (Deutsch)	113-114
8.3.	Curriculum Vitae	115

Abbreviations:

TR	<i>The Road</i>
TDT	<i>The Dark Tower</i>
TP	<i>The Passage</i>

1. Introduction

The latest surge of interest in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives has resulted in the production of numerous novels, films and TV series set in a post-apocalyptic world. As evidenced by the popularity and commercial success of novels such as *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* or *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* by Max Brooks, of recent Hollywood Blockbusters like *28 Days later*, *I am Legend* or *Interstellar* or of the critically acclaimed TV series *The Walking Dead*, it can be extrapolated that Armageddon narratives compel and fascinate the human mind.

In response to this recent trend of depictions of cataclysmic events and its consequences in literary and cinematic fields, three pivotal and prevalent issues of end-of-the-world literature, the struggle for survival, as well as the role of mortality and immortality, shall be examined. For the purpose of gathering conclusive evidence pertaining to the representation of these thematic elements, three selected pieces of post-apocalyptic American fiction will be closely analyzed: Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road*, *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* by Stephen King and the first part of Justin Cronin's post-apocalyptic trilogy, *The Passage*. The aim of this diploma thesis is to illuminate the struggle for survival the main characters are faced with, representations of mortality, as well as the seductive and fatal role of immortality observable in these three novels, and thus to disclose the link between survival, mortality and immortality as an over-arching frame inherent in the genre of post-apocalyptic literature.

In order to lay the framework for the ensuing line of argumentation, a prefatory section on the definition, the characteristics, typical themes of post-apocalyptic fiction, and the content of the three selected examples will be provided. This will be followed-up by an in-depth analysis of the three novels in terms of the struggle for survival, mortality and immortality.

More precisely, this diploma thesis will illustrate the various survival strategies employed by the main protagonists in order to prevail in a decaying and gloomy world that is suffused with the all-pervasive force of death. It will be argued that unadulterated faith, the love and comfort provided by human relationships, human goodness, and the motif of the quest endow the protagonists in the three novels with the required means to persevere in a devastated world bereft of hope and life.

Moreover, it is postulated that the prevalence of death in post-apocalyptic fiction serves as an impetus to the blossoming awareness of the characters' mortality. While some of the characters fall victim to the ubiquitous bleakness of this "cold illucid [end-time] world" (TR 116), some of the characters draw strength and motivation from the inevitability of death and consequently manage to survive.

Finally, this diploma thesis puts forth the hypothesis that the quest for immortality, engendered by the desire to overcome death, culminates in doom and a cursed existence. Hence, human mortality and death are proposed to function as essential components in the post-apocalyptic landscape leading towards redemption, new life and the survival of mankind.

2. Post-apocalyptic fiction

December 21st, 2012. The date when the world was supposed to end and humanity was expected to have reached its final destination. At least according to an old Maya prophecy, resulting in a massive onslaught of media reports on the potential apocalypse of the entire world. Prior to that, similar Doomsday predictions were made at the turn of the millennium, 1999, 1997 or 1910 to name just a selected few of rumored dates of human extinction (Radford). Yet, none of these predictions proved to be accurate, the world as we know it has remained unscathed and the dreaded Judgment Day has been eluded. Even though the panic and commotion spread by the media has been unfounded, the inevitable demise of mankind looms ominously over our heads, has apparently infested our thoughts and has been transferred to the fictional world of literature and film. The uncanny fascination of mankind with its own expiration date manifests itself in the countless novels, movies and TV series exploring the devastating imagery of cataclysmic events and the bleakness of its aftermath (Zimbaro 20). Scenes of decaying corpses, feasting on the brains of human beings, aliens invading the earth and seeking to annihilate the human race, incurable viruses wiping out the population, environmental disasters threatening human existence or nuclear wars, drastically altering the landscape of the earth and ushering in an era defined by death and destruction, are flashing over our TVs or computer screens on a regular basis.

The production of dystopian or post-apocalyptic novels has dramatically increased over the course of the last decade and the commercial success of these novels compounds the notion that the termination of mankind and the world as we know it is an issue that people have emotionally invested in. Exploring the reasons for this popularity of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives would exceed the limited scope of this diploma thesis. Accordingly, this section aims at providing a definition of post-apocalyptic fiction by unveiling the origin of the term apocalypse and its connotative meaning. This definition will serve as the basis for further analysis of this genre in terms of characteristics and themes, and the elaboration on the distinction between post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature. Moreover, the dilemma of the “representational impasse” (Cristofare 67) of post-apocalyptic fiction will be illustrated. Finally, this section will conclude with a brief overview of the most relevant literary developments within this particular genre and will present a synopsis of the

three selected novels that constitute the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the struggle for survival, mortality and immortality.

2.1. Definition and Characteristics

In order to provide a theoretical framework for the topic of this thesis, which involves supporting the following analysis of characteristic issues of this genre and legitimizing the choice of novels used for the line of argumentation offered in this piece of work, it is essential to define the literary genre of post-apocalyptic fiction,.

The term “post-apocalyptic” is derived from “apocalypse”, which is often associated with religious or biblical content. According to the Oxford English dictionary, “apocalypse” indicates “a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, especially on a global scale; a cataclysm”¹. The term “apocalypse” originates from the Greek word “apokalupsis” (Isboa 15) and implies the revelation of something hitherto unknown or veiled (Zimbaro 19). James Berger attributes three distinct meanings to the term “apocalypse”: First of all, the eschatological meaning of the end of the world, as put forth by the New Testament in the Book of Revelation. Secondly, he argues that it can refer to devastating catastrophes that represent a caesura to the preceding conditions of the world. The third meaning ascribed to “apocalypse” is the disclosure of truth pertaining to the nature of the extinguished world (5).

Based on these definitions “post-apocalyptic” indicates the events transpiring after the fatal cataclysm. More precisely, “post-apocalyptic” is defined as, “following an event regarded as an apocalypse, especially following a nuclear war or other catastrophic event; (of a science fiction film, book, game etc) set in a period following such an event.”²

In the midst of the dramatic rise in popularity of dystopian, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature, confusion has arisen with regard to the distinction and the demarcation between these three sub-genres. While the aforementioned definitions have emphasized the difference between what constitutes “apocalyptic” and “post-apocalyptic”, the lines between dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction have been blurred by recent publications exhibiting characteristics of both sub-genres, rendering a clear distinction more problematic.

¹ ><http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229?redirectedFrom=apocalypse#eid<>

² ><http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148402?redirectedFrom=post-apocalyptic#eid28952232<>

A dystopia is the diametrically opposed term to utopia, a term which was coined by Thomas More in the novel *Utopia* in 1516 and attempts to imagine a perfect and ideal world (Ryan 2). Hence, dystopia etymologically refers to a “bad place” (Hammond 664), and thus can be labelled an “anti-utopia” (Schulte-Herbrüggen 119). Typically such narratives portray a world or society that appears to be perfect on the surface, but features some form of limitations and constraints imposed on the majority of its population. However, these societies usually are stable, albeit restrictive and oppressive from our perspective (Ryan 3).

Post-apocalyptic fiction, on the other hand, is characterized by a significant change with respect to society and its organisation, courtesy of a cataclysmic event that triggers a complete obliteration of previously existing forms and functions of society. The struggle for survival in a dying and ceasing world following the disaster is put to the forefront, while potential societies of survivors remain instable and threatened by the hostility of the post-apocalyptic setting and/or its inhabitants (Ryan 10).

The nature of the catastrophe that inaugurates a new era of human existence ranges from pandemic diseases spreading all over the world, flesh-eating zombies, natural disasters, extraterrestrial invasions, to nuclear wars and many more dangers. The novels and films typically focus on the repercussions of these events, rather than the actual event itself. In many cases, for instance in *The Road*, the apocalyptic event remains shrouded and its description is neglected in favor of the visceral fight to survive, which the characters are subjected to. The sense of utter exasperation and hopelessness that permeates these narratives can be considered to be emblematic of this particular genre. Conversely, the perseverance and tenacity of the protagonists in the face of adversity often sparks a glimpse of hope and functions as the driving force behind their journey through a decaying world from the verge of extinction towards survival and the continuity of human existence. Another central element that is shared by all post-apocalyptic fiction is the representational impasse, which will be further elucidated in the following subsection.

2.2. The Representational Impasse

The genre of post-apocalyptic fiction in itself forms an oxymoron, since it purports to portray the aftermath of the end of the world. Based on the premise that the apocalypse signifies the total annihilation of the world, an illustration of its

consequences by definition is rendered impossible (Berger 13). As argued by Cristofare, the apocalypse is defined by its singularity and “its radical otherness from anything humans may have experienced before” (67). Therefore, end-of-the-world narratives are faced with the challenge of depicting the unimaginable, which constitutes the “representational impasse” (Cristofare 67) that is inherent in the post-apocalyptic genre. This “representational impasse” is comprised of two distinct dilemmas, which will be briefly described.

The first dilemma hinges on the temporal aporia caused by the cataclysmic events. As mentioned above, the apocalypse entails the termination of the world and its history. This irrevocable and complete termination shatters our conceptual framework of time and its linearity. Taken into account that “narratives are essentially temporal forms of representation which generally rely on the history of time” (Cristofare 67), the narration of events that transcend the limitations of our conception of time becomes impossible, marking the temporal aporia of post-apocalyptic fiction.

The second dilemma has already been alluded to and pertains to the inconceivable representation of an event that is beyond our cognitive capabilities. It might be argued that the unattainable depiction of such an event serves as the motivation for writers and directors to approach this representational impasse. Similarly, illustrating something that in itself surpasses our imagination might be the catalyst for our fascination with post-apocalyptic fiction and its dramatic increase in popularity. These doomsday narratives share the tendency to convey a reality that is radically altered and clearly removed from the status quo of the pre-apocalyptic world, yet make use of forms of representation at least partially recognizable to the reader. Due to the impasse of painting an image of absolute destruction, commonly associated with the term apocalypse, writers and directors alike are required to resort to methods of trivialization and approximation (Cristofare 68). In many cases this is achieved via the incorporation of elements taken from familiar scenarios that evoke apocalyptic impressions, such as Fukujima, 9/11, Hurricane Kathrina and many others, and the subsequent distortion and modification of these elements to serve the plot of the film or novel.

A popular strategy employed by authors and directors of post-apocalyptic narratives to circumvent this second dilemma is “the device of temporal inversion” (Cristofare 69). This is often linked with the diminishing resources that puts the

technological progress of mankind to a screeching halt and precipitates the decline into preceding states of civilization. The society of survivors that emerges from the ashes of the cataclysmic events frequently bears resemblance with societies from the past and derives many of its characteristics from these templates (Cristofare 69).

As implied by the term “post-apocalyptic”, stories produced within this literary genre typically opt to present merely a “near-universal annihilation but with just enough life left intact to guarantee a reasonable likelihood of a new beginning” (Lisboa 53). While the characters are immersed in a world defined by death and gloom, a fundamental characteristic of post-apocalyptic fiction is the fact that narrative largely hinges on the desire to overcome the inevitability of human mortality and the termination of the world. As a consequence, the re-construction of human existence and ensuring the persistence of the human legacy lies at the core of these novels.

The prior two sections offered a definition of the genre that will be investigated in this diploma thesis, as well as an insight into the typical characteristics and limitations of post-apocalyptic narrative. Subsequently, the next subsection will be specifically concerned with the literary representatives of the genre. First of all, a brief overview of literary developments and notorious examples of post-apocalyptic fiction shall be presented. Furthermore, the plot of the three novels that were selected to represent the post-apocalyptic genre will be provided in order to lay the foundation for further analysis.

2.3. Post-apocalyptic Literature

The earliest instances of post-apocalyptic literature can be traced all the way back to the very first book of the Old Testament, *Genesis*, and its tale of the Fall from Grace and Adam’s and Eve’s eviction from the paradise or Noah and the flood (Lisboa 18), both signifying the respective terminus of a specific world. In modern literature, Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, written in 1826, is largely considered to be the very first post-apocalyptic novel (Booker; Thomas 53). The number of publications increased dramatically after World War II, and after atomic bombs had been dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as these events instilled the fear of complete annihilation among people (Cristofare 21). In the light of the baleful and threatening atmosphere emanating from the following Cold War, some of the most popular and well-known

post-apocalyptic tales were brought into existence (Booker, Thomas 53). *Earth Abides* by George R. Stewart, John Wyndham's *The Day of the Driffids*, Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo* or *I am Legend* by Richard Matheson are among the most notable examples of popular post-nuclear narratives (Booker; Thomas 53-56).

The latest surge of the popularity of the genre correlates with the life-changing real-life events that have become known as 9/11 (Lisboa 22), as the persisting fear of similar events are expressed in popular films, books and the media (Cooper 222). From zombie invasions, lethal plagues wiping out the vast majority of the earth's population to cyber kinetic Armageddon narratives and devastating natural disasters, the post-apocalyptic genre is thriving and its omnipresence in literature, film and other media is irrefutable (Davidson 156). Well-known examples include *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* by Max Brooks, Stephanie Meyer's *The Host* or Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

Three representative examples will form the basis for the investigation of the struggle for survival, mortality and immortality. Accordingly, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Stephen King's *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* and Justin Cronin's *The Passage* will be introduced by a preliminary recapitulation of their plots.

2.3.1. *The Road* – Cormac McCarthy

Set in a grim and decomposing world, a nameless father and his son embark on a journey through the ravaged and inhospitable remnants of the United States. Several years removed from undisclosed cataclysmic events, humanity is on the verge of being wiped out for good. Death has invaded the earth and taken the planet hostage, as scarcely any signs of life have persisted: the sun is blotted out by the thick layers of ash covering the sky, vegetation has ceased to grow, animals have been perished, piles of dead bodies are scattered throughout the streets and human life is reduced to its bare essentials.

Heading south, the father and son are confronted with a hostile environment that has been deprived of its life-sustaining conditions and pushed towards the abyss of starvation and freezing. As the available resources are rapidly dwindling, the struggle for survival entails resorting to the most primeval instincts concealed within the darkest recesses of the human mind, and fosters human depravity. Driven by the overwhelming sense of urgency to stay alive, many of the desperate survivors

perpetrate heinous acts of violence and cannibalism. In contrast to the marauding cannibals and malicious thugs, the boy is intent on ensuring they belong to the “good guys” and clings to the notion that they “are carrying the fire”, metaphorically speaking. While the father hesitates to share some of their food supplies with others, the boy’s determination to engage in acts of human kindness prevails, despite the resulting threat of running out of food.

Throughout their journey the father’s health is gradually declining, as he is coughing up blood on a regular basis. Upon reaching their destination the realization of impending doom dawns on them and they become aware of the irreparable damage done to the world. Their last ounce of hope is sucked out of them, when the father is wounded by an arrow and the claws of death are encroaching upon him. Even though the father had vowed to take his boy with him into the realm of death in order to spare him a more cruel death at the hands of the scavenging cannibals and other “bad guys”, he is unable to pull the trigger and put his plans into action. Thus, the boy is left alone and at the mercy of his surroundings. However, on the third day after the bereavement, he encounters a man with a parka, who claims to belong to the “good guys” and persuades him to join him and his family.

2.3.2. *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* – Stephen King

The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger (henceforth: *The Dark Tower*) is the first instalment of Stephen King’s Magnum Opus that blends themes and elements found in a variety of different genres, ranging from fantasy, to science fiction, western and horror (Russell 32), and incorporates many references to King’s other fiction. Inspired by Robert Browning’s poem *Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, the series is centred on Roland Deschain’s epic quest for the Dark Tower, which represents the nexus of all worlds (Russell 75).

In *The Gunslinger* the last remaining gunslinger, Roland of Gilead, is introduced to the reader, chasing the man in black through the desolated and derelict ruins of a world that has moved on. Catching the man in black represents the first step towards his ultimate goal: the enigmatic Dark Tower.

His seemingly interminable journey takes him to the town Tull, in which the man in black resurrected the addict Nort and set up a trap for the gunslinger. Led by the psychotic preacher Sylvia Pitttston, the entire town assaults Roland, leaving him with no other choice than to kill the entire population of Tull. Subsequently, the

gunslinger travels through a vast and forsaken desert, in which he encounters Jake Chambers, who was killed in his own world, the New York of 1977, by the man in black, only to awaken in the world of Roland. Devoid of any traces of memory where he came from, Jake finds himself marooned at a way station within this desert (Schweitzer 191), when his and the gunslinger's paths cross. Together they leave the way station and soon arrive at the feet of the mountains, where Jake falls prey to a cunning succubus, the oracle of the mountains, while Roland dreams of the love of his life, Susan Delgado, who was burned alive in front of his eyes. Roland barely manages to prevent Jake's second demise and the oracle reveals that "Jake is the gateway to the man in black" (Schweitzer 191-192) and thus the key to the Dark Tower.

At the heels of the man in black, they enter the tunnels below the mountains and are assaulted by subterranean mutants, lurking in the shadows of the mines. Due to Roland's story of how he defeated his trainer Cort by using his loyal hawk as a weapon, Jake is plagued by doubts with respect to Roland's true motives. These anxieties prove to be justified, when Jake happens to stumble on the crumbling tracks they walk on and is left hanging above the abyss. Roland is faced with the crucial choice of saving Jake or pursuing the man in black and the Dark Tower (Schweitzer 192). He opts to choose the Dark Tower and follows the man in black, while Jake falls and is engulfed in the depths of the gorge.

Subsequently, the man in black and the gunslinger "make palaver" (TDT 271), which involves the man in black to read Roland's future from a tarot deck. Moreover, he emphasizes the insignificance of Roland's existence in the grand scheme of things by disclosing the fact that the universe is only one among myriads of universes and the Dark Tower marks the nexus of all universes. The gunslinger falls asleep and the novel ends as he awakens years later next to the skeleton of the man in black and he continues his quest towards the Dark Tower.

2.3.3. *The Passage* – Justin Cronin

Justin Cronin's *The Passage* is part of a yet to be concluded trilogy that envisions the fatal repercussions of government experiments precipitating a disaster of apocalyptic proportions. Since the novel is set both shortly before and years after the cataclysm, it can be classified as being both an apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic piece of fiction. The first part of *The Passage* stages mankind's quest for immortality that precipitates

the outbreak of a contagious virus. Set in the near future, the origin of the secret government experiment "Project Noah" (TP 40) can be traced back to the discovery of a virus carried by bats in the darkest recesses of the Bolivian jungle that prolongs human life and enhances the recuperative powers of the human immune system.

FBI Special Agent Wolgast is supposed to recruit death row convicts for further experiments with the virus, seeking to use the virus to endow human beings with eternal life (Smetana 178). Due to the fact that the previous twelve convicts infected with the virus have been transformed into monstrous, flesh-devouring creatures, Dr. Lear, who is in charge of the practical aspects of the project, speculates that children, whose immune system has not fully developed yet, might be better suited to carry the virus in order to accomplish his goal of forging immortal human beings. Just as 6-year-old Amy Bellafonte is infected with the virus, the twelve inmates break the shackles of confinement and unleash their fury upon the world. All hell breaks loose as these light-sensitive, superhuman creatures spread the virus all over the military compound and initiate a global outbreak, while Amy and Wolgast are able to flee. Due to radiation from a nuclear detonation Wolgast dies and leaves Amy alone in a world of perdition and despair, overrun by the infected, which henceforth become known as virals.

The second part of the narration sets in 93 years after the outbreak, depicting a post-apocalyptic world in which a group of remaining survivors is forced to live in a walled colony in North California, protected by enormous lights during the nights (Smetana 179). Faced with the impending shutdown of the batteries that supply the lights with energy, a group of colonists, led by Peter Jaxon and Amy, embark on a journey towards the source of a mysterious coded signal, carrying the message that whoever finds the girl should bring her back to Colorado. The colonists soon grasp the radical alterity of Amy and the notion that she could be the cure to the virus is planted in their thoughts.

Overcoming the assaults of the virals and one of the twelve convicts, Babcock, the narration ends where it all started: at the government outpost in Colorado. Via an effectively set-up trap, Babcock is killed and with him all the virals infected by him. In order to save mankind from the siege of the virals, the group of survivors is now faced with the challenge of finding a way to annihilate the rest of the 11 original death convicts.

3. The struggle for survival

As already established in the previous section on the characteristics of post-apocalyptic fiction, narratives of this genre are predominantly concerned with the compelling question how humanity can survive within a dying world that has been scraped of its bare essentials that used to guarantee the sustenance of human life. While a definite answer to this question is frequently avoided by post-apocalyptic literature, the struggle of humanity and the respective individual against all odds constitutes the backbone of these narratives, and serves as the basis for multiple highly dramatic, thought-provoking and gut-wrenching scenarios.

The following section will investigate how this struggle of survival is portrayed in the three works by McCarthy, King and Cronin. As a basis for further analysis, the inhospitality of the post-apocalyptic setting will be depicted in order to provide an insight into how the repercussions of the apocalyptic event have impacted the life of the remaining inhabitants and form the primary source of threat to their survival. Afterwards, a variety of survival strategies employed by the novels' characters shall be further elaborated on. It will be proposed that undiluted and irrational faith, the love generated by human relationships, the virtue of moral purity and the theme of the quest function as imperative strategies to overcome the overwhelming, destructive nature of the post-apocalyptic world and to enable survival in a world infiltrated with death.

3.1. After the End – The Post-Apocalyptic World

Representations of the struggle for survival largely hinge on the destructive consequences of the cataclysmic events. Manifestations of these consequences might involve the diminishing supplies of food, the perilous and hostile environment or the emotionally draining bleakness of a death infested world. This section aims at providing an account of the dangers and threats imposed upon the characters of post-apocalyptic fiction by exterior circumstances. Since the cataclysm has precipitated the life-endangering state of the biosphere, examining the literary illustrations of the cataclysmic event in end-time literature serves as the starting point to analyze the post-apocalyptic world as imagined by Cormac McCarthy, Stephen King and Justin Cronin. This will be followed up with an in-depth depiction of the barren and desolated landscape forged by the cataclysmic event, and how humanity is affected by the harsh and cruel nature that they are exposed to. Finally, the

detrimental consequences of these volatile conditions on the memory and legacy of the past will be explored.

3.1.1. “the cold illucid world” (TR 116)

The cause of the devastation that laid waste to the world is never fully revealed by McCarthy. Instead, he chooses to shift the focus of the narrative away from the detailed description of the actual event, and towards the existential struggle of the human beings in the midst of this misanthropic, decaying world, exhibited by the unnamed father and son. The disruptive effects of this “cold illucid world” (TR 116) on the remnants of the earth, and in particular on the two protagonists are highlighted, while a full disclosure of the nature of the cataclysm is neglected (Blasi 91). From this observation it can be deduced that McCarthy is more concerned with the human response, faced with the inevitability of doom and the ubiquity of death, than to provide a detailed account of the events that brought about these inhospitable living conditions.

The sole reference to what transpired on the day of the cataclysm can be detected in one of the father’s memories: “The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (TR 52). Critics have speculated whether this reference might imply a nuclear apocalypse, an environmental disaster or the eschatological Armageddon has occurred and was the impetus for the collapse of the world. The exact time that is alluded to in the man’s flashback might indicate the suddenness of the actual event that changed the complexity of the world as the father knew it (Graulund 68). The subsequent sentence might hint at the nature of the cataclysm, as “shear of light” and “series of low concussions” clearly conjures up images of nuclear detonations that happened in the past. An eschatological reading of this passage might be achieved by linking the indicated time of 1:17 to the Book of Revelation 1.17 and consequently relating the novel’s description of the decaying world to the themes presented in the Book of Revelation (Grindley 11).

The fact that the precise time that has stuck to the memory of the father could be seen as an indicator of an unspecified, sudden and unpredicted singular event that has ushered in these significant changes and thus represents the catalyst for the post-apocalyptic setting. McCarthy does not explicitly describe it, but this passage clearly bears the features of a change brought about within an instant, rather than a gradual demise of the world. Conversely, this scant piece of information could also be

seen as the father's memory of one singular incident that he, as an individual, will forever associate with the apocalypse of the world, as there are no clues pointing towards the temporal sequence within which this memory is embedded (Graulund 68). In this case, the "shear of light and the concussions" (TR 52) described might only refer to a less dramatic event that not directly triggered the cataclysm, but either marked the first instance of turmoil or a further contribution to already transpired events from the father's perspective. Therefore, this passage might only account for the father's individual perception of when the change was initiated, not necessarily portray the moment when the entire world collapsed. Potentially it is merely the most striking and incisive recollection of the cataclysmic events that the father can muster. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the reader can only experience the depiction of this event via the father's point of view.

Irrespective of the true meaning of this short passage, it can be concluded that McCarthy chooses to avoid any explicit elucidation with regard to the nature, the reasons or the time of the events. This narrative device compounds the agony and toils experienced by the father and the son, and puts the spotlight on the human struggle for survival in the light of the apocalyptic aftermath.

The gloomy and monotonous nature of the landscape is established very early on, as McCarthy immerses the reader in this gray and lifeless world devoid of fauna and flora, decorated by the signs of ruin and devastation: "Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop" (TR 4). McCarthy's description of this "cauterized terrain" (TR 14) is characterized by its lack of colour and life. As Chris Danta argues, the landscape the two protagonists wander through, "has been greyed out – has moved from a brighter to a fainter shade" (TR 10), as evidenced by the following passage that reiterates the fact that the sunlight is constantly and permanently dimmed by a thick layer of ash: "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world." (TR 3) Akin to an eye plagued by the effects of glaucoma, the world is gradually being deprived of its light (Danta 10). McCarthy paints the picture of the "final spasms of a world" (Graulund 64) on the verge of its own demise. The unnamed cataclysmic event has extinguished almost all signs of life, while the impenetrable ash-layer prevents the sun from spreading its life-sustaining rays. Mankind's primary source of light, and the epitome of life, is banned from this apocalyptic life and now remains "unseen beyond the

murk" (TR 14). Though the father is incapable of determining which month it is, he is aware of the fact that the approaching winter might be their death sentence (TR 4) and hence decides to move south, hoping to elude the freezing cold of this "cold illucid world" (TR 116). Arriving in the south, however, robs them of their last ounce of hope that they might encounter more hospitable conditions, as the sea has degenerated into a "vast salt sepulchre" (TR 222) and all its inhabitants have been eradicated.

Relocating to the south has not improved their chances to survive, as they similarly encounter a diminishing world without light, life and colour, that invariably evokes the image of a desert, which is characterized by absence: the "absence of sustenance, therefore of life, hence ultimately of presence" (Graulund 70). The barren, "illucid" (TR 116) and colourless landscape is devoid of any distinguishing features, rendering any kind of movement through it meaningless. It does not matter whether the father and son move south or stay put where they are. Wherever they go they are met with gloom and dullness that pervades the wasted land. Thus, their voyage on the road dissolves into utter nothingness and irrelevance, as the deserted nature of the post-apocalyptic setting cannot be defied, irrespective of the miles travelled, the direction taken or being in motion or not (Graulund 67). The omnipresence of the landscape deprived of any signs of life or means of sustenance cannot be escaped. The insignificance of human existence is highlighted by the monochrome and dimmed-out world, as the nothingness of the desert swallows all human life. The only thing left that is still ascribed meaning is death and its inevitability. In order to evade the tightening clutch of death, the father and his son are urged to fill this void of the setting with intrinsic faith, the love produced by their bond, the virtue of kindness and a goal that feeds their motivation to continue. These ideological concepts and feelings function to balance the nothingness that permeates the landscape and spreads its metaphorical wings over its inhabitants.

Not only is the entropy of the world illustrated via the all-consuming grayness and the lack of light and warmth usually provided by the blotted-out sun, but also by vivid descriptions of the ravaged landscape and the ruin of a past world.

On the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. Charred and limbless trunks of tress stretching away on every side. Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened lightpoles whining thinly in the wind. A burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadowlands stark and gray and a raw red

mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned. Farther along were billboards advertising motels. Everything as it once had been save faded and weathered. (TR 8)

By illustrating the ruin and decay of the relics from a pre-apocalyptic time, such as billboards, lightpoles or incinerated houses, memories of the past are instantly evoked within the reader. Based on this alienation of familiar objects the reader is immediately submerged by this “[b]arren, silent, godless” (TR 4) world. Moreover, this juxtaposition of the past and its current state in the present of the narration functions to provide the reader with means of comparison between these two worlds and thus legitimizes the scope of the apocalyptic events preceding the narration.

Apart from the lack of light and the devastated landscape, the rapidly decreasing supply of food and means to preserve their body temperature carries father and son to the brink of starvation and freezing to death. As any recognizable organisations of human society have vanished from this world, the production of food has inexorably been put to a stop as well, coercing father and son to scavenge forsaken towns and houses, which puts them in danger of falling victim to other remaining human beings, desperately on the hunt for food. As they run out of their own supplies, everything barely eatable becomes a highly valuable source of nourishment, as displayed here: “He’d put a handful of dried raisins in a cloth in his pocket and at noon they sat in the dead grass by the side of the road and ate them. The boy looked at him. That’s all there is, isn’t it? he said.” (TR 87) In connection with their dwindling resources, the physical effects of the insufficient nutrition become clearly visible, as the boy “looked like something out of a deathcamp. Starved, exhausted, sick with fear” (TR 117). Consequently, the fundamental needs of human existence dictate the struggle for survival of the father and the boy and thereby determine their daily routine. In the light of the daunting landscape that does not offer the means required to sustain human life, the unexpected discovery of a concealed bunker filled with an abundance of food and other supplies that are suited to enhance the fading lives of the two survivors is almost tantamount to a miracle or an act of divine intervention (TR 138).

Furthermore, McCarthy employs the narrative device of depicting the progressing demise of human memory and the loss of the past world prior to the apocalyptic events. He crafts an anonymous world “bereft of those classifications that would help to place the characters in the physical sense: country, state, county, city”

(Kunsa 63). Geographical boundaries and means of classifications become meaningless, taking into account the society which established these spatial divisions has been obliterated. Similar to classifications pertaining to places, the temporal framework that underlies our perception of time has become obsolete as well (De Bruyn 782). The imminent danger of death has eliminated intricate conceptions of time. Due to the irrelevance of culturally constructed abstract concepts of time and space, the corresponding linguistic representations of these concepts have been dismissed into the dustbin of oblivion. Solely the memories of those individuals who have experienced the pre-apocalyptic life, function as the carriers of a past world, which is also evoked by the dilapidated remnants of the world preceding the disaster. Accompanying this loss of culture and concepts is the loss of memory and loss of language to articulate the meaning of aspects that bear no meaning in this post-apocalyptic world:

The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (TR 88-89)

This passage clearly indicates that language and its lexicalisation are also impacted by the nature of the setting. The young boy's inability to grasp the comparatively simple meanings of words such as "state roads" (TR 42) or "neighborhood" (TR 95) perfectly display the decay that has been transferred from the landscape and the post-apocalyptic world they are subjected to, to the usage of language. Given the fact that the boy has never actively been confronted with the aforementioned terms eliminates the possibility of him being capable of comprehending their meanings (De Bruyn 783). Hence, the decay of the world is not only restricted to its biodiversity or the human population, but has also encompasses the linguistic dimension of the past world. While the boy is scarcely influenced by these extinguished words and phrases, besides not understanding them when being uttered by his father, the father's identity is gradually eroding with the disappearance of geographical terms, naming of the seasons, time allocations or the lexical corpus of a prior society. The disparity of recognition and alienation that is caused by a visit to the father's childhood house corroborates this drastic clash of realities (TR 25). The father's enquiries as to

whether the boy would like to see the place he grew up, are met with reluctance, which is caused by the boy's inability to look beyond the apparent features of the ruin that have overcome the father's home. From the boy's perspective they are entering a creepy and potentially dangerous place that is marked by signs of destruction. The father, on the other hand, is still haunted by the memories of the past and thus ascribes meaning to this important place of his life that the boy is incapable of grasping (Gruber Godfrey 168). While the man reminisces about events that have generated valuable memories and that he now indulges in, the boy finds himself in front of a forsaken and desolated place that suffuses him with fear and repulsion. The differing perceptions of reality clash in this instance, illustrating the diminishing role of the past. As the past world is slowly crumbling with each dying memory, which is tied to the decreasing number of people who still carry meanings from the past within them and their memories, the father is being stripped of his identity. Figuratively speaking, the father is not only fighting for his physical survival, but also for the perseverance of his identity, which was constructed in a pre-apocalyptic society and thus largely hinges on the preservation of the past. Accordingly, it is postulated that the man's struggle for survival is distinguished by his attempts to consolidate his disintegrating identity by clinging to the memories of the past. Even though recollections of former times are detrimental to his determination to defy the murky fabrication of the post-apocalyptic world, it can be argued that he not only fight for his own and his son's survival, but also for the survival of the human legacy.

3.1.2. "The world had moved on" (TDT 3)

The world imagined by Stephen King displays signs of abandonment and desolation deemed to be symptomatic of post-apocalyptic fiction. Yet, his take on the genre slightly deviates from the typical pattern of this particular genre. As already established in the previous subsection on the setting of *The Road*, it is a commonly used device of post-apocalyptic narratives to not explicitly refer to the cause of destruction responsible for the hostile environment the characters are exposed to. Whereas McCarthy at least offers hints and clues embedded within the memories of the father, which may be interpreted as referents to the preceding cataclysm, King's narrative completely denies the reader direct references regarding the actual events and causes underlying the harrowing landscape that Roland and Jake are subjected to. However, the drastic change that has occurred in an undisclosed temporal

distance to the narrated events is acknowledged and immediately invigorates the notion that the setting has cataclysmic origins:

The desert was the apotheosis of all deserts, huge, standing to the sky for what looked like eternity in all directions. It was white and blinding and waterless and without feature save for the faint, cloudy haze of the mountains which sketched themselves on the horizon and the devilgrass which brought sweet dreams, nightmares, death. An occasional tombstone sign pointed the way, for once the drifted track that cut its way through the thick crust of alkali had been a highway. Coaches and buckas had followed it. The world had moved on since then. The world had emptied. (TDT 3)

This paragraph addresses several pertinent points regarding the texture and the scope of the decaying landscape that bears striking similarities to post-apocalyptic settings. Throughout the entire novel, the information on a potential cataclysm remains scarce. The current conditions of the world are summarized by stressing that “[t]he world had moved on since then” (TDT 3). This form of linguistic expression constitutes the essential ingredient of King’s description of his setting in terms of its differences to the world familiar to the reader, as this phrase is repeated multiple times throughout the novel. The theme of the lifeless and vast desert, which is suggested to be characterized by absence and negation of meaning (Graulund 70) in *The Road*, reoccurs in King’s novel, as it stretches beyond the limitations of the human eye and is “without feature” (TDT 3). The gunslinger’s chase of the man in black, which is fuelled by vengeance and his craving to move closer to the Dark Tower, takes him “across the endless, screamingly monotonous purgatorial wastes” (TDT 6) of the desert. In contrast to McCarthy’s novel, the illustrated desert here is indeed a topological specification of the landscape rather than the figurative interpretation of the devastated land in *The Road*. Its function with respect to the narrative does not differ though. The bare and monotonous features that encompass the immediate reality of Roland represent absolute absence. Confronted with this all-consuming black hole of meaning, the themes of the quest, both for the man in black and the Dark Tower, as well as the relationship to Jake as the son he never had, generate meaning that fills this void of the desert and hence manage to endow him with the motivation required to overcome the physical and mental toll the desert takes on his body. Although none of the places passed on his journey to the Dark Tower exhibit forms of human life reminiscent of a pre-apocalyptic world, Roland “ [...] had heard rumor of other lands beyond this, green lands in a place called Mid-World, but

it was hard to believe. Out here, green lands seemed like a child's fantasy." (TDT 16) Facing the vastness of the void renders the thought of more fertile sceneries virtually impossible, but acknowledging this rumor is a first indication of the limited scope of this inhabitable landscape. While the world shows clear signs of decline, the exterior circumstances are relatively stable and apparently places that are more hospitable to human beings do exist.

The characters in *The Dark Tower* stumble upon remnants from the past in regular intervals, as evidenced for instance in the paragraph above by correlating an "occasional tombstone sign" (TDT 3) to its bygone function on the highway. This clearly hints at the fact that highways and road signs have lost their intended function, and thus implies that there once was a time when this was not the case. Similarly, a water pump, which Roland and Jake find at the Way Station, is portrayed as "a thing as alien to this place and time as true love, and yet as concrete as a Judgment, a silent reminder of the time when the world had not yet moved on" (TDT 115). What is noteworthy is the emphasis placed on the alien nature of this water pump, which gives rise to the conclusion that the reality depicted is far removed from the world that the audience is acquainted with. This impression is further confirmed when an ancient railroad is discovered in the mines underneath the mountains and Roland wonders "[w]hat might have run on those tracks at one time" (TDT 211). Clearly, some relics of an ancient world jut out from the devastation that the barren landscape has been subjected to, and indicates their irrelevance in a world deprived of most of its technology. Based on these scant pieces of information cluttered throughout the novel's narrative, it can be deduced that either the apocalyptic event has transpired a long time ago or its nature was so drastic as to eradicate the collective memory of these elements of the past world. Once again it has to be stressed that there is no clear evidence in the book that there indeed was such an incisive event, transforming the face of the earth in the most radical way. It might be argued that "[t]he world had moved on" (TDT 3) refers to a change of environment that has spanned over the course of decades or even centuries. The invention of new word creations such as "devilgrass" and "buckas" (TDT 3) might be seen as supportive of this hypothesis, as the incorporation of new words into the lexical repertoire of the remaining human beings could indicate temporal distance. Moreover, "devilgrass" (TDT 3) refers to a new form of vegetation, which only compounds this notion that a lot of time has elapsed since the day the world remotely

resembled our conception of it. The man in black's account of the past sheds some light on how much time has passed: "There was a time, yet a hundred generations before the world moved on, when mankind had achieved enough technical and scientific prowess to chip a few splinters from the great stone pillar of reality." (TDT 286) This clearly indicates an enormous time span between a world resembling ours and the one depicted by Stephen King.

In comparison with *The Road*, the inevitable loss of memory of the remote past has already occurred and the relics infuse the characters with a feeling of alienation. Based on the presumption that the time gap between the cataclysm (whose nature can only be guessed) and the narrated time in *The Dark Tower* is considerably larger than the one observable in *The Road*, the perception of the past in *The Dark Tower* can be proposed to be the progression of what is already commencing in the narrative of McCarthy's book, as the past gradually disintegrates until its traces are perceived to be alienating. On the other hand, the fact that tunes of the Beatles' song "Hey Jude" are reverberating through the town of Tull (TDT 22) is proof that the past and some of its cultural heritage lingers on.

Another central feature of the world Stephen King's story is set in, is its absence of technology. The gunslinger's weapons of choice are ancient, heavy guns made of sandalwood (TDT 4), he crossed the town of Tull on a mule, and other forms of transportation that are alluded to include "coaches and buckas" (TDT 3). Even the language practices evoke a medieval, ancient world, for instance by using the personal pronoun "thee" (TDT 12) or using archaic expressions such as "[t]he end draweth nigh" (TDT 6). The world has moved on. And time was turned back. King enriches his narrative by making use of the "device of temporal inversion" (Christofare 69) in order to underline the radical alterity of the post-apocalyptic world and the scope of its consequences with respect to the struggle for survival of the main characters.

3.1.3. Underneath the starless sky

In contrast to *The Road* and *The Dark Tower* the events leading up to the outbreak of the virus and the resulting post-apocalyptic world in Justin Cronin's *The Passage* is presented in all its gruesome details. Since the novel contains plot threads set both before and after the cataclysm, inferences with respect to the nature and the causes of the cataclysm can be made. The origin of the post-apocalyptic world that forms the

setting of the second part of the narration harkens back to human actions and is not caused by external events such as natural disasters or meteor strikes. Government experiments on death convicts go awry, when these twelve convicts who have been infected with a virus that enhances their physical and recuperative abilities and has turned them into vampire-like creatures escape and lay siege to the world. Not only the rationale behind the experiments that take a turn for the worse and precipitate the disaster, but also the moment of the outbreak is incorporated into the narrative. Via newspaper articles proclaiming “Rocky Mountain State Overrun by Killer Virus; Borders Sealed” (TP 223) or “‘Vampire’ Virus Reaches East Coast; Millions Dead” (TP 231) the rapid spread of the virus is documented, making the progression of the cataclysm all but transparent.

Realizing the genuine possibility of collective extinction, an evacuation process is initiated by the military to ensure the survival of the human race, as children between 4 and 13 years of age are sent away by train to rebuild the human society and guarantee the survival of the human race (TP 249). Told in the form of a journal of young Ida Jaxon, who will be one of the founding members of the colony presented in the second part of the novel, it is reported that

[...] it was chaos. So many years gone by, but you never forget a sight like that, the thousands of people, all of them so frightened, pressing against the fences, the soldiers and dogs trying to keep folks calm, the shots fired in the air. And me, not more than eight years old, with my little suitcase, the one my mama had packed for me the night before, bawling the whole time, because she knew what she was doing, that she was sending me away forever.” (TP 250)

The utter annihilation of human existence has become not only a dreadful possibility, but an ineluctable certainty, prompting the government of the United States of America to resort to radical measures. To thwart the looming threat of the impending demise of an entire race, several trains, filled with young children are sent to distinct places that have been provided with the necessary means to function as a fortress and protect them from the infected, who have earned themselves a variety of nicknames such as virals, flyers, smokes, drinks or jumps (TP 251). Even though the actual effects on the entire country are incorporated in Cronin’s rendering of the apocalypse, the individual fate is once again showcased in all its detail to foster emotional investment amongst his audience.

To ensure the prevalence of the human race entire cities are bombed in the desperate attempt to prevent the further expansion of the virus. Ida's account of the events preceding the evacuation include "[...] the loudest boom and then another and another and planes screaming over our heads, and my daddy told me they'd blown the bridges, and all the next day we saw more planes and smelled fire and smoke [...]" (TP 253), and the consequences eerily evoke images from McCarthy's post-apocalyptic world: "Flakes were falling and I thought it was snow but when I licked one off my hand I realized it was ashes." (TP 253)

93 years pass between the moment of the outbreak of the virus and the second part of the narration, which involves the portrayal of a post-apocalyptic world from the perspective of one of these colonies that have been founded in the aftermath of the cataclysmic events. These colonies bear characteristic features of a dystopian society with its own set of laws, administration and survival strategies, adapted to the post-apocalyptic life (TP 264-267). Taking into account that the virals represent the main threat emanating from this hostile setting, the colony life is determined by its very features guaranteeing the protection against this threat: "The lights and walls will keep us safe. Safe from the jumps, safe from everything until the war is over. It's like the story of Noah, and this here's the ark." (TP 258) The survival of this colony hinges on two features. First of all, the walls surrounding the colony, epitomizing the threshold between the omnipresent danger of falling prey to the virals and the safe confines of the colony. Secondly, the gigantic lights that are being turned on during the night to deter the light-sensitive creatures from launching an assault on the colony are inextricably linked to the survival of this new form of human existence. As indicated in the quote above, the walls and its light can be correlated to Noah's ark in terms of providing the means to survive in a decaying world.

To maintain this state of security, one of the few laws the colonists are expected to adhere to, involves punishment for anybody deliberately opening the gates at nights, as expressed in the following terms in the "Document of One Law" (TP 264): "Any soul who opens the gates, whether wholly or in part, by accident or design, alone or in the company of others, between SECOND EVENING BELL and FIRST MORNING BELL is subject to the penalty of PUTTING WITHOUT THE WALLS." (TP 266) The importance of the walls with respect to the safety of the entire colony is expressed in this law, which also contains the implication that putting somebody without the walls is the most severe punishment imaginable and equals

guaranteed death. The results of a violation of this law are revealed when Caleb opens the gates to rescue Alicia who is being hunted by three virals. Only one of the virals manages to invade the confines of the colony, wrecking havoc and killing the teacher, who is in charge of the sanctuary, which provides shelter for the children of the colony (TP 385-390). Despite the fact that most of the colonists are aware of the fact that Caleb has not committed this violation premeditatedly, a large group of people, especially the parents of the children being in the sanctuary at that period of time, demand the banning of Caleb, providing evidence of the high priority of adhering to this rule.

The pivotal role of the lights becomes apparent through Peter Jaxon's recollection of the events that have entered the history books of the colony under the designation: "Dark Night" (TP 281). In this night an earthquake caused the collapse of the light supplies and led to the demise of 162 people: "The quake had hit just after sunset, taking out the power grid; [...] By morning, 162 souls had been lost, including nine whole families, as well as half the herd, most of the chickens, and all of the dogs." (TP 282) The post-apocalyptic life within the colony has stabilized and its inhabitants have adopted strategies to cope with the perils of their world, yet without the lights they are at the mercy of the malicious creatures and their insatiable lust for flesh and blood. In order to not conjure up panic among the colonists a highly perturbing piece of information is withheld by Michael, who is responsible for switching on the lights every night. He is aware of the fact that they are living on borrowed times, depending on the decaying batteries: "Mankind had built a world that would take a hundred years to die. A century for the last lights to go out." (TP 306) The impending blackout of the lights is considered to be inevitable, as "[t]he batteries weren't made to be repaired", but only "replaced" (TP 307). The decision of the group of colonists to sally forth into the unknown and predominantly unexplored parts of America is facilitated by the cruel truth of the approaching calamity.

The sacrifices linked to the lights that ensure the preservation of human life include the inability to see the stars at night. Something that is perceived as a nature-given fixture of human existence is denied in this apocalyptic setting, akin to the diluted light of the sun in McCarthy's *The Road*. As a consequence, it can be inferred that post-apocalyptic realities always involve the disposal of aspects of human life that we take for granted. The objective of portraying the absence of these elements might arguably be to foster the awareness of their beauty and the appreciation of

their contribution to our lives. Cronin emphasizes the meaning of recapturing something that has been considered forever irretrievable, when Peter for the first time sees the stars, after merely having access to this fixture of the earth via stories he heard from his father:

He stepped into the stars. It hit him in the lungs first, shoving the breath from his chest. A feeling of pure physical panic, as if he'd stepped onto nothing, onto the night sky itself. His knees bent beneath him, his free hand scrabbled at the air, searching for something to hold on to, to give himself a feeling of form and weight, the working dimensions of the world around him. The sky above was a vault of blackness – and everywhere, the stars!" (TP 299)

Attributing to this experience a sense of mystification and puzzlement stresses the limitations and constraints imposed on this post-apocalyptic world, and simultaneously puts the scope and effects of the cataclysm into perspective. Cronin thus deliberately chooses to make this difference to our world explicit by incorporating the confrontation of one of his protagonists with the stars and the black sky, a phenomenon hitherto inaccessible to Peter Jaxon. In comparison to *The Dark Tower* and *The Road* the distinction between our world and the post-apocalyptic world is included in the narrative explicitly by this confrontation, while Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy only implicitly introduce this notion by primarily filling their narratives with relics from the past.

The past of the pre-apocalyptic world emerges upon the stage of the narration regularly through the memories and stories related to the colonists by Ida Jaxon, better known as Auntie within the colony. In a certain sense she embodies the forgotten world prior to the outbreak of the virus, as she is the only one left who was on one of the evacuation trains and founded this colony. Her accounts of the former times do not represent the sole source of the evocation of former times. The fact that the foundation of the colony directly followed the outbreak has resulted in the preservation of many practices and habits of the world preceding the apocalypse, which have been passed on from generation to generation. This includes the cultivation of the land, breeding livestock, educating the next generation or installing a surveillance system known as The Watch, among many other things. Arguably, a hermetic society has been brought into existence by the evacuation of children of the pre-apocalyptic world and their accommodation within the colonies. This society has been subjected to adaptation processes according to the external circumstances.

However, the isolated nature of the colony has resulted in the preservation of practices that carry similarities to former societies. Therefore, it can be postulated that Cronin's post-apocalyptic world differs from its counterparts in *The Road* and *The Dark Tower* with respect to the loss of the past. Whereas the memory of the past is gradually vanishing in correlation with the progressing extinction of mankind, and the past has acquired mythical status in the other two novels, the past and its practices have been maintained within the colony in *The Passage*.

In conclusion, only Justin Cronin's *The Passage* fully delves into the description of the cataclysm, while McCarthy and King avoid specifications pertaining to the apocalyptic events leading up to their narratives.

In *The Road* the barren landscape that is deprived of all distinguishing features and is thus characterized by nothingness and the absence of meaning, the diminishing light and the dwindling resources of food exacerbate the living conditions for the boy and the father. The landscape in *The Dark Tower* shares similar features of monotony, which is intended to emphasize the strategies of the protagonist to fill this absence with meaning. The post-apocalyptic world in *The Passage* forces the colonists to rely on the walls and the lights protecting the colony from the permanent threat of the virals.

The memory of the past world is gradually eroding in McCarthy's novel, as the father desperately clings to the remnants of the past within his memory. In *The Dark Tower* the past is far removed and the complete loss of memory is almost reached. Contrastingly, many practices of the past world have been sustained within the colony in *The Passage*.

Subsequently, the literary manifestations of survival strategies in all three novels will be introduced.

3.2. Hope and Faith

The despair and fatalism emanating from the post-apocalyptic world imagined by McCarthy, King and Cronin constitute the primary challenge that the struggling characters are faced with. Nevertheless, their struggle for survival is not restricted to the physical components of human life. It also entails the acquisition of intrinsic strategies that provide them with the necessary tools to defy the perils of the perishing world. Among those strategies is the ability to preserve the hope for a

better future. Despite the perpetual bleakness and the encroaching eclipse of the world, the characters in post-apocalyptic environments cling to their convictions of hope. It may be argued that not only despite but because of the sullen state of the world, the maintenance of hope becomes an essential condition for survival. In order to illustrate the presence of hope within the protagonists of these narratives, Søren Kierkegaard's analysis of the story of Abraham and Isaac pertaining to the faith displayed by Abraham, will serve as the theoretical framework to illuminate the central role of hope in *The Road*, *The Dark Tower* and *The Passage*.

In his influential piece of work *Fear and Trembling* Søren Kierkegaard³ scrutinizes the acts of faith underlying the Abraham/Isaac scenario and arrives at the conclusion that Abraham's faith is founded on irrational hope. On the one hand he is commanded by God to sacrifice his son, on the other hand he trusts God to not take his son, resulting in a paradoxical situation (Noble 94). This paradox arises from God's prophecy that Abraham would be granted a son who would become the father of a great nation. However, Abraham is urged by God to sacrifice this particular son, rendering the prophecy seemingly void. Yet, Abraham never doubts God and is fully aware of the fact "that no sacrifice is too severe when God demands it – and he drew the knife" (Kierkegaard 22). From an ethic perspective sacrificing his son could be classified as murder, but in religious ideology it is considered to be the ultimate act of faith in God. Kierkegaard further proposes that Abraham "had faith by virtue of the absurd" (35), taking into account that he simultaneously exhibited the hope that his son's life would not be demanded by God and the unadulterated faith in God by being "willing to sacrifice him if it was demanded" (35). Accordingly, Abraham is determined to obey the orders of God, even if that entails taking the life of his son. Although Abraham accepts the instructions of God without demur, Kierkegaard suggests that he was infused with the absurd hope that God would not allow the execution of these commands.

By examining similar constellations in these three novels, the nature of hope, its manifestations, its results with regard to the narrative and how it is put the test will be explored.

³ Kierkegaard published „Fear and Trembling“ under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio (Noble 95)

3.2.1. “Goodness will find the little boy” (TR 281)

Alan Noble postulates in his article on *The Absurdity of Hope in Cormac McCarthy's The Road* that the dilemma encountered by Abraham can be compared to the dilemma faced by the father in *The Road* (93). Apart from the evident similarities with respect to the exertion of hope in both the biblical text and in Cormac McCarthy's adaption of an end-time world, he supports this claim by referring to a note written by McCarthy on the very first draft of *The Road* that read: “(Kierkegaard: Abraham and Isaac)” (Noble 93). Noble draws the conclusion that McCarthy was inspired by Kierkegaard's views on the meaning of hope and faith in the biblical story and incorporated similar themes in his novel. This subsection is based on Noble's line of argumentation, which includes some highly convincing arguments that validate his claim that this note by McCarthy divulges his intention of drawing a parallel scenario, carrying the same message of undiluted faith as a viable coping strategy.

“He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke.” (TR 5) This quote demonstrates the various essential functions the existence of his son fulfils. The primary assumption to be derived from this quote is the fact that his son embodies the driving force behind his will to carry on in this hostile and decaying world, bereft of all its blissful qualities. The boy provides the fuel for the father's determination to tenaciously hold on to life and prevents him from succumbing to the temptations of death and oblivion. Due to the human kindness displayed by the son throughout their journey, the man perceives his son to possess divine roots and qualities (Kunsa 65). This becomes apparent during his conversation with the man named Ely, the father asks him: “What if I said that he's a god?” (TR 172) The boy has inherited God-like qualities and thus serves as proof of God's existence for the father, which elucidates the juxtaposition of the boy and the word of God in the quote above. Based on these hints Kunsa suggests that “[t]he boy serves as an Adamic figure, a messiah, not unlike Christ himself” (65). As argued by Noble, the father consequently is under the impression that providing his son with all the required means to ensure his survival is his divine duty (97), as illustrated in the following passage “My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to that by God.” (TR 77)

Both Abraham and the father in *The Road* are driven by their obligations to God, yet their scenarios differ with respect to what truly is considered to be an act of faith. While Abraham's faith becomes apparent in his willingness to sacrifice his son

and trust in God's benevolence, the father's act of faith becomes manifest in his refusal to end his son's life and thus abandon him in a world devoid of hope and means of sustenance (Noble 97). From an ethical point of view, the best thing for Isaac would be Abraham's reluctance and eventual refusal of killing him. Conversely, the best thing the father could do, as far as the welfare of his son is concerned, would be to kill him because intense suffering is almost bound to ensue in this post-apocalyptic world. Therefore, the father's situation can be considered to be an inverted version of Abraham's dilemma with the same results (Noble 103), as both decline to relinquish their hope and faith in spite of the hopelessness of their respective situations.

Throughout the events depicted in the novel, the father vacillates between the increasing awareness of impending death within this antagonizing world and his irrational hope for a better future for his son. The fatalism of the dying world he and his son cross becomes palpable and reinforces his nihilistic tendencies:

He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like groundfoxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it. (TR 130)

Being confronted with the perturbing gray light that symbolizes the world's gradual demise, the father is plagued by the realization of the inevitability of death (Squire 220). Hence, he is deprived of the hope that has thus far impelled him to march on through the ashes of devastation. The impenetrable darkness may not only implicate the all-pervasive force of death that has conquered the earth, but also the figurative darkness of their situation (Noble 100). They move south and are greeted by the dreary and cruel indifference of the landscape, scratching and clawing to stay alive only to realize the end of the world, and thus their individual death is drawing closer and closer. This passage epitomizes the irrationality of the father's hope, as surviving is regarded to be merely a temporal reprieve from the death that awaits them.

The absurdity of his hope is rooted in the simultaneous belief in two mutually exclusive perceptions of reality. On the one hand, the father deep down in his heart of hearts acknowledges the fact that the world does not offer the required means to sustain human life and he and his son are bound to die sooner rather than later. On

the other hand, he perpetuates an unfounded sense of hope in a bright and fertile future that lies ahead of them (Noble 102). Comparing the father's dilemma with the one experienced by Abraham allows inferences to be drawn with regard to the hope exhibited by both characters. Akin to Abraham, who has faith in God to not take the life of his son Isaac, even though he abides by God's order to kill his son, the father exhibits faith in God to provide his son with a better life, in spite of the inhospitality of the world (Noble 102). Arguably, the active act of killing in the biblical narrative is replaced in *The Road* by the passive act of killing the boy by leaving him in a dying and malicious world. Holding on to this irrational hope represents one of the essential strategies to penetrate the implacable darkness of the post-apocalyptic world. Although the father struggles to uphold this faith, he attains to not be disheartened by the doom and gloom of the decomposing world, and uses this absurd faith as a strategy to survive and defy potential suicidal thoughts.

The father's faith is realized in particular by "his constant reassurance to his son that everything will be 'okay' and his insistence that they keep on going south" (Noble 101). These two strategies to maintain hope perfectly display the absurd nature of his hope, which was argued to be symptomatic of the father's hope. In both cases there is no observable evidence for the father's claims that everything will be okay and that the south will offer more comforting conditions of living, which once again illustrates the contradictory nature of the two distinct notions clashing in his frame of thinking (Noble 101). At the very beginning of their journey they hear

[...] a sharp crack from somewhere on the mountain. Then another. It's just a tree falling, he said. [...] It's okay, the man said. All the trees in the world are going to fall sooner or later. But not on us.
How do you know?
I just know. (TR 35)

Admittedly, these remarks to his son might originate in the intention to implement hope into his son's thinking and thwart the blossoming of suicide thoughts that infested the thinking of his wife and led to the irreversible loss of his wife. It could be argued that he is solely intent on preserving the last sparks of hope of the little boy, and does not really share the hope offered in these utterances. According to Noble, belief and disbelief in the existence of hope in a world pervaded by death are merged in a hybrid-like simultaneous existence in the frame of thinking of the father (102). Adopting this kind of reading, it may be concluded that the man indeed believes in his

own words and does not merely use them to appease the anxieties of his son. From this point of view, it can be inferred that this irrational hope functions as an invaluable strategy to survive.

The final, ultimate test of Abraham's absurd faith occurs when he draws the knife and is about to deliver the death sentence on his own flesh and blood (Kierkegaard 22). In *The Road* the challenge which puts the faith and hope of the father to the test is the choice whether to kill his own son and thereby prevent him from falling victim to the heinous cannibals scavenging the land or to starvation, or not (Squire 218). This ultimate choice that the father has to face at the end of the novel is symbolized by the gun he carries with him at all times and is therefore constantly reminded of the severity of his burden (Noble 104). When he has to waste one bullet to save his son's life the possibility of both committing suicide has been eliminated, as only one round remains in the gun and the question arises whether he can kill the sole being that is left in his life:

Can you do it? When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesn't fire? It has to fire. What if it doesn't fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing? (TR 114)

Conjuring up possible scenarios that could hinder his plan to take his son's life in order to spare him a gruesome and painful death, illustrate the struggle within him whether he really has the intestinal fortitude to carry out his plans. He wishes to dispose of the emotional bond to the boy in order to do what's best for the boy, illustrated by the thought, "[i]f only my heart were stone" (11). When the time comes and he is on the verge of death he becomes aware of his incapability of ending his son's life:

Just take me with you. Please
I can't.
Please, Papa.
I can't. I can't hold my son dead in my arms. I thought I could but I can't.
You said you wouldn't ever leave me.
I know. I'm sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did. (TR 279)

The conscious choice to not kill his son functions as the ultimate proof of his faith in God, and that the boy will be provided with the required means to ensure him a future worth living. This choice could be considered to be morally objectionable, due to the

fact that the boy has neither been provided with a shelter to defy the hostile environment, nor has the man taught him the many crucial survival strategies to be able to persevere (Noble 105). On the perfunctory level of the narrative this choice bears cruel implications for the future of the boy, yet displays the virtue of irrational hope that has fuelled the actions of the father in the course of the novel.

Do you remember that little boy, Papa?
 Yes. I remember him.
 Do you think that he's all right that little boy?
 Oh yes. I think he's all right.
 Do you think he was lost?
 No. I don't think he was lost.
 I'm scared that he was lost.
 I think he's all right.
 But who will find him if he's lost? Who will find the little boy?
 Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again. (TR 281)

This dialogue between father and son refers to an instance earlier when the boy was convinced he saw another boy, and expressed his concern for the well-being of this boy, being alone, whereas they at least have each other. The rapidly approaching realization that their paths are about to diverge soon supports the notion that the boy he has seen symbolizes the boy himself, without his father. The little boy makes use of substitution and projects his own fears and anxieties onto the little boy, disclosing the excruciating fear of solitude that haunts his consciousness. More precisely, the looming possibility of having to survive on his own in this hostile post-apocalyptic world increases the trepidation of finding himself lost devoid of guidance and protection. The father's reply epitomizes the irrational hope which the father resolves to abide by during the last test he is subjected to. His reassurance that "goodness will find the little boy" (TR 281) functions as the last affirmation of his absurd hope that the boy is taken care of in spite of the discouraging occurrences and impressions they have been exposed to on their journey on the road. The fact that he devotes his last words on earth to transmit his own hope and faith to his son indicates the importance of having hope when only death and exasperation emanate from the surrounding world.

The recompense for the father's seemingly unfounded and irresponsible hope enters the narrative in the form of a man with a parka, three days after the father's demise (Kunsa 67). The little boy is invited to join this man and his family and consequently eludes impending starvation or a more horrific fate. Taking into account

that the father and his son have not encountered one of the “good guys” throughout their entire journey, the sudden appearance at the moment when the boy needs it the most, can be classified as divine intervention or a “deus ex machina” – ending (Josephs 27). This ending once again echoes the interference of God on Abraham’s behalf seconds before he brings down the knife and sacrifices his son. In both cases Abraham’s and the father’s hope and faith are ultimately rewarded and their sons are salvaged (Noble 106). The fact that the man in the parka emerges three days after the son has to endure the agonies of losing the one person he loved the most, evokes the resurrection of Christ three days after being crucified and thus establishes a link between religion and narrative, implying a divine origin of the rescue and rejecting the notion of haphazard events.

Due to this providential turn of events at the end of the novel, it can hardly be refuted that hope lies at the core of the narrative. As argued above, this hope infuses the father with the determination required to face the challenges that are caused by the ruthless landscape, and functions as one of the main strategies to cope with the futility and hopelessness that permeates the post-apocalyptic world. The “deus ex machina” - ending manages to compound the perception that hope itself, irrespective of the hopeless and forlorn world that encompasses them, is an imperative tool to overcome the bleakness of the post-apocalyptic setting. The ending does not purport that hope necessarily will make a difference, but that it might (Graulund 76). Holding on to hope, even though it appears to be absurd to do so, has resulted in a positive outcome for Abraham and the father, evoking the old adage: you reap what you sow.

3.2.2. “Go then. There are other worlds than these.” (TDT 266)

Stephen King incorporates a similar scenario into his narrative, when the gunslinger Roland is confronted with the choice between saving Jake Chambers or pursuing the man in black and the Dark Tower. Nevertheless, the outcome of this crucial choice significantly deviates from the effects depicted in the bible and in McCarthy’s *The Road*. Apart from the differing repercussions of Roland’s choice, several parallels can be drawn with respect to the intertwined connection between hope and survival in the post-apocalyptic setting.

The first correlation that can be detected, comparing the presentations of Roland’s and Abraham’s situation, is the fact that the narrative derives many of its features from the biblical story, as evidenced by the prophecies that foreshadow the

pivotal choice Roland will be required to make. Reminiscent of the prophecy of God that Abraham's son would be the father of a great nation, the oracle in the mountains predicts that "[t]he boy is your gate to the man in black. The man in black is your gate to the three. The three are your way to the Dark Tower." (TDT 179) This marks the first instance which offers indications that augur ill for the immediate future of the gunslinger. Roland's initial reaction is very much in line with the father's response in *The Road* to the dawning realization that the burden of sacrifice has been imposed upon him, as he imploringly enquires: "How? How can that be? Why must it be?" (TDT 179) Not only the indignation courtesy of the implications of this forecast is expressed in this utterance, but also the implicit acquiescence to comply with the obligations he is expected to fulfil. The implication of obedience to the actions implied via the demonic prophecy is brought to fruition when Jake stumbles and precariously dangles over the sheer endless depths of the abyss, while the man in black issues the challenge to either help the boy and never catch him or follow him and thereby inch closer to the Dark Tower:

All the chips on the table. Every card up but one. The boy dangled, a living Tarot card, the Hanged Man, the Phoenician sailor, innocent lost and barely above the wave of a stygian sea. [...]

"Help me. Help me, Roland. "

The trestle had begun to twist further, screaming, pulling loose from itself, giving –

"Then I shall leave you"

"No! You shall NOT!"

The gunslinger's legs carried him in a sudden leap, breaking the paralysis that held him; he took a true giant's step above the dangling boy and landed in a skidding, plunging rush toward the light that offered the Tower frozen on his mind's eye in a black still life..." (TDT 265-266)

His ultimate test of faith bears a striking resemblance to Abraham's test of faith. Both are required to sacrifice an innocent, beloved boy and both make the conscious decision to yield to the demands of God and the man in black respectively. Yet, the consequences put in motion by their vital decision drastically differ from one another. While Abraham's irrational hope and faith (Kierkegaard 35) engenders redemption and new life for his son, as God withdraws the demands previously put forth, Jake Chambers is not rescued at the very last second like Isaac and the boy are in *The Road*. The parallel structure of Roland's fate and Abraham's fate is even acknowledged by King, as the man in black taunts the gunslinger by uttering the following words in response to Roland's desultory threat of killing him: "No you won't.

You can't. But you can gather wood to remember your Isaac." (TDT 272) On the perfunctory level of the narrative Roland seems to be faced with an equivalent test as Abraham, just with differing outcomes. No "deus ex machina". No redemption for the boy, but solely perdition for both the boy and the gunslinger, who has to live with his decision. It might be argued that the post-apocalyptic world imagined by Stephen King is too far removed from its pre-apocalyptic ideologies to contain a deity that people can believe in. However, the fact that the Tower marks "the nexus of Time, the nexus of Size" (TDT 299), unites all of the myriads of universes, and "within it, a stairway, perhaps rising to the Godhead itself" (TDT 290) suggests that the Tower itself represents God or at least contains a god in its chambers. Based on this premise, Roland in fact does exhibit faith in a deity, faith in the Dark Tower, faith in the meaning of his quest towards it. Then why is the life of Jake not spared by this deity?

It has been stated above that the irrational hope attributed to Abraham and the father in McCarthy's novel serves as the impetus for the redemptive results of their respective tests. The irrationality of their hope is founded on the simultaneous belief of mutually exclusive views. Contrastingly, Roland does not share the paradoxical belief in two contradictory perceptions, for him it's either the boy or the Dark Tower. He does not have faith in being able to advance to the Tower and rescue the boy simultaneously, which constitutes the significant distinction to the demonstrations of hope showcased by Abraham and the father. Thus, the hypothesis that absurd hope represents one of the key ingredients towards survival in the post-apocalyptic world is confirmed. The absence of this irrational hope not only demands the life of the little boy, but also the welfare of the gunslinger, who is "realizing that a great passage of his life had come and gone. "I loved you, Jake", he said aloud" (TDT 299). This quote clearly indicates that his crucial decision will haunt him for the rest of his life (Schweitzer 144) and has cost him part of his well-being, as the boy's final words, "Go then. There are other worlds than these" (TDT 266) reverberate through his thoughts.

3.2.3. Noah's Arc

Justin Cronin's *The Passage* does not include a scenario akin to Abraham and Isaac, father and son, or Roland and Jake, yet it conveys the notion that irrational hope is beneficial to surviving in a lethal environment. At the center of this narrative argument

in favor of hope as a survival strategy lies the analogy to Noah's arc incorporated into the plot via the former nun Lacey, whom Peter and Amy meet in the closing stages of the novel. She recounts the story of Noah, who is asked by God to build a ship that is supposed to protect him and his family from the floods God is resolved to unleash upon the land. Additionally, he wants Noah to take two specimens of every animal species with him to initiate the rebuilding of the world (TP 710). Lacey further elaborates:

If Noah had simply done as he was told, the story wouldn't mean anything at all. No. He was afraid that people would make fun of him. He was afraid he would build the ship and the flood wouldn't come and he would look like a fool. God was testing him, you see, to find out if there was anyone who made the world worth saving. He wanted to see if Noah was up to the job. And in the end, he was. He built the ship, and the heavens opened, and the world washed away. [...] God remembered Noah, and sent him a dove to lead them to dry land, and the world was reborn. (710)

In her analogy of this story to the events of their world, Peter represents Noah and Amy is the ship (TP 710-711). Accordingly, in this post-apocalyptic world the flood arrives in the disguise of the virals and the original twelve convicts who have brought calamity upon the land. Lacey intends to plant the seed of the thought of him being the chosen one in Peter who may trigger the salvation of mankind, while Amy symbolizes the means to accomplish this goal.

The awareness of the pivotal position Amy has assumed due to her engaging in a hybrid connection with the virus is being exposed as soon as Michael decodes the transmitted Army signal, spreading their message: "If you found her, bring her here" (TP 476) throughout the vast and forsaken country. After examining military data on a chip that was transplanted into Amy's neck, Michael reveals that Amy is 100 years old and has been endowed by the US military with recuperative abilities to defy the boundaries of human mortality (TP 475). Having analyzed and interpreted the data on the military chip, Michael discloses the potential ramifications of his investigations:

"[...]This girl, Amy, she's not a viral. We'd all be dead if she were. But you've seen the way she heals, and she survived out there. You said it yourself, she protected you. And how do you explain the fact that she's almost a hundred years old but doesn't look a day over, what, fourteen? The Army did something to her. I don't know how they did it, but they did. This transmitter was broadcasting on a military frequency. Maybe she was infected and they

did something to her that made her normal again. [...] Maybe she's the cure." (TP 476)

Michael supports his hypothesis with all the noticeable peculiarities of her existence, such as her outward appearance and her act of effortlessly saving Peter from the virals (TP 347), that corroborate the notion that she indeed has been subjected to experiments by the Army, even though the exact nature of these experiments remain obscure to the colonists. The conclusion that gradually dawns on the group of colonists is Amy's status as the remedy to cure the world and hence end the siege of terror exerted on the world by the virus.

The act of irrational hope occurs when the small group of colonists disregard the presumable death that awaits them and sally forth into the unknown parts of the depredated world to trace the origins of the transmitted signal, hoping that returning Amy to the source of all evils of this post-apocalyptic world will put an end to the virals once and for all. Similarly to Abraham and the unnamed man in *The Road*, the decision hinges on an absurd hope for a better future despite the knowledge of the results of prior excursions. Peter's father found an untimely demise in his attempt to search for other people out there, which is commented on by his own son Theo with "it was stupid, and he got his answer" (TP 334). The colonists' entire existence that is built on the walls and the lights at night is the ultimate denial of hope as far as surviving without these two elements is concerned. The fact that they do not open the gates of the wall at night and impose radical sanctions on not adhering to these rules perfectly displays their conviction that survival beyond the protective walls and devoid of light to deter the virals from assailing them is considered to be impossible. Yet, the group of colonists decide to embark on this journey and base their decision on information gathered via 93 years-old computer chips and electronically transmitted signals. Or more precisely, their irrational hope is generated by the trust they put in Amy as their savior, as implied by the diary excerpt of Sarah Fischer: "Peter is more convinced than ever that the signal from Colorado is the key to all of this, and I agree. After what we saw in the Haven, I am beginning to think that Amy is the only hope we have – that any of us has." (TP 616) Amy is the ship built to rebuild the human race and the world it inhabits. Amy is regarded as the source of hope, which is the impetus for their irrational decision to leave the seemingly safe haven that the colony offers, at least for the time being until the batteries fail to illuminate the colony. The simultaneous belief in both the salvation embodied in Amy and the

assurance of the inevitable death lurking under the starlit sky beyond the colony can be argued to be the manifestation of their illogical hope, which functions as a strategy to survive in the end-time world. This undiluted faith is expressed in another diary entry of Sarah:

“What everybody’s thinking, but not saying, is that there’s no real safety from here on out. The funny thing is, I don’t mind so much, not really. I hope we don’t all die out here, of course. But I think I’d rather be here than anywhere else, with these people. It’s different being afraid when there’s the hope that it will amount to something. I don’t know what we’ll find in Colorado, if we ever get there. I’m not even sure it matters. All those years, waiting for the Army, and it turns out the Army is us. (TP 519)

After years of waiting in vain for somebody to save them, they take action into their own hands and risk their lives for the possibility of complete and final redemption of the entire human race. Their faith rests on the shoulders of Amy, inheriting the cure to the all-pervasive force of death that reigns supreme in this realm of devastation and blood-drinking, flesh-eating creatures. Believing in the chance to alter the course of human history, even though empirical observation of the expected outcome discloses the irrationality of their decision, operates as the driving force of their determination to stay alive.

Illustrations of irrational hope in all three post-apocalyptic stories have been related to the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, which has yielded the conclusion that “faith by virtue of the absurd” (Kierkegaard 35) represents one of the most essential tools to survive in a world that is infested with death. The next subsection will propose human relationships to be another central element that the struggle for survival is dictated by.

3.3. Human relationships

Bonding with other human beings and re-establishing human community is an often re-occurring theme in post-apocalyptic literature. The vast majority of narratives depicting a post-apocalyptic world do not solely focus on the struggle for survival of one individual, but frequently feature a group of survivors or at least two individuals, united by the mutual aim of persevering in a dying world. Examples of this noticeable pattern of narration include Robert Neville and Ruth in *I am Legend*, or Ish and Emma in George Stewart’s *Earth Abides* among many others, which gives rise to the

hypothesis that the community as such represents one of the essentials of human existence.

Based on this assumption, it might be deduced that the struggle for survival within a world that is characterized by the disheartening omnipresence of death, functions as one of the imperative strategies to cope with the fatalism of the post-apocalyptic world. In order to confirm this hypothesis, corroborative pieces of evidence will be offered by means of investigating the central human relationships offered in the books by McCarthy, King and Cronin. Mankind shares the desire to bond with others, establishing human relationships as a necessity of human life. The increasing awareness of threatening death in the post-apocalyptic world reinforces the need to construct human relationships. Thus, community is argued to represent an invaluable instrument to sustain human life against the bleakness of the doomed world. Evidence will be provided by analyzing the intricate relationships of father and son in *The Road*, of Roland and Jake in *The Dark Tower*, and of Amy and Wolgast and Theo and Mausami in *The Passage*.

3.3.1. Father and Son

The gripping depiction of the relationship between the father and his son constitutes the backbone of the novel *The Road* and operates as the narrative vessel to convey the negotiation of themes such as human codes of moral conduct, hope or survival. McCarthy manages to beautifully craft a tale of love between two human beings that transcends the constraints of selfishness or egotism exhibited by the individuals they encounter on their journey. While the visceral struggle for survival pushes many of the survivors beyond the edge of sanity and prompts them to resort to deplorable acts of cannibalism, the father and son can rely on the love and trust that is established between them as an additional source of motivation and the sustenance of hope. Submerged by waves of despair, their relationship becomes their shelter that guards them from the horrors that permeate the garden of ashes. Due to the doubtless certainty of the other's reliability, the bond between father and son is the one constant factor of their lives. The existence of the boy serves as the means to preserve the father's willingness to live and resist the sheer irresistible force of death. The father "knew only that the child was his warrant" (TR 5). In other words, the boy is the sole reason he carries on and does not yield to the temptations of suicide like his wife did. She exposes the truth concerning his decision against death and in favor

of life: “The one thing I can tell you is that you won’t survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far...” (TR 57) This declaration stresses the importance allocated to the presence of the little boy by showing her inability to endure the bleakness of the life they are subjected to. Without the parental urge to ensure the welfare of her own flesh and blood, she would have given up long ago and succumbed to the temptations of finality. The father has accepted the fact that there is no rational reason to strive for survival other than the love he feels for the boy and receives in return and “[t]hat the boy was all that stood between him and death” (TR 29). Moreover, it can be clearly inferred from the following question posed by the boy that the father does not deem it necessary to conceal his contemplation from the boy:

What would you do if I died?
 If you died I would want to die too.
 So you could be with me?
 Yes. So I could be with you.
 Okay. (TR 11)

This dialogue supports the notion that the imagination of being united in death takes precedence over the will to survive and thereby prolong their agony within the decaying world. The father would rather pursue a potential reunion with his son in the afterlife by taking his own life than to bear the misery of the world and the burden of grief bestowed upon him through the loss of his son.

The interwoven nature of their existence is established in the opening sentence that illustrates the priority the father ascribes to the protection of his son: “When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he’d reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him.” (TR 3) Barely awake, the very first thing he feels urged to do is to make sure his son is still beside him, as the boy embodies his determination to cling to life for as long as the child provides him with a purpose of living. Taking into account that the process of awakening is accompanied by dizziness and disorientation, the immediacy with which he seeks confirmation of the boy’s presence, implies the value he places on his son’s well-being.

This feeling is far from being one-sided, as the reciprocal quality of this feeling is evidenced by the blind trust displayed by the little boy:

The boy turned in the blankets. Then he opened his eyes. Hi, Papa, he said.
 I’m right here.
 I know. (TR 5)

The boy's affirmative response not only indicates the knowledge of the father's physical presence, but carries the underlying implication that the boy's faith and trust in his father vanquish all doubts that might arise in him. He trusts in his father taking care of him and always being there for him, contributing to the mutual trust that shapes their relationship. Conversely, the boy watches out for the health of his father and makes sure he doesn't neglect his own nutrition in favor of providing his son with a larger portion of food and drink. When they miraculously get hold of rare cocoa, the father intends to give the boy all of it, yet is caught in the process by the attentive eyes of the boy, who does not hesitate to remind his father of his promise to not do that, and adds the reproaching remark: "If you break little promises you'll break the big ones. That's what you said." (TR 34) The pivotal quality of the trust that is linked to keeping one's promises is exposed in this admonishment, as well as the boy's intention to sustain this state of mutual trust. The reciprocal love that shapes and determines their relationship is best summed up in this passage: "Then they set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash, each the other's world entire." (TR 6) They derive hope and inspiration from the emotional attachment provided by the bond between the father and son. Furthermore, their survival and persistence in this decaying world hinges on the welfare of the other, as each represents the epicentre of the other.

As argued by Knox, their interdependence on each other originates in the yearning to share feelings, thoughts and values with somebody that can echo and thus consolidate their "ideologies" (97). The inflationary use of "okay" in their dialogues strengthens and affirms their set of values and beliefs, as it signifies the positive response of the referent, to which the prior statement was directed. For instance, hit by the realization that their food supplies have diminished significantly, the boy asks his father:

Are we going to die now?

No.

What are we going to do?

We're going to drink some water. Then we're going to keep going down the road.

Okay. (TR 88)

The boy's closing "Okay" functions primarily as a discourse marker that signals the comprehension of the father's utterance. However, it carries an additional function

too. “Okay” accomplishes to provide confirmation of the plans and the underlying ideology that has inspired the father’s choice (Knox 97). It can be inferred from the total alterity of their situation that the man has not experienced anything remotely close to this struggle for survival in a fatalistic world. Therefore, the man can be presumed to be at a loss with respect to the bleak and hopeless forthcoming future. The affirming quality of the boy’s “Okay” serves to strengthen the father’s confidence in his decisions, which impact both of their lives. On the other hand, the boy repeatedly poses questions pertaining to the severity of their situation and potential strategies to guarantee their survival. These frequent questions function to define the role distribution within their relationship: the father is the one who is obliged to provide guidance and make the final decisions, while the boy is assigned the task of providing affirmation and trust, which enhances the father’s own confidence in his decisions and hence provides him with a purpose.

This fixed distribution of roles and the entire paradigm of their interdependent relationship is about to be shattered by the impending death of the father. Since the concrete evidence of his declining health cannot be concealed any longer, the burden of facing a life of solitude is placed upon the boy, which shapes his thoughts. During the altercation with the thief, who stole all of their belongings, a first rift to the stable relationship is caused due to the diverging perceptions of appropriate codes of conduct and the boy’s gradually increasing agency is shown:

You’ re not the one who has to worry about everything.
The boy said something but he couldnt understand him. What? He said.
He looked up, his wet and grimy face. Yes I am, he said. I am the one. (TR 259)

The boy puts forth a pertinent argument which emphasizes the fact that the father’s role in their relationship is about to be terminated. The father’s demise looms ominously over their heads, and attached to it the removal of the guidance and protection that the boy used to rely on. The passive, supportive role that he assumed within this relationship inevitably becomes irrelevant in the light of the approaching solitude, which coerces him to assume a more active and even dominant role. In other terms, he is the one who is affected by their decisions, as the father won’t be here to bear witness to its potential consequences. In the light of this shift in identity and demeanor, prior dialogues provide further insights into the mindset of the boy.

As the narrative progresses the boy becomes more and more concerned with the possibility of the existence of other “good guys”. His question “What if some good guys came?” (TR 151) and the speculations that “[m]aybe there’s a father and his little boy and they’re sitting on the beach” (TR 216) are met with scepticism and evasively worded doubt on the part of the father. The growing significance placed on the existence of other good guys is expressed through the shift from a question to a speculative declaration (Cooper 231). It can be inferred from the subversive implications of this shift that the boy is in the process of accepting the approaching death of his father. What he cannot accept is an existence devoid of human community, hitherto provided by his father. The essential quality of community and human relationships in the boy’s conception of a meaningful life becomes apparent in his declarative utterance: “There could be people alive someplace else” (TR 244). Being unable to imagine a life without engaging in human relationships and being sheltered by the comfort and love offered by community, the boy’s response to the father’s rejection of this idea is significant: “He shook his head. I don’t know what we’re doing, he said.” (TR 244) The boy virtually denies any purpose in living and the continuance of their journey, if human community is rendered impossible, perfectly displaying the fact “that surviving the wasteland requires more than finding food and shelter, surviving the wasteland requires re-creating the communities that the apocalypse has erased” (Knox 97).

The most powerful affirmation of the fundamental nature of human bonding for the survival of human beings is delivered at the end of the novel via the father’s assurance of his continued support from the realm of death:

If I’m not here you can still talk to me. You can talk to me and I’ll talk to you.
 You’ll see.
 Will I hear you?
 Yes. You will. You have to make it like talk that you imagine. And you’ll hear me. You have to practice. Just don’t give up. Okay?
 Okay.
 Okay. (TR 279)

Even death cannot break the bond between the father and his son, providing confirmation of the invaluable and essential quality of human relationships, in this case the love established between father and son, to the survival of mankind. Despite recapturing human community within the boundaries of life, when the boy is integrated into the family of the man in the parka, the boy retains the imaginative

connection to his father: “He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget.” (TR 286)

The comfort and love emanating from human relationships, as depicted in *The Road*, manages to suffuse human beings with the hope and purpose that survival in a dying world hinges upon (Knox 99).

3.3.2. Roland and Jake – Betrayal and Sacrifice

On the surface Roland’s decision to betray and sacrifice Jake appears to subvert the proposed interrelatedness of survival and human community. However, a diametrically opposed reading of this passage will be offered in order to disclose the beneficial effects of relationships to the chances of coping with the inhospitality of the post-apocalyptic setting.

An early indication of the link between survival and human relationships is the barely noticeable character progression of Roland throughout the novel’s narrative. Early on the gunslinger is established as a lone wolf, whose sole purpose of life rests on catching up with the man in black and thereby advancing to the Dark Tower, as he considers his guns to be more relevant to survive than any forms of human relationships: “He still had the guns – his father’s guns – and surely more they were more important than horns...or even friends.” (TDT 7) Attributing more importance to inanimate objects than to social connections divulges the values and beliefs that shape his perception of reality. And yet, the following rhetorical question “Weren’t they?” (TDT 7) might give rise to speculations about potential doubts about this set of beliefs and could thus foreshadow the evolution of his character upon encountering the boy, Jake Chambers. Not only does the company of the boy enrich his previously monotonous quest, but the seed of love is planted inside the gunslinger. After he has rescued the boy from the clutches of the succubus in the mountains, it dawns upon him that this love was not something that required time to develop:

He hugged the kid and put a dry kiss on his cheek, knowing that he loved him. Well, maybe that wasn’t quite right. Maybe the truth was that he’d loved the kid from the first moment he’d seen him (as he had Susan Delgado), and was only now allowing himself to recognize the fact. For it was a fact. (TR 167-168)

The gunslinger acknowledges the immediate connection established between him and Jake and becomes aware of his own denial of this fact preceding this moment. The reason for this rejection of his emotions is hinted at in this passage as well.

Susan Delgado was the love of his life, who was burned alive in front of his eyes, which has left an indelible mark on him ever since, as the vivid images of her death torment his soul by reappearing in his dreams (TDT 162-163). It might be interpreted that her gruesome demise was the impetus for his beliefs that are exemplified by his preference for inanimate guns in favor of human beings and relationships. This excruciating experience may have triggered his conviction to associate love with something detrimental and perilous, which becomes obvious in the following passage:

He held the boy to him, feeling his face, hot against his chest, and his hands, dry against his ribcage. [...] It occurred to him later that this was when he began to love the boy – which was, of course, what the man in black must have planned all along. Was there ever a trap to match the trap of love? (TDT 124)

Even though Roland is incapable of thwarting his succumbing to the persuasive whisper of love and has formed a bond between him and the boy that almost resembles the love of father and son in *The Road*, he surmises that this human relationship is a trap set up by the man in black. The usage of the term “trap” clearly carries a negative connotation. This negatively connoted word articulates Roland’s dread of the crucial choice he expects to face, as Jake and the progressively increasing love to the boy symbolizes an impediment on his path to the Dark Tower. Love is considered to make a man vulnerable, receptive to the incomparable sorrow that is tied to the death of a beloved person. Based on his traumatic experiences in the past Roland suspects that this is the weak point of his character that the man in black wants to exploit. Loving someone always implies the danger of being robbed of this precious love, which can break the will and determination of a human being.

After the fateful decision that he is required to make is foreshadowed by the oracle of the mountains, Roland attempts to escape this insidious trap of the man in black by detaching his emotions and dehumanizing Jake: “‘Come with me or stay’, the gunslinger repeated, and felt something happen in his mind. An uncoupling. That was the moment at which the small figure before him ceased to be Jake and became only the boy, an impersonality to be moved and used.” (TDT 198-199) In order to avert the negative effects on his determination to attain his goal of proceeding to the Dark Tower, which are tied to the loss of a beloved person, he makes a conscious choice against Jake. His ultimate goal to reach the Dark Tower surpasses all human relationships, and the boy becomes a pawn in the metaphoric chess game with the

man in black. Not being tempted to choose love and the relationship to the boy over the Dark Tower is regarded by him to be an act of strength and determination. When the man in black predicts Roland's future via Tarot Cards, he unveils the card of the "Hanged Man" (TDT 276) and adds that "[...] it signifies strength, not death. You, gunslinger, are the Hanged Man, plodding ever onward toward your goal over the pits of Na'ar. You've already dropped one co-traveler into that pit, have you not?" (TDT 276). The rejection of the friendship that has fuelled his journey across the desert is validated by the superior goal of reaching the Dark Tower.

This decision dramatically alters the complexion of their relationship, as Jake recognizes the signs of deceit and betrayal, after Roland reveals how he defeated his former teacher Cort, which signified the gunslinger's coming of age. In order to complete the training provided by their teacher, each gunslinger was faced with the challenge of overcoming their teacher. Roland accomplished this goal via a sly trick that caught his teacher Cort off guard. For this battle each combatant was free to choose one weapon. Roland chose his old hawk David, who dies in the course of the battle. Roland's master plan proved to be effective, as he was able to defeat Cort, yet had to sacrifice the life of his loyal companion (TDT 233-236). Grasping the underlying implication of this story to his own fate, Jake becomes aware of him being nothing more than a "poker chip" (TDT 243) to the gunslinger, a tool to reach his final aim. Thus, it is indicated that human relationships represent nothing more than the means to attain a goal, as the ends justify the means for the gunslinger. In the further course of the narrative Jake addresses the gunslinger with more aggressive remarks that intend to provoke Roland and thus elicit the truth from the gunslinger in terms of his motives. "You won't get what you want until I'm dead. I'll take my chances by myself" (TDT 255), claims Jake, when he is urged on by the gunslinger. He explicitly voices his suspicion that Roland uses him as a tool to advance to the man in black and the Dark Tower and threatens to stay behind. The increasing fear of the approaching tear that their relationship is bound to be subjected to culminates in intimidation, when Roland approaches and the boy declares: "Go back. I don't want you to kill me." (TDT 264) The monumental decision by Roland has destroyed the ties of love connecting the boy and the gunslinger, as suspicion and doubts have invaded the boy's thoughts and in have caused trepidation and fear to surge within Jake.

Even though the decision to depersonalize Jake may be considered to be a calculating and manipulative scheme by Roland, several indications of his struggle within, as far as this decision is concerned, are included in the narrative. His feelings towards Jake are indeed ambivalent, as evidenced by the acknowledgment of the love that accompanies their relationship. Nevertheless, he recognizes the necessity to sacrifice the boy in order to enable him to confront the man in black. He lacks the irrational hope of saving the boy and still reaching the Tower. Hence he perceives it to be “the predestination that had always been there” (TDT 191), which requires him to betray the boy, even though he is “hating himself for what he was going to do” (TDT 255). The realization of the moral reprehension of his decision evokes gnawing doubts that almost result in a change of mind:

In a sudden, simple thought (almost a vision) it came to him that all he had to do was give it over, turn around, take the boy with him, and make him the center of a new force. The Tower did not have to be obtained in this humiliating, nose-rubbing way, did it? Let his quest resume after the boy had a growth of years, when the two of them could cast the man in black aside like a cheap wind-up toy. (TDT 256)

This internal struggle disclosed via this train of thought that would indicate choosing the boy and passing on the chance of ascending the Tower, exemplifies the fact that human relationships do constitute an important feature of his values and beliefs. Moreover, this passage establishes love indeed as the trap that the man in black endeavored to create. In this very moment Roland is very close to relinquish his ultimate goal, which is what the man in black intended to do.

Opting to turn his back on the boy he admitted to love, might lead to the conclusion that the bond of human relations is not portrayed to be a necessity for human survival in *The Dark Tower*. The mere fact of the betrayal and sacrifice of Jake compounds this notion that reaching the Dark Tower is regarded to be superior to all other aspects of human life. However, the immediate reaction of the gunslinger suggests an opposing interpretation of his decision:

It came to him that there would be further degradations of the spirit ahead that might make this one seem infinitesimal, and yet he would still flee it, down corridors and through cities, from bed to bed; he would flee the boy's face and try to bury it in cunts and killing, only to enter one final room and find it looking at him over a candle flame. He had become the boy; the boy had become him. He was become a werewolf of his own making. In deep dreams he would become the boy and speak the boy's strange city tongue. (TDT 267)

This quote illustrates the agony that shapes his conscious thoughts, based on the realization of the consequences of his actions. The immediate conviction that he has just made a decision that will haunt him for the rest of his life hits him like a devastating blow to the face. His attempts to flee the memory of the boy are deemed to be impossible, as he is plagued by the blossoming awareness of the inseparable bond between him and the boy, created by the love he himself acknowledged prior to his betrayal. In the course of the novel Roland is not bothered by the many lives he has taken in order to reach the Dark Tower, but he instantly grieves over the effects of this decision. Even though he did not engage in an active act to cause the death of the innocent and loyal boy, who put all his trust in him, not helping him and saving him from the depths he eventually plunged into amounts to the same result and therefore is tantamount to murder. The mentioning of “one final room” might symbolize the final destination of his quest: the Dark Tower itself. It might be concluded from such an interpretation that not even the accomplishment of the one goal that has dictated his past, his values and beliefs, and his decisions might suffice to erase the haunting image of this fallacy. This horrifying and excruciating insight has resulted in an internal death, the death of his soul, as indicated by the thought that rushes through his mind afterwards: “*This is death. Is it? Is it?*” (TDT 267) The fact that the subsequent palaver between the gunslinger and the man in black takes place in a “golgotha” (TDT 271) evokes the epitome of all betrayals in western culture. “Golgotha” was the hill on which, according to the New Testament, Jesus Christ was crucified, immediately conjuring up the preceding betrayal of Judas. By incorporating references to the most well-known betrayal of human history, King emphasizes the degree of reprehension of the gunslinger’s actions. Based on the fact that Judas Ischariot hanged himself shortly thereafter might give rise to the interpretation that Roland as well has to face death in the form of the demise of his soul.

To relate this to the overarching line of argumentation that human relationships are essential for the survival of human beings, it can be stated that the negative repercussions of Roland’s betrayal and sacrifice only emphasize the importance of community and relationships to the survival in the post-apocalyptic world. While *The Road* illustrated the positive effect of maintaining human communities, *The Dark Tower* depicts the negative consequences of not adhering to the human desire to bond with others. In conclusion, both narratives can be argued

to present human community as an essential tool to both physical and mental survival.

3.3.3. “Recalled to Life” (Dickens 4)

Justin Cronin’s *The Passage* offers many examples of the vital importance of human relationships to the survival of individuals, such as the repressed love relationship between Peter Jaxon and Alicia Donadio, the unconditional love of a prostitute for her daughter Amy, the unselfish compassion that characterized the relationship of Amy and the nun Lacey, or the human community established within the microcosm of the colony. Two of the narrated relationships that support the hypothesis that human community is essential to the survival of human beings exposed to the dreary and harsh nature of the wasteland of the post-apocalyptic world, will be presented in more detail. First of all, the bond between Amy and Agent Wolgast, who considers the protection of Amy to be a second chance after his first child, Eva, had died. Secondly, the complicated love between Mausami Patal and Theo Jaxon that vanquishes all obstacles and leads to new life. In both cases, the love and hope that lies at the core of human relationships facilitate survival and figuratively cause the resurrection of Theo and Amy, as they are being “recalled to life” (Dickens 4) akin to Dr. Manette in Charles Dickens’s *A tale of two cities*.

The origin of the genuine love of FBI Agent Brad Wolgast for orphaned Amy, which prospers against the background of the apocalyptic disaster that devastates the land, can be traced back to the events preceding the outbreak of the virus. Wolgast and his considerably less experienced partner Phil Doyle are instructed by their boss, Colonel Sykes, to abduct a six year-old girl named Amy Bellafonte, who was just recently abandoned by her mother and left at a convent. Having experienced the death of his own daughter that has not only destroyed his personal life, but his marriage as well, Agent Wolgast cannot help but develop an instant feeling for Amy, calling her “honey” or “sweetheart” (TP 125) during their journey to Colorado, where they are supposed to deliver this little girl to. The usage of these terms of endearment apparently does not result from the conscious act of enticing her into a false sense of security, but happens unintentionally: “He couldn’t seem to stop himself; the words just popped out.” (TP 125) His growing affection for the little girl partially results from his desire to undo the tragic loss of Eva, which becomes apparent during their visit to a fair on their way to the FBI compound in Colorado:

She took his hand again as they walked; the feel of her palm against his own was almost electrical, the source of a warm current that seemed to spread through his body as they walked. [...] *Lila*, he thought. *Lila, this was what I wanted. Did you know? It's all I ever wanted.* (TP 128)

The affection displayed in this trivial act of taking his hand, which is typically reserved for parents, fills Wolgast with joy and rapture, while simultaneously unearthing his unconscious longing for this bond between father and child he was deprived of so abruptly by the death of his daughter. This traumatic loss has brought about the gradual internal demise of Wolgast's soul, apparent in depressions, nihilistic tendencies and apathy towards life, resulting in a death-like existence dominated by feelings of guilt and resentment, as indicated by the description that "since that day he'd walked the earth like the living dead, or a man holding a ghost, the empty space in the arms where Eva had been." (TP 174) The scope of the emotional devastation that he experienced becomes apparent in his decision to confide in Amy, and for the first time ever reveals his story about Eva to another human being. While Amy is in a comatose state, he tells the story of a loving father and his daughter Eva, separated by the grim and indifferent fate:

And then something happened. It was her heart. Her heart, you see [...] began to shrink. While around her, her body grew, her heart did not, and then the rest of her stopped growing too. He would have given her his heart if he could, because it was hers to begin with. It had always been, and always would be, hers. But, he couldn't do this for her, he couldn't do anything, no one could, and when she died, he died with her. The man that he was, was gone. (TP 186)

The fact that he could not relate his true emotions to anybody else in all the years, accentuates the immense importance attributed to their relationship. Furthermore, this passage indicates the agony and sorrow that has encompassed his entire life, up to the point when he disregards the positive aspects of his remaining life and is completely engulfed in the black cloud of bereavement. Similar to Roland Deschain in *The Dark Tower* the loss of a beloved person causes a trauma that can be regarded as death-like. Fittingly, this state of existence is compared in the quote above to death itself and the absence of all features that shaped his character. He was a shell of a man on the verge of emotional death, but eventually was restored to the sphere of mortals, when he met Amy: "*And then you came, Amy*, he said. *Then I found you. Do you see? It was like she'd come back to me.* (TP 186) Being awarded a second

chance, he manages to recapture the feeling of love, which in turn enables his emotional survival. The love established between Amy and Wolgast is founded on mutuality and has similar effects for both of them. Just as Wolgast's metaphorical restoration to the living world, Amy overcomes the physical manifestation of near-death, as she awakens from her coma after this exhibition of affection by Wolgast. In both cases, the love provided by their relationship endows them with the means to stay alive and prevail over conditions that bear similarities to death, offering further proof to the beneficial quality of human affection to the survival of individuals.

The ineluctable craving for human company is once again highlighted by Amy's solitude decades after the cataclysm, requiring her to resort to desperate measures: "And one night in the moonlight and after much time had passed, she was lonesome and without a friend in the world for company and she thought: *Come here.* They came." (TP 353) The personal pronoun "they" refers to the infected virals, wandering the earth. Amy is incapable of coping with solitude and a life devoid of community, causing her to call for the company of the virals, who accept her as one of them due to her living a life on the threshold of humans and virals. From this particular scene, and the fact that virals appear in groups of three (TP 276), it can also be deduced that even the virals retain enough human features to cherish the community of other members of their species.

A similar process of escaping a death-like existence by engaging in an affectionate relationship, which yields new life in more than one respect, is portrayed by Cronin via the characters Mausami and Theo and their decision to stay behind at a farmstead to settle down and prepare the impending birth of their child (TP 621), whereas the rest of the colonists continue their journey towards Colorado and the enigmatic signal. Reminiscent of the metaphorical resurrection of Wolgast and Amy through the bond of human affection, Theo is experiencing a renewal of life when the birth of their child and the initiation of their life as a family are approaching:

[...] he found himself suddenly and deeply glad, glad for everything. Back in the cell, he'd wanted only to die. Before that, even. Part of him had always struggled with it. The ones who let it go: Theo knew that pull, a longing as sharp as any hunger. To hand himself over; to step into the wild darkness. It had become a kind of game he played, watching himself go about his days as if he weren't already half dead, fooling everyone, even Peter. The worse the feeling was, the easier this deception became, until, in the end, it was the deception itself that sustained him. When Michael had told him about the batteries that afternoon on the porch, part of him had thought: thank God it's over.

And now look at him. His life had been restored. More than that; it was as if he'd been given an entirely new one. (TP 696)

Not only does Theo confess his desire for an end, when he was imprisoned in the Haven and the chances for survival were rapidly decreasing, he also acknowledges his nihilistic attitude towards life during his final days within the protecting walls of the colony. The “pull” and “longing” he refers to can be interpreted as the lack of faith due to the bleak and hopeless nature of the post-apocalyptic world. Theo had already reached the point of surrendering to the omnipresence of death that devours all aspirations and ambitions. While others might have reacted similarly to the revelation of their ephemeral existence in the colony, whose downfall is linked to the remaining energy of the batteries that supplied the light, he feels relieved to be put out of his misery. Partially, this death drive of him might derive from his inability to cope with the challenges of the post-apocalyptic world. However, the juxtaposition of his feelings during his time in the colony and the enthusiasm and hope attached to the family life that lies ahead, suggests that his willingness to carry on in this hostile world depends on human community. Since his relationship with Mausami is derailed by the interference of Galen Strauss, human affection is absent from his life in the colony. Settling down with Mausami and their dog Conroy, awaiting the arrival of the fourth member of their little family represents the dawn of a new life, a life with purpose, provided by the bond of the family. Once again Cronin stages the figurative resurrection of one of his characters from being “already half dead” (TP 696) to acquire the hope and drive to rise like a phoenix from its ashes and find new meaning within a decaying world.

Mausami's declaration that “[a]s long as we're together, we'll be safe” (TP 637) serves as the articulated symbol of love and affection that sustains human relationships and functions as one of the most effective strategies to reject feelings of despair, disheartenment or despondency. Prevailing over a death-resembling existence promotes survival in its most radical form and emphasizes the relevance of affection and love inherent in the bond of human relationships.

In sum, the affection and love exhibited by the relationship of the father and son in *The Road*, and the bond between Wolgast and Amy and Mausami and Theo respectively in *The Passage* functioned to establish human relationships as an irrefutably effective strategy to assist in the struggle for survival. Roland's decision to

sacrifice these ties between human beings for the sake of the Dark Tower arguably results in the condemnation of his soul and hence underlines the importance of human community too by demonstrating the consequences of relinquishing human relationships.

The following subsection will present compassion and human kindness to be another effective survival strategy.

3.4. The virtue of human kindness

Post-apocalyptic fiction frequently employs the narrative device of posing the question what would the world look like if it was robbed of all its constitutional entities and consequently bereft of all the laws, principles and guidelines in terms of ethically appropriate codes of conduct. In most cases the withering of righteous and morally appropriate demeanor is observable, sacrificed to the struggle to stay alive. Stripped of all legal obligations, mankind is required to resort to ruthless, violent or inhuman actions to preserve the most essential feature of existence: one's own life. Driven by the primeval instinct of survival, the most sinister and deplorable manifestations of human depravity are showcased in many of these post-apocalyptic narratives. Thus, the lack of compassion marks a symptomatic characteristic of post-apocalyptic fiction that seems to indicate a link between the existential struggle for survival and ferocious and relentless behaviour. Displaying mercy with others might be seen as a source of danger that leaves human beings vulnerable to the abuse of others.

Rejecting the predominant reading of these literary representations, this subsection will propose acts of human kindness and compassion to operate as effective and valid methods to overcome the obstacles of the post-apocalyptic world. Disregarding the values of moral and selfless behaviour is argued to culminate in eternal damnation, while the maintenance of the practices and beliefs that shape human existence and differentiate humans from brute animals is presented to be a pertinent strategy to survive. The positive effects of human kindness are illustrated in *The Road* and *The Passage*, while King's *The Dark Tower* offers the deterring consequences of rejecting the essential virtue of goodness.

3.4.1. Carrying the fire

One of the most striking features of McCarthy's style of writing used in *The Road* is the anonymity of its main protagonists, restricting their very existence to generalizing labels such as "the man", "the child", "the father", "the son". Apart from these abstract expressions, McCarthy "often relies on pronouns for character identifications" (Kunsa 61). The absence of names requires the reader to make inferences from the actions of the character in order to be able to identify who is referred to. Accordingly, it can be concluded that McCarthy intentionally uses this literary device to highlight the quality of a person's actions, which thus functions to draw the line between the dichotomy of the "good guys" and the "bad guys". In contrast to other narratives in which the names of characters are associated with particular character traits narrated throughout the story, *The Road* deprives its characters of linguistic clues of identification. This literary device may have caused ambiguity and potentially confusion with respect to the identity of characters in other novels. In *The Road*, however, the reader is easily capable of distinguishing between the different characters on the basis of what they do (Kunsa 61). The dualistic opposition between what constitutes goodness and vileness becomes one of the staples of *The Road*.

In correspondence with the diminishing supplies of food and the increasingly hostile environment, the directly proportional rise of the number of "bad guys" roaming through a decaying world is clearly discernible. The irresistible urge to survive has caused mankind to stoop to heinous acts of debauchery, satisfying the most primal instincts imaginable. When "all stores of food had given out" (TR 181), "murder was everywhere upon the land" (TR 181) and the disturbing degeneration of human morals and the gradual extinction of human integrity is set in motion, as the world is "largely populated by men who would eat your children in front of your eyes" (TR 181). Throughout their journey towards the south the scope of human depravity is constantly hinted at, as the father discovers the remnants of the man he had previously killed in self defence and the bones of the corpse "looked to have been boiled" (TR 71), implying that the group of survivors that they encountered presumably engaged in cannibalistic practices by eating the dead body of their own companion. A further indication of the brutish vileness of the remaining survivors unfolds when they stumble upon "a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" (TR 198). A nadir of human iniquity is unveiled, when the father and son are confronted directly with the atrocious strategies of human beings

to guarantee their own survival at the expense of others. Being on the search for food they enter the cellar of a house and bear witness to a discovery of horrific proportions: "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." (TR 110) The graphic description of human beings being confined in this chamber of torture and manacled like cattle serves to underline the instability of civil modes of behaviour and ethical considerations, when people are on the verge of death. McCarthy illuminates the sinister recesses of human existence. Survival seemingly justifies the disposal of the most fundamental basics of moral and appropriate codes of conduct maintained over the course of centuries.

Moreover, this traumatic and nauseating experience confirms the importance of vigilance and scepticism in this hostile world, when it comes to encountering other people. Based on the notion that the majority of mankind has degenerated into vile individuals, dubbed "bad guys", the father sees other human beings as a threat to their survival, which becomes apparent, for instance, during their stay at a waterfall: "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." (TR 42)

Survival and protecting his little boy from the evils of this world is the father's top priority, which requires him to resort to measures practiced by the "bad guys" (Kunsa 59), as he kills another man, who grabbed his son and threatened to kill him. In the aftermath of this gruesome encounter, the man reiterates: "You wanted to know what the bad guys looked like. Now you know. It may happen again. [...] I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand?" (TR 77) The man's intention here evidently is to ensure that the boy grasps the danger emanating from other human beings and consequently comprehends the necessity of killing the man. The boy's growing concern concerning their own status is expressed via his question: "Are we still the good guys?" (TR 77) In this very moment the boy senses that the father has temporarily crossed the border of what is considered to be ethically appropriate. Even though that man nearly killed him, the boy's question implies his first doubts regarding his father's actions. The father's frame of thinking is dominated by pragmatic considerations to ensure their survival, while "base survival is not enough" (Graulund 73) to the boy, resulting in several clashes of their values in the course of

the narrative. The boy's naïve attempts at helping other human beings are blatantly disregarded by the man and rejected by reminding the boy of the consequences that might result from such behavior. For instance, when the boy believes he saw a lonely boy across the road he begs his father to help the little boy. The father responds by saying: "There's no one to see. Do you want to die? Is that what you want?" (TR 85) Confronted with the consequences, the boy's indifference to the potentially fatal outcome of his desire to help the little boy perfectly displays the fact that the boy cannot imagine living in a world devoid of human kindness and would even risk death rather than living with the guilt of not helping another human being when he had the chance to. For the boy, retaining the values that constitute human kindness is as important as physical survival provided by shelter and food. The man perceives all other human beings as a menace to their welfare and refuses to risk direct encounters with other survivors. In addition, his demeanor towards others is determined by his awareness of the slim chances of survival, culminating in his refusal to help other human beings or share some of their supplies with them. "From the man's point of view, any one such act of compassion, no matter how small, will constitute an unpardonable lowering of his guard [...]" (Graulund 73), which might lead to physical confrontations or the acceleration in the reduction of their supplies. The tension arising from the differing priorities of the father and the son represents the continuous thread running through the narrative, which ultimately underlines the importance of not straying away from the path of righteousness.

Getting a glimpse of the extent of immorality and of reprehensible actions perpetrated by human beings manifest in the grisly discovery in the cellar of the cannibals, the boy is haunted by guilt and the fear that they might end up stooping to the same level as well. A few nights after this experience he seeks guidance from his father:

They're going to kill those people, aren't they?

Yes.

Why do they have to do it?

I don't know.

Are they going to eat them?

I don't know.

They're going to eat them, aren't they?

Yes.

And we couldn't help them because then they'd eat us too.

Yes.

And that's why we couldn't help them.

Yes.
 Okay. (TR 127)

The boy struggles to come to terms with the fact that they were not able to help the people imprisoned by the cannibals and seeks justification for their actions. By being reassured that they were left with no other choice than to flee and leave them at the mercy of the cannibals, because they would have suffered the same fate, his pangs of conscience and his insecurity whether they still could be considered the “good guys” are alleviated. Shortly thereafter, the boy makes his concerns even more explicit and alludes to the nucleus of his fears:

We wouldnt ever eat anybody, would we?
 No. Of course not.
 Even if we were starving? [...]
 No. We wouldnt.
 No matter what.
 No. No matter what.
 Because we're the good guys.
 Yes.
 And we're carrying the fire.
 And we're carrying the fire. Yes.
 Okay. (TR 128-129)

Relating these articulated fears of the boy to the prior events, when the man tried to justify his action of killing a man by referring to its necessity in order to survive, it can be inferred that the boy is gripped by the all-consuming fear of having to resort to even worse actions than killing a man that physically assaulted them (Cooper 231). The boy expresses his fear that eating the flesh of other human beings might be the natural progression from having to kill somebody in self-defence. The father promises they would not succumb to primordial instincts and perpetrate heinous actions as witnessed in the cellar, ensuring that they would continue to be the “good guys”, which is realized by them metaphorically “carrying the fire” of human goodness and compassion.

This promise of sustaining the fire of goodness is put to the test in their subsequent encounters with an old man named Ely and later on with a thief, who has stolen their belongings. The earlier confrontation with Ely is characterized by the father's reluctance to share their resources of food with him, but he gives in to the boy's request and thus adheres to the concepts of compassion and kindness, encompassed by the metaphor of “carrying the fire” (Graulund 73). Nevertheless, the father realizes the detrimental effect of sharing their goods with foreign people, as

their survival hinges on the amount of food left. Figuratively speaking, they are giving away a couple of days of their lives to feed an old man who will presumably die anyway in the immediate future. His reproaching remark, “[w]hen you’re out of food you’ll have more time to think about it” (TR 174), reveals the father’s distress about the unnecessary donation. For the boy, however, the preservation of his own set of values and beliefs, which are determined by his conviction to “carry the fire”, and engage in acts of human goodness, takes precedence over the prolonging of their lives by a few days.

The diverging priorities of father and son come to a head, when their resources are stolen by a thief, drastically exacerbating their slim chances of survival (TR 253). Infuriated by this selfish and ruthless action, the man forces the thief to not only return their own belongings, but to relinquish all of his clothes as well, exposing him to the bitter, unrelenting cold that is bound to cause the death of the thief. Desperately the boy imploringly admonishes his father: “Papa please dont kill the man.” (TR 256) As soon as the anger has subsided, the father becomes aware of his blunder that has pushed him beyond the demarcation of what represents morally acceptable ways of behaviour. His attempts to appease the boy’s dismay by claiming that he never intended to kill the man fail to make an impression on the boy, who faces the sad truth by uttering: “But we did kill him” (TR 260). Even though the rage of the man was restrained by the boy’s intervention, the boy acknowledges the implications of their actions, which are tantamount to murder. Condemning the “eye-for-an-eye” philosophy of his father, he is plagued by the awareness that they are poised to break that promise to continue to be the “good guys”. This realization alters the relationship between father and son, a fact which is further corroborated when the man asks his son whether he should tell him one of his stories. The boy declines his offer by elucidating that “in the stories we’re always helping people and we dont help people.” (TR 268) The best exhibition of the impossibility of reconciliation of these two stances occurs when the father finds a flare gun (Graulund 74). Based on the fact that its original purpose has become redundant in a world deprived of potential witnesses of such a signal, apart from the remaining “bad guys”, the man contemplates the possibility of utilizing it as a weapon, whereas the boy proposes to fire it “like a celebration” (TR 241). Despite the fact that the man’s insistence on avoiding activities potentially harmful to their survival, he simultaneously realizes that

declining his boy this celebration amounts to long-term damages to the boy's willingness to cling to his values of human kindness and life itself (Graulund 74).

In conclusion, the boy functions as the embodiment of human goodness that presents moral purity as one of the key elements that facilitate survival in the post-apocalyptic world. His persistence in "carrying the fire" permeates the narrative and serves to guide the father back towards the path of morality and compassion. The boy's constant reminders of how to engage in acts of human kindness counterbalances the hopelessness of their situation, the bleakness emanating from the decaying landscape and the degeneration of human beings into depraved and animalistic creatures that devour the flesh of their own kin. The boy's virtue of holding on to the values that distinguish the "good" from the "bad guys", is frequently referred to as a divine quality in the course of the narrative, as "the word of God" (TR 5), a "[g]olden chalice, good to house a god" (TR 75) or "the best guy" (TR 279), which gives rise to the possible interpretation of the boy as the epitome of moral innocence and purity associated with Christ, whose function on earth is to initiate "the eventual rebirth of the world" (Chabon 112). In a world that has lost its metaphorical eyesight (Danta 10) through the obscuring of the sun, the sole light that is left in this world is the fire carried and spread by the boy (Blasi 99). As death is encroaching on the man, he has a dream that divulges this monumental insight:

He woke in the darkness, coughing softly. He lay listening. The boy sat by the fire wrapped in a blanket watching him. Drip of water. A fading light. Old dreams encroached upon the waking world. The dripping was in the cave. The light was a candle which the boy bore in a ringstick of beaten copper. The wax splattered on the stones. Tracks of unknown creatures in the mortified loess. In that cold corridor they had reached the point of no return which was measured from the first solely by the light they carried with them. (TR 280)

The fading light of his dream symbolizes the diminishing number of "good guys" who still comply with the codes of human morality and kindness. The essentiality of preserving that fire for the survival of individuals and mankind is stressed by the fact that only the light of the boy's candle still manages to penetrate the implacable darkness of the post-apocalyptic world. Hence, it can be postulated that human compassion and actions of kindness contribute to the survival of individuals by providing them with the light that guides them through the darkness of the dying world. Taking into account that the man's proclamation that "goodness will find the little boy" (TR 281) is proven by the "deus ex machina" - ending, indicates that the

human race and its virtues of goodness will live on. Akin to Prometheus bringing fire to mankind, the ending contains the hope that the boy will carry the fire that will rekindle the flame of human existence (Graulund 76).

3.4.2. A gunslinger's creed

Roland Deschain of Gilead is the last gunslinger of what is known as "In-World" (TDT 13), the rest of his peers being extinct. Through retrospections Stephen King unravels the characteristics of a gunslinger and what role this highly selective breed assumed in the past. The gunslingers represented a knight-like alliance, responsible for the maintenance of order and peace in the world. Being descendents of Arthur Eld, the gunslingers were part of a highly elite group of noble blood who had to run through a vigorous training led by a trainer, who taught them how to effectively use a variety of weapons, most particularly their guns, which functioned as a symbol frequently associated with gunslingers. Undergoing a severe and challenging education in using guns, sharpening their physical sensations and concentration, the novice gunslingers were prepared for their final test to conclude their apprenticeship and ascend to the high social rank of a gunslinger. In order to pass this test they had to defeat their teacher in combat (Schweitzer 192). Becoming a gunslinger entailed being able to detach one's emotion and operating on instinct alone, which is exemplified during the annihilation of an entire town by Roland. Facing the challenge of coping with the assault of the entire population of Tull, "[h]is reaction was automatic, instantaneous, inbred. He whirled on his heels while his hands pulled the guns from their holsters, the butts heavy and sure in his hands." (TDT 79)

Whether the reasons for his calculating, cold-hearted indifference towards other human beings is rooted in his gunslinger education, or partially originates from the cruelty that has encompassed the land, remains shrouded throughout the narrative. However, his demeanor throughout the novel implies the conscious or unconscious absence of the kindness exhibited by the boy in *The Road*. His determination to stay alive and reach his ultimate destination take precedence over morality or compassion, as evidenced very early on in the novel, when Roland is stating that his guns are more important to him than friends (TR 7). On the one hand, this thought accentuates the hostility of the world he travels through. The guns not only symbolize his noble descent and the continuation of the legacy of the gunslingers, but also imply power in a world bereft of technology and pervaded by

violence and death. They are ascribed more relevance to the survival of the gunslinger than human affection. On the other hand, this thought also bears the implicit notion that the gunslinger considers compassion or mercy as indications of weakness, hindering his will to accomplish the goal he has set himself. Roland's actions are shaped by his pragmatic approach with the underlying aim of staying alive, excluding acts of kindness from his repertoire of coping strategies, which is in line with the father's attitude in *The Road*. The manifestations of these conceptions are noticeable during his stay at the house of the old farmer Brown in his highly paranoid considerations: "He thought of adding: *And now I'm going to kill you, if for no other reason than I don't want to have to sleep with one eye open.* But had he come to such behaviour? If so, why bother to go on at all? Why, if he had become what he pursued?" (TDT 21) The gunslinger's constant uneasiness as far as the potential danger attached to other people is concerned is conveyed in this passage. In addition to that, murder is perceived to be a valid solution to eliminate the possibility of falling victim to a cunning trap laid by Brown. However, his conscience intervenes and averts a potential atrocity by evoking a deterrent comparison to the man in black, who is alluded to as the object of pursuit. Roland even questions the meaning of continuing his quest, if it involves the degradation to the vileness that corresponds to the man in black. Thus, it can be extrapolated that the gunslinger does display doubts about other human beings, resulting in heightened vigilance, yet he has not severed all ties connecting him to what constitutes human nature: compassion and morality. The residue of his humanity is already implied here and becomes manifest in his relationship to Jake Chambers.

Their first encounter already bears features of the differing ideologies of Roland and Jake. The boy saves the dehydrated, hallucinating gunslinger from impending death in the desert. Afterwards the gunslinger's suspicion and distrust towards other human beings is exposed, as he is thinking: "*Mayhap some sand in his craw, as well, or he would have taken one of my guns and shot me right where I lay.*" (TDT 103) According to this thought it seems to be evident that Roland considers kindness to be an indication of weakness, maybe even stupidity. His frame of thinking is forged by the post-apocalyptic world that is immersed in cruelty and malevolence, and shaped by the struggle to survive in such a harsh environment. Since Jake entered this world by dying in the Manhattan of 1977 (TDT 113), his ideology is constructed corresponding to the values and beliefs of a pre-apocalyptic reality. Jake

assumes a similar role like the boy in *The Road* by epitomizing the innocence and the goodness of humanity, while Roland's ideological thinking, just like the father's in *The Road*, is determined by the urge to survive.

During their shared journey through the desert and the tunnels of the mountain, an adaptation of conduct of the gunslinger can be detected, showing his capability of morally good and compassionate actions, for instance when he saves Jake from the succubus in the mountains or from the slow mutants of the darkened mines below the mountains. Possibly, this marks the character progression inaugurated by the dawning realization of him approaching the malice of the man in black, depicted at the opening of the novel.

However, this observable inclination to relish the established bond with the boy and engage in actions of human kindness comes to a screeching halt underneath the mountains. Lured by the bait of the unique possibility of facing the man in black and inch one step closer to the enigmatic Dark Tower, Roland makes the crucial decision to abandon Jake, which signifies his ultimate rejection of compassion. The company of the boy, and thus being subjected to his innocence and goodness for an extended period of time, has projected the boy's set of beliefs onto Roland, as evidenced by his doubts pertaining to the moral quality of his actions (TDT 256). Nevertheless, the temptation of the Dark Tower proves irresistible. As already argued in subsection 3.3.2., sacrificing Jake summons the most relentless demon of all: guilt. It has been postulated that his decision against Jake and in favor of the Dark Tower results in the demise of Roland's soul, an internal death, which displays the detrimental effect of neglecting the virtue of human kindness in a post-apocalyptic environment. Adhering to the moral principles of human behaviour thus signifies an important quality beneficial to survive in the wasteland of the post-apocalypse. Relinquishing those qualities that are characteristic of human beings might lead to physical survival, but comes at a high price: the price of emotional death.

3.4.3. Selling one's soul

Similar to *The Dark Tower*, Justin Cronin demonstrates the virtue of human compassion and goodness to be a survival tool by depicting the devastating consequences triggered by disregarding the importance of such essential features of humanity. More precisely, two examples stand out in his narrative that disclose

mankind's tendency to succumb to immoral and unethical thoughts in the face of adversity, in particular in the face of approaching death.

The first example of a blatant denial of the culturally constructed practices of morality takes place after the attack of the viral, which took advantage of Caleb's briefly opening the gates of the wall in order to save Alicia from certain death and killed the teacher of the sanctuary (TP 385). Chaos ensues, based on the indignation of the parents, whose children were at risk of falling prey to the viral on the loose. Since all children of the colony reside in the sanctuary up until their 8th birthday, a large portion of the parents is filled with terror and dismay, as soon as the news breaks regarding the attack of the sanctuary. Having to face the possibility of losing one of their own children, they demand the banishment of Caleb. Triggered by the mingling feelings of their own fears of the heartbreaking sorrow that is attached to the demise of a beloved person and feelings of wrath stemming from the ostensible irresponsibility of Caleb's actions that could have resulted in the annihilation of the entire colony, a movement is initiated to force the punishment of Caleb (TP 467). Putting him outside of the walls devoid of protection is equivalent to a death sentence. Yet, their agonizing fear of death drives them beyond the boundaries of morality and compassion, as they indirectly initiate the departure of a group of survivors. This lack of compassion is rewarded with the exact same thing they intended to thwart by banning Caleb. For when the colonists return to the colony at the end of the novel, they find nothing, but death: "An eerie stillness hung over all. The gates stood open and unmanned. The Colony was empty." (TP 756)

The second thread of narrative that illustrates the increasing absence of human compassion is the encounter with the inmates of the Haven. Justin Cronin confronts his characters with a second group of survivors inhabiting a forsaken prison, who are seemingly exempt from the attacks of the virals. This conspicuous difference to the rest of the world provokes alarm among the group of survivors, consisting of Peter, Alicia, Sara, Michael, Mausami, Hollis, Amy and Caleb. Olson, one of the unofficial leaders of the Haven, divulges the terrible truth concerning the source of their safe and secure lives within the Haven: One of the twelve convicts that have spread the virus all over the planet, Babcock, grants them safety from "the Many" (TP 568), in exchange for a regularly submitted sacrificial lamb, comprised of four heads of cattle and two human beings from the population of the Haven: "*Four and two*, Olson said, *for each new moon. As long as we give him the four and two, he*

keeps the Many away." (TP 584) Furthermore, he elaborates on the tie existing between Babcock and what he calls "the Many". "The Many" represent the virals that have been exponentially created by Babcock, "[t]he ones of his blood" (TP 584). Asked by Peter whether he controls them, Olson proclaims that "[h]e is *them*, Peter." (TP 584) To put it into other terms, Babcock has freed the inmates of the Haven from potential attacks of the virals by making use of his status as the driving force of this collective consciousness of "the Many". In order to survive and be capable of living a relatively peaceful life the inhabitants of the Haven have sold their souls to the evil that has infiltrated the land and brought doom and devastation over its population. They have agreed to a pact with the devil, in biblical terms, as they have relinquished the human codes of morality by sacrificing their own people in order to stay alive themselves. Drawing a parallel to *The Road*, this act of throwing their own people to the wolves, or in this case to the big bad wolf named Babcock, correlates to the barbaric cannibalism exhibited in McCarthy's narrative. In both cases human beings sell their souls and their humanity to guarantee survival and thus satisfy the most essential need of all. Alicia explicitly articulates the moral reprehension of this fiendish pact by stating: "These people are *collaborators*. They're like *pets*." (TP 584) Sacrificing the kindness and compassion that dictates human relationships has turned them into nothing more than livestock, providing the flesh Babcock can feed on. The inmates of the Haven, while physically unscathed, have sold their souls and thereby caused their own emotional death, akin to the gunslinger in Stephen King's *The Dark Tower*. In retrospection, Peter maintains that "[...] they'd been dead a long time" (TP 604), describing their death-resembling form of existence that has been engendered by mankind's urge for survival.

This representation of an immoral and objectionable life compounds the notion of human beings being willing to sacrifice their morality, when faced with the hopelessness of the post-apocalyptic world. They virtually sell their soul and abandon typically human features such as kindness and moral behaviour in order to guarantee their own survival, heedless of the fact this is done at the expense of others. Both examples of yielding to the drive for survival and abandoning the human virtue of compassion result in collective death, as both the inmates of the Haven, as well as those remaining in the colony plummet to the eternal depths of death.

Obedying the codes of moral and compassionate conduct is presented as a viable survival strategy to cope with a world bereft of hope. The boy in McCarthy's novel seems to embody the moral purity of mankind and thus to confirm the positive consequences of adhering to compassion and morality. Conversely, disregarding the relevance of these aspects of humanity entails consequences of fatal proportions in both *The Dark Tower* and *The Passage*.

Another effective strategy to survive in this devastated wasteland is the motivation provided by the quest, which will be further elaborated on in the following subsection.

3.5. The Quest

The theme of the quest is one of the most frequently employed tropes of literature and mythology. Numerous stories ranging from ancient fiction, such as Homer's "Odyssey", to medieval grail narratives like "Percival", up to modern day quest narratives such as Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" center on this theme of the quest that has managed to captivate readers across centuries. The quest in post-apocalyptic fiction is often related to the struggle for survival, taking into account that the purpose of the quest is often linked to the continuance of the human race following a cataclysmic disaster. The quest towards reaching a specific goal in many cases presents an effective strategy to overcome the pervasiveness of death inherent in the post-apocalyptic landscape and serves as a source of inspiration to find meaning in the dying world.

According to Thomas Foster, the structure of a quest is comprised of five different elements. First of all, a quest requires a "quester" (Foster 3) and a destination that the person on the quest intends to reach. Moreover, as he argues, there is typically a "stated reason to go there" and "a real reason to go there", while the journey itself is impeded by the trials and tribulations the "quester" or "questers" are faced with (Foster 3).

The following section will apply Foster's framework to the quests portrayed by Cormac McCarthy, Stephen King and Justin Cronin respectively and in addition will present how the theme of the quest is tied to the protagonists' struggle for survival.

3.5.1. On the Road

The title of the book *The Road* already indicates what lies at the core of the novel. Since a road typically implies the journey from point A to point B, the theme of the quest is already expressed and hinted at in its title. Irrespective of the characters' position on the road, the mere notion of being on the road already incorporates the implicit meaning of a journey and a goal. Whether this quest is indeed the literal journey of a father and his son on the forsaken roads of a devastated America will be further examined later on. First of all, the characteristics of their journey depicted in the novel shall be analyzed by making use of Thomas Foster's model of what constitutes a quest.

The first three ingredients mingled to shape the literary representation of a quest, are established in the early stages of the novel. The main quest that is illustrated throughout the novel is the boy's and the father's journey along the unspecified road to the south. Due to the forthcoming winter, whose survival the man considers to be impossible (TR 4), they are urged to move south. The "questers", the boy and the man, aim at fleeing to the south, the destination of their quest, while the stated reason obviously is to survive and thwart the menace of freezing that looms over them. Challenged and trialled by the hostility of the post-apocalyptic world, which includes the hostility of the dying world that lacks sufficient supplies of food and shelter and is gradually deprived of its daylight, and the hostility of the remaining survivors, who not even shy away from preying and eating their own kindred, the boy and the man arrive at the coast of the south, but to no avail. Their stated reason to embark on this quest was to elude the unforgiving living conditions. Yet, the following thoughts of the father contradict this stated reason for their quest: "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." (TR 213) On the one hand this could be a further example of the man's irrational hope for a better future that was postulated in subsection 3.2.1. On the other hand this could be interpreted as the confirmation of the distinction between "stated" and a "real reason", which supposedly characterizes the quest, according to Thomas Foster (3). The father articulates his knowledge of the world's progressing darkening that renders an improvement of their situation questionable at best. Accordingly, it might be proposed that the real reason to head to the southern regions of the country is to sustain the hope required to persist in this bleak and murky world. As already argued in section 3.1.1., the landscape they are

marching through does not change dramatically, giving rise to the hypothesis that their entire journey becomes meaningless, taking into consideration their quest does not amount to satisfying results (Graulund 67). Their destination does not differ from their point of departure in terms of hospitality or chances of survival. This inherent absence of life in the desert-like landscape has been argued to force father and son to fill this void with intrinsic feelings of hope, human kindness and the love promoted by human relationships. Another central factor contributing to the perseverance required to avoid succumbing to the temptations of death or suicide, is the purpose of their quest. The quest entails engaging in conscious actions to survive. Not going on this quest and staying where they are is tantamount to acknowledging and accepting the absence of hope. Remaining passive constitutes a form of surrendering to the all-pervasive force of death. Hence, it can be concluded that their quest towards the south accomplishes the goal of providing them with a purpose, disregarding the possibility of the senselessness of their actions. Concluding from this hypothesis, their quest transcends the physical aspects of their journey. As stated before, the mere movement does not entail improving living conditions, which deprives the physical journey of its meaning, and might convey the impression that “the quest here feels random, empty at its core” (Chabon 117). Yet, the figurative quest of preserving hope, their relationship and compassion sustains their will to continue and can be seen as the veiled purpose of their quest. Their quest is not devoid of sense, because it sustains hope and thus benefits their survival.

3.5.2. “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came”

The theme of the quest functions as the backbone of the narrative, as Roland’s search for the enigmatic Dark Tower, whose very existence has acquired mythical qualities in the sinister wasteland portrayed by Stephen King, constitutes the ultimate destination of the gunslinger. Yet, reaching the Dark Tower is not the focus of this instalment in *The Dark Tower* series. The very first, infamous line of *The Dark Tower* sets the tone for the rest of the novel in terms of the object of Roland’s quest: “The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed” (TDT 3). Generally speaking this single sentence sums up the contents of this novel, as it portrays the chase of the last gunslinger, devoid of stating an exact purpose or aim. This narrative device of shrouding the specific reason and purpose of Roland chasing the man in black across the vastness of entire deserts serves to captivate the reader’s

imagination. The only specification with respect to his motivation to pursue the man in black is revealed by the oracle in the mountains, proclaiming that the man in black is the gate to the Dark Tower (TDT 179). However, what this mysterious Dark Tower actually is remains still veiled. All the reader knows is the fact that the gunslinger chases the man in black and thereby seeks to reach the Dark Tower. Thus, the theme of the quest is bereft of its “stated” or “real purpose”, according to Foster (3). It is clearly established that the hunt for the man in black is subordinated to the all-encompassing desire to reach the Dark Tower, even though Roland does neither know what it is or whether it truly exists. Before Roland manages to catch up with the man in black, the quest itself might be argued to sustain the determination and willingness to pursue his aim.

Despite this lack of clarification about the Dark Tower’s nature, the importance of the Dark Tower to the post-apocalyptic world is conveyed very effectively, as indicated by Roland’s thoughts: “There was murder, there was rape, there were unspeakable practices, and all of them were for the good, the bloody good, the bloody myth, for the grail, for the Tower. Ah, the Tower stood somewhere in the middle of things (so they did say) [...]” (TDT 107-108) Devoid of offering a description or a hint at the meaning of reaching it, the undeniable attraction that emanates from the Dark Tower becomes almost palpable via the gunslinger’s vivid imagination. Justifying the most revolting atrocities with the argument “for the good”, indicating that the Tower represents the good, only nourishes the reader’s impression of the significant value and meaning of the Dark Tower. From Roland’s comparison it could be inferred that even the most hideous acts of violence are tolerable if they serve the quest for the Dark Tower, which already foreshadows the things to come in the course of the novel.

The most revealing moment with regard to the gunslinger’s obsession with the Dark Tower comes when he betrays and sacrifices the little boy Jake with “the Tower frozen on his mind’s eye [...]” (TDT 266). The quest for the Dark Tower has infested his mind like an infectious disease, repressing other feelings and emotions such as the love for the boy. The willingness to sacrifice friends, family, his pet and eventually an 8-year old-boy can be observed as the reoccurring pattern in Roland’s past that highlights the importance of the Dark Tower within the frame of thinking of the gunslinger. The pursuit for it dictates his life, his decisions, even induces him to commit immoral actions that will haunt him for the rest of his life, as evidenced by the

intense feeling of dismay following Jake's death (TDT 267). The Tower has carried him across the perilous desert and has fuelled his will to do whatever is required of him. In its very essence the Dark Tower sustains the life of the gunslinger and has urged him on throughout the years. Without it the gunslinger's life would be meaningless, as all his sacrifices and sins he indulged in for the sake of the Dark Tower would prove to have been in vain. Even after the traumatic loss of Jake, which has been proposed to mark his internal death, the image of the Dark Tower fills his sorrowful thoughts: "The Tower. Somewhere ahead, it waited for him – the nexus of Time, the nexus of Size." (TDT 299) The quest continues and prevents him from crumbling after his fatal decision, corroborating the fact that the quest serves as the impetus for his determination, and hence can be seen as an essential strategy of his individual struggle for survival in the hostile "world [that] had moved on" (3).

3.5.3. "If you found her, bring her here" (TP 476)

In contrast to *The Road* and *The Dark Tower*, the central quest of the Justin Cronin's novel involves not only a duo, but a whole ensemble of "questers" (Foster 3), who sally forth into the vastness of the realm of the virals to attain their goal. At the time of their departure the group of colonists consists of eight people overall: Peter, Alicia, Mausami, Sara, Hollis, Michael, Caleb and Amy. Though the motives behind their choice to join the survival troop differ, one specific event impels all of these eight individuals to risk their lives: the appearance of the enigmatic "girl from nowhere" (TP 357), the first walker⁴ for decades. Her mere existence, against all odds, provides them with the irrational hope of other human beings being still alive. This hope is further nourished by the decoding of the mysterious military signal, transmitted via the device implanted in the neck of Amy, which spreads the auspicious message: "*If you found her, bring her here.*" (TP 476) In relation with the puzzling abilities of Amy and the astonishing information offered by the military transmitter (TP 475), the group of colonists derives hope from the possible implications of their discovery that "somebody's *there*" (TP 477) and wants Amy back. As a consequence the thought is stimulated within their minds that Telluride, Colorado, is the point of origin that has precipitated the cataclysm and thrust them into this bleak world, where death seems to dwell. The irrational hope of finding other people and Amy constituting the cure for

⁴ A term used by the colonists to refer to a human being not infected with the virus, who is sighted beyond the protective walls of the colony.

a redemption and rebirth of the world gives meaning and purpose to their quest, functioning as the stated reason of it, according to the framework of Thomas Foster.

The completion of their journey requires them to overcome an onslaught of the virals during their stay in what was formerly known as Las Vegas, and the subsequent deception of the Haven's inmates, marking the trials of their quest. The reward for the trials they encountered along the way arrives in the shape of an Army battalion, led by Major Green and Brigadier General Curtis Voorhees, providing affirmation for their ardent longing of finding other human beings in the vastness of the ravaged world. The majority of the group of colonists perceives this providential encounter to be the triumphant end of their quest, due to the security and the encouraging prospects of survival provided by the military, and its resources that far exceed the ones that were at their disposal in the colony. However, for Peter and Amy the quest has not been completed, as their original objective of embarking on this perilous quest through the wasteland filled with flesh- and blood-devouring creatures has not been accomplished. Peter is faced with the challenge of determining whether to be satisfied with the unexpected turn of the events, promising a relatively secure future, or to put his and Amy's life on the line for an even more rewarding goal that might free mankind from the threat of the virus and the constant fear of its lethal spawns, the virals and the twelve former convicts. His contemplation surfaces the underlying "real reason" (Foster 3) for his quest, as he recalls the "Long Rides" of his father (TP 274). These "Long Rides" (TP 271) were expeditions to search for survivors and to explore the surroundings of the colony, led by Peter's father, Demetrius Jaxon. After the disastrous consequences of one of these expeditions, the Household of the colony abolished this highly dangerous practice, while Demetrius ventured out into the obscurity of the unprotected land on his own, resulting in his death (TP 274). Searching for a guiding light to facilitate the process of coming to a decision, Peter reflects on the words of his brother regarding their father's death: *"Our father didn't go out there to let it go. Whoever thinks so doesn't understand the first thing about him. He went out there because he just couldn't stand not knowing, not for one more minute of his life."* (TP 668-669) Peter's father was driven by a similar impulse to engage in a quest, as his son. While the stated purpose of these "Long Rides" (TP 271) may have been to explore the country and to be on the lookout for potential walkers, the real purpose for Peter's father was to satisfy this unquenchable thirst for knowledge. As indicated by Theo's assessment of

the rationale behind his father's desire for these explorations, Demetrius Jaxon was incapable of coping with the uncertainty of their situation. Not knowing whether there were other survivors left and whether there was a reasonable chance for the reconstruction of the human society proved to be more excruciating for him than the fear of the perils and possible death. The attempt to ease that urge to acquire knowledge functioned as the fuel of his personal quest, as it provided him with a purpose. Moreover, it also enabled him to actively engage in activities that might have result in an improvement of their situation. Like the father's decision to go south in *The Road*, the quest for certainty can be seen as a refusal of the inevitability of death. Demetrius could not stand the thought of remaining idle behind the walls of the colony, while the possibility of contributing to the active change of their hopeless situation existed. Projecting his father's motives for his decision onto his own situation, Peter finds inspiration and peace: "It was the peace of truth that Peter felt, and he was glad for it, down to his bones" (TP 669). The real purpose of his father's quest was to ascertain the existence of other human beings. As far as Peter's quest is concerned, the clandestine reason behind Peter's quest is to gain certainty with regard to Amy representing the cure to recapture mankind's dominance over the bleak world. His quest not only propels him to the physical and mental heights required to survive in such a pestilential environment, but also aims at guaranteeing the survival of the entire human race. This is symbolized by their journey to Colorado to find out how the human race can be salvaged from its approaching extinction. Idleness would be tantamount to suicide, taking into account that the electricity supply of the colony is rapidly dwindling. Consequently, the quest is intended to benefit survival on multiple levels. On the one hand, it prevents the group of eight from suffering the same fate as the rest of the colonists, who are discovered to be all dead upon their return. Additionally, it functions to foster the hope necessary to cope with the gloom that emanates from the post-apocalyptic world. Last but not least, the quest of Peter and Amy culminates in Colorado, the source of all evil. There they become acquainted with the secret notes of Dr. Lear and are thus given the key towards their ultimate survival: the remedy for the virus. It can be concluded that the quest represents a vital source of motivation and hope that enhances their chances to survive.

All three examples of post-apocalyptic fiction incorporate the theme of the quest into their respective narratives. In all three cases, the quest serves as a source of motivation, which impels them to defy the abyss of death that pervades the post-apocalyptic landscape and threatens to engulf them. The fact that the quest provides the protagonists with a purpose and a goal serves to support their struggle for survival.

This section has illuminated the various strategies of how to survive in the post-apocalyptic world. The following subsection will delve into the representations of mortality and death in end-time narratives.

4. Mortality – Death as an all-pervasive Force

Learning to live should mean learning to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality [...] I believe in this truth without being able to resign myself to it. And less and less so. I have never learned to accept it, accept death that is. We are all survivors who have been granted a temporary reprieve. (Derrida 52)

This quote illustrates Jacques Derrida's view of the dilemma mankind is confronted with. According to this statement, human beings can be considered to be "survivors", taking into account that death cannot be avoided and is inherent in our existence. Yet, it is suggested that human beings are incapable of coping with their inevitable death, thus their struggle to come to terms with their own mortality significantly impacts their life. Therefore, this quote might be seen as an appeal to accept one's own mortality and focus on that period of time which Derrida termed "a temporary reprieve", until the inevitable fate shared by all human beings: death. Taking this quote as an example of Derrida's extensive work on death, gives rise to the notion that death, as a necessity of human life, is ascribed a significant role in all of our lives. Each and every human being is confronted with death sooner or later, often in the death of a beloved person. Due to the omnipresent certainty of being mortal, death arguably pervades the lives of human beings. Furthermore, death and what follows death represents something no one can provide an account of and thus remains one of the great mysteries of our society. Therefore, it is of no surprise that individual death is a frequently employed theme in literature, as mortality is the one characteristic every human being shares. Post-apocalyptic literature magnifies this concern with one's own mortality by imaging the collective death of the entire human race. What is typically referred to as the apocalypse has not occurred yet, but has entered humanity's consciousness in the light of what is known as the "Anthropocene", implying the "geological epoch marked by human influence on the planet" (Crutzen ; Stoermer 17). This term refers to the fact that due to the detrimental effects on the planet earth of human actions, the world as we know it will "cease to be hospitable to us" (Squire 212). In addition to events whose destructive nature carries features of what is imagined as apocalyptic, the disconcerting developments of Mother Nature in recent years, such as global warming, have inspired numerous authors to transfer the menace of the termination of humanity, on behalf of drastically changing environmental conditions provided by the earth, to their respective mediums of choice.

This section will closely examine how humanity's mortality is portrayed in the three selected novels, focussing on how individual death and collective death are incorporated into the narrative, how the post-apocalyptic setting impacts the characters' awareness of their own mortality and how these characters respond to the ubiquity of death in a decaying world.

4.1. "Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it" (TR 130)

Cormac McCarthy has crafted a grim world imbued with grayness that exudes the omnipresence of death. The extent of the world's decay is articulated by the author's multilayered portrayal of death in all its various manifestations. His account of an antagonistic and indifferent world invaded by the irresistible and obliterating force of death is realized by means of a disturbingly authentic and comprehensive depiction of death and its aftermath. Being challenged with the "representational impasse" of imagining a post-apocalyptic world (Cristofare 67), McCarthy approaches the inaccessible nature of total annihilation by conjuring up a scenario whose very features are permeated by death and its consequences. Ranging from the desolated landscape, to the piles of carcasses plastering the devastated streets and roads the man and the boy travel on, to the progressing decay of the environment, and ultimately to the proximity of the total extinction of the human race; death has cast its gray light onto the remnants of the world (Danta 10) and devours the remaining traces of human life like a ravenous wolf feeding on flesh.

As already established in section 3.1.1., the post-apocalyptic world is illustrated via the dimming light that contributes to the deterioration of the living conditions (Danta 10), the monotonous features of the landscape that make any form of movement through this garden of ashes meaningless (Graulund 67), and the ongoing process of extinction with regard to memory and language of the pre-apocalyptic world (De Bruyn 782). The world is on the verge of reaching its terminus, as indicated by this description:

The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath, trembling and brief. (TR 11)

The attributive adjective “late” to the noun “world” already indicates the impending and inevitable demise that awaits, while the ashes function to symbolize the obliteration that the world has been subjected to. Considering the common association of ashes with the fires that have generated these ashes, this description evokes the image of the cataclysmic destruction and thus perpetuates the image of the apocalypse preceding the narrated present of the story. The comparison to a “trembling and brief” breath of air further reinforces the impression of approaching death via the personification of the world as a dying human being gasping for air. It conveys the notion of the gradual and inexorable death of the world, attested by the collapse of the environment. Apart from the ashes that obscure the epitome of life, the sun, McCarthy emphasizes the detrimental effects of the cataclysm by depictions of decay of previously perceived fixtures of a thriving environment, such as the falling trees (TR 97) or the “vast salt sepulchre” (TR 222) that the sea has degenerated into. As De Bruyn argues, “[t]he novel does not simply evoke the ruin of human stewardship, but the ruin of nature itself” (778), corroborating the omnipresence of death.

Besides the vivid descriptions of a dying world, death is not restricted to the surrounding environment, but also claims casualties among its inhabitants, most notably the human species. While McCarthy forgoes the explicit depiction of the mass extinction caused by the apocalyptic events, he ensures to put its devastating consequences to the forefront by illustrating encounters with the mortal remains of the millions of people falling victim to obliteration throughout his narration: “The mummied dead everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taut as wires. [...] They were discalced to a man like pilgrims of some common order for all their shoes were long since stolen.” (TR 24) The sheer endless amount of dead bodies has made solemn and assiduous burials virtually impossible, depriving humanity of one of its most wide-spread cultural practices. Not only are the dead not honored by graves, but the increasingly intense struggle for survival has caused human beings to rob the corpses of their belongings, which in a pre-apocalyptic world with laws, social practices and taboos would have been considered to be a sacrilege. When the man searches through a wrecked trailer, he is confronted with a familiar image: “Human bodies. Sprawled in every attitude. Dried and shrunken in their rotted clothes.” (TR 47) Death is everywhere and its manifestation functions to augment the awareness of the characters’ own mortality. At every corner the duo

comes across the embodiment of death, “as they find themselves in a space where they have to ‘inhale’ death every year, every day and every hour, a presence they have as little hope of escaping as the necessity to take another breath” (Graulund 70). The only chance to loosen the stranglehold of death on the world seems to be the total extinction of mankind. The old man they meet along the road in the course of their journey, supposedly named Ely, proclaims that “[w]hen we’re all gone at least then there’ll be nobody here but death and his days will be numbered too. He’ll be out in the road there with nothing to do and nobody to do it to” (TR 173). Based on the fact that death as an entity requires a referent to exist entails the notion that death will be absent from this world if all living beings have been extinguished, resulting in a paradoxical situation: the world that is completely conquered by death is deprived of death as an active force, since nothing is affected by the consequences of death. According to this premise, the reign of death over the world can only be brought to an end via the complete regeneration or the complete annihilation of the human race.

The exposure to the dreaded fate that is rapidly approaching forces the survivors to accept the all-pervasive force of death that has infiltrated the land and accentuates their own mortality. Their awareness of the evanescence of mankind becomes apparent through the thought-provoking introspective considerations, mediated through the boy and the father. The boy reflects upon the immediacy of death and the rapid progression of its features: “Look around you. Ever is a long time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all.” (TR 28). The boy has become accustomed to the frighteningly fast declining numbers of survivors, rendering death one of the few truths left in their world. Accordingly, he is well aware of the unfathomable quickness that “ever” can draw near. “Ever” might be interpreted to refer to the end of time, the end of existence, or in this case the end of mortal life. As the realization of the ephemeral nature of their lives is dawning on the father and his son, considerations of a potential future dissolve into meaninglessness, for instance, indicated by the father’s thoughts: “No lists of things to be done. The day providential to itself. The hour. There is no later. This is later.” (TR 54) The deduction that the perception of reality is distorted by the imminence of death and the undeniable effects of death is encouraged by these cogitations. While the past still lingers on within their minds and spreads its echo through their brains, the only thing that still carries meaning is “the immediate present, the next piece of bread, the next

shelter, the next violent encounter that they have, somehow, to survive” (Graulund 66). Precipitated by these harrowing observations, the father acknowledges the hopelessness of their situation and the ruthless oppression exerted by the grim reaper on the post-apocalyptic world:

Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like groundfoxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed earth and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it. (TR 130)

This paragraph clarifies the insignificance of him and his son within the indifferent and vast universe, illustrating the ineluctable nature of death that has already vanquished the better part of this world. The last sentence of this quote beautifully links the limited nature of earth, time and human body via the anaphoric repetition of “borrowed”. This linguistic tie establishes the relatedness of these three concepts, as the earth exhibits evident signs of decay, such as the fading light or the diminished supply of food, the decay of the human race is inseparably linked to the deteriorating living conditions provided by the earth, and the decay of time is an inevitable consequence of the demise of mankind, due to its status as a culturally constructed concept of humanity. Therefore, it can be proposed that this sentence evokes the interrelated progress of the decay of time, world and human flesh by means of visual representations in the language used by McCarthy. This supports the conclusion that death pervades the dying world and operates as an all-pervasive force that subordinates all aspects of human life. Opposing this juggernaut, which continues to dishearten the most determined individuals, evokes different forms of responses from those challenged by the omnipresence of death. In *The Road* these distinct strategies of coping with this bleak and dreary scenario are incorporated through the actions of the mother, the father and their boy in the course of the novel. The most radical reaction, caused by the dominance of death, is showcased by the mother’s decision to commit suicide.

While the father eagerly clings to his irrational hope for a better future and regards himself and his family as “the survivors” (TR 55), his wife is overwhelmed by the grim prospects of their immediate future. Taking into account that death is closing in on them, due to their shrinking resources and the increasingly hostile living conditions, the mother sees death as the only solution to put an end to this miserable form of living (Squire 220). More precisely, she even undermines the father’s

proposition of them representing the survivors. From her perspective, their life is a mere deception of what was formerly associated with living, adopting more and more features of an illusion. She voices her anger and depreciation of the man's delusionary attempts at sustaining a deception in order to provide them with the means to carry on: "What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film." (TR 55) These comments not only convey her distraught state of emotions due to the hopelessness of their situation, it even implies that she considers their lives to resemble a transitional existence on the threshold between life and death: the existence of the "undead". Since the term "walking dead" typically signifies a post-mortem existence it can be proposed that the mother thinks they have already died a figurative death, as their lives have been deprived of all things that made life worth living, and they are now condemned to drift along the subsiding stream of life (Danta 20). The mother is unable to cope with the omnipresence of death fostered by the characteristics of the post-apocalyptic world. Faced with the void of death swallowing all meaning and purpose, she lacks the innate capability of developing the irrational hope that dictates the father's life and prevents him from succumbing to the same death drive. For an unspecified amount of time the duty of taking care of her son (TR 57) and the fact that death could still be verbalized functioned to guide her through the impenetrable darkness of the post-apocalyptic world. However, the ubiquitous presence of death in the world has eventually rendered the verbal confrontation of death and its contention impossible: "We used to talk about death, she said. We dont any more. Why is that? [...] It's because it's here. There is nothing left to talk about." (TR 56) Death has undergone an evolution from an abstract concept that serves to unite all human beings in its inevitability to a presence imminently determining the actions of all human beings. The mother's remarks about the omnipresence of death indicate that death's original status in the pre-apocalyptic reality has ceased to exist. Instead it has become the staple of the new reality, transferred to all forms of meaning and thus irrelevant to verbalize (Squire 221). Unable to "make verbal and categorical understanding of it" (Blasi 96), she craves for the "eternal nothingness" (TR 57) that is characterized by complete absence of suffering and misery, by which her life within this hostile and malicious world is defined by. Due to her decision to choose suicide, it can be postulated that the increasing awareness of her own mortality and the probability of death generate this desire for nothingness that will free her from the unbearable

burden of inhaling death's odor at every second of her life. Basing her decision on the pessimistic outlook of their future, possibly dying an excruciating death at the hands of the cannibals prowling through the grayish twilight of the post-apocalyptic world, she leaves her husband without a reasonable argument against her decision, when she utters the following words: "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. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I cant. I cant." (TR 56). This statement reveals her dismay concerning the things she surmises will be done to her and her son, if they remain passive and deceive themselves with the illusion of a better future. Accordingly, she evaluates her decision as reasonable, based on the critical circumstances of the world and the violence and barbarity that circulate in this hostile world (Noble 98).

Despite the father's objection to the fatalistic views propagated by his wife, he has to concede that "she was right. There was no argument" (TR 58). Yet, the father refuses to be tempted by the same death drive and allow his wife's pertinent argument to plant the seeds of surrender into his frame of thinking. The love for his boy and his innate urge to guarantee the protection of his own flesh and blood are the sole reasons impelling him to preserve the hope for a better future (Squire 220), as "the boy was all that stood between him and death." (TR 29) However, as Skrimshire suggests, "McCarthy displays no triumphalism in allowing his protagonist to refuse giving up" (12), which is already implied by the affirmative response to his wife's nihilism. Further evidence for the man's internal struggle can be observed in his condemnation of God: "Are you there? He whispered. Will I see you at last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God." (TR 11-12) The cruelty of this harsh and unforgiving world entices him into questioning the benevolence of God, threatening to harm him for the suffocating experiences imposed upon the duo.

Another example that supports the notion of ambivalence towards his decision to carry on and not yield to the seduction of "eternal nothingness" (TR 57) that has engulfed his wife, is his covert reaction towards the miraculous discovery of the bunker, which is filled with sufficient supplies of food to prolong their lives for several days or even weeks: "Even now some part of him wished they'd never found this refuge. Some part of him always wished it to be over." (TR 154) The man oscillates between the irrational hope of survival and the nihilistic tendencies deep down within

him that are congruent with his wife's sentiments (Noble 100). Even though he possesses the ability to generate the irrational hope required to resist his death drive, some part of him can't help but feel disappointed that this inner struggle and the miserable life continues.

The first instances foreshadowing the man's death occur via the coughing and the dreams which haunt him. The coughing of the man suggests some undisclosed disease that gradually eats away on him and serves to make him aware of his approaching death, when he coughs up blood for the very first time: "Slogging to the edge of the road with his back to the child where he stood bent with his hands on his knees, coughing. He raised up and stood with weeping eyes. On the gray snow a fine mist of blood." (TR 30) The blood functions to articulate some horrifying truth that the man is not ready to face yet, as it includes the one thing he dreads the most: dying and having to face the challenge of deciding whether or not to kill his own son to salvage him from the even more gruesome horrors that lurk in the sinister corners of this hostile world. Dreaming of delightful things, for example dreams filled with memories of his wife, are considered to be another omen that augurs ill for the man. The man perceives these pleasant dreams to forecast death, as he is intimidated by them: "He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and of death." (TR 18) The disparity created by the colorful and invigorating dreams and the subsequent awakening within the gray and lifeless world is interpreted by the man as an indication of impending death: "And the dreams so rich in color. How else would death call you? Waking in the cold dawn it all turned to ash instantly. Like certain ancient frescoes entombed for centuries suddenly exposed to the day." (TR 21) The metaphoric contamination of these dreams that are suffused with the joy and mirth of a past world by the following juxtaposition to the gray gloom of the dying world (Danta 19) can be regarded as the source of the father's suspicion of approaching death. Possibly, dreams represent the last sphere that still sustains the memories of a better and more comfortable life. The process of contamination of these dreams can be read to be the progressing decline of the remaining hope that is nourished by the past, and consequently is tantamount to death.

The increasing amount of blood traces coughed up by the man coincides with the man's heightening awareness of his own mortality and of the proximity of death's arrival. Moreover, the father recognizes the senseless quality of their lives, in which

“[e]very day is a lie” (TR 238). Throughout the entire duration of their quest towards the south and the sea, the man has clasped his hands around the irrational hope for a positive future, despite the contradictory experiences gathered in the post-apocalyptic world. However, in this very moment his optimistic acceptance of his decision to refuse the suicide solution chosen by his wife, is overwhelmed by the sensation of the somber truth: “But you are dying. That is not a lie.” (TR 238) Having devoted his life to the protection of his son, he realizes that he cannot escape the one truth each and every individual has to face: death. Accelerated by the decay of the world, every attempt at carrying on becomes null and void, as death has arrived on his doorsteps (Graulund 71). Ultimately his tenacity to defy the bleakness of their lives in order to ensure the survival of his son proves to be in vain and his own mortality, the only truth left in this decomposing world, has defeated him and squashed his hope of a joint future with his son. Even though he always intended to kill his son if he was on the verge of death and take him with him into the darkness of the afterlife (TR 248), he is unable to pull the trigger on these plans in the most literal sense of the word:

Just take me with you. Please
 I cant.
 Please, Papa.
 I cant. I cant hold my son dead in my arms. I thought I could but I cant.
 You said you wouldnt ever leave me.
 I know. I'm sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did. (TR 279)

Urged by the boy to keep his promise of never leaving him, the father faces the absolute truth of being incapable of killing his own son. Mankind's mortality has separated him from his own flesh and blood and yet he opts to not relieve his son of the hardships of this world. The reason for this choice is partially founded in the father's continued maintenance of the absurd hope that has fuelled their quest and enhanced their struggle for survival (Noble 102), partially in his conviction that the boy's moral purity of almost divine quality will serve as the Promethean flame to rekindle the fire of the world and possibly inaugurate the rebirth of the world (Graulund 76). As indicated by his justification of his denial to take him with him into the realm of death, the man has been persuaded by the boy's goodness that the boy has a specific function to fulfil: “You have to carry the fire.” (TR 278) Thus, it can be argued that in the course of the narrative the man has embraced the virtue of human kindness as an invaluable tool for survival that will sustain his son's future,

irrespective of his father's presence, which is conveyed by his last thought on earth: "Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again." (TR 281) It can be concluded from these signs of irrational hope that the father's awareness of humanity's mortality has endowed him with the means to generate inner strength, not in spite, but because of the all-consuming force of death that encompasses all aspects of life in this post-apocalyptic world. While his wife failed to develop an intrinsic source of motivation to counter-balance the bleakness of the dying world, he was able to draw strength and motivation, due to the inevitability of their situation. To put it into other terms, the horrors of the post-apocalyptic world have provided him with the motivation required to find a fire within himself that has urged him on throughout their journey on the road.

As previously argued in sections 3.3.1 and 3.4.1. the boy's values and beliefs largely hinge on his determination to "carry the fire" and on his desire for human company. Survival does not suffice, as the boy strictly adheres to the moral stance, symbolized by the notion of "carrying the fire" (Graulund 73). His insistence on ensuring that he and his father belong to the "good guys" and his urge to sustain this virtues of morality and tenderness might be regarded to be his coping strategy in the light of the omnipresence of death everywhere around them. Similarly, his longing for human company dictates his actions and shapes his thoughts, as he continuously seeks to elicit affirmative responses from his father with regard to the possibility of other "good guys" existing (TR 151).

On the surface the boy's inclination to neglect the perils of the world in order to remain faithful to his own creed of human kindness and his desire to engage in communication with other human beings might appear to be inspired by the naivety of a young and inexperienced boy. Taking a closer look might lead to the proposition that these concepts of "carrying the fire" and of human community function to sustain the hope to continue and the will to live within the boy.

His response to the all-pervasive force of death laying siege to the land dramatically differs from his parents' reactions. Both of his parents share the experience of having lived in a fertile, pleasant and vital world before the apocalyptic events, and thus struggle to find meaning, being confronted with the decay and hopelessness of the post-apocalyptic world. His mother fails to find meaning and succumbs to her death drive. The father struggles for the majority of the narrative, yet manages to generate and retain hope towards a better future at the very end of his

life. In contrast to his parents, the boy has already been born in “grief and ashes” (TR 54) and consequently does not suffer from the juxtaposition of these two worlds (Squire 223), which arguably compounds the disconsolate impression evoked by the post-apocalyptic world. Despite the fact that he is exposed to the mortality of mankind through his parents’ suicide and death respectively, as well as the deplorable manifestations of human depravity in the cellar of the cannibals, he lacks a source of reference to compare this world with an alternative. Hence, it is less challenging to confront the gloom of the world and still carry on, in comparison to his father, who is plagued by dreams of the better past. His strict clinging to the moral and ethic codes of human conduct and his desire to find other survivors are closely linked to the fact that he is the one, whose future is directly concerned (Squire 223). “Carrying the fire” and finding the “good guys” serve as the source of motivation that endows him with the fortitude to resist the vise-grip of death and overcome the effects of human mortality manifest in his father’s demise.

4.2. The Man in Black – Defeating Death

Death’s role as an all-pervasive destructive force is realized in Stephen King’s *The Dark Tower* predominantly by the ravaged landscape and the indifference towards death and its effects. Similar to the post-apocalyptic landscape in *The Road*, the setting of King’s novel is characterized by the absence of life and fertility, indicated in the following quote:

The forests were long gone now, replaced by the monotonous flat prairie country: endless, desolate fields gone to timothy and low shrubs; eerie, deserted estates guarded by brooding, shadowed mansions where demons undeniably walked; leering, empty shanties where the people had either moved on or had been moved along [...]” (TDT 22)

Manifestations of ruin and decay are depicted to be not only restricted to the barren landscape, but also include forsaken and desolated edifices such as “mansions” and “shanties”. The reoccurring pattern that unites the various aspects of human life is the prevalence of death and decay that has swept the land and left devastation and ruin. The omnipresence of death has resulted in utter indifference towards it, as evidenced by the reaction of the gunslinger and Brown following the death of Roland’s mule: When asked by the gunslinger how the mule has died, the farmer provides merely scant information: “It just laid over, that’s all. It looked like an old mule. [...] Zoltan et the eyes.” (TDT 17) The report of the demise of gunslinger’s means of transport is

rendered rather apathetic, giving rise to the conclusion that the remaining survivors in this world that “had moved on” (TDT 3) are confronted with death on a regular basis and have accepted it as an essential feature of their reality. The gunslinger’s response further strengthens this interpretation: “‘Oh.’ He might have expected it. ‘All right’” (TDT 17). Death has conquered the ravaged land and has become a staple of their lives. Brown’s answer to the gunslinger’s question whether he believes in an afterlife serves to corroborate the notion that death reigns over the post-apocalyptic world of *The Dark Tower*, as he proclaims: “I think this is it.” (TDT 18) This remark implies the population’s acknowledgement of the all-pervasiveness of death, taking into account that afterlife refers to the time after death. Therefore, it can be argued that Brown considers the very existence within a world bereft of all forms of life and fertility to be tantamount to death.

In spite of the indifference displayed by Brown and the gunslinger with respect to the mule’s death and its effects, the mystery of death is still portrayed to mesmerize and engross human beings. The morbid fascination with death and the afterlife is realized in the novel by the devious letter from the man in black to the bartender Allie in the town of Tull. Taking advantage of the undeniable thirst for the unknown, the man in black sets up a tempting trap towards perdition through the letter that reads:

You want to know about Death. I left him a word. That word is NINETEEN. If you say it to him his mind will be opened. He will tell you what lies beyond. He will tell you what he saw.
The word is NINETEEN.
Knowing will drive you mad.
But sooner or later you will ask.
You won’t be able to help yourself. (TDT 48-49)

The letter is delivered by Nort, who was resurrected from the dead by the man in black earlier (TDT 45) and has been offered dismaying and horrid insights into what lies on the other side. Nort is referred to as the one who can divulge the intriguing secrets of the afterlife and death to Allie. Even though the man in black predicts disaster for Allie if she succumbs to her inner-most desire to be acquainted with the world’s most compelling secret, the shrouded truth pertaining to the life after death, she instantly comprehends the irresistible nature of this bait: “And oh dear God, she knew that she would. Already it trembled on her lips. *Nineteen*, she would say – *Nort, listen: Nineteen*. And the secrets of Death and the land beyond would be opened to

her.” (TDT 49) Undoubtedly, what lies beyond the boundaries of human mortality is highly intriguing in our society, a pre-apocalyptic society, as well. Being confronted with death on a permanent basis arguably increases this innate desire of mankind to be granted access to something that is inherently inaccessible: death, which signifies the end of human’s existence and thus the demarcation of epistemological knowledge. Since death has become an all-pervasive force that encompasses all forms of life in the post-apocalyptic world, the yearning for certainty regarding the consequences of death and the landscape of the afterlife might be even more pressing. Being presented with the unique possibility to transcend the limitations of human life, Allie is overwhelmed by the urge to give in to her longing for certainty and exhibits patterns of behaviour symptomatic of addicts (TDT 50-51). This overwhelming sense of urgency experienced by Allie to yield to her craving can also be traced back to the insidious nature of the trap, which is elucidated by the gunslinger in the following words:

The trap had a ghastly perfection. If someone told you you’d go to hell if you thought about seeing your mother naked [...], you’d eventually do it. And why? Because you did *not* want to imagine your mother naked. Because you did *not* want to go to hell. Because, if given a knife and a hand in which to hold it, the mind would eventually eat itself. Not because it wanted to; because it did *not* want to. (TDT 52)

The paradoxical reflex of the human mind to conjure up the image that it tries to avoid is linked to the illogical desire to long for something that is guaranteed to entail condemnation. Both the human desire to gain access to the mystery of death, particularly in a world dominated by death, and this cunning trap inherent in the seductive offer by the man in black spell doom for Allie, as she submits to the trap by the man in black.

The man in black assumes a central position within King’s narrative, as the perennial theme of death and mortality hinges on the presence of the man in black. Applying an allegorical reading of the man in black it can be argued that he functions as the personification of death, as indicated by several hints within the novel. First of all, the fact that he was responsible for the supernatural resuscitation of Nort solidifies the impression that he has powers that surpass the capabilities of a sorcerer, possibly holding the key to the gates of death. Moreover, Allie’s description of his outward appearance might give rise to a differing, allegorical interpretation of his character and function within the novel: “He might have been a priest or a monk;

he wore a black robe that had been floured with dust, and a loose hood covered his head and obscured his features, but not that horrid happy grin.” (TDT 38) While Allie at first draws comparisons to a “priest or a monk”, the “black robe” and the “loose hood” combined with a grin that she perceives to be irritating and dreadful, might be interpreted as features of death, based on the widely spread cultural conceptions of death and its physical appearance portrayed in literature, myth or other forms of cultural media. The linguistic term of reference, “the man in black” can be suggested to imply death, and supports the hypothesis of the man in black as the personification of death. This possible interpretation of the man in black is confirmed early within the narrative by his own words, following a perfunctory question by Allie: “Don’t talk trivialities. You’re here with death.” (TDT 41) Admittedly, the second part of this quote might be a reference to the dead Nort, lying in the middle of the room. However, an alternative reading of his statement might be to interpret his reference to death as a revelation of his real identity. Furthermore, the fact that both deaths of Jake coincide with the presence of the man in black can be conceived to be additional evidence for the notion of him embodying death. The gunslinger’s hypnosis discloses the events leading up and causing Jake’s miraculous appearance in a world that bears barely any signs of familiarity to the Manhattan of 1977:

He is just a boy, but not average, and he sees the man who kills him out of the corner of his eye. It is the man in black, and he doesn’t see the face, only the swirling robe, the outstretched hands, and the hard, professional grin. (TDT 111)

In this first incident that culminates in the first demise of Jake the man in black actively causes the death of Jake. The second time that the boy has a rendezvous with death occurs under the mountains, as Roland makes his fatal decision. Here the man in black’s arrival ushers in the end for Jake, as he puts Roland’s determination to catch him to the test by confronting him with the choice between the boy and the Dark Tower. In both cases, the man in black is present, the first time as active perpetrator, the second time as fiendish figure that entices Roland into sacrificing Jake. Adopting an allegorical approach of reading these two incidents, one may argue that the death of Jake is a direct consequence of the man in black’s existence, arguably rendering him the figurative embodiment of death.

Based on this premise, the pursuit of the gunslinger acquires metaphorical meaning. Accordingly, the initial sentence, “The man in black fled across the desert,

and the gunslinger followed” (TDT 3) sheds new light onto the narrative. The physical hunt carried out by Roland thus signifies the allegorical chase of death by humanity. A further corroborative indication in favour of this hypothesis is the lack of specification provided by King in this very sentence. This literary device is not restricted to this very first sentence, but reoccurs in the entire novel, as the gunslinger’s first name is mentioned for the very first time on page 80, while the true identity of the man in black is merely hinted at in his letter to Allie and rare allusions by Roland. Deciding to predominantly refer to the two main characters as “the gunslinger” and “the man in black” seems to affirm the allegorical meaning attributed to the man in black. The plot of the novel can thus be read to foreground the metaphorical quality of the chase for the man in black as mankind’s attempt to overcome death and defeat it. The post-apocalyptic, decaying world renders this pursuit to be the ultimate goal. Catching up with death can be seen as the figurative escape from the clutches of death that has held the post-apocalyptic world hostage for centuries.

The gunslinger’s first direct encounter with mortality has made an indelible impression on him. After overhearing a conversation of their ostensible friend and cook of the west kitchen, Hax, which exposed him as a traitor, Roland and his friend Cuthbert cling to the creed of gunslingers and bring about his conviction before he is able to carry out his plans of treason. Since treason is punished with public hanging, the two boys are given permission to attend the hanging, which coincides with their first taste of the bitter experience of death (TDT 151-153). The recollection of the thoughts and feelings evoked by this experience leads the gunslinger to the conclusion that “[t]here are quests and roads that lead ever onward, and all of them end in the same place – upon the killing ground” (TDT 155). This pessimistic attitude towards life puts emphasis on the inevitability of death within the post-apocalyptic world. Moreover, this experience may have prompted his aim to catch the man in black, or in a more figurative sense, to overcome death and mankind’s mortality.

However, relieving the decaying world of the shackles of death might not have been the sole inspiration for his quest. Taking into account the demise of the love of his life, Susan Delgado, still haunts him in his dreams (TDT 162-164), it may be suggested that the catalyst for the gunslinger’s hunt for the man in black is his determination to undo the most traumatic event in his life and seek redemption. Consequently, the symbolic chase for the man in black might not exclusively be seen

as mankind's quest to overcome death and thereby thwart the ultimate eradication of mankind and instead initiate its rebirth. The gunslinger's chase could also embody the individual's quest to defeat death and avert the agonizing sorrow attached to the death of a beloved person. Being robbed of a person we hold dearly to our hearts by death might thus be categorized as losing the battle against death. Due to humanity's mortality death constitutes a battle we all lose at some point of our lives. The loss of such a cherished person can break an individual because we are reminded of our own mortality and the ephemeral nature of human life. Loving another person can be suggested to infuse people with a feeling of being immortal, invulnerable. This imagined immortality is abruptly brought to an end, if the origin and referent of this feeling is taken from us by force. Defeating death and ultimately winning the battle against death, which was lost countless times before by the gunslinger, requires Roland to catch the personification of death, the man in black, irrespective of the sacrifices that this quest entails.

4.3. The Passage

The Passage illustrates humanity's mortality in various forms, but with the same narrative function of enhancing the characters' awareness of their own mortality. This is accomplished via three distinct themes. First of all, the death of beloved persons is a narrative device employed to confront the characters with their own mortality. Secondly, being provided with an exact date of one's death impacts the perception of mortality and life itself. Finally, the post-apocalyptic surroundings and the inevitable death that is intrinsically tied to it foster awareness of the mortality inherent in human life. All three of these perennial patterns of narration generate different forms of responses from the book's characters.

In accordance with the events depicted in *The Road* and *The Dark Tower*, the loss of a cherished person is presented to stimulate increased reflections about the restraints of human life in Justin Cronin's novel too. Additionally, human mortality and its gruelling effects on the emotional state of an individual serve as the impetus to the man-made apocalypse. Mediated through the emails sent to a friend, Jonas Abbott Lear's quest for immortality within the murky depths of the Bolivian jungle is described to have been initiated by the tragic death of Lear's wife Liz. Experiencing the demise of a beloved person has pushed Jonas Lear over the edge of sanity. When the expedition to the Bolivian jungle takes a turn for the worse and the whole

crew is endangered by the perils of the jungle, he acknowledges that there is nothing in the mortal sphere that might induce him to resign from his path towards solving “the greatest mystery of all – the mystery of death itself” (TP 19). Finding a cure for death and freeing mankind from the shackles of mortality arguably serves to undo the sorrow and sense of guilt attached to Liz’s death. Since the love of his life cannot be brought back, the redemptive quest for immortality is all that is given importance by Jonas Lear: “When I ask myself why I should turn back now, what I have to go home to, I can’t think of a single reason. It would be different if Liz were still alive.[...]If push comes to shove, I may press on alone.” (TP 24) This passage shows the fatal consequences of losing somebody that is loved, as Dr. Lear’s decision to put his life on the line for the purpose of gathering information on the mysterious bat-carried virus indicates that he has nothing to lose and nothing to live for. The deep melancholy evoked by Liz’s death has impelled him to devote his life to the quest of how to prolong the lives of human beings and thus prevent the untimely demise of people that enrich our lives. Similar to Roland who figuratively seeks to rob death of its power over mankind, Dr. Lear is driven by the aim to find a scientific solution to overcome humanity’s mortality.

The same burden is carried by FBI Agent Brad Wolgast, who has lost his daughter at the age of only one year, which left him a shell of a man and, as argued in section 3.3.3., led to his internal demise (TP 128). After an eye-opening conversation with Colonel Sykes, who is one of the people in charge of “Project NOAH” (TP 40), he is struck by the realization of why he was chosen to be the federal agent to carry out the recruiting of the convicts:

It was then that he realized what the missing piece was, the thing Sykes hadn’t said. It would be in his file, of course. It was the reason, of all the federal agents they might have chosen, that they’d picked him. They’d chosen him because of Eva, because he’d had to watch his daughter die. (TP 44)

The government’s decision to appoint Wolgast to this project, whose objective lies in the conquest of death and the abrogation of the restraints of mortality imposed upon the human race, has been influenced by his encounter with death. Conclusively, this decision demonstrates the influence exerted on the human mind by the death of a beloved person. In this case, the government has taken advantage of the bereavement of Wolgast by assuming he would be more willing to participate in such a controversial project, if the ultimate goal would be to overcome death. Like Roland

and Dr. Lear, contributing to mankind's ascension to immortality might function to redeem himself and thus come to terms with the trauma he has experienced.

The fear of death and what lies beyond is exacerbated by the announcement of the exact date of the dreaded event. Based on this assumption, the officials of the aforementioned secret government project have chosen death row convicts as candidates for their experiments:

The Army needed between ten and twenty death row inmates to serve in the third-stage trials of an experimental drug therapy, code-named 'Project NOAH'. In exchange for their consent, the inmates would have their sentences commuted to life without parole. (TP 40)

Given the fact that these death row convicts have already been sentenced to death and thus have to face the truth of their impending and inevitable death, they are considered to be the ideal subjects for "Project NOAH" (TP 40). The death-bound inmates are granted temporary reprieve by being provided with the choice between death and an unknown option B. Lured by the possibility of eluding the death sentence they have been subjected to, all of the subjects agree to sign the paper devoid of knowing what option B is. This fact indicates that their fear of death and being forced to think of one's own demise within the prison suffices to expose their bodies to some undisclosed experiments in order to temporarily thwart and delay death. While the general dread of the unknown that is attached to death might constitute the primary reason to sway their decision, Anthony Carter divulges another rationale behind his decision during his conversation with Wolgast. He confesses his inability to comprehend and accept the events leading up to his imprisonment, indicating that his consciousness is still haunted by the guilt evoked by the murder he perpetrated (TP 52). Therefore, he requires more time to come to terms with the crime he committed, as his own death is perceived to vanquish the possibility of acceptance and atonement. Death imposed on him by the law might deprive him forever of a chance to find his inner peace, which presumably influenced his decision to choose life, despite not being aware at what cost.

The post-apocalyptic world resulting from the aftermath of "Project NOAH" (TP 40) is the third factor that impacts the perception of humanity's mortality. Whereas the impending death of the convicts only concerned the individual, the permanent presence of death of the decaying world 93 years after the outbreak of the virus is sensed by the entire population. Due to the fact that the survival of the colonists

hinges on the walls around the colony and the lights at night, the lives of the colonists are constantly in jeopardy. The gruesome repercussions of the unexpected failure of one of these two protective devices are exhibited by the death of 162 individuals during the infamous “Dark Night” when an earthquake disabled the light supply (TP 281) or by Caleb’s faux-pas of opening the gate of the walls at night, which culminated in the murder of the teacher by one of the virals. Hence, the population of the colony is at the mercy of the protection offered by the walls and the lights. Each and every technical malfunction or human error might end up in the complete obliteration of the colony and the death of all its inhabitants. Therefore, the possibility of falling prey to the virals remains a fixture of the post-apocalyptic life and consequently intensifies the fear of death. Mortality is thus recognized to be an essential feature of human existence and has assumed a central role within the colonists’ minds. The prevalence of death that they are subjected to through the characteristics of the post-apocalyptic world increases their awareness of their mortality, as indicated by the fact that a group of colonists detained by an incident involving an attack of virals and forced to stay out four days longer than planned are “on the verge of being declared lost” (TP 362) by the rest of the colony. Since the walls and the lights are such an integral part of their struggle for survival, being exposed to the menace of the virals for an extended period of time is already considered to be a death penalty. Moreover, being spared a violent death caused by the virals and succumbing to a natural cause of death is regarded to be “[a] good death” (TP 274) by the majority of the colonists. However, having witnessed the ordeal his mother has gone through due to cancer, Peter rejects this form of perception and summarizes: “No, there was no such thing as a good death.” (TP 274) The disturbing disclosure of the expiration date of the life within the colony has a striking parallel with the reveal of the date of death of the death row inmates in the first part of the narration. Being informed of the imminence of death and their awareness of being mortal evokes a variety of responses. While the twelve convicts chosen for the experiments are willing to accept the condition issued by Wolgast in order to defer the day of their deaths, Theo is overwhelmed by this life-shattering revelation, precipitating his internal death, a death-like state tantamount to taking a plunge into the void of the abyss. Michael, the bearer of the shocking message, obtains the impression that “[s]omething had gone out of him” (TP 308). Similar to the boy’s trauma following the encounter with the cannibals in the cellar in *The Road*,

Theo Jaxon is crushed by the realization that death is upon them and cannot be escaped. Only later in the narrative, does Theo recapture his will to live through the wonder of founding a family.

Confronted with the same revelation a few months later, the group of colonists, who embark on the journey to Colorado, gain hope and strength from Amy and the enigmatic message that indicates that other survivors are still alive and the decaying batteries might not be the end of their lives after all. In other terms, the hope provided by the possibility of Amy being a cure to the virus and other forms of civilizations being out there somewhere, eases the fatality of the initial discovery of the decaying battery. Viewed from a different perspective, the group's decision to head for Colorado might be seen as the direct response to the ineluctable fate that is bound to await them in the confines of the colony. The prospect of certain death at the hands of the virals provides them with the courage to leave their safe shelter and use their mortality as a source of motivation rather than succumbing to it.

In sum, in all three novels the growing awareness of mortality is fostered by the omnipresence of death. This yields differing responses from their characters.

In *The Road* the mother surrenders to the bleakness promoted by the hopeless world and commits suicide, while the father struggles throughout the duration of the narrated time to find meaning within this death-infested landscape. He eventually succeeds by sustaining the irrational hope for a better future. The boy has been born within this garden of ashes and thus is not plagued by memories of a blissful pre-apocalyptic world. He relies on the guidance of moral purity and human community to resist the claws of death.

The Dark Tower depicts the figurative hunt of mankind for death, realized by the gunslinger's chase of the man in black. The gunslinger's trauma, suffered when the love of his life was burnt alive, fuels his quest to defeat death.

In Justin Cronin's *The Passage* human mortality becomes illuminated and penetrates the thoughts of individuals via the death of beloved person, the announcement of the exact date of death and the omnipresent threat of death in the post-apocalyptic world. The loss of beloved persons is presented as a source of motivation to endeavor to overcome the mortality of human beings. The death row convicts are impelled to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of eluding the death penalty. The heightened awareness of mortality among the colonists engenders

depression and submission on the one hand, and motivation to embark on a journey through the unprotected country, on the other hand.

The decaying world of post-apocalyptic fiction and its dangers to the survival of human beings emphasize the individual's sense of mortality. While this might be detrimental to the struggle for survival for some characters, others gain encouragement from the inevitability of death and consequently manage to stay alive.

The following section will closely examine representations of the interrelated, yet diametrically opposed concept to mortality, immortality in *The Road*, *The Dark Tower*, and *The Passage*.

5. Immortality – The Tithonus Syndrome

Alfred Tennyson's famous poem *Tithonus* illustrates the pitfalls of acquiring immortality conveyed through the perspective of the Greek mythological figure Tithonus. According to Greek mythology Tithonus was a Trojan prince whose love to "the goddess of the dawn, Aurora" (Ward 678) resulted in her plea to Zeus to make him immortal. Providing him with the gift of immortal life, his eternal life did not entail eternal youth, culminating in him suffering from the typical woes of age. (Ward 678) In Tennyson's poem Tithonus "laments the cruel immortality that consumes him" (Weinfield 359), as he is forced to succumb to decrepitude and senility and is not allowed to find peace in death.

This dilemma has been presented also in other forms of literature as well and has resurged as a popular theme employed in a wide variety of literary genres. One of the most well-known examples that depicts the curse of immortality is Jonathan Swift's episode on the island Luggnagg, inhabited by the immortal Struldbrugs. According to the account of the Luggnaggians they, similarly to Tithonus, are not granted eternal youth and thus are condemned to a life of eternal infirmity (Barroll 44). Other representations of this negatively connotated fate attached to an immortal existence include, for instance, various vampire narratives.

The purpose of this chapter will be to explore the portrayal of immortality within the post-apocalyptic genre by gathering evidence from the three selected novels. Based on the findings of depictions of mortality in post-apocalyptic fiction offered in the prior chapter, it can be concluded that post-apocalyptic fiction contains a plethora of distinct representations of human mortality. As established throughout this diploma thesis, the increased exposure to death and humanity's mortality magnifies the awareness of one's own mortality and spawns different forms of reactions. Postulating that the fact of death pervades the post-apocalyptic world can evoke the desire to acquire immortal life, all three examples of post-apocalyptic fiction will be examined with respect to representations of immortality, whether immortality is actively sought by the novel's characters and whether immortality is portrayed to entail disastrous consequences or is illustrated to be a property worth pursuing.

5.1. The End of the Road – A New Beginning

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* does not explicitly incorporate the theme of immortality into its narrative, yet advocates the necessity of humanity's mortality and

even hints at immortality, not for the individual, but the collective, in the final, enigmatic paragraph of the novel.

Following the line of argumentation adopted in the previous chapters of this thesis, effective survival strategies to defy the powerful maelstrom of death prevalent in the post-apocalyptic world include irrational hope, human kindness and human community. The boy is anchored by the values attached to these virtues and is ultimately rewarded for maintaining his set of beliefs in spite of the cruel living conditions, the atrocities he witnessed and the heartbreaking separation from his father. The arrival of the “good guys” three days after the traumatic loss experienced by the boy (TR 281) promotes optimism and hope towards an unknown future. On the one hand, it might be proposed that despite the bleak prospects in this decaying world, this “deus ex machina”- ending fosters hope among the survivors. On the other hand, the hope inherent in this miraculous turn of events might be a direct result of the bleakness of the world surrounding them. As death inexorably invades the world, the wonders of human community are compounded and function to provide hope in a world bereft of all its hope. Accordingly, it could be argued that the optimistic ending hints at the rebirth of mankind, as the man in the parka and his wife have two children, a boy and a girl (TR 284). Additionally, the religious indications of the boy being “the word of God” (TR 5), a “[g]olden chalice, good to house a god” (TR 75) or “the best guy” (TR 279) has been argued to stimulate interpretations of him being of divine origins, whose goodness and compassion sustains central qualities of humanity and that he could thus be seen as the prophet to inaugurate the rebirth of the world (Kunsa 69). Figuratively speaking, the survival and sustenance of the human race, as indicated by this passage, can be interpreted to function as a sign of immortality. Not immortality for the boy or the family he encounters, but the immortal quality of human life in the sense of survival in the face of adversity.

The final paragraph of this novel, albeit puzzling and mysterious, can be seen as further evidence for this hypothesis:

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep of the glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (TR 286-287)

The depiction of the brook trout “evoke the green world that has been lost” (Gruber Godfrey 172), which could not “be made right again” (TR 287). The cataclysmic events have irrevocably eradicated the world of the past. However, the juxtaposition within this paragraph that recalls the past wonders of the lost world and the hopeful ending for the boy, who is welcomed within a new family that indicates the better future his father has hoped for all along, might be intended to emphasize the survival of mankind. The detailed description of the gradually decaying world throughout the novel is here summarized in this paragraph by pointing out the things of beauty erased from the face of this earth. The fact that human beings are still alive by the end of the novel, as well as the hint towards an optimistic future, gives rise to the conclusion that human life has acquired metaphorical immortality. The persistence of the human race, which is implied by the family that the boy encounters, can be regarded to be the immortal existence of mankind. Procreation and human community guarantee the continuation of the human legacy and thus the immortality of the collective, of the human kind.

Moreover, human mortality is portrayed to be the key to prevent the collective termination of the human race. Considering the fact that the boy and his father are not successful in their attempt to find other “good guys” that can be trusted throughout the majority of the novel, mortality can be postulated to be the precondition for the acquisition of immortality. Because only after the father’s death, as the narrative manifestation of humanity’s mortality, the boy reaches the end of the road, embodied by the family that joins him. A new beginning for humanity is indicated in the final stages of McCarthy’s post-apocalyptic story, the metaphoric rekindling of the flame of human life by means of the symbolic fire that the boy carries. As long as compassion and goodness, as well as the love generated by human affection are sustained, humanity, as a collective entity, is indeed immortal.

5.2. The Dark Tower – The Key to Immortality

In section 4.2. an allegorical interpretation of the gunslinger’s chase for the man in black lead to the conclusion that Roland’s hunt is the figurative attempt of mankind to conquer death. If this line of argumentation is further elaborated on, defeating death can be correlated to the transcending of mortal life. Roland’s accomplishment of catching up with the man in black might thus be seen to function as the first step

towards immortality for the gunslinger. This hypothesis is supported by one of the comments made by the man in black during their final palaver in the golgotha: "I am nearly immortal, as are you, Roland [...]" (TDT 274) This statement raises several questions pertaining to its meaning. The first question concerns the immortality of the man in black. Based on the previously postulated hypothesis of him representing death itself on the symbolic level of this book, it might be concluded that death is merely "nearly immortal" because death is deprived of its function and thus its existence if every mortal species of this world is consumed by death. What the man named Ely in *The Road* proposed can be transferred to this restrictive statement by the man in black. First of all, the use of "immortal" further strengthens the assumption that the man in black represents death, considering the fact that death is an entity that continues to exist as long as there is something or someone it can exert its powers on. Secondly, "nearly" suggests that even death can cease to exist, if the world is deprived of all living creatures.

Another question would be why Roland is labelled to be "nearly immortal"? As already stated, his successful chase of the embodiment of death might be seen as the conquest and defeat of death, and hence as an ascension above the mortal restraints of human life. And yet, he is declared to be still removed from complete immortality. Taking into account that his quest for the man in black is subordinated to his ultimate goal of reaching the Dark Tower, it may be suggested that accomplishing this goal constitutes the final step towards immortality. While there is no explicit evidence for such an assumption, linking the Dark Tower to immortality becomes more plausible in the light of the astonishing revelation provided by the man in black in the course of their palaver: "Suppose that all worlds, all universes, met in a single nexus, a single pylon, a Tower." (TDT 290) The man in black elucidates the infiniteness of the world as something which "the finite mind cannot grasp" (TDT 286). According to him each grain of sand within the deserts of this world encompasses myriads of universes and these universes contain also an infinite number of other universes (TDT 289). The sole thing that connects all of these universes is the Dark Tower, functioning as "the nexus of Time, the nexus of Size" (TDT 299). It can be inferred from the description of the man in black that the Dark Tower not only contains all the myriads of universes, but also all different realities of time. The Dark Tower is therefore all encompassing and eternal. Reaching it might be the equivalence of becoming immortal. King incorporates the implication that God

is the sole being who has thus far reached this goal, but refuses to confirm this notion. Roland proposes that God has dared to enter the Dark Tower, which is neither affirmed nor denied by the man in black, because “[i]t might be unwise” (TDT 290). The fact that God is considered to be immortal and eternal in western culture provides additional evidence for the hypothesis that the Dark Tower is the key towards immortality that the gunslinger strives to attain.

The final question that remains is how this quest for immortality that underlies the quest for the Dark Tower is evaluated by King. The gunslinger evidently has not reached immortality yet. Consequently his quest cannot be related to the tragic immortal figures alluded to before, such as the Struldbrugs in *Gulliver's Travels* or the mythological figure of Tithonus. However, the immediate doom that accompanies his decision to choose the Dark Tower and hence his quest for eternal life over the life of a young, innocent boy that put his trust in him, clearly establishes the endeavor to reach the Dark Tower as a negative one. As proposed in previous chapters, Roland's decision crushes his soul and triggers the emotional demise of the gunslinger (TDT 267). Arguably, opting to pursue his aspirations of proceeding to the Dark Tower can be perceived to be a negatively connoted decision, as he is being haunted by the face of the boy. The gunslinger is filled with the dread that even reaching the Tower might not suffice to relieve him of the guilt that has been imposed on him. Consequently, it can be concluded that King's narrative functions to reject the human desire for eternal life by showing the repercussions of such a quest to the emotional state of a human being.

5.3. Opening the Box of Pandora

At the heart of Justin Cronin's post-apocalyptic novel lies the quest of humanity for immortal life, which serves as the impetus for the disastrous consequences depicted in the second part of the narration. The unexplainable curing of several cancer patients following a tour through the Bolivian jungles raises the attention of the US government. Upon further medical analysis the experts make the following discovery:

And their immune systems had gone into overdrive. A hugely accelerated rate of cellular regeneration. And there were other benefits. Remember these were cancer patients, all over fifty. It was like they were teenagers again: smell, hearing, vision, skin tone, lung volume, physical strength and endurance, even sexual function. (TP 41)

This discovery results in the collaborative project of the US government and the military, dubbed the “Project NOAH”, (TP 40) aiming to “solve the greatest mystery of all – the mystery of death itself.” (TP 19) The unexpected and haphazardly illuminated path towards immortality is considered to be a big chance for the human race to prolong life and eventually defeat death, as stated by one of the men who pulls the strings behind the scenes, Colonel Sykes: “We’re not talking about curing one disease, Agent. We’re talking about curing *everything*. How long would a human being live if there were no cancer, no heart disease, no diabetes, no Alzheimer’s?” (TP 42). The high priority of this project becomes evident in the ruthless murder of several human beings for the sake of preserving the secret of the ongoing experiments (TP 171). A few lives are presented to be an appropriate and acceptable sacrifice in order to propel humanity towards immortal life.

However, the first twelve subjects infected with the virus mutate into flesh-eating, glowing and life-sensitive creatures with an uncanny ability of telepathy. While their infection with the virus indeed has caused the intended physical improvements, such as increased physical abilities and recuperative powers, as well as the strengthening of their immune system, the convicts have assumed grotesque, inhuman features and dwell on the threshold between humanity and a monstrous existence. Even though this might have sufficed to indicate the dangers of these ambitious experiments, the unique chance to attain immortality and defeat age and the diseases within the world once and for all proved to be too tempting. The fatal effects of the quest for immortality are brought to fruition when the twelve demonic creatures manage to escape and precipitate calamity. During the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the virus, Dr. Lear becomes aware of the monumental consequences his experiments have caused: Instead of providing human beings with a longer life, his quest for immortal life has driven mankind towards the abyss. Instead of the life he and the officials behind “Project NOAH” (TP 40) had bargained for, death is approaching not only for them, but for the entire human population. Instead of defeating death, he has created immortal monsters that spread death throughout the country (TP 196).

Apart from the obvious negative consequences this desire for eternal life has brought about for the entire population, the novel is rich in cleverly crafted scenes that depict the curse of immortality for the individual, which function as manifestations of the Tithonus Syndrome. One of the representations of this curse is realized in the

fate of Amy and Lacey, who both are infected with the virus created by Dr. Lear and not through transmission by one of the already infected virals. Both share the same burden of being forced to witness the demise of their loved ones and having to bear the sorrow triggered by the agonizing loss. Amy realizes the consequences of her immortal existence, when Wolgast dies because of nuclear radiation (TP 245) and she is doomed to solitude. Each and every form of human relationship she engages in is built on borrowed time, based on the dividing line of mortality that separates her from the rest of humanity, which is expressed in the following passage:

She lived here and there, with these and those [...] She was different, they said. She was not like them, not of them. She was apart and alone and there were no others like her in all the world. The people sent her away or they did not, but in the end they always died. (TP 350)

The tribulations caused by her status as immortal being are portrayed to involve the inability to sustain the bond and community with other people, due to the fact that human beings either do not accept her as one of them or eventually pass away, leaving her with nothing but sorrow and solitude. Former nun Lacey shares a similar fate. Following the collapse of the world she has engaged in a love relationship with Dr. Lear and has been infected with the same virus like Amy. Observing how age withers away the man that she loves, "Lacey wished she could die also, so that he would not have to make this final voyage alone" (TP 700). Both Amy and Lacey have to endure the heartbreaking experience of losing all the people they have loved in their lives, evoking the impression of immortality as a cursed existence.

This notion of immortality as a curse is not restricted to these two characters, but also includes the virals and the twelve former convicts. The emotions felt by Anthony Carter after becoming Number 12 and being immortal further establish immortality as something detrimental and torturous:

The sickness felt like forever. That's the word it made him think of. Not that it would last forever; more that he was sick with time itself. Like the idea of time was inside him, in each cell of his body, and time wasn't an ocean, like somebody had told him once, but a million tiny wicks of flame that would never be extinguished. The worst feeling in the world. Someone had told him he'd be feeling better soon, much better. He'd held on to those words for a while. But now he knew they were a lie. (TP 181)

Cronin makes it perfectly clear that being deprived of the characteristics of human life and transforming into a monster is not the primary source of suffering for these

twelve convicts, rather it is the overwhelming and incessant agony of time itself, consuming Carter's body like an inextinguishable flame burning within him. By providing an insight into the thoughts and emotions surging through the body of Carter, Cronin emphasizes the inability to cope with an infinite form of existence and portrays eternal time to be something excruciating, solidifying immortality as a curse rather than a blessing. The virals infected by these twelve display similar forms of suffocation, given the fact that they wander the earth in search of their true identity, haunted by the agonizing question: "*Who am I?*" (TP 351) Faced with the horror of being unable to remember their true identity, they aimlessly roam through the remnants of the dying world, urged on by their desire for human flesh. Assuming that being exposed to the irresistible current of eternal time, the memories of their past lives gradually fade away and leave them hollow at the core of their existence. Cronin describes this state of desperation in the following words: "The world was a world of dreaming souls who could not die." (TP 351)

Becoming a viral is considered to be even worse than death by the few remaining survivors, as the general consensus is that suicide or being killed before the complete transformation into one of the infected remains the more attractive option than such a pitiful and disconsolate form of life. This refusal to degenerate into this state of living is exemplified by the stranger Bob, who begs Wolgast to kill him right on the spot, upon grasping that the contagious virus is surging through his body and is on the verge of taking him hostage, addressing him with the words, "For godsakes, I'm begging you. I'd do it myself if I had a gun." (TP 238)

Contrasted with these deterrent representations of the fatal effects of being immortal are other images of immortality conveyed within the novel. Being immortal is correlated to the sustenance of memory and the creation of new life. Following the demise of one of his best friends, Curt Vorhees, Major Greer provides Peter Jaxon with a potential form of immortality that is not harmful to human beings: "Someone once told me that part of you lives on so long as somebody remembers you." (TP 670) Based on this assumption a metaphoric immortality of human life is possible within the memories of those that loved and cherished a human being. This description covertly implies that human beings are not supposed to search for the holy grail of eternal life, but rather fill their lives with immortal memories that live on after one's demise within friends and family.

The representation of Auntie can be argued to function as a symbolic form of immortality, taking into consideration she has defied death for almost 100 years and serves as the link between the past and the present. Staying alive for almost 100 years within this decaying world can be argued to be a near-immortal existence. And yet, she does not manage to overcome the mortality of human beings. Not only because she dies in the course of the novel, but because she is unable to generate new life and pass on her genetic code to the next generation of humans. Based on the premise already presented in section 5.1., in which the newly founded family at the end of *The Road* was proposed to be a metaphoric sign of immortality, procreation and thus guaranteeing the persistence of the human race is shown to be the true and righteous path towards immortality. Since children are passed on the DNA of their parents, they might be seen as the realization of immortal existence. Birth as a symbolic form of immortality of mankind is incorporated into the narrative by the birth of Theo's and Mausami's child in the midst of a world pervaded by death (TP 726). Similar to *The Road* and *The Dark Tower*, attaining immortality is preceded by death, as the last chapter ends with the implied death of Alicia, and the next opens with the birth of a child. Death is followed by new life, propagating hope for the continuation of the human race despite the threat of total annihilation. Reading procreation as a metaphor for eternal life for mankind, it might be further concluded that the direct juxtaposition of life and death functions to emphasize the necessity of mortality and death. Akin to the father's death before the arrival of the family in *The Road*, and the sacrifice of Jake before catching the man in black in *The Dark Tower*, death and mortal, restricted life can be suggested to represent the precondition for the acquisition of figurative immortality, realized through procreation.

The clearly identifiable moral message of not striving to transcend the border of mortality is almost contradicted by the ending of Cronin's novel. The rescue of Alicia from a doomed state being a viral by injecting her the serum with the virus might lead to the conclusion that immortal life has positive aspects after all (TP 723). The successful injection that saves her life and spares her the same fate as the twelve convicts is subsequently perceived to be not only fortunate, but generates the impression of the virus functioning as an efficient weapon in their combat against the rest of the twelve and the virals. Peter, Major Greer and Hollis all make a conscious decision to follow suit and use the rest of the vials of Dr. Lear to turn themselves into immortal creatures as well. However, before their plans can be put into practice, Amy

voids their chances at immortal life and burns each and every one of the vials, thus reaffirming the negative portrayal of immortality: "They found her kneeling by the fire pit as she was dropping the last vial into the flames." (TP 752) Having experienced excruciating suffering due to her immortality, Amy prevents them from placing this heavy burden onto themselves and she explains her actions accordingly: "I'm sorry, Peter. [...] But it would have made you like me. And I couldn't let that happen." (TP 752) This last chance at immortal life almost causes these three individuals to succumb to the innate desire of human beings to prolong their own life, without fully grasping the curse of immortality, which has been depicted throughout the novel via the pain imposed upon Amy and Lacey by having to witness the death of all beloved people in their lives, by the agony of eternal life felt by the twelve former convicts or by the disorientation and hollow existence of the virals. Cronin's narrative rejects the quest for immortality and proposes other forms, such as keeping the memory of deceased people in mind or procreation, as devices towards a metaphoric immortality.

The implied rebirth of the world in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* through the foundation of a new family, supported by the virtues of human kindness of the boy, was proposed to function as a metaphor for the immortality of the collective, of mankind. Similarly, Justin Cronin depicts the birth of a child within the devastation of the post-apocalyptic world. Both texts can be argued to plead for immortal life through procreation, which in both cases is preceded by the manifestation of mortality: death. In *The Dark Tower* the object of Roland's quest functions to represent immortality, based on the fact that it serves as the nexus of all realizations of space and time. Pursuing eternal life is portrayed by King to culminate in perdition, as evidenced by the gunslinger's suffering stemming from his decision to sacrifice the loyal Jake. *The Passage* is comprised of numerous depictions of negative effects that accentuate the fatal consequences of striving for immortal life. Ranging from depictions of sorrow evoked by the inevitable loss of beloved people, to the agonies resulting from the awareness of infinite time, to the miserable form of living of the virals, which is viewed to be even worse than death, Cronin leaves no doubts about his proposed evaluation of immortality and its quest.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this diploma thesis was to illuminate how the struggle for survival, and the related aspects of mortality and immortality are realized in post-apocalyptic fiction by examining Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the first part of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, as well as the first instalment of Justin Cronin's *The Passage* trilogy. Per definition, post-apocalyptic fiction is concerned with the aftermath of cataclysmic events. The reader is confronted with the "representational impasse" (Cristofare 67) of these narratives, depicting something that has never occurred before and something that implies the notion of finiteness yet includes events following this terminus.

The post-apocalyptic world functions as the primary threat to the survival of the characters in the selected works of post-apocalyptic fiction. The cataclysmic events that have caused this post-apocalyptic state are only hinted at and never fully explored by McCarthy. Instead, he chooses to emphasize the struggle for survival of the individual in the example of the father and his son. Stephen King summarizes the state of his world with the label, "the world had moved on" (TDT 3) and also omits any specific information on the reasons of the change. It can be inferred that potential apocalyptic happenings have preceded the narrated time a long time ago. *The Passage*, on the other hand, contains explicit information on the cataclysm, since the first part of the book depicts the outbreak of the epidemic in all its detail.

At the core of *The Road* lies the human response towards the dull and grayed-out world, displaying signs of ecological glaucoma, the inherent absence of meaning in the landscape that is typical of the desert, the ruinous nature of relics of the past, the agonizing quest for food and life-sustaining goods, as well as the rapidly approaching total loss of the past world that solely remains intact within the memory of those few who have survived the apocalypse. The theme of the all-consuming desert can be found in *The Dark Tower* as well, in a more literal sense, but with the same objective to emphasize the void-filling survival strategies of the protagonists. Due to the temporal distance to the past world, the relics from this time are perceived to be alien, as the loss of the past has been almost complete. The survival of the characters in *The Passage* is tied to the walls protecting them from an onslaught of the virals and the lights that blot out the stars and keep the light-sensitive creatures out. The past world and its practices have been conserved because the evacuation

and the subsequent establishment of new societies occurred in the midst of the cataclysm.

The most effective survival strategies employed by the characters of these narratives include the maintenance of irrational hope, engaging in human relationships, retaining the virtue of human compassion and deriving motivation from the quest.

In *The Road* the father preserves the absurd hope for a better future for his son in spite of the fatalism of the world they cross and decides not to kill his son in an inversion of Abraham's test of faith, in which his unadulterated faith is rewarded by the intervention of God, saving his son's life. The father's display of hope results in the arrival of other "good guys" after his death, validating his decision to leave his son defenceless and marooned in a hostile world. Roland Deschain lacks this irrational faith and is punished by the death of his soul caused by the guilt burdening him after sacrificing Jake Chambers. The faith of the group of colonists in Amy as the cure for the virus and in a military signal provides them with the confidence to leave the secure shelter of the colony and embark on their journey towards Colorado, even though experiences in the past indicate that this may be tantamount to suicide.

Another essential strategy to survive the perils of the post-apocalyptic world is the love and affection generated by human community. The bond between father and son in *The Road* impels them to carry on and defy the all-pervasive force of death. Similarly, the affection established between Mausami and Theo and Amy and Wolgast corroborates the importance of human relationships, as both these relationships result in a metaphorical resurrection of the spirit. In contrast to that, Roland makes the choice to sacrifice the affection and love for the boy in order to reach his ultimate goal, the Dark Tower, which results in him being plagued by tormenting guilt and sorrow, the equivalent to the demise of the soul.

Refusing to relinquish the kindness that is implied by the term "carry the fire", the boy in McCarthy's novel upholds the qualities of human codes of morality and goodness. His moral purity functions as the guiding light during their journey through the black depths of the post-apocalyptic world. Retaining this moral purity is rewarded by the "deus ex machina"- ending. Conversely, various forms of violations of these unwritten laws of human conduct entail fatal consequences for the characters of *The Dark Tower* and *The Passage* respectively.

The quest functions as another pertinent strategy to stay alive, as it provides a purpose and the motivation of reaching a goal. In *The Road* the perfunctory journey to the south underlies the implicit quest for human community and compassion. The quest for the Dark Tower fuels the determination of the gunslinger, while the colonists are urged on by the desire to be granted certainty with respect to Amy's status as the remedy for the virus.

The all-pervasive force of death enhances the individual's awareness of their mortality and stimulates varying forms of responses. In *The Road* the mother is incapable of coping with the hopeless quality of life offered by the post-apocalyptic world and commits suicide. While the father is haunted by memories of a better past, he manages to develop the irrational hope required to withstand the temptation of suicide. The boy is encouraged by his insistence to maintain the virtue of kindness. *The Dark Tower* represents the figurative pursuit of death, personified by the man in black, by the gunslinger, representing mankind. The awareness of their own mortality is fostered in *The Passage* by the death of beloved people, divulging a fixed date of death or the bleakness of the post-apocalyptic world. Mortality can thus be concluded to increase the awareness of mortality amongst the survivors within the post-apocalyptic world and can either benefit the struggle for survival or can be detrimental to the willingness of individuals to fight the all-consuming death reigning over the devastated wastelands.

The prominence of death can be argued to enhance mankind's quest for eternal life. While immortality is merely implied in *The Road* as the figurative persistence of the human race is hinted at in the final stages of the novel, and *The Dark Tower* presents the successful journey to reach the Dark Tower to be the equivalent to immortal existence, *The Passage* makes the quest for immortality explicit via the experiments carried out by Dr. Lear, which aim at forging immortal life. Due to the fact "Project NOAH" (TP 40) culminates in the creation of twelve monsters that spread a virus all over the world, it can be postulated that Cronin's novel functions as a warning against devoting one's life to the quest for immortality. The fatal results of this quest are illustrated in the novel by the curse of being forced to witness the demise of beloved persons, the suffering emanating from endless time and the misery that accompanies the life of the virals.

Based on these findings, survival in the post-apocalyptic world is impacted by the omnipresence of death that increases people's awareness of their mortality.

Furthermore, immortality is presented to be a curse, and longing for it can be fatal. Hence, mortality serves as a necessity of human life that contributes to the persistence of the human race in the post-apocalyptic landscape.

7. Bibliography

Primary Sources

Cronin, Justin. *The Passage*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2010

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York: Vintage International, 2006.

King, Stephen. *The Dark Tower: The gunslinger*. New York: Signet, 2003

Secondary Sources

"apocalypse". *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. Online version. 6 May 2015 ><http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229?redirectedFrom=apocalypse#eid><

Barroll, Leeds J., III. "Gulliver and the Strudlbruggs". *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 73.1 (1958): 43-50.

Berger, James. *After The End: Representation of Post-Apocalypse*. Minnesota UP: Minneapolis, 1999.

Blasi, Gabriella. "Reading Allegory and Nature in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *Arcadia* 49.1 (2014): 89-102.

Booker, Keith Marvin; Thomas, Anne Marie. *The Science Fiction Handbook*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2009.

Chabon, Michael. "After the Apocalypse". *New York Review of Books* 54.2 (2007). 1 May 2015 ><http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/feb/15/after-the-apocalypse><.

Cooper, Lydia. "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative". *Studies in the Novel* 43.2 (2011): 218-236.

Cristofare, Diletta De. "The Representational Impasse of Post-Apocalyptic Fiction: The Pesthouse by Jim Grace". *Altre Modernità: Rivista di studi letterari e culturali* 9 (2013): 66-80.

Crutzen, Paul; Stoermer, Eugene. "The 'Anthropocene'". *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17-18.

Danta, Chris. "'The cold illucid world': The poetics of gray in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's The Road*. Ed. Mark Steven and Julian Murphet. New York: Continuum, 2012: 9-26.

Davidson, Rjurik. "End of Days: Moral Regression and Spiritual Redemption in 'The Road'". *Screen Education* 61 (2011): 155-159.

- De Bruyn, Ben. "Borrowed Time, Borrowed World and Borrowed Eyes: Care, Ruin and Vision in McCarthy's *The Road* and Harrison's *Ecocriticism*". *English Studies* 91.7 (2010): 776-789.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*. An Interview with Jean Birnbaum. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. London: Wordsworth Classics, 1999.
- Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2003.
- Graulund, Rune. "Fulcrums and Borderlands: A Desert Reading of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 65.1 (2010): 57-78.
- Grindley, Carl James. "The Setting of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *The Explicator* 67.1 (2010): 11-13.
- Gruber Godfrey, Laura. "'The World He'd Lost': Geography and 'Green' Memory in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52.2 (2011): 163-175.
- Hammond, Andrew. "'The Twilight of Utopia': British Dystopian Fiction and the Cold War". *The Modern Language Review* 106.3 (2011): 662-681.
- Isboa, Maria Manuel. *1. Apocalypse Now and Again In : The End of the World: World: Apocalypse and its Aftermath in Western Culture*. Cambridge : Open Book Publishers, 2011.
- Josephs, Allen. "What's at the End of *The Road*?". *South Atlantic Review* 74.3 (2009): 20-30.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*. Ed. And Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton UP: 1983.
- Knox, Paul. "'Okay Means Okay': Ideology and Survival in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *The Explicator* 70.2 (2012): 96-99.
- Kunsa, Ashley. "Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *Journey of Modern Literature* 33.1 (2009): 57-74.
- Noble, Alan. "The Absurdity of Hope in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*". *South Atlantic Review* 76.3 (2011): 93-109.
- "post-apocalyptic". *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. Online version. 6 May 2015 ><http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148402?redirectedFrom=postapocalyptic#eid28952232><.

- Radford, Benjamin. "10 Failed Doomsday Predictions." *Livescience*. TechMedia Network, 4 November 2009. 10 May 2015 ><http://www.livescience.com/7926-10-failed-doomsday-predictions.html><.
- Russell, Sharon A. *Revisiting Stephen King: A critical companion*. Westport, Conn. [u.a.] : Greenwood Press : 2002.
- Ryan, Devin. *Emerging Themes in Dystopian Literature: The Development of an Undergraduate Course*. Honors Theses.Paper 2466, 2014.
- Schulte-Herbrüggen, Hubertus. Utopie und Anti-Utopie: von der Strukturanalyse zur Strukturtypologie. Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie 43. Bochum Langendreer: Heinrich Pöppinghaus, 1960
- Schweitzer, Darrell. *Discovering Stephen King*. Mercer Island, Wash.: Starmont House, 1985.
- Skrimshire, Stefan. "‘There is no God and we are his prophets’: Deconstructing Redemption in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*". *Journal for Cultural Research* 15.1 (2011): 1-14.
- Smetana, Erik. "Books with Bite: The Evolution of the Vampire in Contemporary Literature." *The Missouri Review* 34.1 (Spring 2011): 173-180.
- Squire, Louise. "Death and the Anthropocene: Cormac McCarthy’s World of Unliving" *Oxford Literary Review* 34.2 (2012): 211-228.
- Ward, Geoffrey. "Dying to Write: Maurice Blanchot and Tennyson’s ‘Tithonus’". *Critical Inquiry* 12.4 (1986): 672-687.
- Weinfield, Henry. "‘Of happy men that have the power to die’: Tennyson’s ‘Tithonus’". *Victorian Poetry* 47.2 (2009): 355-378.
- Zimbaro, Valerie P. *Encyclopedia of Apocalyptic Literature*. Santa Barbara, Calif. [u.a.]: ABC-CLIO, 1996.

8. Appendix

8.1. Abstract (English)

The aim of this thesis was to analyze representations of the struggle for survival, mortality and its counterpart, immortality, within the desolated and ravaged landscape of the post-apocalyptic wasteland and examine whether there is an over-arching link between these three thematic elements in contemporary post-apocalyptic American fiction. The primary literature selected to accomplish this objective includes Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Stephen King's *The Dark Tower*, and Justin Cronin's *The Passage*.

In order to explore the various illustrations of the struggle for survival in these three selected pieces of post-apocalyptic fiction, the characteristics of the post-apocalyptic world were summarized and closely analyzed with regard to their function. Based on the findings, it is argued that the perils and challenges inherent in this monotonous and dreary landscape serve as the primary threat to the survival of the characters of these narratives. The most effective strategies to guarantee survival within this hopeless world include the maintenance of irrational hope, engaging in human relationships that generate feelings of love and affection, the virtue of compassionate and selfless actions and the motivation derived from the quest.

The omnipresence of death, which is symptomatic of literary representations of the apocalyptic aftermath, is closely linked to the struggle for survival. Taking into account that death as an all-encompassing force entails the growing awareness of one's own mortality, different forms of responses are observable. Some characters, such as the mother in *The Road*, cannot develop the required survival strategies to withstand the hopelessness and gloomy prospects of the post-apocalyptic world and are overwhelmed by the prevalence of death. Others derive strength and motivation from the increasing awareness of their own mortality and impending demise, like the father in *The Road* or the group of survivors in *The Passage*, and thus manage to survive not only despite, but because of the inevitability of death in the post-apocalyptic world. Accordingly, mortality is postulated as a necessary aspect of human life that can be beneficial to the struggle for survival.

Mankind's quest to overcome its human mortality, as exemplified by the gunslinger's quest for the Dark Tower, the epitome of immortality, in King's *The Dark Tower* or the secret government experiments in *The Passage*, are proposed to be

fatal, as immortal life and the quest for it are illustrated to be a curse, rather than a blessing. Conversely, the metaphoric immortality, realized by procreation that guarantees the persistence of the human race, is present in both *The Road* and *The Passage* and can be argued to serve as the ultimate goal of post-apocalyptic narrations.

8.2. Abstract (Deutsch)

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit war es die Darstellungen des Überlebenskampfes, der Sterblichkeit und seinem Gegenstück, der Unsterblichkeit, innerhalb des trostlosen und verwüsteten post-apokalyptischen Ödlandes zu analysieren und festzustellen, ob ein übergeordneter Zusammenhang zwischen diesen drei thematischen Konzepten der post-apokalyptischen, amerikanischen Literatur existiert. Die Primärliteratur, die ausgewählt wurde um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, umfasst folgende Werke: *Die Strasse* von Cormac McCarthy, *Der Dunkle Turm* von Stephen King, und *Der Übergang* von Justin Cronin.

Um die verschiedenen Repräsentationen des Überlebenskampfes in den drei ausgewählten Werken der post-apokalyptischen Literatur genauer zu erläutern, wurden zunächst die Charakteristika der post-apokalyptischen Welt zusammengefasst und eingehend ob ihrer Funktion in der Erzählung analysiert. Basierend auf den Ergebnissen dieser Analyse wird behauptet, dass die Gefahren und Herausforderungen der monotonen und tristen Landschaft als primäre Gefahr für das Überleben der Charaktere dieser Erzählungen fungieren. Zu den effektivsten Strategien, um in dieser hoffnungslosen Welt zu überleben, gehören das Beibehalten von irrationaler Hoffnung, das Eingehen von menschlichen Beziehungen, die Liebe und Zuneigung generieren, die Tugend des mitfühlenden und selbstlosen Handelns, sowie die Motivation der Suche.

Die Allgegenwärtigkeit des Todes, die symptomatisch für literarische Darstellungen der apokalyptischen Nachwirkungen ist, ist eng geknüpft an den Überlebenskampf. Zieht man in Betracht, dass der Tod als alles umfassende Kraft das verstärkte Bewusstsein über die eigene Sterblichkeit fördert, sind unterschiedliche Reaktionen beobachtbar. Einige Charaktere, wie die Mutter in *Die Strasse*, können die notwendigen Überlebensstrategien, um der Hoffnungslosigkeit und den düsteren Aussichten der post-apokalyptischen Welt standhalten zu können, nicht entwickeln und werden übermannt von der Übermacht des Todes. Andere schöpfen aus dem gesteigerten Bewusstsein ihrer Sterblichkeit und dem drohenden Ableben Motivation und Kraft, wie der Vater in *Die Strasse* oder die Gruppe von Überlebenden in *Der Übergang*, und schaffen es nicht nur trotz, sondern auch wegen der Unausweichlichkeit des Todes in der post-apokalyptischen Welt zu überleben. Dementsprechend wird Sterblichkeit als notwendiges Merkmal des menschlichen Lebens postuliert, welches förderlich für den Überlebenskampf sein kann.

Das Streben der Menschheit die menschliche Sterblichkeit zu überwinden, wie beispielsweise die Suche des Revolvermannes nach dem Dunklen Turm, dem Sinnbild der Unsterblichkeit, in Kings *Der Dunkle Turm*, oder die geheimen Experimente der Regierung in *Der Übergang*, haben fatale Konsequenzen, da unsterbliches Leben und das Streben danach als Fluch dargestellt werden, und nicht als Segen. Auf der anderen Seite stellt die metaphorische Unsterblichkeit in der Form von Fortpflanzung, die das Überleben der Menschheit sichert, sowohl in *Die Strasse*, als auch in *Der Übergang* das ultimative Ziel von post-apokalyptischen Erzählungen dar.

8.3. Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten:

Vorname: Dominik

Nachname: Schreiner

Geburtsdatum: 10.4.1990

Geburtsort: Melk

Schulische Ausbildung:

1996-2000 Volksschule Petzenkirchen

2000-2008 Bundesgymnasium/Bundesrealgymnasium Wieselburg

2008 Matura

Studium:

2009-2015 Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Deutsch, Universität Wien