To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First, I want to acknowledge the committee for all their help and support throughout the process. I want to thank Professor Carmen Lugo-Lugo for agreeing to chair the committee and being a source of great help. Without her, this would be a drastically different project and she has my eternal gratitude. I want to Professor Mary Bloodsworth-Lugo for her comments and guiding me through the defense process. I also want to thank Professor Rory Ong for his feedback throughout the entire process. They were always fantastic and even though I might have not had the time to use them all, I plan on using them when I hopefully transform this into a book. All three members of the committee have my eternal thanks and gratitude and without them, none of this would be possible.

I also want to thank my family who acted as a source of constant encouragement and inspiration through the process. For that I thank: my mom Robyn, my dad Richard, my sister Amanda, my brother Ian, my brother Patrick and my sister-in-law Rebekah. Finally, I would like to thank my friends who kept me both sane and entertained during the grind of writing. I would like to thank Chris and Shannon Trapani, Jared Woldseth, Lucas Rosen, and Pitor Cymbalski for not only being the greatest friends I have ever had but for also tolerating my passion for the game of baseball.
Abstract

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May 2019

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This dissertation examines the relationship between the Western and post-apocalyptic genre in cinema. Specifically, how the post-apocalyptic genre translates and adapts key tenets of the Western to create a genre that is both foreign and familiar. However, this translation compromises the post-apocalyptic genre due to baggage of the Western genre especially racism, sexism and imperialism. These issues complicate the regenerative capabilities of the post-apocalyptic genre by never moving on from the old world.

Chapter 1 explores the relationship between the archetype of the savage and race in post-apocalyptic cinema, specifically focusing on in the inverted frontier and the universalized savage via zombie cinema. Chapter 2 explores how by translating and adapting the Western genre frontier, the gender norms of the Western haunt the post-apocalyptic genre and compromise the possibility of a new world. Chapter 3 examines the intersection of the apocalypse and colonialism as represented by the Mad Max quartet of films. Chapter 4 analyzes the relationship between Western genre locations and low budget post-apocalyptic films. Chapter 5 examines the
spatial temporality of the post-apocalyptic genre and how it is in the past, the present and the future.
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Dedication

For Ginger, Lola and Sammy
CHAPTER ONE: APOCALYPTIC APPROPRIATION:

ZOMBIES, WHITEWASHING AND THE UNIVERSALIZED SAVAGE

Where must we go, we who wander this wasteland, in search of our better selves
-George Miller, Mad Max: Fury Road

Man isn’t a noble savage, he’s an ignoble savage. He is irrational, brutal, weak, silly, unable to be objective about anything where his own interests are involved- that sums it up. I’m interested in the brutal and violent nature of man because it is a true picture of him.
-Stanley Kubrick

Essential to many stories is the battle between the protagonist and the antagonist and it is through these roles that the plot is produced. Good vs evil, light side vs dark side, and man vs machine. In each scenario, the protagonist triumphs over the antagonist and nowhere is this better illustrated than the Western genre. Due to the simple but infinitely adaptable formula, the Western genre relies on strict archetypes to populate its world. In discussing the simplicity of the Western formula, John Cawelti in The Six Gun Mystique states that “the simplest version of all has the hero protecting the townspeople from the savage, using his own savage skills against the denizens of the wilderness.”

The role that the antagonist inhabits is called the savage and is an essential part of any Western story.

In linking the frontier to the savage, the archetype has racial connotations due to the nostalgic interpretation of the past that the Western portrays. The savage in the Western is always tied to race even though the archetype theoretically can be inhabited by anyone. Corrupt bankers, outlaws and bandits can inhabit the role quite freely. Even though the savage archetype can be portrayed in numerous different ways, the archetype in the Western is that of the antagonist. For civilization to spread out across the frontier, the savage must be dispatched.

Different genres have adopted the civilization vs. the savage tropes from the Western, most

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notably, the post-apocalyptic genre. In adopting the savage archetype from the Western, post-apocalyptic films add a wrinkle that disrupts the relationship between the frontier and the savage.

While the archetype of the savage in the Western is directly tied to the antagonist, the post-apocalyptic genre opens the savage archetype via the inversion of the frontier. In inverting the frontier, the racial connotations surrounding the archetype are erased. These racial connotations are erased in the post-apocalyptic genre due to the apocalyptic event wiping out civilization. For many post-apocalyptic films, the location that embodies civilization is the city. It is the destruction of Los Angeles, New York, etc that represents the potential of the end of the world. The city also plays an essential role in the rise of civil defense in 1950’s in the United States. At the time, the strategy of the United States was to sacrifice the cities to save the suburbs.

However, this plan was racially motivated. In discussing the role of racism in civil defense planning in *Savage Perils*, Patrick Sharp argues that “the elimination of cities- especially the potentially dangerous racial problems associated with slums- was a common element of civil defense narratives during the 1950’s…the survival of the idealized white suburban family came to represent a major aspect of the strategy of the U.S for winning an atomic war.”\(^2\) This erasure of cities and the diverse population in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event creates a universalized version of the archetype and no better example of this than the figure of the zombie.

This chapter will explore the relationship between the archetype of the savage and race in post-apocalyptic cinema, specifically focusing on the inverted frontier and the universalized savage via zombie cinema. The figure of the universalized savage although being an extension of

the Western archetype differs in some key places. Within the Western formula, the savage while representing the frontier is doomed to fail due to civilization and all that entails (science, technology, etc). The savage worldview has no room within civilization so must be snuffed out. The post-apocalyptic genre offers the inverse in that civilization has already failed and the only way to survive is to adapt that savage worldview.

The zombie in popular culture has a long and storied history beginning with an adaptation of the zombie in Haitian mythology, a figure created out of Haiti’s history as a colonial slave state and its revolution against France. The zombie within Haitian mythology was centered around slavery and labor as the zombie was controllable slavery. The film *White Zombie* directed by Victor Halperin and released in 1932 appropriates the Haitian figure of the zombie and portrays a white plantation owner controlling black slaves in Haiti. This construction of the zombie was phased out and was replaced in 1968 with the release of *Night of the Living Dead* directed by George Romero.

Romero’s construction of the zombie was a zombie that could no longer be controlled and did not have a definable cause. Romero’s zombie was more of a force of nature that could not be stopped, and this interpretation of the zombie would become the dominant construction of the zombie in popular culture due to a copyright snafu that caused the film to enter the public domain. In entering the public domain, Romero’s rules around zombies were adopted and used for free due to entering the public domain and this helped to disseminate this version of the zombie. In constructing the zombie, Romero transformed the zombie into a tool to critique social inequalities such as consumerism, racism, and imperialism, etc. This version of the zombie would reign supreme due to a lack of copyright until 2002.
In 2002, Danny Boyle released 28 Days Later, and it offered a completely new construction of the zombie. Instead of a slow, lumbering and decaying zombie that gave a false sense of security, Boyle offered a fast, vicious, and lively zombie that kills and infects people fast. Instead of taking hours to turn an infected individual into a zombie, it now only takes seconds. This is due to the rage inducing virus as it turns humans into vicious killing machines who must feed.

Unlike Romero who does not give a cause for the zombie outbreak, Boyle links the zombie to disease, specifically the idea of infection. The virus will continue to infect while at the same time encountering no resistance. There is no cure and the only way to survive is to wait it out. The deadliness and the futile nature of the rage virus evokes the deadliness of the Spanish Flu pandemic. A virulent strain of influenza that mutated during trench war and quickly spread across the world.

This specific strain of the flu tended to kill those at the peak of their lives. In discussing the unique mortality curve of the Spanish Flu, author Carol Byerly in Fever of War wrote that “this penchant for killing young adults twenty to forty had the highest death rates in the epidemic, forming a terrible W morality curve.” The flu itself lasted from January 1918 to December 1920 infecting close to 25% of the world population at its peak. Estimates range from as low as twenty-one to as high as one hundred million died in those two years. Medical technology was useless against the disease as it ran rampant across the globe.

In looking at these three decisive films with three different constructions of the zombie, race plays a pivotal role in the construction of both the zombie and the protagonist. In White Zombie, both the protagonist and the antagonist are white and even though there are white

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zombies in the film, most of the zombies are black Haitians. In *Night of the Living Dead*, the zombies are white, but the protagonist of the film is black. Finally, in *28 Days Later*, the protagonist is white, and the zombies are white. By whitewashing the zombie, the racial connotations surrounding the savage archetype are masked and in turn creates a universal figure that exists in the inverted frontier. However, before the universalized savage can exist in the inverted frontier and the post-apocalyptic genre, the savage archetype must exist in the Western frontier and the Western genre.

Western History and Archetypes

The Western genre in popular culture stretches back to James Fennimore Cooper and the publication of the *Leatherstocking Tales* in 1841. However, the history of the modern Western can be directly traced back to Owen Wistler and the publication of *The Virginian* in 1902 to fantastic success. Within the book, Wistler helps to refine the mythic Frontier by not only focusing on the battle between civilization and savagery but also between aristocracy and egalitarianism.

Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* discussing this battle states “the crucial battle of the mythic Frontier is therefore not simply the struggle between White republican and Red savage but the struggle between true aristocracy and false democracy as the latter internal struggle is what literally threatens the existence of civilization.”4 While *Leatherstocking Tales* served as the genesis of the genre, *The Virginian* serves as the refinement of that formula for popular consumption. Within *The Virginian*, Wistler created the prototypical Western and other authors such as Zane Gray and Louis L’Amour started to imitate Wistler. In imitating Wistler, a standardized formula for the Western started to emerge and this transformed the Western genre

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into a popular culture dynamo for the next seventy years. The formula that was created in the aftermath of *The Virginian* was incredibly popular for two reasons: flexibility and simplicity and nowhere is this better illustrated than in the construction of characters.

In a traditional Western, you have three groups of characters, best described by John Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique*: “there are three central roles in the Western: the townspeople or agents of civilization, the savage or outlaws who threaten this first group, and the heroes who are above all ‘men in the middle’ that is, they possess many qualities and skills of the savages but are fundamentally committed to the townspeople.”5 In a simple Western, the villain is harassing the townspeople and the hero in turn stops the villain, saves the townspeople and saves the day. Although these roles seem simple, they are also incredibly flexible as the flexibility of the Western genre can be seen in the archetype of the savage.

Moving past the protagonist/antagonist relationship, the savage also inhabits the role of the frontier as the protagonist represents civilization. The Western portrays a nostalgic interpretation of the past in that white settlers traveled across the United States to settle on fertile and empty land. The problem with this nostalgic interpretation is that it is inaccurate in its depiction of an empty land and it completely ignores and undermines the pain and suffering that Native Americans faced.

It is not only that this pain and suffering is ignored but it is then justified by the archetypes of the noble savage and the brute. The archetype of the noble savage represents an alternative to civilization that must be destroyed for civilization to spread. On the other hand, the archetype of the brute portrays the savage as violent, ignorant and brutish and as a threat that must be destroyed. In discussing the inevitable destruction of the savage, Cawelti states, “in both

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his roles it turns out that the savage must be destroyed but in one case we rejoice and in the other feel nostalgically sorry.” Although there might be sadness in the dispatching of the savage, there is also justification as the savage cannot co-exist with the hero. Both the brute and the noble savage justify the disappearance of the savage through different means.

However, the savage inhabits the role of the antagonist due to its relationship to the construction of the frontier. At the same time, women are inexorably linked to the savage due to their positionality in the Western as symbols of civilization. In discussing the role of women within the Western, Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* states that “character groupings in the Western often show a dual as a well as tripartite opposition: the hero and the savages are men while the town is strongly dominated by women…the sexual division frequently embodies the antithesis of civilization and savagery.” For there to be civilization, the frontier must be destroyed as both constructions are mutually exclusive due to the strict binaries that are inherent to the Western genre.

The hero must defeat the savage as civilization must dispatch the frontier. However, the dispatching of the savage can take on many different forms ranging from exile to death. The only thing that matters is that the savage disappears. As Cawelti states, “where the fifty-yard line is the frontier and the major points of social and geographical topography are an advancing civilization on one side and a savage wilderness on the other.” However, the post-apocalyptic disrupts the strict binary between civilization and the frontier by having the savage emerge from civilization and not the frontier. While the Western portrays civilization conquering the frontier, the post-apocalyptic genre portrays the inverse in that the frontier conquers civilization. In

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6 Ibid., 80.
7 Ibid., 75.
8 Ibid., 99.
disrupting the civilization/frontier binary, it then disrupts the savage archetype by removing the limitations that the Western imposed upon it. The same qualities that were used to justify the dispatching of the savage in the genre now become positive traits in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. Cawelti tell us, “[the role of savage can be played interchangeably by Indians or outlaws because both groups symbolize the same basic qualities: negativity, lawlessness, a love of violence, rejection of the town and its way of life, and, more positively, the capacity to live and move freely in the wilderness.” In disrupting the link between the savage and the frontier, the link between the savage and the antagonist is also disrupted.

In an absence of civilization, the savage becomes a role that can be inhabited by both the antagonist and the protagonist. The skills that the savage possesses become incredibly important tools to survive as humanity enters a Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. However, it is through the savage archetype that the survivors of the post-apocalypse can transcend this state of nature. In discussing the rise of future-war stories after World War II, Patrick Sharp in *Savage Perils* states that “the white atomic bomb survivors of American future-war stories were not simply thrust into a degrading struggle for survival, however; the nuclear frontier allowed them to shed their civilization-induced weaknesses and be reborn.” For Sharp, the aftermath of these future war stories is a repetition of Manifest Destiny.

At the same time, Sharp also explicitly notes the absence of people of color in relation to whiteness. These future war stories subscribed to the civil defense propaganda that for the suburbs to survive, the cities had to be sacrificed. The exclusion of people of color in post-apocalyptic scenarios is directly tied to the translation and adaptation of the savage archetype of the Western. Although the savage can inhabit many roles in the Western it is still an archetype

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9 Ibid., 81.
that has racial connotations surrounding it. It is in the absence of people of color in the apocalypse that opens the savage archetype to white survivors via the masking of racial connotations. A side effect of this transformation is that it opens the archetype to both protagonists and antagonists that in turn removes the limitations created by the Western.

By creating a universalized figure, the genre allowed the predominantly white male protagonist to inhabit the role of the savage and gain the skills to both survive and thrive. However, as Sharp reminds us, “…many science fiction writers also drew on the imagery of the frontier…with their emphasis on civilized white protagonists who were reborn through their confrontation with savagery, nuclear frontier narratives repeated the white supremacist formulation of American civilization.”11 In looking at the translation and adaptation of the savage archetype from the Western to the post-apocalyptic genre, it is not a perfect translation as the nostalgic interpretation of the Western inhabits an unchecked potential in the post-apocalyptic genre. Meaning that the potential future of the post-apocalyptic is compromised by the destruction of civilization. The translation and adaptation of the savage from the Western to the post-apocalyptic genre mirrors the translation and adaptation of the Haitian zombie into American popular culture and its subsequent whitewashing and evolution into the Romero zombie and the rage zombie. The traditional Western savage archetype and its racial connotations can be seen in Haitian zombie and this can be illustrated in the 1932 horror film *White Zombie* and how the construction of zombies is directly tied to the Haitian Revolution.

*White Zombie: More Human Than Human*

*White Zombie* (1932), directed by Victor Halperin, was the first full length zombie film produced. The film itself is set in Haiti at a sugar plantation run by white plantation owner

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11 Ibid., 6.
Charles Beaumont who to run his plantation has turned to the help of Murder Legendre, a white Haitian voodoo master and played by Bela Lugosi. Beaumont to work his plantation has had Legendre enslave the local population and work at his plantation against their will. The slaves are black Haitians and by enslaving the local population, both Beaumont and Legendre are reconstructing colonial narratives surrounding the nation-state of Haiti. In 1659, France established the colony of Saint-Domingue on the island of Hispaniola. To make the island productive, France constructed plantations to cultivate coffee, cocoa, and sugar with sugar and coffee being its greatest export. To work these plantations, France started to import thousands of slaves into Saint-Domingue to work on the plantations.

In 1685, Louis XIV enacted code noir, a decree that defined slavery in French colonies. In discussing the regulation of slaves in Haiti via code noir, author Carolyn Fick in the chapter “Slave Resistance” in Haitian History: New Perspectives states that “slaves of different plantations were now forbidden to assemble and that…. planters were now permitted to shoot on sight any slave, they believed to be a fugitive.” However, even with code noir, slavery in Haiti was a deadly business as plantation-owners ignored code noir and worked slaves to death. Plantation-owners realized that it was cheaper to import new slaves than it was to fix working conditions. Therefore, as more and more slaves died, the importation of slaves into Saint-Domingue reached record highs with an estimated 500,000 by 1789. Plantation owners worked slaves increasingly hard and half of all slaves imported died within three years. It is out of this barbarity that the figure of the zombie was created. Mike Mariani in discussing the link between the zombie and slavery in” The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombies” states “Haitian slaves believed that dying would release them back to lan guinee, literally Guinea, or Africa in general,

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a kind of afterlife where they could be free...though suicide was common among slaves, those who took their own lives wouldn’t be allowed to return...instead, they ‘be condemned to skulk the Hispaniola plantations for eternity.’ However, slaves still escaped and out of hundreds of thousands imported to the island, close to fifty thousand managed to escape. The escaped slaves instilled fear in the slave-owners due to the possibility of rebellion. Even though slaves were dying at a rapid rate, the production of sugar outweighed all consideration. It was through the increasing importation of slaves that revolution started to brew.

By 1789, there were three distinct groups in Haiti. The first group were white colonists who consisted of rich plantation owners and poor whites. The second group consisted of free blacks who served as administrators for plantations and served in the army. The third and final group were African slaves who outnumbered both groups by a 10 to 1 margin. These three groups created a rigid caste system that denied opportunities to free blacks and slaves. It is in this discrimination that the origins of the Haitian Revolution are found. Two years later in 1791, free blacks and African slaves revolted against the French colonial government and started a revolution lasted from 1791 to 1804.

In 1804, the revolutionaries declared the island’s independence from France and renamed the island from Saint-Domingue to Haiti. Haiti is the only nation-state in human history to be created out of a successful slave revolt. Haiti’s history of slavery and its successful revolt is inherent in the construction of the zombie in Haitian folklore as zombification is directly linked to slavery. Elizabeth McAllister in “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies” discusses the relation between zombification and slavery: “the

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moment of punishment-by-zombification throughout Haitian history replicates and reproduces the crucial transformative moment in the lives of West and Central Africans and the slaves in the colonies, where Africans were seized, kidnapped, bound, whipped, sold and forced to labor.”

The figure of the zombie in Haitian mythology is not a mindless killing machine as seen in popular culture but instead is an undead laborer who works at the sugar plantations that were abandoned during the Haitian Revolution. This in turn recreates the colonial slave state that was destroyed and at the same time implies the recreation of empire.

This relationship between slavery and zombification is also seen in the film as the zombies who work in Legendre’s sugar plantation. In meeting with Beaumont, Legendre states the cost saving benefits of using zombies: “They work faithfully, and they are not worried about long hours. You, you can make good use of men like mine on your plantation.”

Within the film, the only people of color that are portrayed are zombies who do the bidding of white men. White Zombie and its portrayal of white men as plantation owners reconstructs the caste system that played a pivotal role in the Haitian Revolution. Legendre in the construction of his plantation creates labor force for zombie slaves. On the top of the caste are white zombies who work as servants. These zombies have names and work within Legendre’s mansion. On the bottom of the caste are black Haitians who toil away in Legendre’s sugar plantation. Albert Memmi in The Colonizer and The Colonized discusses the depersonalization of the colonized by arguing that “the colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity.” These zombies are nameless and are only used for their labor. However, like pre-revolutionary Haiti, the construction of freedom is only discussed in

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16 Albert Memmi, The Colonized and the Colonizer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 81
relation to white zombies. This perception of freedom would be rocked to its core with the independence of Haiti.

When Haiti declared its independence in 1804 it shot a shockwave that was felt by European colonial powers as it challenged pseudoscientific beliefs that positioned Africans as inferior to whites. Although Haiti gained its independence through a successful slave revolt, it soon lapsed into civil war as numerous factions tried to take control of the nascent country. In discussing the issues that Haiti had after the revolution “Independent Haiti in A Hostile World”, author Alyssa Sepinwall states that “Haiti faced a triple challenge after independence: simultaneously founding a new state, reinserting itself into the international community and establishing a new economic system to succeed slavery.”

This does even consider the multiple leaders all trying to vie for control. This in turn led to a series of coup-d’État’s that considerably hampered its ability to govern itself. This apparent failure to govern itself justified European colonialism as critics of Haiti could look at the nation-state and saw a backwards, primitive, and savage nation that needed to be civilized through colonialism. Lisa Marie Cacho in Social Death addresses the susceptibility of people of color to spatial violence stating that “people of color [are] not imagined as being able to actualize the principles of self-determination as if they [are] not guided by an interior consciousness able to analyze and rationalize; instead, they [are seen as governed by instinct (outer-determined or easily affected by others) rather than guided by reason (self-determined). This idea of susceptibility also interacted with the perception that Haiti was always on the verge of collapse due to rebellions, coups, and civil wars that left Haiti on a constant verge of rebellion.

Within the film, both Beaumont and Legendre represent this colonial figure via the sugar plantations using native labor and in the case of Legendre, enslaved labor. To enslave the local population, Legendre turns to voodoo and becomes a voodoo master. By becoming a voodoo master, Legendre goes native and occupies the role of the savage. It is with the use of magic that Legendre can be a strong force who brings order to the “primitive” Haiti. Voodoo was used by opponents of the Haitian Revolution to portray the revolution as savage barbarians who killed. As Mariani conveys, “[the zombies of the Haitian Voodoo religion were a more fractured representation of the anxieties of slavery, mixed as they were with occult trappings of sorcerers and necromancy.” 19 Charles W. Mills in *The Racial Contract* in discussing Eurocentric perceptions of religions states that “the link between the cognitive and the moral, of course, connects the failure to perceive natural law with moral flaw: the darkness of the Dark Continent is not merely the absence of a European presence but a blindness to Christian light, which necessarily results in moral blackness, superstition, devil worship.” 20 Legendre is using voodoo to not only enslave white zombies and black zombies but to also help Beaumont by turning his unrequited love Madeleine Short into a zombie. Legendre’s zombification of Madeline echoes a form of colonial control.

However, Beaumont is not happy with the zombie Madeleine as she is no longer what Beaumont desired. “I thought that beauty alone would satisfy but the soul is gone. I can’t bear those empty staring eyes.” 21 Unlike the black Haitian slaves, zombie Madeleine is not put to work but instead spends her time lounging in Beaumont’s palatial estate. Although zombie Madeline is physically the same, she shares no mental similarities with the zombie version. The

19 Mariani, “The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombies”
transformation of Madeleine into a zombie becomes what David-Livingstone Smith calls counterfeit human beings “creatures that look like humans, but who are not endowed with a human essence- and that this is possible because of our natural tendency to think that there are essence-based natural kinds.”22 The film creates a line separating the zombie based on race. White zombies within the film are not treated as mindless servants. Black zombies on the other hand are treated as mindless servants and are forced to work in Legendre’s sugar plantation. Within the Haitian mythology of zombies, the soul plays a pivotal role in that it is through the capturing of a soul that the undead can be controlled.

It is through voodoo that Legendre can force them to work at his plantation. In turning Madeleine into a zombie, Legendre has her soul. Her fiancé Neil is not only fighting for her physically but also for her soul. However, it is her physical body that drives Neil to save her. When Madeleine first becomes a zombie, it is not the fear that she became a zombie that terrifies her husband, but it is the fact that her body was taken by the natives. Neil in discussing her abduction with Dr. Brunter states that “well surely you don’t think she’s alive, in the hands of natives! Oh no, better dead than that.”23 It is the fear of miscegenation that drives Neil to save his wife. He accomplishes this by teaming up with Dr. Brunter, a Christian missionary who can help Neil understand what happened to his wife and how to free his wife from Legendre. Neil’s fear of miscegenation reinforces colonial language, this same fear is also explicitly found in the Western genre. As Cawelti reminds us, “[w]omen are also women, however, and implicit in their presence is the sexual fascination and fear associated with the rape of white women by savages…there seems little doubt that the possible savage capture of women plays a crucial role

23 Halperin, White Zombie.
in many Westerns.™ Although *White Zombie* is a film set in Haiti each character can fit within the Western formula. Neil occupies the role of the hero while Dr. Brunner occupies the role of the townspeople. Legendre occupies the savage and Madeleine occupies the role of the woman. The hero along with the townspeople destroy the savage to save the woman.

Within the Western genre, the savage archetype represents a threat to civilization while at the same time representing something that must be destroyed to make way for civilization. For Neil to save his fiancée, Legendre must die. As Cawelti states, “[the hero’s destruction of the savage to protect the chastity of the schoolmarm symbolizes the repression of his own spontaneous sexual urges and his acceptance of the monogamous sexual pattern of modern middle-class life.” In killing Legendre, voodoo is destroyed to make way for Christianity as represented by Dr. Bruner. However, Legendre does not die by Neil’s hand but instead is killed by a zombified Beaumont who pushes him off a cliff and this releases Madeleine from her zombie state. The end of *White Zombie* mirrors the Haitian Revolution by having the enslaved labor force overthrow their colonial masters. In the film, the zombies overthrow Legendre by pushing him off a cliff. In the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, Jean-Jacques Dessalines decreed that anyone suspected of helping the French army would be put to the death. Around more than three thousand French were brutally murdered. In analyzing Dessalines’s motives in *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, Jeremy Popkin states that “in [Dessalines] mind, the killings were a brutal form of realpolitik, necessary for Haiti’s security; if there were French in the island, the former metropole might be able to use them to undermine the unity between blacks and people of color.” The fear of undermining unity and re-establishing colonial control

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25 Ibid., 75.
is represented by Legendre. It is in his death that Haiti can reestablish sovereign control. Although the ending of White Zombie seems to repudiate colonialism as seen in the deaths of Legendre and Beaumont, colonialism played a pivotal role in the production of the film via the occupation of Haiti by the U.S.

Due to Haiti’s chronic problem of strong leadership, Haiti was politically unstable entering the 20th century. From 1911 to 1915, Haiti had six different presidents with each one either being exiled or killed. During this disarray, Haiti fell under both German and U.S. economic influence. Both countries jostled for economic influence and in 1915, the United States occupied Haiti under the guise of re-establishing law and order. However, the goal was sorely economic. In discussing the economic relationship between the U.S and the Haiti occupation, Jeffery W. Sommers in “The US Power Elite and the Political Economy of Haiti’s Occupation: Investment, Race, and World Order” states that the occupation of Haiti was “in part a highly organized effort to push US investment in Haiti by powerful interests that had their hands on the levers of machinery that could shape elite public and private action…meanwhile foreign markets were key profit for many US manufacturers.”

This economic investment in Haiti had the goal to change the Haitian constitution as it explicitly prohibited foreign land purchases. In changing the constitution, it allowed U.S. interests to start buying land that in turn increased U.S. assets in Haiti. Charles Beaumont, a white American plantation owner embodies this change to the constitution. Haiti’s troubled past as a nation is not only due to a lack of strong leadership but also due to chronic debt.

In 1825, Haiti under pressure by France, agreed to a treaty that paid one hundred and fifty million francs in exchange for France recognizing the new state. In discussing the lop-sided

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nature of this agreement, Jeremy Popkin in *The Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* writes that “if Haiti did not fulfill these commitments, the French reserved the right to withdraw their recognition of its independence…[President] Boyer was warned that if he rejected the French ultimatum the French would bombard Port-au-Prince.”

This debt would cripple the economy for decades.

To pay off this debt and to remain solvent, Haiti throughout the 19th and 20th century took out numerous loans from the U.S., Germany and France to stay solvent. In occupying the island, the United States took over the national bank, custom houses and the national treasury. During the occupation starting 1915 to 1934, the U.S. government repurposed forty percent of Haiti’s national income to pay debts to American and French banks. A side effect of this repurposing is that it stabilized Haiti’s economy and built up a sizeable amount of infrastructure including roads, bridges, schools and hospitals just to name a few of the improvements that the U.S made to the U.S. controlled Haiti.

In building up the infrastructure, the U.S was attempting to find equivalence with Haiti. Neil Smith in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production in Space* in discussing the relationship between equalization and capital states: “…like the tendency towards differentiation, the tendency towards equalization is inherent in capital…it is expressed most clearly in the world market and in the circulation process, because the individual act of exchange is one of creating a social equivalence.” However, this attempted equivalence fails both due to the forced occupation of the Haiti by the U.S and to uneven development. It is through the occupation of the Haiti by the United States that the colonial powers reassert control of Haiti.

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Both the French colonial occupation of Haiti and the U.S occupation are directly linked to both economic opportunity and exploitation of Haitian workers. This economic exploitation then reinstates colonial control which would reinforce the inherent contradiction surrounding Haiti: to “save” Haiti, a former colony, it needed to be colonized again.

During the occupation, Haitians were excluded from positions of power as the U.S. Marines ruled over the island violently stopping any protests from Haitians. The ending of *White Zombie* does not only represent a reconstruction of the Haitian Revolution, but it also represents the expulsion of the United States from the island. *White Zombie* was produced in 1932 and two years later the U.S. leaves Haiti after nineteen years of occupation. Within the film, the deaths of Legendre and Beaumont not only represent a retelling of the Haitian Revolution but also serves as a warning to the United States. During the occupation, Haitians revolted and attempted to capture the capital of Haiti. However, this revolt was quickly and violently put down by the U.S. Marines. Chera Kee in “From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again” in discussing this contradiction states “Thus, while zombies seem to represent a very real fear of the return of the colonial master, they also offer a critique of both slavery and the abuse of the worker. Yet, while the zombie could thus be a critique of empire, zombie films also replayed a fantasy of empire.”

It is during both occupations that native labor was used to enrich white land-owners as represented by both of the antagonists of *White Zombie* who are white sugar plantation owners who use native labor on their plantation.

Even with the death of both Beaumont and Legendre, colonial control continues through the work of Dr. Brunter who wants to “civilize” the Haitians and turn them away from voodoo and towards Christianity. Due to Haiti’s status as a nation-state that established its independence

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through a slave revolt, the need of white colonial control will continue to haunt the island. This will continue to position the island as a backwards and primitive nation-state.

*White Zombie* both represents an acquiescence to the colonial desire to re-establish control of Haiti while also serving as a cautionary tale to those who attempt to re-establish control. At the center of this need to re-establish control is the construction of the savage and Haiti’s long history of being painted as inferior to Western nation-states.

Voodoo, lack of strong leadership and economic uncertainty have all been used to paint Haiti as a state that needs strong Western control through colonization. It is through colonization that the savage nation can be civilized. However, the savage archetype as portrayed in the film is not a black Haitian but instead is Murder Legendre, a white European who masters voodoo. Who uses his mastery of voodoo to enslave black Haitians to do his will and to work on his sugar plantation. He masks his ability using black Haitians who do his bidding as seen in the kidnapping of Madeleine Short. It is through voodoo that Legendre can colonize Haiti, and this is represented in his sugar plantation. Legendre’s colonization of Haiti is accomplished through the knowledge that he learns from occupying the savage archetype. In *White Zombie*, colonialism is done via the practices of voodoo. It is through occupying the archetype of the savage that Legendre can be the strong leader that Haiti has lacked. However, this occupation is short lived as Legendre is murdered by the same zombies who work in his plantation echoing the Haitian Revolution in that the slaves revolted against French colonial control.

It is in the death of the antagonist that civilization can start to spread to the island through Christianity. Although the savage plays a pivotal role in *White Zombie* it has not transformed into the universalized figure of the savage due to the location as you have white Europeans traveling to Haiti, a predominately black country. The universalized savage and the Haitian
construction of the zombie as seen in *White Zombie* are mutually exclusive. In 1968, George Romero released his cult classic *Night of the Living Dead* that created a new interpretation of the zombie.

*Night of the Living Dead: Whitewashing the Zombie*

Unlike the zombies in *White Zombie*, Romero’s interpretation of the zombie differed in three key ways. First, while the Haitian zombie was created by magic, the Romero zombie has no origin story. Secondly, there is no “cure” for the Romero zombie. Once someone is bitten, it is inevitable that they themselves will turn into a zombie and attack. Finally, the Romero zombie cannot be controlled and put to work. The Romero zombie is a force of nature that cannot be stopped by any means. If the Haitian zombie represents the intersection of race, colonialism and slavery then the Romero zombie represents a hurricane, a natural disaster causing untold destruction and devastation. Although the Romero zombie would become the benchmark for the zombie in popular culture, the protagonist of the film sets it apart from earlier zombie films.

In *White Zombie* a white man fights a white voodoo master and for his white wife who was turned into a zombie on the island nation of Haiti. Although there are black Haitian slaves in the film, they are seen working in a sugar plantation recreating colonial narratives surrounding Haiti. For a large majority of the film, the only zombies that the viewers see are white zombies and the white zombies are the only zombies from which the freedom from zombification is offered.

Romero, in *Night of the Living Dead*, transforms the construction of the white zombie into a homogenous white horde that roams the farmlands of rural Pennsylvania. In creating the white homogenous zombie horde, Romero “flips the script” making Ben, an African American, the protagonist. As McAlister observes, “zombies are overwhelmingly white in Romero’s films, and the small minority of African-American zombies have powdered whiteface. Just as white in
society are ‘ordinary looking’ and therefore unremarked as white, as ‘nothing in particular’ so too are the zombies.”

More importantly, Ben is the only person of color in the entire film and unlike the other survivors, he is the first one to notice that something wrong.

Throughout the film, Ben is the only individual who has a plan to deal with the zombie outbreak. This is clearly seen when he first encounters Barbara. While Barbara has gone into shock over the death of her brother, Ben is barricading windows and doors to keep the zombies out. In removing the racial connotations from the savage, it makes it difficult to locate and this is illustrated in the first encounter with a zombie in the film. When Barbara first encountered a zombie, she had no idea it was a zombie because it was a white man in a suit walking towards her. She had no worries about the man until it attacked her. Linda Martin Alcoff in *Visible Identities* discusses the construction of the visual register stating, “and the visual registry thus produced has been correlated with rational capacity, epistemic reliability, moral condition, and, of course, aesthetic value.”

The first zombie in the film that the audience sees is a white male in a suit that is shambling towards Barbara. For Barbara and Johnny, they see nothing out of sorts because visually, the zombie looks like a white male. Their perception changes when the zombie attacks Johnny. In discussing the relationship between race and visibility, Alcoff argues that “racial identities that are not readily visible create fear, consternation, and sometimes hysterical determination to find their visible trace.” The visible sign of whiteness masked the visible sign of the zombie.

This masking of the zombie along with the failure to determine the cause of the zombie invasion leads to paranoia and hysteria. In erasing the visible sign of the savage as represented

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33 Ibid., 192.
by the zombie, it then directly impacts who is perceived as the savage. When Ben and Barbara are interrupted by Harry and Tom who emerge from the basement of the farmhouse, they brandish weapons at both as they do not know who a zombie is and who is not. After learning who is who, Ben then chastises them both for not knowing the difference and Harry states “how were we supposed to know what was going on up? It could have been those things, for all we know.” Harry’s paranoia is directly tied to the fact that the racial identity of the zombie was being masked by whiteness. This masking of the identity of the zombie is what gets Harry killed. After locking himself in the basement with his family, his daughter who was sick throughout the entire films turns into a zombie. Due to the absence of a well-defined savage then potentially everyone can then inhabit that role. This potential threat exists on the interpersonal level as survivors start to encounter other survivors. In *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We’ll not go Home Again* by Claire P. Curtis, states that “the apocalyptic event, through its destruction of official manifestations of authority (politicians, police, military), reveal humans fighting against one another for their survival…this world demands eternal vigilance.”

This constant vigilance is something that is new to the white survivors but is something that Ben has had to enact throughout his entire life. This vigilance is the result of decades of systematic racism and it is through this vigilance that Ben is the first to understand what is happening.

In the film he is the only survivor of the zombie attack at the farmhouse. Barbara is killed by her brother who became a zombie and the rest of the survivors are killed by zombies. This taps into the notion of Alcoff’s disequilibrium: “Disequilibrium for whites is not an inevitable result of the mere presence of racial others, then, even in a historico-racial schema of

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white supremacy, though it may be experienced as a potential disruption that the body appreciates, and which puts it in the mode of watchfulness.”36 This disequilibrium intersects with the potential threat of the zombie. Throughout the film, Ben does not only deal with the threat of zombies but also the threat of other survivors. He is locked out of the farmhouse by Harry who attempts to shoot him, for Harry is only looking out for himself and his family. However, from Ben’s perspective, Harry is endangering the group. Harry’s action allows the zombies to breach the farmhouse and to kill everyone except for Ben. When Ben eventually leaves the cellar of the farmhouse to investigate. He is shot in the head by a white posse traversing the countryside killing zombies. The posse did not stop to investigate if Ben was a zombie but shot him with no warning. The credits of the film portray the posse dismembering the body and throwing it onto a pile of corpses that are then set on fire.

Even though Ben is not a zombie, his status as the only person of color in the entire film positions him as monstrous to the posse. The monstrosity of the zombie in popular culture is directly tied to the racial other. Majid Yar in Crime and the Imaginary of Disaster in discussing the links between the racial other and zombies states that “the popular mythologisation of the zombie inverts this relationship with the production of the social order; it is a malevolent incursion that destroys, rather than preserves, social cohesion…it is also from its earliest cinematic incarnations, firmly located within a framework of racialized danger and the encounter with a dark otherness.”37 Romero inverts this relationship by having the zombies be homogenously white while having an African-American protagonist. Instead of breaking down

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36 Alcoff, Visible Identities, 193.
social cohesion, Ben is trying to keep social cohesion from breaking down but is being thwarted by the other survivors that is itself a manifestation of disequilibrium.

Ben’s role in keeping the social cohesion is part of a larger inversion. He now has value while the white survivors do not. This value is directly tied to his knowledge of what is going on and his plan to survive. As Cacho reminds us, “value is ascribed through explicitly or implicitly disavowing relationships to the already devalued and disciplined categories of deviance or nonnormativity.”

In the zombie invasion, Ben’s status as an African American man is masked by his status as not a zombie. This masking is representative of the shift from the dark otherness of the Haitian zombie being replaced with the white otherness of the Romero zombie. This shifting in the construction of the other is itself a manifestation of disequilibrium. In discussing the relationship between visibility and racialized identities, Alcoff in Visible Identities argues that “one source of the importance of visibility for racialized identities is the need to manage and segregate populations and to catch individuals who trespass beyond their rightful bounds…visible difference naturalizes racial meanings.” The whiteness of the Romero zombie breaks down these boundaries due to the relationship between whiteness and normality.

When the zombie attacked Barbara in the cemetery, she was not worried when the zombie shambled towards her due to the perception of normality. In discussing the relationship between the English and the Irish and how the Irish were racialized and forced to inhabit the role of the other, Alcoff in Visible Identities states that “the observer in the passage experienced a disequilibrium in his corporeal self-image prompted by finding is own features in the degraded Other.” Barbara, Harry and the other white survivors are experiencing disequilibrium due to the

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38 Cacho, Social Death, 18.
40 Ibid., 191.
whiteness of the zombies and the fact that they can see themselves in the zombies. Ben does not experience this disequilibrium due to him no longer inhabited the role of the other. However, his positionality is in constant flux.

As the zombies are killed and as Ben becomes the only survivor, his value dwindles. His value dwindles as he is repositioned as the other. Through the white zombie, the universal savage can start to emerge as the post-apocalyptic wasteland represents a Hobbesian state of nature in that everyone must look out for themselves. It is in the dispatching of the zombies that the figure of the universal savage starts to re-appear as the social order is re-established. The universal savage relies on the construction of white otherness. The presence of people of color complicate this construction via the construction of the other and the construction of the monstrous and the criminal, for as Cacho reminds us, “…the criminalized figure does not disappear; often, the figure is displaced and mutates into other easily recognizable figures of criminality, such as the illegal alien.”

Or in Night of the Living, Ben is conflated with the zombies.

In the presence of zombies, Ben has inherent value due to the inversion of the monstrous. However, with the absence of zombies, Ben’s value is removed, and he again inhabits the role of the monstrous. Therefore, when he encounters the posse, they shoot him before asking him if he is a zombie. Positioning him as a zombie, Romero makes him as a monster who is trying to upset the social order and must be killed. For the posse, killing Ben is re-establishing the social order as the need in any post-apocalyptic scenario is to establish order. In other words, Ben becomes positioned as a criminal in relation to the state. Lisa Marie Cacho in Social Death in discussing the relationship between personhood and the criminalization of populations of persons of color

41 Cacho Social Death, 13
argues that “because the state renders criminalized populations of color ineligible for personhood and, consequently, ineligible for the right to ask for rights, they cannot be incorporated in rights-based politics.”\textsuperscript{42} Inherent to any post-apocalyptic scenario is the destruction of the nation-state. Instead of portraying a zombie apocalypse, Romero portrays a zombie outbreak. However, the state regains control at the end of the film.

Throughout the film, Romero hints at some causes but never actually tells the audience what caused the zombie outbreak. However, the only way to stop the zombie outbreak is to shoot the zombies in the head. This in turn leads to a shoot first and ask questions later approach. This film mirrors the social upheaval that happened in real life as 1968 proved to be a year of both successes and of tragedies in the Civil Rights Movement. \textit{Night of the Living Dead} was released on October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1968 to controversy due to its gory nature. Almost six months to the day earlier, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated by James Earl Ray in Memphis. In the aftermath of the assassination, riots broke out across the United States. To quell the riots, President Johnson mobilized the army and the National Guard. In 1965, three years before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Malcom X was also assassinated. The Watts Riots in Los Angeles took place in that year, causing Governor Pat Brown to call in the National Guard. Thus, to quell both the Watts riots and the riots occurring after the assassination of MLK, the National Guard was sent in. Because of the military presence, violence escalated.

In the case of the Watts Riots, thirty-one out of the thirty-four people killed were killed by law enforcement. At the same time, the chief of the LAPD initiated a policy of mass arrest, arresting close to 3,500 people during the riots. In trying to quell the riots, a state of exception was created. Giorgio Agamben states that “the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as

\textsuperscript{42} Cacho, \textit{Social Death}, 8.
the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics. This transformation of a provisional and exceptional measure into a technique of government threatens to radically alter - in fact, has already palpably altered - the structure and meaning.”⁴³ In mobilizing the National Guard, a state of exception was created to reconstitute order. This state of exception is then mirrored in the film as the armed posse, reminiscent of the incursions of the National Guard in urban spaces, comes to life and exists through the construction of the state of exception.

To re-establish order, the posse is then justified in the killing of those who are both literally and figuratively the living dead. Although the zombies occupy the role of living dead so does Ben. Ben’s status as the representative living dead intersects with the work of Achille Mbeme, specifically his idea of Necropolitics when he states, “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds new and unique forms of social existence in vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead.”⁴⁴ Mbeme’s construction of the living dead intersects with Ben’s positionality as the other. It is through his positionality as the other that he is killed at the end of the film. Even though he is not a zombie, he still inhabits the position of the living dead in relation to the white posse.

It is this same status of the living dead that serves as the foundation for the Watts riots. Inequality in housing, education, and economics along with police brutality provides the kindling for the riots. This kindling reignites three years later due to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. that ignites riots nationwide. To quell the riots, the National Guard was again called in to re-establish order. By calling in the National Guard that the state of exception is reconstructed for, as Agamben argues, “…the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical

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order, and the problem of defining it convenes precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.”

The suspension of the law and the re-establishment of the law are not mutually exclusive but instead blur within each other just as Ben is blurred as living dead. The murder of the zombies at the end of *Night of the Living Dead* and the death of Ben exist within this blurring of both the suspension and establishment of the law. In discussing the relationship between the state of exception and power, Mbeme states that “power (and not necessarily state power) continuously refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized enemy and it also labors to produce that same exception, emergency, and fictionalized enemy.”

Within the film, the Romero zombie takes on the role of the fictionalized enemy through which law can then be suspended. The zombie who roams the Pennsylvania countryside can now be executed with no remorse as it threatens the stability of the state. It is also through this fictionalized enemy that Ben is killed due to his de-facto positionality as a zombie. The fictionalized enemy creates a binary between the enemy and the state as the state needs the enemy to create the state of exception that in turn creates the need to kill the enemy. This binary between the enemy and the state is strikingly like that of the civilization/frontier binary in the Western genre.

Within the Western genre, civilization uses the construction of the frontier to justify its civilizing of the frontier. To civilize the frontier, there first needs to be a frontier in the first place. Within the Western genre, the civilizing of the frontier is constructed racially. In a large subset of Westerns, a white hero represents civilization battling against an Other who occupies the role of the savage fighting for the frontier. The white hero triumphs over the savage and in turn civilizes the frontier. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* flips this relationship by having the

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46 Mbeme, “Necropolitics”, 16.
protagonist of the film be a person of color while having the savages represented by homogenously white zombies and the armed posse. One of the key distinctions between the hero and the savage in the Western genre is how both archetypes use violence. John Cawelti in discussing this relationship states “in general, its function seems to be one of distinguishing between the hero’s disciplined and moral use of violence and the uncontrollable aggression which marks the bad savage.”

For Cawelti, the savage is not only represented by race but also via the use of violence. Within the film, Ben is disciplined when it comes to violence, only using it as a last resort when he is locked out of the house by Harry. On the other hand, the armed posse walks across the countryside gunning down zombies without second guessing or making sure that they are zombies.

The violence is aggressive and undisciplined. George Romero forever changed the figure of the zombie in popular culture by transforming the zombie into a blank slate represented by the homogenously white zombie hordes. In transforming the zombie into a blank slate, it allowed Romero to invert earlier representations of the Haitian zombie as seen in *White Zombie*. Instead of portraying white heroes and black zombies, *Night of the Living Dead* shows the inverse with a black hero and white zombies.

Even though the film offers the inverse, this inversion only works within the apocalyptic scenario as the film ends with Ben being shot by an armed posse of white males who then set his body on fire. The main reason for the popularity of the film is due to a copyright error that made the film enter the public domain shortly after its original theatrical run. Romero inadvertently created a zombie template that was adopted by many because it became both free and easy to...
duplicate. This in turn popularized the Romero zombie and made it the de-facto zombie in popular culture.

28 Days Later: The Urban Zombie

The Romero zombie would in turn be challenged in 2002 with Danny Boyle’s 28 Days Later that portrays a fast and vicious zombie that transformed survivors into zombies within seconds of biting. The fast zombie is also an urban zombie due to the clustering of individuals in cities and exemplifies how fast the virus can spread from individual to individual. In Night of the Living Dead, the zombie shambles across the Pennsylvania countryside looking for people to kill. The slow, shambling nature of the Romero zombie is reflected in the sense of dread that it creates. Even though the survivors can barricade themselves in a farmhouse, the zombies will not stop until they are all dead. Or in other words, the Romero zombie is a rural zombie. The fast zombie as portrayed in the 28 Days Later is representative of the portrayal of cities within the post-apocalyptic genre. In the aftermath of World War II, the potential apocalypse intersected with both white flight and the city in the construction of civil defense. With the moving of white families in the suburbs through white flight and the moving of people of color into the city, the perception of the city was reconfigured as a dangerous and urban location. This perception was then tied into the civil defense as the U.S Government in its propaganda valued the white suburban family over the city. Patrick Sharp in discussing this mutually exclusive belief argues that “surrounded by forces that threatened to destroy it, the white suburban family fought against the savagery of the city and the dangers of the nuclear age in its quest to uphold traditional American values.”

Civil defense propaganda reused frontier imagery in that it portrayed the residents of the suburbs as pioneers while portraying the residents of cities as savages. It is this

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48 Sharp, Savage Perils, 176.
portrayal of the city as a dangerous place that in justifies its destruction in the event of a nuclear war. One of the most enduring visual images in apocalyptic films is the destruction of a city (New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, etc).

In the case of Los Angeles, a city that has been destroyed in multiple creative ways, the destruction of the city is tied to racial anxieties. In *Ecology of Fear*, Mike Davis in discussing the relationship between disaster fiction and race argues that “the urge to strike out and destroy, to wipe out an entire city and untold thousands of its inhabitants is rooted in racial anxiety…from the earliest 19th century examples of the literary destruction of London and New York to the latest survivalist fantasies about LA, white fear of the dark races lies at the heart of such visions.”

The destruction of the urban space in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction is itself an attempt to save the white suburban family over the African American city dweller. The destruction of the city in apocalyptic fiction goes hand in hand in the segregation of civil defense.

In 1950, President Truman appointed Millard Caldwell, a well know segregationist head of the Federal Civil Defense Administration. During his time at the FDCA, Caldwell protected whites at the expense of African Americans. In discussing Caldwell’s civil defense policies, Sharp in *Savage Perils* states that “Caldwell oversaw the enactment of policies that produced segregated public bomb shelters and that largely abandoned the sizeable population of African Americans living in major urban centers.”

In segregating bomb shelters and abandoning African Americans, the FDCA in turn excluded African Americans from the post-apocalyptic wasteland due to the destructive capabilities of atomic bombs. The destructive capabilities of the

50 Sharp, *Savage Perils*, 197.
atomic and hydrogen bombs made evacuation nearly impossible due not only to logistics but also due to systemic racism. The eradication of the urban space via atomic bombs is both immediate and incredibly destructive and as special effects improved, the aesthetic of destruction kept improving. In discussing the destructive capabilities of the hydrogen bomb in SF Cinema, Mick Broderick in “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster” states that “in the 70’s and early 80’s SF Films returned to closer mimetic renderings of thermonuclear war emphasizing in greater detail the devastating impact upon urban landscape.”\textsuperscript{51} The fast zombie within 28 Days Later is stronger, faster and more agile that in turn increases its destructive capabilities. The fast zombie is not as fast as an atomic bomb, but it only takes twenty-eight days for society to collapse in the United Kingdom.

The collapse of society within the film can be seen in the military blockade. Instead of trying to re-establish order, the surviving soldiers are trying to attract women to sexually assault them. Major Henry West, the commanding officers in defense of the soldier’s state “What do nine men do, except wait to die themselves? I moved us from the blockade. I set the radio broadcasting, and I promised them women…because women mean a future.”\textsuperscript{52} Similar to Romero in Night of the Living Dead, Boyle positions the antagonist of the film not as zombies but as other survivors. At the same time, the savage archetype is used differently by both the antagonist and the protagonist.

The antagonists of the film are the male soldiers who plan on gang raping the female survivors. However, these soldiers are not deserters or former soldiers who are bandits but are members of the military who survived the apocalypse. Order has not broken down as they are

\textsuperscript{52} 28 Days Later, directed by Danny Boyle (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2002) Blu-Ray (20th Century Fox, 2007).
highly regimental with roadblocks, trip mines, floodlights, and a generator. They even have comforts such as hot water. They represent the illusion of civilization within the post-apocalyptic wasteland. This illusion is what attracted fellow survivors to the blockade.

However, the soldiers have entered the Hobbesian state of nature and are now trying to instill order into the post-apocalyptic wasteland. In *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction* William Katteberg discusses the temptation to instill order in the chaos of a post-apocalyptic world: “The danger in the wake of a holocaust is the desire to impose order on the chaos, whether a return to the old order, the self-serving order of regional strongmen or new totalitarian dreams of universal order.”53 It is through the connection to the failed state that West and the soldiers derive their power and authority. However, their attempt to re-establish order is undermined by the urban space. In post-apocalyptic narratives, order is re-established not in cities but in the wasteland itself. The city and its inhabitants are sacrificed to save the suburbs as portrayed in civil defense propaganda. It is also through this connection that they do not devolve into the savage. This connection between the soldiers and the savage is embodied in the character of Mailer.

Mailer was a black male soldier who was infected by the virus. Instead of killing him and putting him out of his misery, West had a chain tied around his neck as a way to study the infection. It is through studying the effects of the virus that West can position himself as not a savage. According to West, “in a way, he’s telling me he’ll never bake bread, farm crops, raise livestock. He’s telling me he’s futureless and eventually he’ll tell me how long the infected take

to starve to death.” In tying up the zombie Mailer, West is relying on traditional connotations of the savage archetype that is based around race.

At the same time, Mailer status as savage intersects with the portrayal of urban space. In analyzing Upton Sinclair’s, *The Jungle* and its perception of the city as an urban jungle, Patrick Sharp in *Savage Perils* argues that “with the writing of men like Sinclair, a vision of the American city emerged that viewed civilization as an urban jungle that was full of dangerous savages…to live in the city was to brave the threatening mix of foreign cultures and nonwhite races.” Mailer’s status as a savage has multiple meanings within the film. He can be positioned as the savage within a western context while also inhabiting the savage within the urban jungle. If West has Mailer, he can then position himself as civilized in relation to Mailer, for as Mills tells us, “…the most notorious state of nature in contractarian literature- the bestial war of all against all is really a nonwhite figure, a racial object lesson for the more rational whites, whose superior grasp of natural law will enable them to take the necessary steps to avoid it and not to behave as savages.” In linking race to zombies, it in turn links race to savagery. In the beginning of the film when Mark gets infected, Selena kills him not only to spare his life but to prevent him from becoming a savage from completely entering the state of nature. This state of nature comes from the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes.

It is in the state of nature that life is nasty, brutish and short. In discussing the relationship between violence and the state of nature in *Post-apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*, Claire P. Curtis states that “Hobbes argues that human beings in the state of nature have the right to anything to survive. And while humans might kill another or take food that

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54 Boyle, *28 Days Later.*
another had procured (but does not own, and so cannot steal) the motivation to survive does not reveal any inherent evil in human nature.”\textsuperscript{57} In order to save Selena from the soldiers, Jim releases Mailer and begins to kill the soldiers while running around shirtless covered in blood. In killing Mailer, the traditional connotations surrounding the savage are erased as whiteness then becomes linked to the savage archetype. This link between the savage and whiteness is embodied in the character of Jim and his transformation during the climax of the film.

The illusion of Jim as a zombie is so complete that Selena pulls a machete on the bloody and exasperated Jim and is willing to kill him until he talks. Jim unlike Mailer has literacy. For Jim, to save the day, he had to willingly enter the state of nature and become the savage. Patrick Sharp in discussing nuclear frontier stories and survival states “the destruction of civilization threw them into a Darwinian confrontation with savage nature…this return to a basic struggle to survive was portrayed as one of the ironic horrors of the atomic bomb: the ultimate weapon and sign of progress was precisely what brought about a devolution that reduced humans to an animalistic state.”\textsuperscript{58} Although Sharp is discussing post nuclear frontiers in America, the inverted frontier that Sharp is portraying can be applied to the zombie apocalypse of 28 Days Later. At the center of the inverted frontier is the belief that the survivors of the apocalypse build a better world out of the ruins. However, this better world is directly linked to whiteness and the countryside.

To survive, Jim and Selena leave the city and live in the countryside. It is in the countryside that they encounter a low flying jet, a symbol of civilization. In discussing the relationship between nuclear frontier stories and social Darwinism in Savage Perils, Patrick Sharp states that “drawing on Darwinist formulations of progress and the frontier, most nuclear

\textsuperscript{57} Curtis, \textit{Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract}, 42.
\textsuperscript{58} Sharp, \textit{Savage Perils}, 172.
frontier stories repeated the racism of Darwin’s arguments that depicted superior Europeans winning the struggle to establish a new and better civilization.” 59 The linking of the future to whiteness is embodied in the character of Mailer. There is no future for Mailer not because he is a zombie but also because he is a person of color.

In discussing the future of Mailer, West explicitly brings up crops, farming, and livestock in relation to the future. All three are linked to the conquering of the frontier as in the absence of civilization, the frontier then re-establishes control. In response to the frontier establishing control, civilization then will begin to reconquer the frontier. This new and better civilization that Sharp discusses relies on the absence of people of color as inverted frontier calls on white protagonists to enter the savage archetype to gain the skills to survive.

Jim can enter the role of the savage to save the day while also having the ability to leave the role of the savage. This ability to turn on and off the savage is directly tied to his whiteness. Due to his whiteness, he has the privilege to inhabit the role of the non-savage. He occupies the role of the savage to save Selena and Hannah from sexual assault. He then leaves the savage archetype when he encounters Selena after saving her. The film ends with Jim, Selena, and Hannah in a remote cottage where they are saved by the outside world. 28 Days Later was released in 2002 but was produced and made in 2001 in the months before and shortly after the September 11th terrorist attacks. The influence of September 11th can be seen in the construction of the rage zombie.

The Romero zombie in Night of the Living Dead is a slow and bumbling zombie that cannot be stopped and what makes the zombie terrifying is the inevitability of the zombie. It does not matter if you try to escape, the Romero zombie will get you in the end. The Boyle

59 Ibid.,
zombie offers instant death in transformation is near instant and there is nothing that can be done about it. The term fast and slow zombie does not only denote the locomotive capabilities of the zombie but also the speed of infection. It takes hours for Harry’s daughter in Night of the Living Dead to turn while it takes seconds for a human in 28 Days Later to turn. At the same time, both connotations of zombie are defined by their space. For the slow zombie, it needs a space that is both open and wide therefore the audience can see the zombie horde approach. In Night of the Living Dead, Romero set the film in the Pennsylvanian countryside all shambling towards the farmhouse.

For the fast zombie, it needs a space that is tight and confined with low visibility. In 28 Days Later, Boyle sets the film in London that in turn heightens the tension by not knowing what it is around each corner. This paranoia surrounding the zombie then intersects with the speed of the zombie, both locomotion and infection. Another point of comparison between the fast and slow zombies is the potential to stop the attack. In response to the slow nature of the Romero zombie, the state had time to figure out how to deal with the threat. The solution was a bullet to the head. However, in response to the rage zombie there is no solution due to how fast the virus spreads. Boyle in constructing the rage zombie gives a source for the virus: captive chimpanzees that are infected with a rage virus. Unlike Romero who gives no source, the source of the rage zombies is science.

In making the source of the rage zombies a virus, Boyle uses the trope of science as a double-edged sword in that the positive discoveries of science can be outweighed by the negative discoveries. Heather Urbanski in Plagues, Apocalypses and Bug-Eyed Monsters discusses how biology is mobilized in speculative fiction stating that “whether these fictional apocalypses plagues are the results of accidental or intentional releases, the work of a rogue individual or a
coordinated state offensive…as our knowledge of genetics and biology expands, however, so
does the threat, something the genre frequently depicts.”\textsuperscript{60} This biological virus is something that
the state cannot respond to due to how fast it spreads throughout the country and within twenty-
eight days, Great Britain is quarantined by the world. There is nothing to do to prevent the virus
as it strikes Great Britain as there is no warning and is already done by the time that state can
respond.

This failure to anticipate and respond is like the reaction of a terrorist attack. The
disequilibrium that Jim feels at the beginning of the film when he exits the hospital to a deserted
London is that of knowing something happened but not exactly what happened. James Berger in
\textit{After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse} in discussing the relationship between trauma
and the apocalypse states “in this generalized sense of trauma and survival, the survivors are
everywhere, marked with the imprints of catastrophe but without clear knowledge of what
exactly the catastrophe was.”\textsuperscript{61} Berger in \textit{After the End} is analyzing a metaphorical apocalypse in
that an apocalyptic trauma has directly impacted an individual but civilization has remained.

For Berger, the apocalypse is difficult to measure due to how trauma can take on many
different forms. “The idea of catastrophe as trauma provides a method of interpretation and
posits that the effects of an event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not obviously
associated with the event. Moreover, this dispersal occurs across time, so that an event
experienced as a shattering may actually produce its full impact only years later.”\textsuperscript{62} This trauma
can take on the form of a ghost in that the trauma of the event can then haunt the individual.

\textsuperscript{60} Heather Urbanski, \textit{Plagues, Apocalypses, and Bug-Eyed Monsters: How Speculative Fiction Shows Us Our
\textsuperscript{61} James Berger, \textit{After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
1999), 49.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 26.
Even though an individual might seem fine after a traumatic event that does not mean that the impact will not show up later in surprising ways (i.e., PTSD). However, this haunting can take on many different forms and can impact how people would live their lives. Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters* in defining a haunting suggests that “the way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening…being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience.”63 For Jim, he is not only experiencing the literal apocalypse but also a metaphorical apocalypse in that everyone he has ever known is now dead and everything he knows is now obsolete. This memory of his past life haunts him and is why he is so determined to save Selena and Hannah from the soldiers. As he inhabits the role of the savage, Jim reckons with the trauma of his past life. In reckoning with the trauma, he reconfigures his life.

Berger elaborates: “Trauma has the effects that it has, is as painful and apocalyptic as it is, because it really happens…but also because trauma really happens, it can eventually be addressed, remembered, retold, and different futures can be imagined and lived.”64 Jim begins the film alone in a deserted hospital with no idea of what happened or is going on. He then ends the film in a remote cottage surrounded by his new family and is rescued by NATO. It is in the remote cottage that Jim is finally safe from the fast zombie. The fast zombie is stronger and faster than a regular human, but they have a higher metabolism and they must feed, or they will die. The speed of the fast zombie and the speed of infection is tailor made for cities due to the

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64 Berger, *After the End*, 29.
large population. As the fast zombie leaves the city, its effectiveness is decreased exponentially because it now entering the space of the slow zombie.

In dealing head on with his ghost, Jim creates a new life with a new family. However, if one does not engage with the trauma then the haunting can negatively impact one’s life as seen in the character of Major Henry West. Instead of trying to address his trauma, West tries and fails to instill order into a post-apocalyptic scenario. This failure causes him and soldiers to die as he cannot reckon with his trauma and this causes him to fail to adapt to the ever-changing world. The failure for West is trying to rebuild the old world in the new world and failing to break all ties to the old world. The potential of the new world is centered around the idea of a fresh start. By bringing baggage of the old world into the new, it in turn compromises the possibility of the new world. The destruction of civilization opens the possibility of creating a new world away from the corrupting influence of the old world. However, this possibility is inherently flawed as there is never a clear break from the old world.

The old world haunts the new world and this haunting is represented in the savage archetype of the Western genre. The savage within the Western is an essential piece to Western formula as it serves the role of the antagonist. The protagonist of the Western who embodies civilization dispatches the savage who embodies the frontier. By conquering the savage, the frontier is civilized. However, the post-apocalyptic genre inverts this relationship as it no longer civilization conquering the frontier but the inverse. In the absence of civilization, the frontier then re-establishes order. Within the post-apocalyptic genre, urban space is linked to disorder while open space is linked to order. In inverting the relationship between civilization and the frontier then it inverts the positionality of the savage archetype.
Within the Western genre, the savage archetype although not being racialized does have racial connotations attached to it. This is due to the relationship between civilization and the frontier aka Cowboys vs. Indians. However, the post-apocalyptic changes the positionality of the savage archetype by making it valuable for protagonists. Within post-apocalyptic stories, protagonists now inhabit the role of the savage to learn valuable skills to survive in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. White protagonists are given this opportunity while minority protagonists are killed such as Ben in *Night of the Living Dead*. However, this changes the racial connotations surrounding the savage due to the protagonists of the post-apocalyptic films being predominantly white. This in turn creates the figure of the universalized savage. The erasure of racial connotations from the savage archetype can be represented in the construction of the zombie in popular culture.

Starting with the release of *White Zombie* (1932) directed by Victor Halperin, the film uses Haitian mythology. Even though most of the zombies in the film are black Haitians, the antagonist is a white male who inhabits the role of the savage. Murder Legendre, a white European who masters voodoo and populates his sugar plantation with black Haitians that in turn reinforces colonial fantasies surrounding Haiti. At the same time, Legendre at the end of the film is murdered by his zombies that replays the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian zombie would become the main interpretation of the zombie until 1968 when George Romero revolutionized the genre with the cult classic *Night of the Living Dead*.

In *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero reinvents the zombie by removing religion and creating a secular zombie. At the same time, Romero transforms the zombie from something that can be controlled to something that is unstoppable. However, Romero’s biggest contribution to zombie lore is that he made the zombie white and by making the zombie white, he removed any
racial connotations from it. Due to a copyright snafu, Romero’s zombie would become the template for any zombie film.

At the same time the zombies became white, Romero’s protagonist would be an African American male. Unlike the white survivors who have no idea what to do, the protagonist knows what is going on and how to survive. Although he survives the minor zombie outbreak, he is killed by an armed posse of white males who then burn his body with other zombies. The protagonist of *Night of the Living Dead* is the only person of color in the film. The Romero zombie would remain the dominant form of the zombie until 2002 when a new challenger arrived: the rage zombie in Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later*. Like the shift from Haitian to Romero, the rage zombie made fundamental changes to the zombie mythology. Instead of being slow, lumbering, and clumsy; Boyle’s rage zombie became fast, agile, and athletic. Instead of taking hours to turn an individual into a zombie, it now takes seconds. Even though the rage zombie made drastic changes, the zombie horde itself remains white.

However, the protagonist of *28 Days Later* is a white male who to save himself and his friends inhabits the role of savage. Although he inhabits the archetype, he can then leave the archetype due to the creation of the universalized savage. The evolution of the zombie in popular culture intersects with the creation of the universalized savage. As race is erased from the zombie shifting from the Haitian zombie of *White Zombie* to the Romero zombie and finally to the rage zombie, the value of the savage increases exponentially as people of color are removed from post-apocalyptic stories. Nowhere is this removal better represented than in the whitewashing of the zombie. However, the whitewashing of the zombie is part of a larger shift within the post-apocalyptic genre called the foreign and familiar.
The post-apocalyptic genre portrays a hellish future in that civilization has been destroyed and bandits roam the countryside. However, to make the genre familiar to viewers, the genre then adapts Western genre archetypes, tropes, and motifs. Yet, in adapting these archetypes, tropes and motifs, the post-apocalyptic genre becomes haunted by the Western genre. The creation of the universalized savage illuminates the removal of race from the post-apocalyptic genre.

Chapter 2 will examine the contradiction that the post-apocalyptic genre has in relation to gender norms and portrayals and how this contradiction is directly tied to the portrayal of women in the Western genre. The portrayal of women as symbols of civilization in the Western genre complicates the inherent possibilities found within the post-apocalyptic genre. Chapter 3 will explore the relationship between post-colonialism and the post-apocalypse as represented in the Mad Max series of films, focusing on the relationship between linear time and colonialism. Chapter 4 will examine the directors of post-apocalyptic films, specifically examining their portrayal of the post-apocalypse and narratives surrounding the production of these films. Within the production of these films, aesthetic choices are made in how to portray the post-apocalypse. These aesthetic choices are directly tied to the genre’s low budget nature. Finally, Chapter 5 will examine the various temporalities of the post-apocalyptic genre examining how the genre itself exists in two different time periods due to its status as a hybrid genre. The genre takes cues from both science fiction and the western.
CHAPTER TWO: LITTLE HOUSE ON THE WASTELAND:

HYPER MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN THE POST-APOCALYPTIC FRONTIER

I can’t really remember when I last had any hope, and I certainly can’t remember when anyone else did either. Because really, since women stopped being able to have babies, what left to hope for?
Alfonso Cuaron – *Children of Men*

In routine Westerns, the women fall into one of these camps, with little latitude for movement between... Although unlike the male characters they do not wear black hats or white hats to signal their moral status, as symbols they are equally readable
-Julie Levinson

The post-apocalyptic genre creates something that is both foreign yet familiar to viewers. One way it does this is by appropriating the savage archetype from the Western genre as seen in the previous chapter. In the case of the savage archetype, its translation and adaptation require the construction of the inverted frontier. However, in translating the savage archetype from the Western, a contradiction starts to emerge.

In post-apocalyptic media, the hero who is predominantly a white male co-opts the role of the savage. In co-opting this role, the hero gains the skills to both survive and thrive in a post-apocalyptic wasteland while taking on a hyper masculine positionality through the savage. In contrast, female survivors of the post-apocalyptic wasteland become hyper feminine. This hyper feminine identity is mirrored to how women are in the Western genre.

His positioning as women as symbols of civilization exist a dichotomy between white women and women of color. John Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* discusses this dichotomy stating “In the contemporary Western, this feminine duality shows up in the contrast between the schoolmarm and the dance-hall girl, or between the hero’s Mexican or Indian mistress and the WASP girl he may ultimately marry”65 Within this dichotomy exists the well-known

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civilization/frontier binary that is inherent to the Western genre, specifically in the differences between the savage and the hero. Women of color in the Western genre are engendered to the savage archetype vis a vis the hero’s use of violence. “The dark girl is a feminine embodiment of the hero’s savage, spontaneous side…She understands his deep passions, his savage code of honor and his need to use personal violence,” states Cawelti. With the arrival of white women into the frontier, the hero rejects the woman of color to be with the white woman as she represents civilization finally meeting the frontier.

Within the Western genre, women also inhabit the role of townspeople who in turn need to be protected from the savage who threatens the town. “The town offers love, domesticity and order as well as the opportunity for personal achievement and the creation of a family, but it requires the repression of spontaneous passion and the curtailment of the masculine honor and camaraderie of the older wilderness life,” states Cawelti. The contradiction found within this genre can be traced back to the construction of hyper masculine and hyper feminine characters, which become embedded within the post-apocalyptic genre.

As such these, gender norms betray the possibilities that the post-apocalyptic genre can offer. The post-apocalyptic genre is predicated on the possibility of a new world being built out of the ruins of the old. But, adapting items from a corrupted old world spoils that possibility, for the corruption of the old world influences the construction of the new world and in turn sets the new world up for failure. By adapting Western genre gender norms, women once again are portrayed as symbols of civilization and in turn are forced to become hyper feminine in contrast to the hyper masculine hero. By re-enforcing these character roles, the Western genre haunts the post-apocalyptic genre. Instead of offering a brand-new world full of possibilities, the post-

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
apocalyptic genre is now confined to offering a foreign yet familiar reinterpretation of the conquering of the American West.

This chapter will explore the contradiction that the post-apocalyptic Western has in relation to gender norms and portrayal and how this contradiction is due to its hybridity as a genre. I will be analyzing *A Boy and His Dog* directed by LQ Jones, and *The Book of Eli* directed by the Hughes Brothers and *Children of Men* directed by Alfonso Cuaron. Although all three films differ in some key points such as both *A Boy and His Dog* and *The Book of Eli* portray a post-apocalyptic scenario while *Children of Men* portrays a dystopic/apocalyptic scenario; there are similarities in the portrayal of female characters within each film. The women within these films provide us all with new insights into the apocalypse by breaking away from the strict notions of womanhood established by the Western genre. However, to understand the counter-position of women within the post-apocalyptic genre, one must first understand their positionality within the Western genre.

**Positionality of Women Within the Western Genre**

The Western genre as seen in Chapter 1 is a hyper masculine genre in that predominately white males conquer the frontier using violence. This use of violence is represented in the battle between the protagonist and the savage, and by killing the savage, hyper-masculinity opens the frontier for civilization. Civilization is then represented by the arrival of women to the frontier. Within the Western formula, you have three specific groups of characters: the protagonist, the townspeople, and the savage. A typical Western plot is that the savage attacks the townspeople and the hero in turn dispatches the savage that saves the townspeople. More specifically, “the most important single fact about the group of townspeople is that there are women in it…character grouping in the Western often show a dual as well as tripartite opposition: the hero
and the savage are men while the town is strongly dominated by women,”68 states Cawelti. By representing, the town as predominately female, rescuing the town against such attacks are linked with threats of miscegenation due to the racial connotations surrounding the savage archetype. Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* states that “the visualization of that rescue as a struggle between men of White and Dark races for the body of a White woman is of course a fundamental trope of the Frontier Myth.”69 By dispatching the savage the hero saves the white woman. However, the role of the townspeople within the Western is a dynamic role that can lead to different interpretations.

For some townspeople, the West does not represent an area of possibility but an area to escape from their failures located in the East. “This group consists of people who have fled the East, for them, the West is not a place to build a new civilization but a haven from failure or personal tragedy in the East… the dance-hall girl who, like the drunken professional, has had some shattering experience in the East and has come West to lick her wounds,”70 states Cawelti. It is common for the dance-hall/girl who comes out west, to become engaged in a love triangle with the schoolmarm and the hero. Her failures back East prohibit her from being with the protagonist due to her connection to the savage archetype. The dance-hall/girl represents the spontaneous and savage side of the hero as the hero engages with a more controlled violence than the savage. The tools of violence within the Western genre is the gun and both the hero and the savage differ in relation to the gun. While the savage is more spontaneous with their use of violence (e.g. Vic in *A Boy and His Dog*), the classical Western hero is reluctant to use violence unless it is necessary (e.g. Shane in *Shane*). The hero while in conflict with the savage must also

68 Ibid., 75.
70 Cawelti, *The Six Gun Mystique*, 77-78.
negotiate their own identity in relation to civilization and the frontier and women serve as stand-ins for this conflict (dance hall v schoolmarm).

It is through this controlled violence that the savage is dispatched, and civilization can then conquer the frontier. Once he dispatches the savage, the hero pushes away from the dance hall girl and towards the schoolmarm. “The hero’s destruction of the savage to protect the chastity of the schoolmarm symbolizes the repression of his own spontaneous sexual urges and his acceptance of the monogamous sexual pattern of modern middle-class life,” argues Cawelti. The image of middle-class life that the hero aspires to is one of predictability and control and there is no place for the dance-hall girl within this construction. Although the dance hall/girl cannot be with the hero, this does not mean that the character remains static. The common theme that follows the dance hall/girl is one of failed redemption in that the character will try to move past her career only to be denied that chance. This failed redemption arc can be seen in classic John Ford western *Stagecoach* and in the character of Dallas.

Dallas is the archetypal prostitute with the heart of gold who begins the film being run out of the town Tonto by the “Law and Order League” under the guise of decency. However, director John Ford re-imagines Dallas’s ejection due to social prejudice instead of social indecency. This change criticizes morality of the schoolmarm archetype within the Western. Ford’s portrayal of Dallas drastically changes throughout out the film as the inhabitants of the stagecoach reach a new level of understanding. Unfortunately, Dallas’s change does not necessarily transcend her position as a prostitute. “And social prejudice will continue to treat Dallas as a whore no matter how her actions transcend that name…the only justice they get is what they make for themselves,” argues Slotkin. Instead of staying in town at the end of the

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71 Ibid., 75.
film, Dallas rides out into the frontier with Johnny Ringo as she has no place in civilization. For both Ringo and Dallas, their positionality as outlaw and dance hall/girl respectively exclude them from the morality/respectability of civilization within the genre itself. In adopting Western genre archetypes, tropes and motifs, the post-apocalyptic genre in turn becomes ruled by the morality/respectability of the Western. However, Ringo differs from Dallas in one key way, specifically in his access to violence. Violence within the Western cannot only redeem the frontier but also characters. Violence is directly tied to the possibility of redemption within the Western.

The possibility of redemption within the genre is linked to violence while at the same time inextricably linked to masculinity. There is a limit to Dallas’s redemption due to her lack of access to violence. Access to violence in the Western genre is divided by gender. However, the post-apocalyptic scenario opens access to violence to everyone due to the construction of a Hobbesian state of nature in that everyone becomes hyper vigilant of everyone else. This binary between the schoolmarm and the dance-hall/girl becomes deconstructed within the post-apocalyptic genre and I will begin my analysis looking at the character of Quilla June Holmes in A Boy and His Dog and how she uses the schoolmarm archetype while at the same time subverts it.

A Boy and His Dog: Apocalyptic Americana

A Boy and His Dog directed by LQ Jones portrays a post-apocalyptic wasteland destroyed by nuclear weapons. However, the film is set in two different locations: the above ground and Topeka. The above ground is a desolate desert filled with the debris of the pre-apocalyptic nation-state. Topeka is an underground bunker that is an exaggeration of 1950’s
Americana. The protagonist, Vic begins the film in the above ground and Quilla June begins the film in Topeka.

The character of Vic is a fantastic example of the universalized savage. He has no interest in rebuilding civilization and his only interest is in survival. He has a telepathic dog named Blood who follows him around. The only long-term desire that he has is to have sexual intercourse with a woman. Vic will do whatever he must do to accomplish this goal and he has no problems with sexual assault. As we have seen the Western genre, savage archetype is linked to miscegenation due to the racial connotations surrounding the savage. “Women are also women, however, and implicit in their presence is the sexual fascination and fear associated with the rape of white women by savages,”\textsuperscript{73} discusses Cawelti. However, this fear of by savages takes on new meaning in the post-apocalyptic genre due to the creation of the universalized savage.

Although Vic starts the film above ground, he is lured to Topeka by Quilla June. She lures Vic down to Topeka by embodying the image of the schoolmarm in the Western genre. While everything is dirty, grimy, and broken, Quilla June in contrast stands out in the wasteland. She is washed, has blond hair, and wearing a white dress. For Vic, she stands out like a beacon. “This dichotomy resembles the common nineteenth century novelistic dualism of blonde and brunette…the blonde, like Cooper’s Alice in \textit{The Last of the Mohicans}, represents, genteel, pure femininity,”\textsuperscript{74} argues Cawelti. Although Quilla June uses the imagery of the schoolmarm, there is no fear of sexual assault as she is using her sexuality to control Vic. After sleeping with Vic, she then leaves a trail to Topeka. After reaching Topeka, he is knocked out and wakes up to a new world. The leaders of Down Under talk to Vic and tell him that they need him as the community

\textsuperscript{73} Cawelti, \textit{The Six Gun Mystique}, 75.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 75.
is lacking genetic diversity. In discussing the character of Quilla June, Majid Yar in *Crime and the Imaginary of Disaster* states that the film “extrapolates from contemporary hostility towards women in general and feminism to present a vision of society in which it is men, not women, who are used abused, killed for sexual purposes by conniving females.” To attract males, the leaders of Topeka send women to above ground to lure them down. However, this need is done through the practice of electroejaculation in that sperm is forcibly taken be used for artificial insemination. It is also at this point we learn that Quilla June’s attraction to Vic was not personal but instead for business. The leadership of Topeka promised her a leadership position but eventually retract the deal.

To get back at the leadership for their betrayal, Quilla starts a revolution and attempts to recruit Vic to her side. She knows that in order for the revolution to be successful that she needs to co-opt the violence of the savage. Although Quilla June lives in civilization, she needs the savage to do the things that she cannot. To launch a coup d’état against the leadership, she requires Vic’s help. Vic’s character of the savage is directly linked to the practice of civilizing and intersects with the character of Quilla June. Above ground, Vic is a master of his own domain. He can do whatever he wants. This is represented in his personal hygiene. Vic is caked in dirt and has no desire to get clean due to the dry, dirty and barren nature of the wasteland. However, when he is taken to Topeka, the first thing that happens to him is that he forcibly given a bath and cleaned up. After the bath, he is given a brand-new set of clean clothes and becomes forcibly controlled by the leadership. While Vic may be the master of his domain above ground, in the post-apocalyptic wasteland, he is constrained by rules and regulation.

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Mick Broderick in “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster” discusses the inhabitants of Topeka stating that “the farcical though nightmarish imagery of Topeka’s nocturnal inhabitants, dressed in turn-of-the-(20th)-century costume with rogue circles adorning their white-faced cheeks, evokes a prophetic critical sense of postmodern nostalgia in its attempt to recreate a repressive communal past.”76 The division between above ground and Topeka is itself reminiscent of the divide between the frontier and civilization in the Western genre. “The Western requires a means of isolating and intensifying the drama of the frontier encounter between social order and lawlessness,” writes Cawelti.77 In recruiting Vic to save Topeka, the committee tries to civilize Vic and offer him a position in civilization. While the leadership tries to civilize the savage, Quilla June on the other hand requires the savage to launch her revolution. Although she has recruited members of Topeka to help her, she needs the skill provided by Vic to pull it off.

After rescuing him from electroejaculation, she offers him the possibility of ruling Topeka with her, but he quickly turns it down. Shortly after the escape, Quilla June pulls a gun on Vic and states “you think I would let you slobber all over me and paw me, so you can walk out right now. I didn’t bring you down here, so they could use you, I brought you down here, so I could use you.”78 During the escape, Vic is wearing utilitarian clothes that would blend in above ground while Quilla June is wearing a beautiful white wedding gown that would stand out like a beacon above ground. “The literal grab bag of dress of the surface dwellers who survive by looting, murdering, raping, and bartering reoriented existing survivor’s iconography away from both the confirmative modernist uniform…and the luxurious off the rack apparel afforded the

78 *A Boy and His Dog*, directed by L.Q. Jones (LQ/JAF, 1975), DVD (Slingshot Entertainment, 1999).
short-term survivor/looter,”\textsuperscript{79} states Broderick. Although Quilla June uses the imagery of the schoolmarm to lure Vic, the imagery only works in relation to civilization. Within the Western, the schoolmarm symbolizes two things: civilization and the regulation of violence. The spontaneous violence of the savage has no place in civilization. However, it is this spontaneous violence that can in turn overthrow the leadership of Topeka. Although the schoolmarm in the Western genre predicates the extermination of the savage, both archetypes exist hand in hand in the post-apocalyptic genre.

The leadership quickly puts down the revolution as Vic’s decision to escape dooms it. Topeka as stated by Broderick represents “the continuation of Middle American praxis as a continuing means of social control, permeating with its invisible ideology successive generations who are sutured into unconscious compliance.”\textsuperscript{80} In response, the leadership exiles Quilla June to the surface. When they reach the surface, they encounter Blood, Vic’s telepathic dog who is dying and needs food. Vic must choose between Quilla June and Blood. While Blood represents the clear, open and dirty frontier, Quilla June represents civilization and the possibility of civilizing the frontier. Due to his status as the savage, Vic rejects Quilla June to save Blood. This rejection is then represented in the killing, butchering and feeding of her remains to Blood. This cannibalization of Quilla June is not only seen the story of the film but also in the cannibalization of the Western genre within the post-apocalyptic genre. Blood survives while Quilla June is killed mirroring how the death of civilization ensures the survival of the wild frontier while at the same time reinforcing the idea that both cannot coexist.

In a Western genre film, the opposite most likely would happen as Blood would die to ensure the survival of Quilla June due to the relationship between the schoolmarm and the

\textsuperscript{79} Mick Broderick “Surviving Armageddon”, 374.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 375.
savage. In a classical Western film, the arrival of schoolmarm archetype is predicated on the extermination of the savage. With the extermination of the savage comes the regulation of violence. Civilization as represented by Topeka/Down Under is doomed to fail as they lack genetic diversity but more importantly are constrained by rules and regulations and the threat of violence. They are shut off from the rest of humanity. While the survivors up top scavenge, murder, and in some cases rape, they are free to live their lives as they see fit. Gary J. Hausladen in “Where the Cowboy Rides Away” analyzes how the desolate nature of the Western is one of its key features. “As one looks at these landscapes for the Western, adjectives that repeat themselves include stark, foreboding, dangerous, God-forsaken, but at the same time wide open, challenging, liberating.” Quilla June is constrained by Topekan rules and regulations and must bring in an outsider to cause change.

However, this fails since Vic has no reason to help. At the center of the post-apocalyptic genre is the belief of creating a new life in the ruins of the old world. Vic and Blood create a new life for themselves by scavenging through the wreckage of civilization. Quilla June and the inhabitants of Topeka fail to live up to this belief due to the Topeka’s stranglehold on the old world. By being forcibly stuck in the past, the inhabitants of Topeka can never create something new in the wasteland. Instead, Topeka becomes a hyper simulation of 1950’s Americana gone awry where the breaking of any rule leads to either exile or death. Instead of trying to create something new, Topeka became a space haunted by the previous civilization and caught in its own cycle of destruction/regeneration. Due to the limited number of individuals living in Topeka, the leadership must refresh the genetic diversity of the community via electroejaculation. The use of electroejaculation within the film is itself a critique of the

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regulation that civilization brings with it. Topeka not only regulates violence via the character of Michael, a robot but also sex through the practice of electroejaculation.

The spontaneity and violence of sex is seen in the above ground when Vic encounters a severely mutilated women on the verge of death. Vic’s concern with the woman is centered on two distinct points: the violence done to her and the possibility of pleasure. In response to the mutilated woman, Vic states that “Hell! They didn't have to cut her! She could have been used two or three more times.”

Within the film, the violence of the savage intersects with sexual pleasure.

However, this changes in Topeka as Vic is tied down to a chair and has his semen forcibly taken from him. In the civilized Topeka, there is no pleasure in sex as it has become regulated by leadership. The practice of electroejaculation can only slow the inevitable destruction of Topeka due to numerous factors. The first factor is the small population as Topeka is shown to be sparsely populated. This ties into the second factor that is zero tolerance when it comes to infractions. People who are judged to have committed an infraction are offered two distinct punishments: death or exile. The third and final factor is the isolation of Topeka from the above ground. Instead of sharing its wealth, Topeka hides itself from the above ground. Quilla June’s revolution does not only represent an adolescent repudiation of the leadership of Topeka but the impotence of new leadership and its impact on Topeka future. Any potential to reform Topeka is undermined by Quilla June’s eagerness to punish the leadership of Topeka. She tried to bridge the two different post-apocalyptic societies only to be exiled from both. And eventually is killed, butchered, and fed to Blood. “In its ironic though brutally misogynistic finale, Vic cooks Quilla June and feeds her to his starving faithful hound, bleakly signifying that

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82 Jones, *A Boy and His Dog*. 
post-holocaust life can only be revitalized through the literal cannibalization of prewar goods, artifacts, and sentiments,” states Broderick. A Boy and His Dog in the character of Quilla June critiques the role of women in the Western genre and how these different archetypes can be translated differently into other genres such as the post-apocalyptic.

In both the Western and post-apocalyptic genre, women serve as symbols of civilization. However, civilization for both genres have different definitions. In the Western genre, the inherent conflict is that of civilization vs the frontier and how the protagonist civilizes the savage frontier. This need to civilize the frontier is directly tied to Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis. However, essential to Turner’s thesis is the contradiction inherent to the Western. William Katteberg in Frontier West in discussing the contradiction states that “the hero’s success in winning the frontier is his undoing and by, extension, the fear is, it is also the undoing of the nation…he tames the wilderness and defeats his enemy but in doing so ends up domesticated (and often married, in a genre in which women represent civilization).” This fear of being domesticated is why Vic refuses Quilla June’s proposal to lead Topeka. The civilization and frontier conflict are portrayed as two different ideas coming together instead of a merger of both.

The post-apocalyptic genre makes subtle tweaks to this conflict. Within the post-apocalyptic genre, it is not that civilization and the frontier are separate ideas but are different sides of the same binary. Out of the contradiction of the post-apocalyptic frontier is where civilization will be rebuilt. This constant cycle of destruction and regeneration is what I call the civilization/frontier binary in that in the absence of civilization, the frontier will flourish and in the absence of the frontier, civilization will flourish. This binary fit within larger cycles built into

84 William Katteberg, Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 22.
the post-apocalyptic genre specifically surrounding human nature. A recurring motif built into the genre is both the failure and possibility of humans surpassing the cycle of destruction and regeneration. Both Quilla June and Vic are offered the possibility in different ways.

For Vic, he is offered the possibility to become part of something a lot larger than himself but he in turn rejected it to return to the wasteland. It is in his rejection of Topeka that Vic reaffirms his individuality. For Quilla June, her revolution fails as she cannot think past herself and gets exiled from Topeka. Her revolution was based on the desire of punishing the leadership for lying to her and not for some great idea. Their failures lead to Vic returning to the wasteland and killing Quilla June to feed her to his dog. Her death is the direct result of Topeka’s isolationist policies. In trying to control Topeka, she not only dooms Topeka to double down on isolating itself but dooms herself. “The common element in these diverse forms of human transformation is the ongoing and endless nature of the process…such processes are not linear but often cyclical…if perfection is not achievable in this lifetime, the hope of it remains,”\(^8\) states Katteberg. Although the above ground is chaotic, brutish, and violent, it still remains the best possibility for humanity. The post-apocalyptic genre not only shows the worst-case scenario for humanity, but it also gives hope that humanity can transcend its own problems and create something new out of the ruins of the old world. However, by failing to achieve this, the same problems that undermined and caused the apocalypse in the first place will come back and haunt the new world, reigniting the cycle of destruction and regeneration. Topeka serves as an example of this failure, for being a functioning society is doomed to fail as it is built upon a failed civilization. The same issues that impacted the previous civilization will in turn haunt the new civilization. Within the film, the schoolmarm archetype and the savage are interconnected as the

\(^8\) Ibid., 219
schoolmarm uses her sexuality to try and control the savage to do her bidding. In this intersection, sexuality is tied to power both to power to control and to civilize.

Quilla June needs to control Vic to do her bidding while the leadership of Topeka need to keep Vic repressed and that repression leads to civilization. Michel Foucault in *History of Sexuality Volume 1* in discussing the relationship between power and repression states that “all the longer, no doubt, as it is in the nature of power- particularly the kind of power that operates in our society- to be repressive, and to be especially careful in repressing useless energies, the intensity of pleasures, and irregular modes of behavior.”\(^{86}\) When Vic is taken in front of the leadership and told that he has to impregnate the women of Topeka, he is extremely happy to do it.

However, he instead is tied down, gagged and forced to supply sperm through the process of electroejaculation. At the same time, Quilla June faces repression due to her gender. To bring Vic down to Topeka, she was promised a seat in the leadership, but that promise was broken. In being freed by Quilla June, he can either lead Topeka or return to the wasteland and his choice is directly tied to the idea of repression. In discussing the triangle between the savage, the hero and the female in the Western genre, Cawelti states that “the violence endemic to this triangle reflects the terrible incompatibility between the free spontaneity and sexuality associated with savagery and the genteel restrictiveness of civilized monogamous domesticity.”\(^{87}\) In choosing to stay with Quilla June, Vic in turn becomes civilized through repression. The violence of the savage has no place in Topeka and therefore, Vic rebuffs her proposition as he would rather fight than lead a society. “I want to get in a good and straight forward fight with some son of a bitch


\(^{87}\) Cawelti, *The Six Gun Mystique*, 75.
over a can of beans, I got to get back in the dirt,”\textsuperscript{88} states Vic. Vic has had enough of civilization and wants to return to the frontier where he is beholden to no one. His retreat from civilization is emblematic of the savage archetype in the Western. “The savage symbolizes the violence, brutality and ignorance…but he also stands for certain positive values which are restricted or destroyed by the advancing civilization: the freedom and spontaneity of wilderness life, the sense of personal honor and individual mastery,”\textsuperscript{89} states Cawelti.

\textit{A Boy and His Dog} is a strange mixture of the post-apocalyptic and the Western. Although the film does have Western genre archetypes and tropes, the connection between the Western and the post-apocalyptic is an implicit connection. The savage and the schoolmarm are overshadowed by electroejaculation, hidden vaults, and 1950’s Americana gone awry. Even though the connection is implicit, the film does use these archetypes but at the same time inverts as way to critique. In inverting the schoolmarm archetype, the film changes the relationship between the schoolmarm and the savage.

The construction of choice plays a pivotal role in the film as choice, specifically how Western genre archetypes limit the choices of specific characters. While Vic can do whatever, he wants due to his status as the savage, Quilla June is limited to what she can do both due to the archetype that she inhabits and her gender. Throughout its history, the Western genre has privileged white masculinity above all. Vic’s choice to leave Topeka is itself representative of this white male privilege. The post-apocalyptic genre is centered on the idea of creating a new world out of the old. However, this opportunity is only granted to one character while the other never gets that change. This construction of choice plays a pivotal role in the next film that I will

\textsuperscript{88} Jones, \textit{A Boy and His Dog}.
\textsuperscript{89} Cawelti, \textit{The Six Gun Mystique}, 80.
be analyzing and more evidence of how to invert and critique Western genre archetypes and gender norms.

_The Book of Eli: The Next Generation of Gunslingers_

While _A Boy and His Dog_ is a post-apocalyptic film with Western influence, _The Book of Eli_ is a post-apocalyptic Western set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. As a Western film, _The Book of Eli_ uses Western genre archetypes to populate the world and like _A Boy and His Dog_, both the protagonist and antagonist become archetypes. For this section, I will be focusing on how the construction of choice within the post-apocalyptic genre both inverts and critiques the rigid archetypes of the Western genre.

While Vic represented the savage and Quilla June, the schoolmarm, both Eli and Solara portray different archetypes. For Eli, he reflects the role of the gunslinger. The gunslinger is an extremely skilled individual whose skill with firearms verges on the supernatural who finds itself in a scenario where its violence can serve as a tipping point. In a traditional Western, the gunslinger fights for the weaker side and it is through its skill with violence that the weaker side wins. However, the gunslinger archetype also portrays a darker interpretation of the Western. Richard Slotkin in _Gunfighter Nation_ writes “the gunfighter is psychically troubled and isolated from normal society by something ‘dark’ in his nature and/or his past.” At the center of the archetype of the gunslinger is the use of violence which plays a pivotal role in how both archetypes and the protagonist/antagonist are divided in the Western genre.

A key point to the construction of the antagonist in the Western is how freely they use violence. Within the Western, the savage archetypes represent the antagonist and their relationship to violence. The antagonist’s relationship to violence is uncontrollable and

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unrestrainable. In differentiating between the protagonist’s and antagonist’s use of violence, Cawelti argues that “the Indian outlaw as savage delights in slaughter entering into combat with a kind of manic glee to fulfill an uncontrollable lust for blood.”

Vic’s use of violence in *A Boy and His Dog* embodies this relationship.

On the other hand, the protagonist is expected to be reluctant with violence and use it as a last resort. “The cowboy hero does not seek out combat for its own sake and he typically shows an aversion to the wanton shedding of blood, killing is an act forced upon him and he carries it out with the precision and skill of surgeon and the careful proportions of an artist,” writes Cawelti. Throughout the film, Eli is incredibly reluctant to use violence and he only uses it as a tool of last resort when diplomacy is no longer available. A good example of this reluctance is Eli’s first appearance in the small town.

He goes to get water at a bar and offends an individual. This individual attempt to harm Eli but Eli breaks his jaw. Eli lives in a post-apocalyptic wasteland and his view of the world is strikingly like that of the gunslinger. “That understanding is essentially ‘hard boiled’: the world is a hostile place, human motives are rarely good, and outcomes depend not on right but on the proper deployment of might,” states Slotkin. While the schoolmarm archetype was portrayed in *A Boy and His Dog*, the dance hall/girl is portrayed in *The Book of Eli*. While Eli inhabits the role of the gunslinger, the character Solara inhabits the archetype of the dance hall girl. Both archetypes are directly tied to one another as in the Western, the hero starts the film with the dance hall girl but ends the film with the schoolmarm who represents civilization coming to the frontier.

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However, this civilizing of the frontier is inverted in the post-apocalyptic genre as civilization re-emerges out of the post frontier. In the post-apocalyptic wasteland that *The Book of Eli* portrays, the only outpost of civilization for most of the film is small town surrounded by desert. It is in this archetypical location that the gunslinger intersects with the dance hall. Eli enters the town and is courted by Carnegie, the ruthless leader who recognizes Eli’s potential as a soldier. Eli rebuffs him but is forced to spend the night. To get Eli to stay, Carnegie sends Solara in to his room to seduce him. In forcing Solara to stay the night with Eli, Carnegie positions Solara within the archetype of the dance hall girl. He rebuffs her advances but allows her to sleep in his room. Solara is fascinated by Eli since he treats her like a human being instead of being treated like property. When Eli leaves town, she quickly follows him from a distance. More importantly, she makes the choice to follow him.

As mentioned above, the construction of choice within the post-apocalyptic genre is part of the bedrock of the genre. The choice to create a new life in the ruins of the old. However, the gunslinger archetype of the Western is fundamentally in contradiction with this construction of choice due to its positionality within the Western genre. The gunslinger although helping the weaker community is never actually part of its moral choice. Slotkin in discussing the classic Western *Shane* and its ending states “Shane is never part of the community, and his superior values are not seen as belonging to the community…he is an aristocrat of violence, an alien from a more glamorous world who is better than those he helps and is finally not accountable to those for whom he sacrifices himself.”

The gunslinger for the most part is a benevolent mercenary who finds itself as an impartial third party in a conflict.

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94 Ibid., 400.
In *Shane*, the titular gunslinger/mercenary finds himself in the middle of a conflict between ranchers and homesteaders. He joins the side of the homesteaders and helps to win the day, but he cannot stick around to bask in the glory as Slotkin in discussing the end of the gunslinger argues that “their calling will reach its pinnacle of achievement followed by its exhaustion, and they will become critically conscious, before the end, of just what has gone wrong with them and their world.” 

In a traditional Western, the gunslinger is either killed in the line of action or leaves shortly after the victory. Eli, on the other hand, is not fighting for control of the town as he has no investment in the town. Instead, he is fighting for a specific book which by the end of film, the book is identified as the Bible. Throughout the film, the directors leave hints about the book such as Solara knowing the Lord’s Prayer after spending the night with Eli. The Bible within the film embodies the archetype of the double-edged sword, a weapon that can be both used for good and for bad. Carnegie in his search for the Bible sees its potential in re-creating order in the wasteland. It is in Eli’s choice to fight over the Bible that leads to his inevitable death. His choice to fight for the Bible is part of a larger quest for progress and the gun is indispensable in this quest. In discussing the relationship between the gun and progress, Slotkin argues that “a good man with a gun is in every sense the best of men- an armed redeemer who is the sole vindicator of the liberties of people, the indispensable man in the quest for progress.” The film bucks the delineation of violence in the Western genre via the transformation of Solara into a gunslinger at the end of the film.

Solara begins the film representing the role of the dance hall girl working in one of Carnegie’s bars. Solara is trapped both archetypically and in the story as her mother is

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95 Ibid., 404.
96 Ibid., 396.
Carnegie’s mistress. There is no room in town for any drastic change to her character. Once she leaves town, her representation of the dance hall girl archetype becomes irrelevant due to her leaving civilization. Under the tutelage of Eli, Solara goes through a drastic change in that she no longer inhabits the dance hall archetype but instead represents the gunslinger at the end of the film.

The last shot of the film is of Solara walking back to her home decked out in Eli’s gear. In representing the gunslinger, Solara will bring order back to her home. In discussing the relationship between order and the gunslinger in the Western, Slotkin argues that “a common ideological structure that devalues democracy as an instrument of progress and declares that the only effective instrument for constructive historical action is a gun in the hands of the right man.”97 In the case of Solara, she is the right woman with a gun to bring order to her collapsing town. The reason for the collapse is due to another Western archetype brought to life in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. The antagonist Carnegie represents the archetype of the unscrupulous banker. This archetype is centered on two defining goals: the first being the exploitation of natural resources in the frontier and the second is manipulation of outlaws to do his bidding. In defining the archetype, Cawleti states that “this figure represents the decent ideals of the pioneer gone sour…in him the pioneer goal of building a good society in the wilderness has become avarice and greed for individual wealth and power.”98 Carnegie manipulates individuals to achieve what he wants and that is the Bible. He accomplishes his manipulation through various means. The first being is that he sends out raiding parties to forcibly take any remaining books. He then hordes these books. For Carnegie, books become the economy and he can control the

97 Ibid.
98 Cawelti, The Six Gun Mystique, 79.
economy by controlling information. Second, he promotes illiteracy so no one else can read. By being the only person who can read, Carnegie can then manipulate the Bible for his own means.

In discussing the value of The Bible, Carnegie states that “it is a weapon aimed right at the hearts and minds of the weak and desperate…People will come from all over, they’ll do exactly what I tell ‘em if the words are from the book.”99 However, Carnegie justifies his manipulation through his status of being civilized and living in a civilized town. “This is the unscrupulous banker, rancher, or railroad agent who sometimes plays the role of central villain by becoming the employer or manipulator of the Indians or outlaws who actually perform the acts of savagery,”100 states Cawelti. The film creates a clear distinction between who is civilized and who is uncivilized via the trait of cannibalism. This distinction causes the survivors to become hyper vigilant. In Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We’ll not go Home Again by Claire P. Curtis, she states that “the apocalyptic event, through its destruction of official manifestations of authority (politicians, police, military), reveal humans fighting against one another for their survival…this world demands eternal vigilance.”101 At the beginning of the film, Solara is an employee at a bar that is owned by Carnegie who is sent up to Eli’s room to seduce him. After Eli leaves town after a shootout, Solara quickly follows but is tricked by Eli and left in an abandoned building. She escapes but is attacked by bandits who plan on raping her. Eli quickly dispatches the bandits and saves her.

For Solara, this is her first time engaging in the state of nature. Although she lived in a town run by a dictator under the guise of civilization, for the most part, she was protected from

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100 Ibid., 79.
the worst of humanity. This moment serves as a pivot point for the character towards a hard-boiled viewpoint of the world. The attempted rape of Solara is part of a larger trend within post-apocalyptic media, specifically focusing on sexual assault. In discussing rape in the post-apocalyptic genre, Yar argues that “we can suggest that in the imaginary of disaster, the risk of rape goes further than making straightforward recourse to the sadistic and disturbed stereotype of the sexual offender…rather, it is notable that the perpetrators are ordinary men, who prior to the collapse of law and order, would have not contemplated such behavior.”102 It is in the absence of the social contract that the survivors enter the Hobbesian state of nature.

In the absence of civilization that the gunslinger’s hard-boiled perspective of humanity becomes essential to survival, and Solara quickly adapts for herself. It is with the adoption of this perspective that she embraces the use of violence. The gunslinger mythos is centered around the idea of right equals might and without violence the gunslinger is doomed to fail. “In the world of the gunfighter and the man who knows Indians, moral suasion without violent force to back it is incompetent to achieve its civilizing ends; it is foolish at best, at worst a species of complicity with evil,”103 argues Slotkin. Violence is not only justified in the post-apocalyptic wasteland, but it is required as a civilizing tool, for in using violence, the gunslinger makes the frontier habitable for settlers to come in and civilize the frontier. At the same time, this process of civilizing also intersects with the creation of the social contract. This image of civilization intersects with images of domesticity and the idea of settling down and civilizing the frontier.

*The Book of Eli* complicates this image of domesticity by linking it to cannibalism. Domesticity in the Western genre for the most part has signaled the end of the Western hero. This end has been represented in numerous ways with the most popular being is that after the

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hero wins the day, he marries the schoolmarm and becomes a pioneer. The beginning of a Western story is that the hero rejects domesticity which in turn is a rejection of civilization. In discussing this rejection of domesticity, Cawleti argues that “the cowboy hero represents an image of man directly opposed to the official American pioneer virtues of progress, success and domesticity.” The film inscription of domesticity as a literal trap reinforces the Western hero’s initial rejection of it. The lone house in the frontier is no longer a beacon of civilization but instead is a deadly trap.

While on the run from Carnegie, Eli and Solara come across a rundown farm house in the middle of nowhere occupied by an elderly couple. After a quick misunderstanding, they are offered tea and food. However, the occupants of the house are cannibals who suffer tremors and who plan on eating both Eli and Solara. After escaping from the cannibals, they encounter Carnegie and his troops, and it is at this point that Solara finally starts to embrace violence as the shift from dance hall girl to gunslinger is becoming permanent as a matter of necessity. The second half of the film has Eli incapacitated due to a gunshot and Solara takes a more active role in the mission. It is in this shift of focus from Eli to Solara that signals her shift to mirroring the gunslinger archetype. However, her mirroring of the gunslinger is an alternative construction of archetype not based on isolation but based on a personal connection towards the community. After taking the Bible to Alcatraz, she decides to return home to her mother. In the Western genre, the gunslinger is always seen as a mercenary, as someone who has no personal investment but fights for the metaphorical little guy. Solara is the opposite as she has a personal investment in the town as that is where she grew up and where her mother is.

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The gunslinger’s use of violence as a tool of civilization intersects with the collapse of order in the town as Carnegie dies due to an infected wound. As he dies, the purposed civilization that he created falls all around him as he was the unifying figure that brought it all together. Carnegie’s control of the town is the temptation to instill order in a chaotic world. William Katerberg in *Future West* discusses the temptation to instill order in the chaos of a post-apocalyptic world and he states that “the danger in the wake of a holocaust is the desire to impose order on the chaos, whether a return to the old order, the self-serving order of regional strongmen or new totalitarian dreams of universal order.”105 This order is temporary as it is built around the solitary charisma of the leader.

Before civilization can emerge, the frontier must be tamed using violence. Eli at the beginning of the film and Solara at the end represent this unending need to tame the frontier. The film beings with Eli walking aimlessly through the post-apocalyptic wasteland on his mission. He gets tied up in town due to his status as a gunslinger. It is his status that attracts Carnegie in the first place. At the same time, the habitation of the gunslinger archetype also limits his character as even if he saves the day, he cannot stick around to enjoy the victory. To paraphrase Slotkin, the killings are sanctioned as acts of sacrifice, because he “does not stay to enjoy the fruits of triumph.”106 However, Solara offers an alternative to the gunslinger archetype in that her use of violence is not of an outsider but an insider. She has a personal connection to the town and to the inhabitants and by having that connection she is no longer a mercenary but a full-fledged member of the town.

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By having a personal connection to the town, Solara’s use of violence is completely redefined. It is no longer a third party finding itself in the middle of a conflict but instead it is a violence based on revenge. Solara is returning home to save her mother from Carnegie. There is no third party in this conflict. In discussing the outlaw Western and the isolation of its main character, Slotkin argues that “the revenger always faces a world in which social authority and community support are lacking; he must rely on himself, and perhaps one other person, for the fulfillment of his obsessional quest and/or redemption.” The post-apocalyptic embodies this erasure of social authority and community support. Solara is going to return home to a collapsing town with no source of authority and with that no sense of community. It is through her status as the gunslinger and her access to violence that a sense of community and social authority can be reinstituted in her town. At the end of the film, she is not roaming the post-apocalyptic wasteland but has a clear-cut mission. Solara unlike Quilla June in *A Boy and His Dog* is not tied to the old world at all. As we have seen, Quilla June is stuck in the old world due to her positionality and her location in Topeka. Her entire life is centered around this exaggerated 1950’s Americana gone awry and that is all she has ever known. Yet, it is the failure of Topeka to move beyond the ghost of the old world that dooms it to failure. On the other hand, Solara is not stuck in the ruins of the old world but instead is trying to create a new life and therefore transitions between the dance hall girl and the gunslinger archetype. She mirrors Eli at the beginning of the film. Both are gunslingers with different missions, but both will eventually have to use violence to win the day. *The Book of Eli*, due to its status as a post-apocalyptic Western, reinforces Western archetypes and gender norms while at the same time offering alternatives. The film reinforces Western archetypes through the characters of Eli and Carnegie.

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107 Ibid., 382.
Both inhabitant traditional Western archetypes that lead to their eventual death. Eli inhabits the gunslinger, a mercenary who gets involved in a situation and by regulated violence saves the day at the cost of exile or even death. Carnegie inhabits the archetype of the banker-villain who by manipulation controls an entire town on the search for a Bible. “Instead of the pioneer’s mutual respect and loyalty, the banker-villain possesses skill at manipulating and exploiting the townspeople to his own advantage,”108 states Cawelti. At the same time, both Eli and Carnegie remember the world before the apocalypse and both use this knowledge for different means. For Eli, he uses this knowledge to prevent a similar event from happening by keeping the Bible away from individuals who would use it for harm. For Carnegie, he seeks the Bible to reconstruct the old-world society with him as its leader. However, both end up dead as they cannot fit within the newly constructed world as both of their deaths are called for in the Western genre. Eli is killed during his mission as is required in the gunslinger mythos. Carnegie is killed due to an infection and in turn his life’s goal collapses around him. In the death of the old world, a new world is created, and this is represented by Solara and the transformation that she goes through in the film as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Solara’s transition is representative of the shift between the old world and the new world and how this embodied in the gunslinger archetype.

This transition is also forecast in the opening and closing images of the film. The film opens with Eli wandering the wasteland aimlessly looking for the right spot for the Bible. Eli has a mission, but this mission is open-ended. On the other hand, the film ends with Solara in similar clothing returning to her home to save her mother and the town from collapsing. The shift from the old world to the new world gunslinger is a shift from the violence of the outsider to the

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violence of the insider. More importantly, Solara is not beholden to the old world and is in the position to create something new.

*Children of Men: A Permanent State of Exception*

Unlike *A Boy and Dog* and *The Book of Eli* that portray post-apocalyptic scenarios, *Children of Men* portrays a dystopia on the verge of collapsing. The key difference between the earlier films and *Children of Men* is that the nation-state has not collapsed. For there to be a new world, the old world must be destroyed, and this is represented in the destruction of the nation-state. In *Children of Men*, the only nation state that still exists is Great Britain and ads within the film celebrate this fact by showing numerous different cities collapsing and only Britain remains. However, the dystopic nation-state within the film will inevitably collapse into an apocalypse.

David Ketterer in *New Worlds for Old* discusses the plot of science fiction linking dystopias to apocalypses by arguing that “dystopian fictions characterize the first phase to the extent that such fictions imply a steadily worsening state of affairs, this phase develops naturally into the second phase, accounting for fictions in which the world is either threatened with destruction or variously done away with.”¹⁰⁹ *Children of Men* is a textbook example of a dystopia in that civilization is collapsing due to global infertility. The only nation remaining is Britain, but it is on the verge of collapse as it can no longer replenish its population. To prevent this collapse, the nation-state asserts control over fertility making it is a crime to avoid fertility tests. Sexuality and fertility become agents of the nation-state.

Sex becomes something to be regulated. As Michel Foucault explains in *History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* while discussing sex and the nation-state: “sex was not something one judged: it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential;
it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses.”

The administration of sex by the state intersected with the term of population and the economic and political problems inherent to population starting in the 18th century. Foucault in discussing the relationship between population and its problems states that “at the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyze the birthrate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile.” Riches and power became inextricably linked to sex in that sex created the future citizens of the state.

The great irony is that, in the film, it is unregulated sex by non-citizens that provides the possibility of saving the state from its own destruction. This is represented by the character of Kee who a refugee is and is the first person in eighteen years to become pregnant. She becomes entangled in a conflict between the state and the Fishes, a militant immigrants’ right group who want to use her pregnancy for political gain. The state’s interest is in her baby and not her as she is not a citizen but is an undocumented immigrant who somehow made it to Great Britain. The state wants to use the birth to prop up its collapse by offering hope. In discussing the government’s response to the pregnancy, a member of the Fishes states that “the government will take her baby and parade a posh black English lady as the mother.” On the other hand, the Fishes can use the baby as a tool to destabilize the police state that Great Britain has become. Kee and her child have become sources of power.

The power to regulate the population of the state. In discussing the relationship between sex and population, Foucault argues that “there was a progression from the crudely populationist

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110 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 24
111 Ibid., 25.
112 *Children of Men*, directed by Alfonso Cuaron (Universal Pictures, 2006), DVD (Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2007).
arguments of the mercantilist epoch to the much more subtle and calculated attempts at regulation that tended to favor or discourage according to objectives and exigencies of the moment an increasing birthrate. "

In the world of *Children of Men*, fertility tests are mandatory and avoid tests becomes a crime.

Both the Fishes and the state want to use Kee for political gain even though she has no interest in it. Kee and the protagonist Theo have no interest in the conflict between the two organizations but are dragged into it. Kee and her baby represent hope and change in that they offer a way out of the slow burn apocalypse that the film portrays. Due to global infertility, the population is engaged in the process of slow death. Slow death comes from Lauren Berlant who defines it as “the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical condition.”

There is no possibility of a future due to infertility and this in turn is represented in the dystopia of the film. Another layer to this dystopian infertility is the portrayal of London filled with dirt and grime and the destruction of the arts. When Theo is recruited by the Fishes to get transit papers for Kee, his first choice is his cousin who is a bureaucrat whose job is to save pieces of art from destruction. When Theo first meets his cousin, he sees Michelangelo’s *David* with a broken right leg while his cousin laments that he could not save *Pieta* and other numerous pieces of art. The annihilation of art represents a repudiation of a world without a future. Since there is no next generation to enjoy and learn from art, there isn’t any point in preserving it. Even through Theo’s cousin is rescuing these pieces of art, it seems like a futile effort. The destruction of art is a continuation of the destruction of civilization as the dystopian police state continues its slow but inevitable slide into

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113 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, 26
apocalyptic destruction. Kee and her baby represent a pause in the apocalyptic destruction and the slow death with which the world is engaged.

However, even though Kee and her baby can possibly prevent the apocalypse and act as a source of hope it can also become problematic, Kee’s baby provides what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism.” In her words, cruel optimism “is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object…. but if the cruelty of an attachment is experienced by someone/some group, even in a subtle fashion, the fear is that loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything.”\(^{115}\) Berlant’s cruel optimism intersects with London’s slow death because if one has nothing to hope for then there is nothing to do but live out a deteriorating life. The protagonist, Theo on the other hand, embodies the flip side of cruel optimism. The film begins with Theo, a cynical mid-level bureaucrat who is just trying to live his life with little to no problems. He has no interest in the refugees being locked up or the fact that Great Britain has become a police state. He has become cynical and a husk of a human after his son Dylan died during a flu pandemic. The death of his son caused him to become estranged from his partner and give up on life.

In meeting Kee, he now has something to be optimistic about and, more importantly, he now has hope. At the same time, Theo knows how optimism can lead to dejection. Kee and her baby represent the opportunity to invest back into the world. As Berlant points out, “the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way.”\(^{116}\) In helping Kee, Theo can then in turn reckon with the trauma of his dead son and how that trauma has haunted him.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 24.
\(^{116}\) Ibid., 2.
The film ends with Theo and Kee escaping the collapsing refugee camp by stealing a row boat and rowing out to a sanctuary ship. Kee names the recently born baby Dylan in honor of Theo’s dead son. Although Theo has moved past the intersection of slow death and cruel optimism, the same cannot be said of the state or the Fishes. By Kee escaping the clutches of both organizations, both devolve into violence. The state cannot keep control of the refugees, and the Fishes only remaining hope is violent revolution. It is in the failure to acquire Kee that both the state and the Fishes loses power. As Foucault points out that “their supervision was affected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population…the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed.”¹¹⁷ To smuggle Kee out of the country and to the Human Project, Theo and Kee need to cut across a refugee camp called Bexhill. Due to Great Britain being the only remaining nation-state, refugees have flocked to the UK. However, the state has rounded up the refugees and put them in camps where there are heavily regulated. Since the refugees are not part of the state, and given that the world continues to collapse, we enter what Giorgio Agamben calls “a state of exception,” embodies by the refugee camps. Agamben states that it “is not a special kind of law (like law of war); rather, insofar as it is a suspension of judicial order itself, it defines law’s threshold or limit concept.”¹¹⁸ The dystopia that was brought on by global infertility has created a permanent state of exception in that the state will suspend the law to prevent its destruction.

It is in the state of exception that the U.K. Government has effectively carte blanche in dealing with the refugees. In discussing the biopolitical ramifications of the state of exception, in relation to the USA Patriot Act, Agamben points out that “neither prisoners nor persons accused,

¹¹⁷ Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction, 139.
but simply detainees, they are the object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight.” The refugee camps in the film are controlled by the military under the guise of national security.

Due to their status, as non-citizens and in turn with the creation of a permanent state of exception, the state engages in the practice of Necropolitics and decides who lives and who dies in relation to the state. Achille Mbeme, in “Necropolitics” states that “to exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power.” The state is forced to control this refugee population, and this become apparent in Britain’s status as the last nation standing. While Theo and the population of Britain is going through the process of slow death, the refugees on the other hand are inhabiting the role of the living dead. In discussing the relationship between Necropolitics and weapons, Mbeme states that “weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead.” There is nothing for the refugees to do other than to waste away in the camps as they can never be part of the nation state and this is why the Fishes are so attractive to the refugees.

The state through biopower has permanently excluded the refugees from the state and in turn justifies their eventual death. Mbeme in analyzing the relationship between racism and biopower argues that “the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state.” As Agamben

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119 Ibid., 3-4.
121 Ibid., 40.
122 Ibid., 17
points out that the refugees due to their status are excluded from judicial law. The climax of the film is set during an open rebellion in that the refugees violently rebel against the state. In response to the open rebellion, the state launches a counter offensive that uses tanks, airplanes and soldiers to violently put down the rebellion by any means necessary.

The open rebellion is itself a direct result of the exclusion of the refugees via the state of siege. In defining the term Mbeme states that “it allows a modality of killing that does not distinguish between the external and the internal enemy as entire populations are the target of the sovereign…freedom is given to local military commanders to use their discretion as to when and whom to shoot.” In the state of exception, judicial law is suspended in order to save the state. Their message of revolution and refugee rights offers hope to those who do not have it. Therefore, the climax of the film is set during an open rebellion in that the refugees violently rebel against the state. In response, the state launches a counter offensive that sends in tanks, airplane, and soldiers to violently put down the rebellion.

The collapse of order at Bexhill not only represents the breakdown of order but it allows the state an opportunity to exercise power on large scale through the death of refugees. “If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the massacre,” states Mbeme. It is the collapse of order at Bexhill that stands in for the apocalyptic event as the dystopic state devolves into the apocalypse. As Kee and Theo row away from camp, the state begins to bomb the camp to kill the refugees, so it can continue to exist. Or as Foucault writes, “the atomic situation is now at the endpoint of this

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123 Ibid, 29.
124 Ibid., 34.
process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of power to guarantee an individual’s continued existence.” In bombing the refugee camp, the state attempts to prolong its existence via the destruction of the refugee camps.

However, in dystopic fiction there is the inevitability of the state collapsing into an apocalypse. The film itself represents two distinct interpretations of the apocalypse. The first is a slow burn apocalyptic event that is stretched across decades as represented in the global infertility crisis. The world is ending but it is going to take a long time for it to happen. This interpretation of the apocalypse intersects with Berlant’s slow death. The second interpretation is the deterioration of order at the refugee camp in that the state collapses into a Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. A post-apocalyptic wasteland necessitates that the nation-state must be destroyed as the embodiment of the old world.

*Children of Men*, unlike *A Boy and His Dog* and *The Book of Eli*, has no Western genre connections. It is not set in a desert and the protagonist is not the universal savage or a gunslinger but instead is an ordinary guy who becomes a savior. At the same time, *Children of Men* is not post-apocalyptic at all but instead is dystopic. However, even the with these issues there are still connections to be made between the film and the Western genre. Within the film, women are linked to civilization as infertility is causing the apocalyptic event in the first place. This linking of women to civilization is like the positionality of women within the Western genre. Specifically, the idea that women coming to the frontier will in turn civilize it via their presence. However, *Children of Men* alters this relationship.

As already noted, within the Western genre, white femininity civilizes the frontier just as women of color are erased from it. We also seen this hegemony of civilization in how the hero

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chooses the schoolmarm over the dance hall girl. In *Children of Men*, it is a woman of color, who is a prostitute, that saves humanity by offering hope. The character of Kee fits within the dance hall archetype while disrupting the gender norm binary that is inherent to the Western. However, in the slow burn destruction of the world that the strict binary surrounding the dance hall archetype is broken down. The morality and the middle-class lifestyle that the schoolmarm represents is destroyed in the apocalypse. The state tries to reconstruct this middle-class morality by trying to steal the baby from Kee but the state fails and eventually collapses at the end of the film. It is not white femininity that will save the world, but instead African femininity holds the key.

It is theorized that modern humans originated in Africa therefore it is often called the cradle of civilization. In *Projecting 9/11: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Recent Hollywood Films*, authors Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo and Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo in discussing the relationship between Africa as the source of human civilization and the character of Kee when they suggest “the fact that Kee has (and by extensions viewers have) no idea as to who the child’s father is becomes a way of acknowledging humanity’s obscure beginnings.”[126] The obscure beginnings of humanity intersects with Kee, the obscure savior of humanity. It is not the prim and proper schoolmarm who saves humanity but instead is the dance hall/girl. The post-apocalyptic genre breaks down the straightjacket of gender archetypes that the Western genre created.

Although Kee holds the future of humanity, the construction of a new world is process fraught with danger. As the dystopic state falls into the apocalypse, there is hope of a better future being built out of the destruction. However, this hope is problematic due to the ruins of the

old world in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. Kee’s baby in *Children of Men* also embodies this contradiction. Likewise, ruins similar haunt the construction of old world and nowhere is this better represented than in the film *A Boy and His Dog* and the underground bunker of Topeka. *A Boy and His Dog* exists on two distinct areas: the desert and Topeka. The desert is a post-apocalyptic wasteland and wreckage of past civilizations in that bandits fight over civilizations. It is a Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. Topeka on the other hand is an underground bunker that portrayed a warped version of 1950’s Americana in that the citizens are kept in line via fear and violence. Unlike *A Boy and His Dog*, a film that is a post-apocalyptic film with Western influences, *The Book of Eli* is a post-apocalyptic Western, a hybrid genre, that merges two genres. Eli, an archetypal gunslinger who wanders into town, and Carnegie, us the archetypal patriarch who controls the town. Both Eli and Carnegie are emblematic of the old word which is represented in the rigidity and death of their characters. However, this merger is not always a net positive in that problematic ideas of one genre are merged with another. In this case, the problematic ideas are the gender norms of the Western genre being merged into the post-apocalyptic genre and this merger exists in two distinct forms: the hyper masculine and the hyper feminine.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the construction of the universalized savage and how the archetype of the savage in the post-apocalyptic exists to teach the skills to survive and thrive in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. However, by inhabiting this role, the character also inhabits a position of the hyper masculine. On the other hand, there also exists a position of the hyper feminine due to the positionality of women within the Western genre. This positionality of women within the Western genre haunts the post-apocalyptic Western due to the contradiction found within the hybrid genre.
The post-apocalyptic genre is one that is looking towards the future but takes its inspiration from the past. No more is this more evident than in the character of Quilla June who finds herself constrained in the straightjacket of hyper-femininity and when she tries to break out of it, she is exiled and brutally murdered by her one hope of instigating change. However, the world does not need to be destroyed to break through straightjacket of Western genre gender norms built into the post-apocalyptic genre. Unlike the first two films, *Children of Men* does not portray a post-apocalyptic wasteland but instead it portrays a dystopic Great Britain slowly inching towards the end of the world.

Yet, the characters in *Children of Men* manage new insights into tried and true Western archetypes. The protagonist Theo does not inhabit the archetype of the savage like Vic or the gunslinger like Eli, but he follows the path of the gunslinger in that he dies to protect Kee and take her to the Human Project. In helping Kee, he is doing something that has nothing to do with him but will save the world. Although he follows the path of the gunslinger, he has no skill in guns or driving but is still a savior who finds himself involved with something a lot bigger than he is.

This adoption and disavowal of the Western archetype can also be found in the character of Kee. In a traditional Western, Kee would inhabit the role of the dance hall/girl archetype who in a traditional Western would start the film with the hero but would then be cast aside for the schoolmarm. However, there is no schoolmarm in *Children of Men* and the middle-class lifestyle and morals that are embodied in the schoolmarm no longer exist. Instead, the girl saves the day as an undocumented African prostitute is humanity’s savior. Humanity is saved by a cynical and disaffected bureaucrat and an undocumented African prostitute who find themselves adapting Western archetypes while disavowing large portions of the archetypes to create new insights.
Someone who follows the path of the gunslinger without any of the skills attributed to the
gunslinger. Or someone who inhabits the dance hall/girl archetype but without the strict morals
and middle-class respectability that undermines the archetype. In relying on the past for
inspiration, it fundamentally undermines the potential change that the post-apocalyptic genre can
offer. In relying on Western genre gender norms, it creates a straightjacket that limits the
potential of characters to create something new in the ruins of the old world.
CHAPTER THREE: CYCLICAL DESTRUCTION:

POST-APOCALYPTIC COLONIALISM IN THE *MAD MAX* SERIES

In the roar of an engine, he lost everything….and became a shell of a man…a burnt-out, desolate man, a man haunted by the demons of his past, a man who wandered out into the wasteland.

The Narrator, *The Road Warrior*

One of the key foundational pieces of the post-apocalyptic genre is its hybrid nature in that it merges the Western with Science Fiction. Although the Western genre is typically centered in the United States, it is also a genre that has transcended national borders with different countries constructing their own interpretation of the American West. An excellent example of this interpretation is the rise of the Spaghetti Western in the 1960’s and 1970’s coming out of Europe that portrays a violent American West with an ambiguous morality that challenged the good/evil binary of the traditional mainstream Western. This ambiguous morality along with violence would influence George Miller, the director of the *Mad Max* series of films. Unlike the films that I analyzed in Chapter 1 and 2 that were set mostly in the United States, *Mad Max* and its subsequent sequels are set in a post-apocalyptic Australia.

The *Mad Max* quartet portrays a dystopia on the verge of collapse, wasteland, with bandits and raiders who roam the countryside scavenging for fuel and no compassion for other survivors. The protagonist of these films is Max Rockatansky, a police officer who watches his family die at the end of the first film. Max wanders the wasteland as an archetypical gunslinger who helps groups in need. What makes these films different from other post-apocalyptic sequels is how Miller complicates linear time. Instead of drawing a line from the first film to the second to the third and to the fourth, Miller confounds the chronology of the series by viewing each subsequent film as a separate story in the life of Max. After the first film, the viewer can rearrange the order of the sequels into any order that they please without the plot or timeline
losing coherence. Miller accomplishes this by (1) refusing to give a clear chronology of each film in the series; and (2) the use of framing devices. An excellent example of Miller’s erasure of linear time can be seen in *The Road Warrior* (1980), the first sequel. *The Road Warrior* is set after the events of the first film in that the crumbling nation-state of *Mad Max* has been replaced with a full blown post-apocalyptic wasteland. Miller gives no indication of how long it has been. This becomes even more complicated after the audience learns that the plot of the film is being narrated by an individual who lived through the events as a child and is now recalling them as an elderly man.

The chronology of *The Road Warrior* and subsequent films are themselves undermined by Max and the gunslinger archetype. In Chapter 2, I discussed the gunslinger archetype in my analysis of *The Book of Eli* and how both Eli and Solara typify two different constructions of the gunslinger. Max in the *Mad Max* series of films represents a translated version of the archetype as the traditional supernatural gun skill is replaced with supernatural driving skill. Yet, this is the only change as he still falls into archetypal behavior. He allies himself with groups that needs help and in allying with these groups, he helps to win the day. Yet, this comes at the cost of isolating himself because like the typical gunslinger he does not stick around to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

It is in his failure to stick around that Max’s chronological displacement can be found. *The Road Warrior, Beyond Thunderdome,* and *Fury Road,* although different films share the same beginning and end: Max wanders across the post-apocalyptic wasteland alone. He wins the day for the inhabitants of the oil refinery, the children and Master, and Furiosa and the war brides respectively but does not stay to enjoy the victory. Max’s chronological displacement is directly linked to the collapse of the nation-state and the disruption of the nation-state traveling
through linear time. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* discusses the importance of the progression of time for nations and states “we have seen that the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even ‘world events’ into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and, how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time.”\(^{127}\) This progression of time is missing in the post-apocalyptic wasteland due to the destruction of the nation-state. Essential to any post-apocalyptic story is the explicit destruction of the nation-state and time to create something new. This destruction of the nation-state can take on many different forms ranging from the literal to the metaphorical. The destruction of the nation-state in Australia where the films take place takes on a new meaning due to Australia’s history as a British colony and denotes how the colonization of a country can serve as an apocalyptic event. Colonialism disrupts the nation-state by serving as an apocalyptic event.

However, the apocalypse that colonialism represents is also a metaphorical apocalypse in that apocalyptic trauma happens to specific people, but the world keeps turning for everyone else. The colonization of a country represents a traumatic experience that directly impacts everyone in that country. This trauma is represented in the construction of “ ghosts.” These ghosts contain the trauma of the event, “haunting” the individual. Avery Gordon defines a haunting as “an animated sense in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely.”\(^{128}\) The trauma of a metaphorical apocalypse can negatively impact an individual who fails to reckon with the ghost. The only way

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to be free of a haunting is to reckon with the ghost and its haunting, and to move past the traumatic event.

In the *Mad Max* series, the character Max does not only go through a literal apocalyptic event but also a metaphorical apocalypse. His family is run down and killed by motorcycle bandits which causes Max to drive and wander through the wasteland instead of dealing with the death of his family. In failing to reckon with the trauma of his own apocalypse, these hauntings cause Max to drive further and further into the wasteland. In *After the End: Representations of the Post Apocalypse* James Berger discusses the relationship between trauma and the apocalypse stating that “the idea of catastrophe as trauma provides a method of interpretation and posits that the effects of an event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not obviously associated with the event.”\(^\text{129}\) Using this idea we can conclude that the trauma surrounding the death of his family directly impacts how Max engages with fellow survivors.

As he roams the wasteland, Max purposefully avoid survivors. By avoiding survivors, Max is failing to reckon with the ghost that is haunting him. This in turn makes it impossible for him to join a long-term community. In each sequel, Max is given the opportunity to join a newly constructed imagined community but, in each instance, he rejects the opportunity and instead roams the wasteland. Gordon, in discussing the process of encountering a ghost states that “yet, in this moment of enchantment when you are remembering something in the world, or something in the world is remembering you, you are not alone or hallucinating or making something out of nothing but your unconscious thoughts, you have bumped into somebody else’s memory.”\(^\text{130}\)

This process of bumping into someone else’s memory is amplified in *Mad Max: Fury Road* as


\(^{130}\) Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 166.
these memories take on corporeal form and act as hallucinations. These memories are no longer focused directly on his family but on the people, he had failed to help on his never-ending journey through the wasteland. The family trauma that Max is running away from compounds with the people that he failed to help reinforcing the ghost that is driving him insane. In encountering survivors in the post-apocalyptic wasteland, he is then simultaneously encountering the ghosts of his family. Gordon discusses how ghosts can impact reality states that “living in a dual and surreal reality where a fragile veneer of normalcy and stability simultaneously cloaks and reveals the nervous working of a system of terror that once can witness without seemingly ever hearing or seeing it.”

“By failing to reckon with the ghosts of his family, Max remains stuck in the wasteland and cannot move past the trauma of his literal and metaphorical apocalypse.

Berger also discusses trauma and states that “trauma has the effects that it has, is as painful and apocalyptic as it is, because it really happens. But also, because trauma really happens, it can eventually be addressed, remembered, retold, and different futures can be imagined and lived.” That is, the trauma that Max has lived can be addressed, and by addressing the trauma, the ghost that is haunting him can be reckoned with. Max and his trauma stand in for the colonized state. He goes through an apocalypse that disrupts the linear progression of the nation as it is subsumed through the practice of colonization. Jessica Langer, in her book Postcolonialism and Science Fiction, discusses the relationship between post colonialism and decolonization conveying the idea that “the conceptualization of post colonialism and decolonization as processes rather than fixed states…enables one to situate them outside a strict temporal or historical limitation…decolonization may be defined as the ways in

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131 Ibid., 87.
132 Berger, After the End, 29.
which a society forms itself in the wake, however long ago, of colonization.” The process of
decolonization is directly linked to time displacement. The colonization of a country disrupts the
progression of the state through time as the colonized becomes subsumed within the colonizer.
Benedict Anderson in discussing the movement of communities through history states that “the
idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a
precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving
steadily down (or up) history.” Nevertheless, colonization disrupts this movement by placing
the state in stasis removing any possibility of movement. Yet, the state changes location during
the colonization process shifting from the colony to the metropolis.

Instead, the colonized state is constantly reminded of the trauma of colonization in how
the colonized are treated by the colonizer. If the colonization of a country serves as an
apocalyptic event, the post-colonial represents a post-apocalyptic scenario when the state returns
to the former colony. In Chapter 1, I discussed Haiti and how it is the only state to gain its
independence out of a successful slave revolt. Shortly after Haiti gained independence, two
factions engaged in a civil war to see who would lead the country. In the background of this
conflict, European nations refused to recognize Haiti as a sovereign country that prevented the
country from decolonizing.

Even though Haiti faced issues, the community viewed themselves as state in opposition
to other states. In Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, Etienne Balibar analyzes the role of
the imaginary in the creation of the nation, “…a community which recognizes itself in advance
in the institution of the state, which recognizes that state as its own in opposition to other states

134 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 26.
and, in particular, inscribes its political struggles within the horizon of that state.” It is in this post-apocalyptic wasteland that the nation-state is reborn as the post-apocalyptic requires the old world to be destroyed to make way for the new world. It is in the destruction of the old world and time that survivors create new communities and out of these communities comes the post-apocalyptic nation-state.

For example, In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Aunty Entity and Master Blaster create Bartertown, a massive city with trade, laws, and energy. Aunty Entity runs the above ground while Master Blaster provides energy for the city. Bartertown serves as a trade hub for other communities. In *Fury Road*, cities have begun the process of turning into states as dictators start to hold large tracts of land while having large armies to protect their borders. In the aftermath of an apocalyptic event, survivors come together to build communities that then transition into cities and finally into states that can begin to progress through time. As mentioned above, in the case of colonialism, the apocalyptic event is not literal but instead metaphorical. However, like the post-apocalyptic state, the post-colonial state must again progress through time.

*Mad Max: The Collapsing State*

*Mad Max* (1979) directed by George Miller portrays a dystopic Australia on the verge of collapse due to a lack of gasoline. This in turn creates bandit motorcycle gangs who steal and murder anyone in their way. In response, the state creates the Main Patrol Force whose job is to patrol the highways and to stop the gangs. Like *Children of Men*, *Mad Max* portrays a dystopia on the verge of collapse as the foundation of the state is crumbling under the pressure of scarcity. Defining a dystopia in his article “Six Worlds of Tomorrow,” Alan Clardy states that dystopias portray “modern society in extremis, barely functioning amid an alienated and densely populated

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mass just one food ration short of rebellion and anarchy…dystopian society shows a world whose veneer of order barely holds back the surging tides of breakdown and anarchy." The apocalypse that is attacking the world of *Mad Max* is not instant but instead is a slow burn caused by a lack of gasoline. This in turn causes people to fight over the remaining gallons.

In the case of *Mad Max*, the inevitable apocalypse is slowed down by the presence of the police. Yet, the film foreshadows the end as it begins with the death of an officer and as the film progresses, Max’s best friend is burned alive by a motorcycle gang and Max himself quits the force to protect his family. As the police grow weaker, the gangs grow bolder in their action as the police no longer have the manpower to stop them. The antagonist Toecutter and his motorcycle gang intimidate and force a judge to release a rape suspect due to the police not having the manpower to protect the court. Lawlessness, chaos and the absence of order set the stage for the apocalypse.

In looking at *Mad Max* as a dystopia transforming into an apocalyptic event, we can also look at a colonial state transforming into a post-colonial state. It is the removal of colonial vestiges of authority that allows the post-colonial state to create their own laws and become a sovereign state in opposition to other states. However, this removal of the colonial is not a complete clean break but instead is a process as discussed by Langer as she writes “decolonization, along with Postcolonialism in general, is also a process. Such a consideration not only covers disengagement from the colonial syndrome but also includes the building of a decolonial society with a distinct identity.”

The issue becomes, how does this process take place? Throughout the 20th century there were wildly different examples ranging from a peaceful

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transfer of power (i.e., Australia) to a full-blown civil war (i.e., the Algerian war of Independence). In both scenarios, the colonial state is destroyed to make way for the new post-colonial state. This transition between the two states serves as a metaphorical apocalyptic event in that the old world represented by the colonial is destroyed to make way for the post-colonial. However, this change between the old and the new world can be fraught with danger as no one knows who to trust. This becomes incredibly important due to the need to negotiate a new identity in the absence of the colony. The new identity is not new but instead carries over vestiges of colonial power that are then ported over to the post-colonial state.

In *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We’ll not go Home Again* by Claire P. Curtis, states that “the apocalyptic event, through its destruction of official manifestations of authority (politicians, police, military), reveal humans fighting against one another for their survival…this world demands eternal vigilance.”\(^\text{138}\) In *Mad Max*, Max is a police officer enforcing the law but as the film progresses, law and order breaks down. The social contract that existed is destroyed via the destruction of the nation-state. The apocalypse comes with the collapse of law and order as represented in the death of his family. With this collapse comes the collapse of the social contract as survivors enter a Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. At the end of the film, Max quits the police force encounters Johnny, a member of Toecutter’s gang who was responsible for the death of his family. Max handcuffs Johnny to a destroyed car and creates a timed explosive. He also gives Johnny a hacksaw and the choice between sawing through his ankle or the handcuffs. As Max starts to walk away, Johnny starts to scream that he needs help and that he is mentally ill. “Don’t do this to me, please…I was

sick, don’t bring this on me, please!” The film ends with Max driving away and an explosion occurring in the background.

Max’s use of violence in this scenario is not justified due to him being outside of the state. The nation-state has a monopoly on violence because it can then legitimate its use. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* in discussing the use of legitimate violence tell us that “one of the fundamental pillars of the sovereignty of the modern nation-state is its monopoly of legitimate violence both within the national space and against other nations.” Max’s use of violence at the end of the film is not legitimate in the eyes of the state but since the state has collapsed, violence is now legitimized on the individual level. With the collapse of the state comes the collapse of manifestations of authority and the evolution of Max from a family man at the beginning of the film to a burnt-out drifter at the end who represents this apocalyptic event that will resonate for the rest of his life.

Max, like the post-colonial state, must also reimagine his identity as the signifiers of his former life have been destroyed. Max began the film as a police officer and a family man. Both signifiers have been ripped away from him and with them his position in the old world. The question then becomes, where does Max fit within the new world that will be constructed? Out of the apocalyptic trauma that he goes through comes an opportunity to create a new life. Berger discusses the inevitability of apocalypse stating that “it is not inevitability that gives an apocalyptic character, it is its ability to obliterate existing narratives, to initiate a new history that takes the form of an ominous and symptomatic aftermath.” Although the post-apocalypse

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offers hope there is always the fear of falling into the same behaviors that caused the apocalyptic event in the first place.

This fear also applies to the decolonized state, which also needs to merge the colonized past with the decolonized future and create something new. Langer, in discussing the relationship between the past and the future in relation to post colonialism states that “post colonialism is the process by which a decolonizing society negotiates its identity apart from that of its colonizer and apart from its identity as a colonized place or people, within the context of both colonial history and decolonized future.”

Mad Max represents the dystopic state entering the inevitable apocalyptic event. Yet, out of this event will come the possibility of a new world and more importantly, a new state, as the survivors of the apocalypse come to terms with their new potential identities and this negotiation is started in The Road Warrior, the first sequel to Mad Max. While Mad Max portrays a dystopia sliding into an inevitable apocalypse, The Road Warrior portrays a full on post-apocalyptic wasteland in that the nation-state has collapsed and with it the collapse of law and order.

The Road Warrior: The Black Leather Gunslinger

Although the nation-state has collapsed, the director George Miller gives no chronology of when exactly the film takes place. The film begins with narration that briefly recaps the events of the first film. After the narration, the film picks up with Max driving looking for gasoline to keep on roaming across the wasteland. It is in his roaming that he encounters a small group of survivors who have found solace at an oil refinery and have begun to create a community. However, they are under siege by a group of bandits led by the Lord Humongous, a large heavily scarred man who wants the oil refinery and the potential gasoline that it has. The survivors at the

142 Langer, Postcolonialism and Science Fiction, 8.
refinery have the technology and knowledge to refine the oil into gasoline. Max joins the side of the refinery to get gasoline, but he also becomes part of their community and helps them to win their battle with the bandits.

It is in *The Road Warrior* that Max adopts the gunslinger archetype as he portrays a mercenary who joins a conflict between two parties and fights for the smaller group. James Berger in *After the End* in discussing the film states that “in the film *Road Warrior*, for instance, Max, who lives alone, somewhere between the values of the human remnant and of the punk barbarians, is forced to choose whether or not to remember how to be part of a human community.”\(^{143}\) This choice to stay or leave intersects with the gunslinger archetype.

The figure of the Western genre gunslinger overlaps with the archetypal hero of a post-nuclear holocaust in numerous ways. Mick Broderick in “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster” discusses the archetypal post-apocalyptic hero and states that “with few exceptions, the hero is male and frequently a drifter who has rejected social conformity due to a past of persecution at the hands of the forces of evil…his project becomes one of self-preservation, of surviving in the wilderness through superior dexterity, strength and cunning, fending for himself (though he gladly challenges the forces of evil wherever they are encountered).”\(^{144}\) Broderick’s description of the archetype of the post-apocalyptic hero suits Max perfectly due to his mythological status as implied by the film. *The Road Warrior* starts and ends with a narrator who encounters Max at an important time in his life and how that encounter changes his life. The narrator is an elderly man who is recounting his life story. The narrator meets Max when he becomes an unlikely ally with the survivors at the refinery. During his time

\(^{143}\) Berger, *After the End*, 10.

at the refinery, Max meets a child who is nicknamed the Feral Kid who is intrigued by the figure of Max. Max attempts to push the kid away only for the kid to win him over.

At the end of the film, Max saves the Feral Kid and returns him to the survivors at the refinery. The Feral Kid would grow up and become the leader of this community and would lead the community to prosperity. The narrator is the Feral Kid looking back on his life and his encounter with Max. “As for me, I grew to manhood, and in the fullness of time, I became the leader…the Chief of the Great Northern Tribe and the Road Warrior? That was the last we ever saw of him. He lives now only in my memories.” In looking back on Max, the Feral Kid paints him as a mythological figure who came into his life and quickly left. This also intersects with the Western as *The Road Warrior* is a translation of the classic Western *Shane* down to the framing device. Both films have a gunslinger wade into a conflict and ally themselves with the losing side. Both films have a gunslinger bond with a child and who must leave the child after accomplishing their goal and leading the losing side to victory. In *Shane*, you have conflict between the settlers and the ranchers with both sides having eyes on the land. In *The Road Warrior*, you have the survivors at the refinery and the bandits who want the refinery. Although both want the refinery what is at stake is not the refinery but is the foundation of the post-apocalyptic nation-state. The survivors create a new nation-state that emerge in the wasteland. Both the refinery and the bandits led by Lord Humongous represent two different potential constructions of post-apocalyptic communities. Within the refinery, a democracy has been created and technology is in use as the survivors can refine the oil into gasoline. Mick Broderick in discussing the idealized forces of good in post-apocalyptic media describes them as “communities that attempt reconstruction through renewal, not of the immediate prewar lifestyle

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an ethics, but of an earlier, superseded morality and social ethos.” The survivors at the refinery are preoccupied with trying to reconstruct a society that can survive in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. On the other hand, the bandits led by Lord Humongous only want one thing: the refinery and they will do whatever they must do to gain control of it.

Claire Curtis in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract in analyzing the antagonists of post-apocalyptic fiction states that “inherent in all of these accounts is the necessary Other: the groups of people who do not react so well to the cataclysm…these people, who seem to band up far more quickly than our survivors, are bent on continued destruction (despite the total irrationality of this).” In the aftermath of the apocalyptic event, both communities define themselves in opposition to one another. The survivors of the refinery define themselves in opposition to the bandits and vice versa. This process of defining one another via opposition is part of a larger binary inherent to the construction of communities. These communities serve as the building blocks for post-apocalyptic nationalism.

In Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, Etienne Balibar discusses the binary nature of nationalism stating that “there is always a good and a bad nationalism. There is the one which ends to construct a state or a community and the one which tends to subjugate, to destroy; the one which refers to right and the one which refers to might.” Both communities fit within this binary of nationalism that Balibar defines. This binary between good/bad is also exemplified in the film via clothing due to Western genre motifs. One of the foundational motifs in the Western genre is using the color of clothing to illustrate good and evil. John Cawelti in The Six Gun Mystique in discussing this motif states that “in simplest form, as in the B Western, costumes

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146 Broderick, “Surviving Armageddon”, 376.
147 Curtis, Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract, 8.
148 Balibar and Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, 47.
In “B” Westerns, this opposition is then represented in the choice of hat. The protagonist wears the white hat that represents good and the antagonist wears the black hat. The white hat at the end of the film triumphs over the black hat or in other words good defeats bad. *The Road Warrior* adopts this motif but makes subtle changes to fit within the post-apocalyptic wasteland.

The settlers at the refinery wear white and the bandits led by Lord Humongous wear black, but the difference comes in how much skin is covered. The bandits although wearing black have costumes that show a lot of skin while the settlers wear full leather garments that expose little to no skin. Berger in *After the End* in analyzing the difference between the two communities’ states that “while the Punks pour out of their clothing, most of their bodies open to contact, the Humans live in their soft, blond, enveloping leather garments as in a second, more durable skin; they are never undressed.” The only member of the settlers who fails to cover up is the Feral Kid who only wears a loin cloth, which exemplifies his feral nature. This color/skin binary works against Max in his first encounter with the settlers, due to his appearance, as one of the settler’s remarks: “for all we know he’s one of them, give him nothing.” His clothing is like the bandits, but like the settlers, he is mostly covered up except for his bare left arm. This ambiguity in his clothing reinforces the moral ambiguity of the post-apocalyptic hero that Broderick in “Surviving Armageddon” describes. Max’s clothing isolates him from both sides as the abundance of black alienates the settlers while the lack of skin alienates the bandits. Due to his gunslinger nature, Max is an interloper in both societies and even though he joins the settlers,

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151 Miller, *The Road Warrior*.  

he is still isolated physically and symbolically. Yet, Max does have similarities with the settler’s due to movement.

When Max first encounters the settlers at the refinery, they are held up due to a blockade constructed by Lord Humongous. The settlers want to leave the refinery but do not have the firepower to blast through. They want to leave the refinery and travel two thousand miles to a spot where they can rebuild their society. When Max becomes a temporary part of the settlers, an old man tells him their plan “ya have to come sonny, this is where we are going...Paradise, two thousand miles from here. Fresh water. Plenty of sunshine. Nothing to do but breed.” The entire plan is based on a postcard as no one from the settlers has ever been there. However, the settlers have hope of finding a better place to live. The situation in the film is reminiscent of a side effect of the process of colonialism: the creation of diaspora, the movement of a population from its original homeland.

In her book *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction*, Jessica Langer discusses the definition of diaspora states: “in general diaspora is clearly both a physical, geographical and often economic displacement, while also a mental, emotional and spiritual one.” Like the definition of an apocalypse, there is a metaphorical and a literal definition for diaspora. Although, the definition is irrevocably changed in a post-apocalyptic scenario in that the homeland is irrevocably destroyed. One cannot reckon with the trauma of diaspora if the homeland no longer exists and this in turn complicates the relationship between trauma and the colonial in that both the settlers and Max are trying to return to something that no longer exists.

For the new nation state to be born, the old nation-state must be eradicated, and it is in this process, trauma is created. In *After the End*, author James Berger discusses the relationship

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152 Ibid.
153 Langer, Postcolonialism and Science Fiction, 57.
between trauma and ghosts and how trauma can act as a symptom of a disease. “Like the return of trauma, the ghost is propelled from one time to another; its presence is a sign of some traumatic disorder in the past, some crime that has not been witnessed or put right, and is therefore a sign also that the present still suffers from that traumatic disorder.”¹⁵⁴ This trauma is inherent to the post-apocalyptic survivors since they cannot fix the issue that caused the trauma in the first place since the state no longer exists. Out of the trauma of the apocalyptic event comes the possibility of hope as represented in the settler’s proposed migration.

The construction of hope out of trauma in post-apocalyptic media is one of the touchstones of the media in that out of the destruction of the world remains the possibility for a new and better world. However, this hope can be misplaced and in the case of the settlers, they are moving two thousand miles on the hope that a postcard is not lying to them. In *The Production of Space*, in analyzing the abstraction of space, Henri Lefebvre states that “the error or illusion-generated here consists in the fact that, when social space is placed beyond our range of vision in this way, its practical character vanishes and it is transformed in philosophical fashion into a kind of absolute.”¹⁵⁵ Due to the postcard, the settlers have in turn fetishized the proposed land that they selected since they have no idea if the place exists or not. Yet, even with the fetishizing of the land there exists the possibility of hope in creating a new homeland and this possibility in turn unites the settlers with a common goal. Etienne Balibar in discussing the construction of the nation form states that “in every case, however, a model of their unity must anticipate that constitution: the process of unification (the effectiveness of which can be measured, for example, in collective mobilization in wartime, that is, in the capacity to confront

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¹⁵⁴ Berger, *After the End*, 79.
death collectively) presupposes the constitution of a specific ideological form."\textsuperscript{156} It is out of the conflict with Lord Humongous that the settlers at the refinery unify and start to see themselves as a community instead of a loose confederation of survivors.

This in turn reinforces the binary between good and bad nationalism as both the refinery and Lord Humongous are created in opposition to one another. Balibar also discusses the relationship between good and bad nationalism and the role of emotions when he argues that “there is the one which derives from love (even excessive love) and the one which derives from hate. In short, the internal split within nationalism seems as essential- and as difficult to pin down- as the step that leads from dying for one’s fatherland to killing for one’s country.”\textsuperscript{157} In both scenarios, violence is essential in the construction of the state and the film embodies this use of violence. The climax of \textit{The Road Warrior} is a massive car chase in that an oil tanker driven by Max must outrun the forces of Lord Humongous while the settlers escape in buses. However, the chase is a ruse as the oil tanker is filled with sand and the buses themselves are filled with oil containers. The end of the film represents the intersection of the gunslinger archetype and legitimate violence in the construction of the nation. As I have stated, Max represents a translation of the gunslinger archetype in that by using his near supernatural abilities, he wins the day for a group but cannot stick around to enjoy the victory. He instead must continue to roam the wasteland. In a traditional Western, the gunslinger’s use of violence is legitimized due to his forced exit as he cannot stick around to rebuild. In the case of \textit{The Road Warrior}, this legitimate violence is key in the creation of the state that the settlers build.

In \textit{The Production of Space}, Lefebvre discusses the relationship between violence and the state saying that “every state is born of violence, and that state power endures only by violence

\textsuperscript{156} Balibar and Wallerstein, \textit{Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities}, 94.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 47.
directed towards a space. This violence originated in nature, as much with respect to the sources mobilized as with respect to the stakes—namely, wealth and land.”158 This desire for wealth and land is the repetition of colonial power and violence. The settlers are colonizing a land that had already been colonized. Although Max kills the Lord Humongous and his henchmen, the settlers themselves engage in violence in that they must change the land while at same time interacting with the violence in the service of colonialism.

The settlers begin the film at an abandoned oil refinery that is still operational and is pumping oil. They take this oil and refine it into gasoline that they can use to leave the refinery. The refinery itself serves as a symbol of the old world and it is through this symbol of the old that the settlers use to create something new. At the same time, the violence of colonization intersects with the violence of the apocalypse. The land that the settlers will drive to that is two-thousand miles away and is fetishized by the settlers as this Edenic land that is untouched by humanity. This in turn will serve as a place to rebuild civilization. The fetishizing of the space complicates the relationship between humanity and nature. In Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space, Neil Smith in discussing the relationship between nature and production states that: [T]he point here is not nostalgia for a preproduced nature, whatever that might look like, but rather to demonstrate the extent to which nature has in fact been altered through human agency…If we must, we can let this inaccessible nature support our notions of nature as Edenic, but this is always an ideal, abstract nature of the imagination.”159 This idea of a preproduced nature is always constructed in the abstract due to human agency and in turn nature becomes a commodity than can be leveraged to create a profit.

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158 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 280.
This leverage in turn can take on many different forms and a key aspect of colonialism was the extraction of natural resources from the colony. As I have stated before, the oil refinery itself is representative of colonial practice. It was constructed in the colony (apocalyptic event) but it remained after in the post-colonial state (post-apocalypse). However, the end of the colony does not mean the end of the influence of the colonizer. In some cases, this led a colonial power forcing a former colony to pay debts under the threat of war. In 1825, France demanded that Haiti compensate France for the Haitian Revolution, specifically for the loss of slaves and for the colony itself. This demand was delivered by French warships. In return, France would acknowledge Haiti as a sovereign republic. The total cost was estimated at one hundred fifty million francs. This demand from the colonizer to the recently colonized is another potential part of development theory. Development is not only something that happens after colonization, but it is something that occurs during colonization through the practice of underdevelopment. Describing underdevelopment in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Robert Young states that “western industrial growth had been achieved through a process of underdevelopment of the colonies in the colonial era, whereby the west had destroyed local industries and kept the economies of the non-western nations in a condition of stagnation for its own interests.”\(^{160}\) In the case of Haiti as a French colony, sugar and coffee became the cash crop and everything else was thrown to the way side.

To maximize profit, France destroyed the local economy. In his book *Uneven Development* Neil Smith discusses the need of capitalism to expand by arguing that “under the banner of benevolent colonialism, capitalism sweeps before it all other modes of production, forcibly subordinating them to its own logic…geographically, under the banner of progress,

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 50.
capitalism attempts the urbanization of the countryside.”¹⁶¹ However, this sweep of capitalism also leads to its own destruction in that capitalism causes the apocalyptic event in the *Mad Max* series.

A lack of oil led to a lack of gasoline. This lack of gasoline led to conflict between nation-states to secure oil resources and in turn led to the dystopia that is portrayed in *Mad Max* and the post-apocalyptic wasteland portrayed in *The Road Warrior*. Smith, in describing the end of capitalism, states that “to the extent that capitalist development levels the urban-rural dichotomy and thereby destroys the foundation for its own economic history, it prepares the way not only for its own defeat but for the development of a wholly new economic history built on a new foundation.”¹⁶² Capitalism in its need for constant expansion destroys itself but in its destruction, is regenerated into something new. Like how the destruction of the nation-state through the apocalypse opens the door for the creation of a new nation-state. The destruction of capitalism can be seen in *The Road Warrior* with the destruction of the oil refinery. In leaving the refinery, the settlers create a timed explosive that will prevent Lord Humongous and his henchmen from taking it over. In turn, they take the colonial power away. At the same time, the destruction of the oil refinery also represents the destruction of the colonial economy in that the post-colonial state is removing the vestiges of the process of underdevelopment. Henri Lefebvre in discussing the relationship between economic growth and violence states that “we have yet to ascertain the exact relationship between ‘spontaneous’ economic growth on the one hand and violence on the other, as well as their precise respective effects, but our hypothesis does affirm that these two moments indeed combine forces and produce a space: the space of the nation

¹⁶² Ibid., 149.
It is in the destruction of the oil refinery that the settlers can finally start to rebuild society. After leaving the wasteland, the settlers create the Great Northern Tribe and start to thrive. Max is always in between groups as he can never escape the trauma of his dead family.

However, there is progression in the construction of communities in the *Mad Max* series. If *Mad Max* portrayed a dystopia on the verge of collapse, then *The Road Warrior* portrays a post-apocalyptic wasteland in that the survivors are starting to form groups and re-create communities. Even so, these communities form in opposition to one another and this in turn leads to conflict as seen in the conflict between the settlers and Lord Humongous. Each community has a mutually exclusive and one-dimensional goal. It is in this conflict that Max finds himself on the side of the settlers and helps them to win the day. These small communities eventually turn into cities with their own laws and economies and this transformation can be seen in the third movie of the *Mad Max* series: *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985).

*Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*: We Need a Hero

Like *The Road Warrior*, *Beyond Thunderdome* gives the viewer no chronological location for the film other than it takes place after *Mad Max*. The film opens on a heavily bedraggled Max leading a pack of camels and dragging his broken-down car across the wasteland. The opening of *Beyond Thunderdome* mirrors *The Road Warrior* in that it opens with Max roaming the wasteland. After losing the camels and his car, Max makes his way to Bartertown. To enter the town, one must barter their way in. Max uses his gunslinger skills to enter. While the wasteland of *The Road Warrior* contained small settlements under siege by bandits mirroring small Western towns under siege by bandits. The wasteland of *Beyond Thunderdome* portrays a wasteland in that these small settlements have blossomed into self-

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163 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 112.
contained city states. Bartertown is its own sovereign state with its own laws and its economy is built on trade with other individuals and other cities.

Still, Bartertown is two different entities working together with two different leaders: one on the surface and other underground. The surface is led by Aunty Entity who rules with an iron fist. The bottom is led by Master Blaster: a dwarf who controls a giant. Due to a lack of oil, Bartertown is run using pig feces that are transformed into methane gas that powers generators to keep the lights on. This need to farm pig feces creates a dichotomy that is essential to the existence of Bartertown: Bartertown and the Underworld. Those in the Underworld are expected to farm pig feces and many are convicts who were sentenced to work until they died. The average life expectancy of a working down below is only two to three years. In turn, the inhabitants of Bartertown exploit the inhabitants of the Underworld. This exploitation in turn starts to look like post-apocalyptic colonialism in that post-apocalyptic cities/states are starting to follow the same paths that pre-apocalyptic states created. Describing the equalization of geographical differences and the shrinking of world space in Uneven Development, Neil Smith states that “the equalization of geographical differences and the shrinking of world space emerge together; the more accessible foreign parts become, the more similar they seem to home…regardless of its social expression this geographical one-dimensionality has a real historical basis in the equalization of the conditions and levels of production.” The locations of Bartertown and the Underworld are examples of this equalization of geographical differences. At the same time, this equalization also intersects with the cyclical nature of the post-apocalyptic genre.

164 Smith, Uneven Development, 158.
Repetition, which is inherent to the post-apocalyptic genre is also inherent to the postcolonial. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* discusses the relationship between the post-colonial and time and argues that “the post-colonial passage through modernity produces that form of repetition- the past as projective. The time-lag of postcolonial modernity moves forward, erasing that compliant past tethered to the myth of progress.” Although Bartertown exploits the Underground like European colonialism, this relationship takes on an added twist in the post-apocalyptic genre. For example, in the article “Beyond Mad Max III: Race, Empire, and Heroism on Post-Apocalyptic Terrain,” Paul Williams analyzes the inversion of colonialism in *Beyond Thunderdome* arguing that “Bartertown has intriguingly inverted the racial dynamics of nineteenth century imperialism...Aunty Entity has constructed civilization in the desert of the post-apocalyptic world, but in contrast to the European colonial projects, its creator is a black female.” However, Aunty’s rule is complicated by Master Blaster, who although living in the Underworld, controls the production of energy, meaning that there can be no Bartertown without Master Blaster. Although the inhabitants of Bartertown can exploit the inhabitants of the Underworld, Master Blaster reverses this exploitation by forcing concessions from Aunty Entity. In a pivotal early scene of the film, Master Blaster creates an embargo and forces Aunty to proclaim to Bartertown that “Master Blaster runs Bartertown!” Although she seemingly controls Bartertown, she needs the Underworld for power and Master Blaster is aware of this.

Although Bartertown is a post-apocalyptic city-state, it is repeating the same colonial binaries. Smith in discussing irrationality of accumulation states that “the rational logic of

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165 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 253
166 Paul Williams, “Beyond Mad Max II: Race, Empire, and Heroism on Post-Apocalyptic Terrain,” *Science Fiction Studies*, 32, no.2 (July 2005):304.
accumulation leads to utter irrationality, to war, in which laborer and capital alike are rudely devalued; the deepening and widening of crises into global configurations transforms the cannibalistic tendencies of capitalism into so many modes of mutually assured destruction.”

Within Bartertown, the forces of capitalism and labor are in an uneasy alliance but that alliance fractures when Max comes into town. In discussing the role of Master Blaster in Bartertown, Williams states that “as they assert that centrality, potentially wrestling control of Bartertown’s civilization away from its architect, Aunty seeks to buttress her leadership by reinforcing the restless subterranean workforce’s subservience; but she is handicapped by the seemingly typical dilemma of those who have assumed colonial authority.” The appearance of Max in Bartertown offers Aunty an opportunity to dispatch Master Blaster for good and for her to consolidate her leadership.

She gets Max to infiltrate the Underworld and to pick a fight with Blaster and challenges him to a duel in Thunderdome. Thunderdome is a gladiatorial arena where problems are solved via a fight to the death between opponents. It is in Thunderdome that order is consolidated as the emcee of Thunderdome states that “Bartertown learned. Now, when men get to fighting, it happens here. And it finishes here! Two men enter; one man leaves.” Max defeats Blaster but does not kill him as he is developmentally disabled. Aunty, who uses Max to seize power from Master, then exiles him to wasteland for breaking the law.

Just as the colonizer consolidated power over the colonized labor force, Aunty consolidates power over Master and his labor force. This in turn intersects with the cyclical nature of the post-apocalyptic genre in that what has happened will happen again. In discusses

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169 Williams, “Beyond Mad Max III”, 305.
170 Miller, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. 
the imagery of capitalism as a plague, Smith states that “to borrow an Image from Nigel Harris, capital is like a plague of locusts, it settles on one place, devours it, then moves onto plague another…better, in the process of restoring itself after one plague the region makes itself ripe for another.”\textsuperscript{171} The apocalypse that ended civilization in the world was an economic apocalypse caused by a lack of natural resources. This apocalypse created the fertile ground for Bartertown.

As Bhabha argues, “the temporal action of modernity- its progressive, future drive is staged, reveling everything that is involved in the act of staging per se…this slowing down, or lagging, impels the past, projects, gives its dead symbols the circulatory life of the sign of the present.”\textsuperscript{172} However, what has happened will happen again in a different way as the colonizer in \textit{Beyond Thunderdome} is a black woman. This inversion of the past directly impacts those who would be the native people of the wasteland. When Max is exiled to roam the wasteland, he is rescued by a tribe of children who then view him as a holy figure who will deliver them out of the wasteland. In “Beyond Mad Max III” Paul Williams describes the children: “the children take the place of indigenous, native people: their records are the stories of their oral culture or cave paintings; they live in huts and use spears as weapons. As with the Australians convicts, a preceding group of white inhabitants understood as savage, the children are exiled from the edifice of civilized order.”\textsuperscript{173} The children in \textit{Beyond Thunderdome} represent a fantastic example of the universalized savage in that they are all white and it is through the skills of the savage that they have picked up the skills to survive in the harsh Australian desert. It is through the arrival of Max that the children start to negotiate with the tribe’s identity. In the folklore of the tribe, a figure named Captain Walker will lead them to their homeland. This figure takes on a

\textsuperscript{171} Smith, \textit{Uneven Development}, 202
\textsuperscript{172} Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 254.
\textsuperscript{173} Williams, “Beyond Mad Max III”, 306.
mythological status for the tribe who automatically assume that Max is Captain Walker. Captain Walker is not only a mythological figure but also a figure of adult authority that is missing from the tribe of children. The mythological figure of Captain Walker intersects with Max’s status as a gunslinger because he can help the tribe but not deliver them from the wasteland due to his status as the gunslinger. Like *The Road Warrior*, Max exchanges his pre-apocalyptic identity as a family man with his post-apocalyptic identity as a protector when he encounters children. Although he is not Captain Walker, he reluctantly helps the children. To accomplish this task, he sneaks back into Bartertown and allies himself with the recently disposed Master to free the workers that work in the Underground. By freeing the workers and stopping the production of methane gas, Max cripples Bartertown and in turn causes mass hysteria.

Smith in *Uneven Development* discusses the struggle against capital: “in the process of struggle against capital, it is the working class that will win the chance truly to define human nature…as a class alienated from control of the society that employs them, the working class are in every way unnatural and a product of capitalism.”174 The relationship between the workers in the Underworld and Bartertown is an product of capitalism due to the need for a labor source. In the destruction of Bartertown, Aunty Enity not only loses the town but also the working class. Aunty pursues Max, Master, and the children and for them to escape, Max sacrifices his opportunity to escape the wasteland. Once more, he finds himself stuck in the wasteland by his own accord. Max wins the day but does not stick around to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

While he is exiled in the wasteland, Master and the children are flown to the bombed-out ruins of Sydney by a self-appointed “Captain”. Williams is helpful here as he argues that “*Mad Max III* effaces the Aborigine presence and repopulates the Outback with white children, ready

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to make their way in the world and break their self-imposed exile now that they have been discovered by their “Captain”, a rank that invokes the seafaring figures of European exploration.”¹⁷⁵ The erasure of Aborigines from the wasteland is itself a repetition of British colonialism in Australia. Disease, massacres and forced relocation decimated the Aborigine population. To make way for the white children to re-populate the outbreak, the Aborigines needed to be removed. This removal is itself another form of the universalized savage that is examined in the Chapter 1. Max becomes a mythological figure for the children mirroring the settlers at the end of The Road Warrior. After sacrificing himself, Max encounters Aunty who instead of killing him for destroying the civilization that she built, laughs at Max’s predicament and drives back to Bartertown to rebuild.

Aunty’s reluctance to kill Max is directly tied to her interpretation of the apocalyptic event. For Max, the apocalyptic event is one of trauma in that his family was brutally murdered and this event still haunts him. However, for Aunty, the apocalyptic event was a positive event in her life. “Know who I was? Nobody. Except on the day after World War Three, I was still alive. This nobody had a chance to be somebody.”¹⁷⁶ It is in the aftermath of the end of the world that Aunty can become someone new. For both characters, the construction of their new identities is directly tied to their relationship with the apocalyptic event. Williams analyzes Aunty’s relationship with the apocalypse arguing that “her construction of Bartertown is not the transplanting of a pre-existing culture into the Outback, but an act of self-definition and realization for someone marginalized by her race and gender in the pre-apocalyptic world.”¹⁷⁷ Although Bartertown is irrevocably damaged by the explosion, Aunty is going to rebuild due to

¹⁷⁶ Miller, Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome.
¹⁷⁷ Williams, “Beyond Mad Max III,” 307.
the power that Bartertown offers her. She goes from a nobody to a somebody and this becomes even more alluring with the removal of Master as she can then become the one ruler of Bartertown.

Yet, it is in this cycle that the destruction of Bartertown mirrors the destruction of the pre-apocalyptic nation-state. However, it is in the pre-apocalyptic nation-state that Aunty gets the inspiration for what Bartertown can be. This repetition of the pre-apocalyptic into the post-apocalyptic mirrors the repetition of the colonial into the post-colonial. Bhabha in discussing the relationship between the colonial paradox and repetition states that “for the repetition of the same can in fact be its own displacement, can turn the authority of culture into its own non-sense precisely in its moment of enunciation.”178 In the case of Bartertown, Aunty engages with the process in that Bartertown aesthetically looks like a European colony yet it lacks the racial boundaries inherent to colony. Williams also discusses the aesthetics of Bartertown when he states that “one might argue that the city’s post-apocalyptic social hierarchies, where the racial codes of European imperialism seem meaningless, are as indebted to the multicultural centers of the postcolonial period as they are to nineteenth century colonial outposts.”179 With the construction of Bartertown, Aunty merges the pre-apocalyptic with the post-apocalyptic and the colonial with the postcolonial.

However, just like Max, Aunty is still beholden to the past. Both of their post-apocalyptic identities derive from the pre-apocalyptic world. Max’s status as a gunslinger is directly tied to his former life as a police officer. For Aunty, it is her existence as a nobody that is directly tied to the construction of Bartertown. It is in Bartertown that the gunslinger and the colonizer meet in that both Max and Aunty are dependent on one another. Without Max, Aunty could not

178 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 137.
179 Williams, “Beyond Mad Max III,” 305.
destabilize Master Blaster and take control of the Underworld. Without Aunty, Max never finds his stolen belongings and encounters the tribe of children. Williams addresses this dependency by arguing that “in accepting that they form some sort of dyad, she seems to point to a recognition of their dependency on each other in metaphysical terms - the nomad needs the metropolitan to be the nomad, and the civilized need the barbarian to be civilized.” For both characters base their identity in opposition to the other like the settlers and bandits in The Road Warrior. While Thunderdome ends with the children leaving the wasteland to fly to the bombed-out ruins of Sydney, both Max and Aunty remain in the wasteland. However, their response to being stuck in the wasteland is different.

On the other hand, Max continues to roam the wasteland trying to escape from the ghosts of his dead family that continue to haunt him. These ghosts make it impossible for him to join a community and like the end of The Road Warrior, he is offered a position in a community, but he refuses. To settle down with a community is to come to terms with the trauma that defined his post-apocalyptic identity. On the other hand, Aunty sees the apocalypse as a tool to redefine her entire identity going from a nobody in her words to a somebody: the co-ruler of Bartertown. It is important to note that both of their post-apocalyptic identities derive from apocalyptic trauma.

For Max, the death of his family represents a metaphorical apocalypse and this metaphorical apocalypse directly impacts the construction of his new identity. Aunty offers a different interpretation of the apocalypse as her post-apocalyptic identity congeals around the literal apocalypse. It is in the destruction of the state that Bartertown can exist. Both the literal and metaphorical construction of the apocalypse create ghosts that haunt the survivors. Avery Gordon in Ghostly Matters in discussing the construction of ghosts’ states that “the post-modern,

\[180\] Ibid., 308.
late-capitalist, postcolonial world represses and projects its ghosts or phantoms in similar intensities, if not entirely in the same forms, as the older world did.\footnote{Gordon, \textit{Ghostly Matters}, 12.} Just as the pre-apocalyptic world haunts the construction of the post-apocalyptic so does the colonial haunt the construction of the postcolonial. The construction of Bartertown in \textit{Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome} represented the first step in reconstituting society in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event. Bartertown offers its inhabitants law and order, and trade but more importantly, a symbol of civilization in the Australian wasteland.

Bartertown in \textit{Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome} represents the first step in rebuilding civilization. Instead of loosely built confederations of survivors, you now have full blown city states with their own economies and laws. Yet, these newly constructed cities start to reestablish colonial binaries as survivors start to become colonizers or colonized as seen in the difference between Bartertown and the Underworld. These city states represent the first step of rebuilding civilization after the apocalypse. These cities are only the first step in constructing a post-apocalyptic nation-state. Small communities turn into towns into cities and finally into full blown nation-states as seen in \textit{Mad Max: Fury Road} (2015), the fourth installment of the \textit{Mad Max} series.

\textit{Mad Max: Fury Road: The Nation-State Redux}

Like the first two sequels, \textit{Fury Road} gives no chronological time or location for when the film is set other than being after \textit{Mad Max}. The film opens with Max roaming the wasteland in his car and being run down by bandits who flip his car and pull him out of the wreckage. He is taken to Joe’s Citadel, a nation state with its own military called the War Boys and ruled by Immortan Joe. Like the relationship between Bartertown and methane gas, the main resource of
the Citadel is that of water that is called Aqua Cola by Immortan Joe. This water is then used to trade for other goods. However, the Citadel differs from Bartertown in some key respects. In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Bartertown was an isolated town in the middle of the wasteland. By isolating Bartertown, it reinforced the Western visual motif of the isolated Western town as a symbol of civilization like the refinery in *The Road Warrior*.

The Citadel on the other hand is part of a loose confederation of states consisting of the Citadel, Gas Town, and Bullet Town. Trade is a big part of their relationship as water from the Citadel is traded for both bullets and gasoline that in turn arms the Citadel’s army. They also come to the aid of one another during conflicts. The Citadel is a continuation of Bartertown as survivors start to form communities then in turn these communities start to evolve into cities and finally into states. Instead of a two-headed ruler in Bartertown, the Citadel is ruled by Immortan Joe alone. The character of Immortan Joe fits within the archetypal antagonist of the post-apocalyptic genre. Mick Broderick in the article “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster” analyzes the binary between good and evil in the post-apocalyptic genre and for the archetypal evil forces he argues “their community is dominated by patriarchal law, but normally in the form of a younger, autocratic and ruthless tyrant who commands a band of (mostly, if not exclusively) male troops.”

In order to rule, Immortan Joe creates a cult of personality in that he is viewed as holy figure to his army and to the slaves who keep the Citadel running.

The Citadel itself consists of three rock towers that are located on top of an aquifer. This water is pumped up and used to irrigate the wasteland and to produce crops. Like Bartertown, the Citadel also relies on a vertical hierarchy that reproduces the exploited/exploiter binary.

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182 Broderick, “Surviving Armageddon,” 362
inherent to the practices of colonialism. In the society that Immortan Joe constructed each tower of the Citadel represents a specific caste of the social order. The first tower consists of Joe and his wives and is the most luxurious of the towers. The second tower holds the military and mechanics that make the army mobile. The last tower consists of the slave labor that is used to keep the Citadel running. An example of this labor can be seen in the massive elevator that is human powered since the original parts have been scrapped. At the same time, the vertical hierarchy also determines your access to the natural resources.

Although the Citadel is pumping clean water out of the aquifer, Immortan Joe rations the water to create artificial scarcity. This is reinforced in the first appearance of Immortan Joe when he is speaking to the slaves below him about the dangers of water. He states that “do not, my friends, become addicted to water. It will take hold of you, and you will resent its absence.” In turn, Joe is repeating colonial practices in that the colonizer exploits the natural resources of an area while exploiting the colonized. However, Joe’s position as the ruler of the Citadel can be tied directly back to his pre-apocalyptic position. While Max was a police officer in the pre-apocalyptic world, Immortan Joe was Colonel Joe Moore, a former military officer who used his military acumen to become a dictator. Both Max and Joe represent former figures of authority in the pre-apocalyptic world who had to re-invent themselves in the new world. Joe sees a world that needs order and it is through his military training that he can be the one to lead humanity.

Order in the post-apocalyptic genre can take on many different forms and for Joe it is a complete dictatorship. In Future West, William Katerberg discusses the temptation to instill order in the chaos of a post-apocalyptic world: “The danger in the wake of a holocaust is the

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183 Mad Max: Fury Road directed by George Miller (Kennedy Miller Productions, 2015), Blu-Ray (Warner Home Video, 2015.)
desire to impose order on the chaos, whether a return to the old order, the self-serving order of regional strongmen or new totalitarian dreams of universal order.”

Joe’s dictatorship is itself a continuation of the pre-apocalyptic world because it is his status as a figure of authority that attracts survivors. Claire Curtis in *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* in analyzing the need for an authority figure in post-apocalyptic media states that “out of this violence and tension comes the desire for peace, the recognition that the desire for peace is mutual, and the choosing of an authority figure that we endow with the right to create rules and punish transgressors.”

Like Aunty and Bartertown, Joe offers the survivors of the apocalypse the possibility of safety and security. This illusion of safety is tied to a figure of authority that no longer exists. Joe’s construction of civilization mirrors the previous civilization as the ghosts of the past in turn haunt the figures of the present.

Bhabha discusses the concept of national time when he says that “national time becomes concrete and visible in the chronotype of the local, particular graphic, from beginning to end. The historical narrative structure of this historical surmounting of the ghostly or the double is seen in the intensification of narrative synchrony as a graphically visible position in space.”

What has been constructed in the past ghosts the construction of the present. This in turn haunts the cyclical nature of the post-apocalyptic genre. What has happened will continue to happen due to the failure to stop the cycle. This failure to stop the cycle can have drastic impacts as seen in Max’s portrayal in *Fury Road*.

In *The Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome*, the character of Max was a laconic gunslinger who was dealing with the trauma of his dead family. *Fury Road* portrays Max as a

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186 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 143.
near mute who is nearly driven insane by his failures. In his words: “I am the one that runs from both the living and the dead. Hunted by scavengers, haunted by those I could not protect. So, I exist in this wasteland, reduced to one instinct: survive.”

Max’s trauma intersects not only with his gunslinger identity but also with the death of his family. When he is first kidnapped by the War Boys, Max tries to escape, and he runs down a long narrow hallway separated by doors. As he bursts through each door, he encounters a different physical manifestation of a ghost. Each ghost is someone who he has personally failed in wasteland: “Here they come again…worming their way into the black matter of my brain. I tell myself, they cannot touch me. They are long dead.”

Although Max has failed many individuals, he is haunted throughout the film by a specific ghost: a small girl who haunts him when he sleeps and when he is awake.

In the previous sequels, he always encounters children and forms a bond with them. In The Road Warrior, he forms a bond with the feral kid and in Beyond Thunderdome, he helps the tribe of lost children to escape the wasteland. The small girl not only represents his failures in the wasteland but also his failure to protect his family from being killed in the first film. Although he attempts to escape his past, his past plays a pivotal role in getting him involved in the conflict. It is in his roaming through the wasteland that he encounters the Citadel and the conflict between Immortan Joe and Imperator Furiosa.

The physical manifestation of his trauma not only gets him involved but it saves his life by forcing him to dodge an arrow aimed at his head. In discussing the relationship between the past and violence in Ghostly Matters, Avery Gordon argues that “the oppressed past is neither linear, a point in a sequential procession of time, nor an autonomous alternative past. In a sense, it is whatever organized violence has repressed and, in the process, formed into a past, a history,

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187 Miller, Mad Max: Fury Road.
188 Ibid.
remaining nonetheless alive and accessible to encounter.”\textsuperscript{189} Every time Max fights, he is in turn reopening his trauma. In fighting with Furiosa, he is reliving the death of his family and his failures with other individuals.

At the center of the gunslinger archetype in the Western genre is an event, a psychic pain, that irrevocably changed the gunslinger. Every time the gunslinger fights, he encounters this event. It is in their failure to change this event in their past that signals their voluntary exclusion from the community. Although Max can help the settlers escape from Lord Humongous or help the tribe of lost children escape from the wasteland, he cannot change the fact that his family was murdered. It is this failure to change the past that drives him insane. In discussing Furiosa’s plan to drive across the salt flats in search for a better place, Max states that “you know, hope is a mistake. If you can’t fix what’s broken, you’ll, uh…you’ll go insane.”\textsuperscript{190} Max finds himself repeating the same behavior because he cannot fix what is fundamentally broken with him. The same thing occurs with Immortan Joe. Joe is a former military officer who in attempting to create order in the chaotic wasteland becomes a dictator.

If one cannot fix the problem, the issue will keep repeating. The destruction of the state leads to the construction of a new state that is then saddled with the same problems that ended the state in the first place. What is needed then is new leadership and someone who can then break this cycle of repetition and finally create something new outside of the shadow of the old world. When Max first encounters the Citadel, he stumbles across a conflict between Immortan Joe and Imperator Furiosa. Furiosa has stolen Joe’s wives and he wants them back. What begins as a minor dispute escalates into a battle of ideologies.

\textsuperscript{190} Miller, \textit{Mad Max: Fury Road}. 

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William Katerberg in *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction* in discussing humanity’s inability to change states “hope for change in humanity, however thin, lies less in technology or religion than in the end of ideologies.”191 Within the film, the battle is between colonial ideologies and decolonial ones. Immortan Joe built the Citadel using old world ideologies and he continues to use these ideologies to insure his power. The Citadel’s exploitation of the underground aquifer along with the creation of a vertical hierarchy reconstructs colonialism in the post-apocalyptic wasteland. However, Furiosa offers a decolonial state in that the vertical hierarchy is destroyed and the exploitation and forced rationing of the aquifer is stopped. The film ends with Furiosa and the slave work force that Immortan Joe exploits rising to the top of the Citadel via an elevator. This alternative construction of the state also intersects with an alternative construction of the gunslinger archetype.

The character of Max throughout the three *Mad Max* sequels has represents the archetype of the traditional Western genre gunslinger. It is through the archetype that Max’s trauma is repeated. He finds a group that needs help, he helps the group and then he leaves never to be seen from again. In Chapter 2, I analyzed *The Book of Eli* and the characters of Eli and Solara who although both fitting within the gunslinger archetype both bring something different. While Eli is a traditional gunslinger and follows a traditional gunslinger path, Solara offers an alternative construction of the archetype.

At the center of this alternative construction is the positionality of the gunslinger to the community. Instead of being a mercenary, this new construction is part of the community and helps to win the day and can enjoy the spoils of victory. Furiosa creates this new construction of the gunslinger and it is through this construction that she ends the film able to take over

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191 Katterberg, *Future West*, 164.
leadership of the Citadel due to her positionality within the community. She has a vested interest in keeping the Citadel running because that is where she lives. It is in the death of Immortan Joe that the Citadel can move past the ideologies of the old world. This harsh divide between an old generation who survives the apocalypse and a new generation who never knew before is a post-apocalyptic staple. This divide is caused by the apocalypse of which there is no Western genre facsimile. The Western genre is reflective of the divide between generations, but ultimately resolved by civilization. In the post-apocalyptic genre, this connection is severed.

Furiosa taking control of the Citadel represents the new world and a new interpretation of what the post-apocalyptic nation state can become instead of relying on past constructions. To build this new interpretation both the old and the new world need to come together to create something new. To dispose Immortan Joe, Furiosa must ally with Max and in turn this alliance represents the intersection of the old and the new construction of the gunslinger. Both working together kill Joe and return to the Citadel as victors. However, while Furiosa is being elevated to take control of the Citadel, Max once again leaves haunt the wasteland as a remnant of the old world.

To settle down is to start progressing through time and to progress through time is to reckon with trauma. Max cannot out run that memory and the memory of other individuals that he failed. Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters* in discussing the havoc a haunting can have on individual argues that “not only because memory that is sociality is out there in the world, but it will happen again; it will be there for you …and therein lies the frightening aspect of haunting: you can be grasped and hurled into the maelstrom of the powerful and material forces that lay claim to you whether you claim them as yours or not.”192 The repetitious nature of the ghost intersects with the repetitious behavior of Max. Wherever he goes, he will encounter the ghosts

whether he wants to or not. In *Fury Road*, these encounters take place when he is awake or asleep. Although he cannot be part of the newly constructed state, Max plays a pivotal role in the construction of numerous post-apocalyptic states.

Due to his skill in driving, he helps the settlers stuck at the oil refinery escape and become the Great Northern Tribe at the end of *The Road Warrior*. In *Beyond Thunderdome*, he helps the children escape and in turn they form a community in the ruins of Sydney. Similarly, in *Fury Road*, he helps Furiosa kill Immortan Joe and take control of the Citadel. Max’s status as a gunslinger also intersect with his role as a mythological figure in each community as he becomes ingrained in the culture. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* in discussing the temporalities of nation states argues that “the language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past.”

By leaving these communities at their inception Max becomes tied to both their past and future. *The Road Warrior* ends with narration of the Feral Kid talking about Max as the Road Warrior. For the Feral Kid, the Road Warrior has become a mythological figure that showed up for a tiny bit and then disappeared forever. A similar occurrence happens in *Beyond Thunderdome* with the tribe of lost children that he rescues from the wasteland.

*Beyond Thunderdome* ends with an oral history of the tribe and how they create beacons to guide people to the city, specifically Max: “Still in all, every night we does the tell, so we ‘member who we was and where we came from…but most of all we members the man that finded us, him that came the salvage. And we lights the city, not just for him, but for all of them that are still out there.” Max becomes a key figure in all three communities yet only in their past. He no longer fits within society especially the society that is constructed in the post-

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193 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 142
194 Miller, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. 

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apocalyptic wasteland and this in turn directly ties back to time. Bhabha discusses the relationship between repetition and memory in the construction of the nation by arguing that “it is the repetition of the national sign as numerical succession rather than synchrony that reveals that strange temporality of disavowal implicit in the national memory…being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation.” It is in forgetting the nation that a new mythological construction of the nation can be constructed. It is in this construction that certain figures become bigger than life and in turn both positive and negative features are sandblasted away. Max Rockatansky is a complicated individual who lost his family and began to roam the wasteland. However, it is in the valorization of Max that details are lost. It is in the losing of details that the state can then repurpose Max for whatever they need.

The valorization of Max intersects with mythologization of heroes in the Western genre and how these heroes are then used to justify the expansion of the United States. An excellent example of this valorization is seen in classic Western The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1960) directed by John Ford. The protagonist of the film is Ransom Stoddard, a lawyer who arrives in the Western town of Shinbone. At the time of his arrival, Shinbone is under siege by the bandit Liberty Valance. Stoddard engages Valance in a duel and kills Valance. This makes Stoddard a local legend and it is on the back of this legend that he becomes governor of a Western state then a U.S. Senator and finally the Ambassador to Great Britain.

However, the legend is a complete hoax in that Stoddard never killed Valance. The film ends with Stoddard telling a news reporter the truth and the reporter stating that “no, sir. This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” It makes no difference that

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195 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 161.
Stoddard did not kill Valance because the legend allowed the nation to admit another state to the union. Like Max, the valorization of Stoddard allows the state to repurpose him for their own means. This valorization takes on another level in the post-apocalyptic wasteland due to need for a chronology. It is in valorizing the individual that time can start to progress again. Both Max and Stoddard signify concrete events that can be used to create a starting point for a community.

In the aftermath of an apocalyptic event, the nation state is destroyed, and the survivors are thrust into a state of nature where life is violent, nasty and short. It is in the destruction of the state that the survivors can start to construct a new state in the ashes of the old. This apocalyptic event does not have to be a literal end of the world scenario (nuclear war, asteroid, volcano, etc.) but instead it can be a metaphorical apocalypse. An apocalypse in that the world does not end but instead feels like it has.

An excellent example of a metaphorical apocalypse is colonialism in that a sovereign state is colonized and taken over by an outside force. The world keeps spinning although the colonized state has been through a traumatic event. In being colonized, the colony becomes part of a larger empire and a side effect of this colonization is that that the nation stops progressing through time. It is in the post-colonial that the nation can then start to progress through time. At the intersection of the metaphorical and literal apocalypse and of the colonial and the post-colonial is the Mad Max series of films and the character of Max.

In Mad Max, Max is a police officer who is trying to ensure law and order in a crumbling dystopian Australia brought on by a lack of gasoline. Max’s attempt to ensure law and order fails and society collapses at the end of the film. Although he is living through a literal apocalypse, he also goes through a metaphorical apocalypse in that both his partner and his son is run down and killed by a motorcycle gang. This causes Max to become a burnt-out drifter who wanders across
the wasteland. The trauma of his dead partner and child in turn haunts Max and it is the constant movement through the wasteland that he attempts to out run the ghost. Yet, it is in his attempt to out run the ghost that he becomes an adaptation of the gunslinger archetype in the sequels.

Although there are four films in the Mad Max series, the sequels take place in no discernable timeline due to a lack of dates. However, if one looks at the sequels in chronological release of each sequel, a potential timeline for the construction of a post-apocalyptic nation-state comes into view. In The Road Warrior, Max comes across a conflict between survivors at an oil refinery and bandits led by the Lord Humongous. Max joins the side of the survivors and helps them to escape. In escaping the wasteland, the survivors create the Great Northern Tribe, free from bandits. At the end of The Road Warrior, Max remains in the wasteland.

In Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome, Max encounters Bartertown, a city with its own laws, trade and rulers. Bartertown is ruled by two rulers who are stuck in a beneficial relationship: Aunty Entity and Master Blaster. Aunty Entity rules Bartertown while Master Blaster rules the Underworld. For Bartertown to run, the Underworld farms pig feces that is then transformed into methane gas. Although Bartertown exploits the workers of the Underworld recreating colonial binaries, Master Blaster inverts these binaries by holding Bartertown hostage using embargoes. Once more Max finds himself stuck in the middle between two groups. It is in this conflict that Max finds himself exiled from Bartertown. It is in his exile that he finds a tribe of lost children who helps to escape from the wasteland. These children along with Master settle in the ruins of Sydney and begin to construct a community. Yet, Max remains in the wasteland. At the same time, Bartertown is destroyed and Aunty instead of calling it quits decides to rebuild Bartertown.
In the change from *The Road Warrior* to *Beyond Thunderdome* there is a progression from tiny communities to full blown cities and the eventual rebirth of civilization in the frontier. Yet, it is in this regeneration that these new communities start to engage in a cycle of repetition. In Bartertown, Aunty via the exploitation of the workers in the Underworld recreate colonized/colonizer binaries in relation to labor. Paradoxically, it is also these binaries that cause the destruction of Bartertown. As communities create towns, the next step in the evolution is the construction of the nation-state as seen in *Mad Max: Fury Road.*

*Fury Road* represents the final stage in the construction of the post-apocalyptic nation-state. At the same time, it also represents the failure of the survivors to learn from their mistakes. The Citadel as constructed by Immortan Joe represents the cyclical nature of colonialism in that the former colony after becoming an independent state starts to mirror its former colonized. The Citadel reinforces colonial thinking in its creation of a vertical hierarchy, its exploitation of natural resources and in its treatment of the workers. Immortan Joe himself is a former military officer who in the aftermath of the apocalypse took control of a natural aquifer who tried to ensure order in the wasteland. However, it is in his need to control that he starts to repeat the same behavior that ended the world in the first place. Once again Max finds himself in a conflict and he helps Imperator Furiosa kill Immortan Joe and take over the Citadel. Furiosa represents a new leader and a new ideology that can prevent the same mistakes that ended the world.

The *Mad Max* series of films portray a post-apocalyptic wasteland in that survivors of the apocalypse attempt to rebuild society and these attempts take on many different forms ranging from small communities to full blown nation-states. The urge to rebuild in the aftermath of an apocalypse is the same desire to rebuild in the aftermath of colonialism. However, this desire to rebuild intersects with the unconscious need to rebuild the same system of inequality that was
destroyed in the first place. By failing to build something new in the ruins of the world, one can never move on as one is constantly haunted by the failure of the old world.
CHAPTER FOUR: LIGHTS, CAMERA, WASTELAND:

PRODUCTION, AESTHETICS AND COST IN POST-APOCALYPTIC CINEMA

It meant that we had to sweep the roads after there was a car crash, it was that kind of guerilla filmmaking. It meant that the film was cut in a flat that we borrowed from a friend and he would cut sound in the lounge room and I’d cut picture in the kitchen.

-George Miller

The idea of going out and making a low-budget movie with creatures was interesting. But at some point, this became a different post-apocalyptic movie. This is what America will look like if it does go under.

-Jim Mickle

If we pay attention to the post-apocalyptic genre, there is no standard apocalyptic event that will end the world. There are standard tropes such as nuclear fallout, artificial intelligence, asteroid collisions, and volcano eruptions, but there is no designated apocalyptic event envisioned by the genre, and this is due to its hybrid nature. If one breaks the post-apocalyptic genre down into its component pieces, you will find the Western and Science Fiction. The genre of Science Fiction encompasses everything from the beginning of time to the end of time and this also encompasses an infinite variety of apocalyptic events.

Nuclear fallout, infertility, asteroid-earth collision, volcano eruption, zombie (or rising of the dead), artificial intelligence, and scarcity all represent potential apocalyptic events that have the capability of destroying humanity. If Science Fiction represents the future and the apocalyptic event, then the Western represents the past and the post-apocalyptic event merges both the past and future to create the present. But, although there are numerous ways to end the world in cinema, there only seems to be one or two ways to portray the post-apocalyptic wasteland in films.

This lack of originality in portraying the wasteland can be directly tied back to the Western genre with its locale formula. One of the most important parts of any Western is the
locale. Mainly, the Western is a morality tale about the conflict between good and evil, civilization and the frontier and the hero vs the savage. This tale must take place in a big empty space where the antagonist and protagonist can fight. Dry, dirty, dusty, arid and barren are all terms used to describe the locale of Western genre films. Locations that match these adjectives are wide open areas with few people, as it reinforces the position of towns as small outposts of civilization in the middle of the expansive frontier. By setting the Western in these locations, it reinforces the formulaic story of the genre that seeks to demonstrate how the “West was won.”

These same (barren, dry, dirty, dusty) places that built the Western genre have been recreated by the post-apocalyptic genre. The transition from the Western location to the similar post-apocalyptic site requires locations that are nearly void of human life (the illusion of the post-apocalyptic wasteland) to sell the idea of survival. The desert for one made a perfect setting for a post-apocalyptic film as seen in *A Boy and His Dog*, *The Book of Eli*, *The Mad Max series*, *The Rover*, *The Postman* just to name a few. The desert itself has an apocalyptic connotation, as it invokes the Nevada Test Site where the U.S. Government detonated over nine hundred and twenty-eight nuclear weapons. The U.S. Government chose the Nevada Test Site due to its isolation and desert landscape.

The apocalyptic connotation of the desert is perfect for the post-apocalyptic genre as it requires the absence of the traditional signifiers of life in the creation of the aesthetic of isolation and desolation, the result of the destruction of civilization and the near extinction of humanity. To sell the wasteland to the audience, the director of a film must find a way to visualize the end of the world, and the desert and plains provide the perfect, inexpensive visualization, as the need to visualize the end of the world also intersects with the genre’s low budget origins. Thus, many post-apocalyptic films were filmed in the same locations where Westerns were set. One of the
most influential post-apocalyptic films is the original Mad Max directed by George Miller. The entire film was made on a shoestring budget. After stunts involving cars, Miller would have to sweep up the broken glass from the road. In shooting Mad Max, Miller chose an isolated location that allowed the audience to implicitly assume that the world is collapsing. Four years earlier, LQ Jones shot A Boy and His Dog in the middle of the desert to create post-apocalyptic aesthetic of isolation and desolation.

In choosing to shoot in the desert and plains to create a post-apocalyptic aesthetic, I argue that post-apocalyptic directors create a homogenous vision of the future that is primarily based on the budget of the film. In this chapter, I will be analyzing A Boy and His Dog directed by LQ Jones, Mad Max directed by George Miller and Stake Land directed by Jim Mickle. While A Boy and His Dog and Mad Max portray a similar apocalyptic setting, Stake Land portrays a more varied apocalyptic setting. To save costs, directors appropriate Western genre locations and then transform them into post-apocalyptic locations quite easily. For instance, when LQ Jones was shooting A Boy and His Dog in the desert, he had telephone poles half buried in the desert to help create the post-apocalyptic aesthetic. By having the broken telephone poles, the audience could assume that civilization was destroyed. Before the post-apocalyptic wasteland appropriated the Western aesthetic, we must first look at the Western aesthetic when it comes to locations.

The Paradoxical Plains

As stated above, the Western demands wide open locations that are isolated to sell the conflict between good and evil. One of the most iconic locations for the Western is the Great Plains. The use of the Great Plains is analyzed in The Six Gun Mystique by John Cawelti who states that the “four characteristics of the Great Plains topography have been especially important: its openness, its aridity and general inhospitality to human life, its great extremes of
light and climate, and, paradoxically, its grandeur and beauty.” All four of these characteristics come into play in a traditional Western story: it is the paradox of the beauty and the inhospitality that attracts settlers who are trying to cultivate the land. At the same time, these characteristics also help to define the protagonist and the antagonist within the western genre.

Within the division between the hero and the savage that I discussed in Chapter 1 is also the division between the (untamed) frontier and civilization. It is in this division that the protagonist and antagonist fight for control over the land. The traditional Western hero wants to protect the townspeople who are taming and civilizing the land while the traditional Western villain wants to stop the civilizing mission to preserve the frontier. The Western formula creates a mutually exclusive binary in that the civilization conquers the frontier. Both cannot exist at the same time. One must be destroyed for the other to live. Or in other words, the hero must dispatch the savage to save the townspeople. It is in the setting of the Western where this conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist is fought.

Cawelti in discussing the binary between the frontier and the social order argues that “the Western requires a means of isolating and intensifying the drama of the frontier encounter between social order and lawlessness.” The wide-open lawlessness of the frontier in the Western genre is contrasted by the small town surrounded by nothing for miles as the lone symbol of civilization and it serves as one of the essential images of the Western genre. Thomas Schatz in *Hollywood Genres* discusses this contrast by stating that “the landscape with its broad expanses and isolated communities was transformed on celluloid into a familiar iconographic arena where civilized met savage in an interminable conflict.” An excellent example of this

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relationship between the frontier and civilization can be seen in the classic Western *the Searchers* directed by John Ford.

*The Searchers* opens with a camera walking out of a house to show the frontier and the return of the protagonist, Ethan Edwards. Ford frames the shot of the frontier with the house itself to not only show the vastness of the frontier but also to illustrate the isolated nature of this house. Ford ends the film with Ethan saving his niece from the Comanche and returning her home. In framing this shot, Ford reconstructs the visual motif at the beginning of the film, but he makes a clear distinction. Although Edwards returns her home, he cannot enter the house and must instead wander the wasteland because he cannot fit into civilization. His inability to enter the house/civilization is directly tied to his perception of civilization and his positionality within it.

Gary J. Hausladen in “Where the Cowboy Rides Away” analyzes how the desolate nature of the Western is one of its key features. “As one looks at these landscapes for the Western, adjectives that repeat themselves include stark, foreboding, dangerous, God-forsaken, but at the same time wide open, challenging, liberating.”200 This division is embodied in the character of Ethan Edwards. He is an ex-Confederate soldier who spends most of the film in the frontier. For Ethan, the Western landscape is both dangerous and liberating in that it is the only place that fits him. He has no interest in the settler lifestyle as seen in his rejection at the end of *The Searchers.* He can fight for settlers, but he cannot join them as there is no place for him there. In *The Six Gun Mystique,* John Cawelti discusses this relationship between man and nature arguing that “the characteristic openness and aridity of the topography also makes the contrast between man and

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nature and between wilderness and society visually strong.”

Ford in *The Searchers* illustrates this contrast in the framing of the opening and ending shot of the film.

Ethan Edwards ends the film not being able to enter the house due to his positionality to wilderness. Ethan cannot live in civilization because it demands that he assimilates to the settler lifestyle. He can protect civilization as embodied in his brother’s homestead, but he cannot stay. In turn, he has some of the same characteristics as the gunslinger but with a couple key differences. The most drastic difference is in the fact that Edwards is not a random mercenary but instead has a personal investment. *The Searchers* as a film investigates this contrast between civilization and the frontier with the character of Ethan standing in for the wilderness. A large majority of the adjectives that Hausladen uses to describe the Western landscape can also be applied to the character of Edwards. Although both the savage and Edwards represent the Western landscape their relationship to the frontier differs in some key places. The differences in this relationship can be seen in the protagonist and antagonist of *The Searchers*.

If Ethan Edwards is our representative of the Western hero, then Scar is the representative of the savage archetype. Scar kidnapped Ethan’s niece and Ethan in turn wants to kill both Scar and his niece due to concerns surrounding miscegenation. However, both Scar and Ethan are mirror reflections of one another not only in their use of violence but in their moral code. Schatz in *Hollywood Genres* in discussing the similarities between the two characters states that “the coincidence of Ethan’s and later, Scar’s unannounced arrivals into the precariously balanced community, coupled with their similar moral codes and renegade reputations, finally make it rather difficult to distinguish between the demon Indian and Redeemer Indian.”

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that both lost large swaths of their family. For Scar, two of his sons were killed by white settlers and for Ethan, his entire family was massacred by Native Americans. Both blame the other side for their loss and this creates a hatred for the other side that verges on mania.

The film begins with these two monoliths that are incapable of change. However, the film ends with a drastically different Ethan Edwards. His worldview and perception of Native Americans is altered during his journey to rescue his niece. His change in perception is directly tied to landscape, specifically to the regenerative properties of the frontier. John Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* states that “in its rocky aridity and climatic extremes the Great Plains landscape embodies the hostile savagery of the Indians and outlaws, while its vast openness, its vistas of snow-covered peaks…suggest the epic courage and regenerative power of the hero.”

In the Western frontier in that the hero can regenerate into something new. In the case of Edwards, he does not kill Scar but instead his partner does in self-defense.

More importantly, when given the chance Edwards does not kill his niece but instead returns her back home. Even though his worldview changes, he still cannot enter civilization. The regenerative capabilities of the frontier change Edwards in some key areas but his worldview for the most part stays the same. It is in the regenerative power of the frontier that we can see the difference between Edwards and Scar. This regenerative power that transforms Edwards is only available to the Western hero. This itself goes back to the conflict essential to the Western genre: civilization v frontier and this conflict is represented in both Edwards and Scar. While Edwards as a character is changing in numerous ways, Scar for the most part remains static. Scar’s static character ties back to the overall purpose of the savage archetype in that it is dispatched by the hero to make way for civilization. At the same time, Scar’s inability to

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change is directly tied to Edwards inhabiting a very similar archetype. Schatz in *Hollywood Genres* discusses the similarities between Scar and Edwards stating that “the threat involves that very same nomadic, self-reliant individuality which society cannot tolerate, and which is shared by both the hero and the Indian.”

Society can only tolerate Edwards in this role due to the possibility of assimilation as Edwards can assimilate while Scar cannot.

Although Edwards ends the film walking back into the frontier, there is still the possibility of assimilation. Assimilation within the Western genre is directly tied to civilization, specifically whether one can peacefully assimilate into society. Edward ends the film on the borderlands between the frontier and civilization. The apparent inhospitality of the desert makes its suitable for both the Western genre and the post-apocalyptic genre for its current state and what it could be transformed into.

The Tiny Town and the Encompassing Desert

The desert is a natural occurring biome that is defined by a lack of precipitation that supports spare vegetation and not much more than that. For all intents and purposes, the desert biome represents a wasteland but potential in the conflict between man and nature, specifically the terraforming of the desert into an area that is hospitable for human habitation. The conflict between man and nature is that of violence in that man must drastically alter the landscape via the damming of rivers, the adding of flora and massive irrigation. This new terraformed land can now be settled and in turn the frontier is conquered. In *Savage Perils*, author Patrick Sharp in discussing Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis and the relationship between conflict and civilization states that the “the colonist had to give up the aspects of comfortable civilized European life to survive the struggle with savagery. Turner’s colonist was the embodiment of

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this Americanization process.” For Turner, the frontier served as a site of regeneration in that Europeans would be transformed into Americans. Or in other words, an “Eden of sorts.

For this process to happen, the European became part of the conflict that was inherent to the frontier. In conquering the desert, the settlers fought the land and won, and an example of this victory can be seen in the city of Las Vegas, a metaphorical and literal city in the middle of a desert. For Vegas to exist, the U.S. Government dammed the Colorado River that in turn created Lake Mead, a man-made lake that supplies almost all of Vegas’s water. Vegas is representative of the regenerative potential that the desert has in the Western genre. Of transforming nothing into something.

At the same time, Las Vegas also has a connotation in the post-apocalyptic genre as seen in the video game *Fallout: New Vegas*. New Vegas (Las Vegas) and Hoover Dam survive the nuclear apocalypse and become beacons in the post-apocalyptic wastelands representing electricity and capitalism. What both Las Vegas and New Vegas represent is the potential that the desert has. Although it is barren, empty, devoid of water and near all flora and fauna it can still be terraformed, and it is in this process that man engages in conflict with nature. Man, drastically alters the environment to support a literal city in the middle of the desert. Sharp in discussing Theodore Roosevelt’s Darwinist interpretation of history states that he “believed that the American character could continue to develop and progress as long as Americans chose the strenuous life of conflict and toil instead of resting on their laurels.”

This sense of conflict is an essential part of both the Western and the post-apocalyptic genre. However, the frontier only makes up half of the Western landscape with civilization making up the second half.

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206 Ibid., 62.
While the frontier is embodied as a wide-open, dangerous, god-forsaken and liberating locale, civilization serves as the inverse. A small town in the middle of nowhere being encroached by the frontier is the traditional symbol of civilization in the Western genre. Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* in discussing the pervasive nature of this image states that “the Western has come to center about the image of the isolated town or ranch or fort surrounded by the vast open grandeur of prairie or desert and connected to the rest of civilized world by a railroad, a stagecoach, or simply a trail.” Although the town is connected to civilization by a tenuous link, for the most part, the town is on its own for food, protection and most everything else. These small towns in the middle of the frontier almost act as a sort of cancer in that by spreading, the power of frontier is sapped as both the frontier and civilization cannot co-exist as one must conquer the other.

This image of the small defenseless town can be inverted in the post-apocalyptic genre as seen in the film *The Book of Eli* When Eli and Solara approach a house in the middle of nowhere, they encounter an elderly couple who offer them tea and biscuits. Yet, the couple lace the food with sleeping pills, so they can knock out the visitors. Eli and Solara quickly learn that the couple are cannibals who lure unsuspecting travelers to their deaths. It is through the inversion of the Western landscape that the post-apocalyptic genre creates something that is both foreign and familiar. In discussing the production of space, Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* argues that “what is involved, therefore is a production of space. Not merely a space of ideas, an ideal space, but a social and a mental space. An emergence. A decrypting of the space that went before. Thought and philosophy came to the surface, rose from the depths, but life was decrypted as a result, and society, along with space.” The post-apocalyptic wasteland is itself decrypted

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from Western frontier, a space that went before it. The portrayal of the elderly couple as cannibals reinforces the destruction of the social contract, an incisive portrayal of the foreign. In the traditional Western, the townspeople create tight bonds of community due to their isolation from civilization.

The post-apocalyptic genre inverts this sense of community by creating an unending feeling of paranoia surrounding the survivors. This aura of paranoia makes it hard to trust fellow survivors. In Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We’ll not go Home Again by Claire P. Curtis in discussing the need for vigilance states “the apocalyptic event, through its destruction of official manifestations of authority (politicians, police, military), reveal humans fighting against one another for their survival…this world demands eternal vigilance.” However, the need for eternal vigilance must be tempered as the reconstruction of the social contract is needed to rebuild civilization as a whole. It is through the creation of these small isolated towns that civilization will again spread throughout the wasteland.

The isolation of the Western town in both the Western and the post-apocalyptic genre serves not only the story but also in the production of the film to drive down costs. Filming a post-apocalyptic film in the desert allows for the filmmaker to imply that the apocalypse is much worse without showing it. A great example of this implication can be seen in the film A Boy and His Dog and how LQ Jones created a post-apocalyptic aesthetic that was indebted to the Western genre.

A Boy and His Dog: Wasteland on a Budget

In Chapter 2, I analyzed the haunting of Western genre gender norms in the post-apocalyptic genre and how they create a straightjacket of masculinity and femininity. This

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straightjacket can be seen in *A Boy and His Dog* with the characters of Vic and Quilla June. In my analysis, I briefly touched upon the division between above ground and Topeka and how it represents the division between civilization and the frontier. For this section, I will be mostly focusing on the above ground. However, before I start my analysis of *A Boy and His Dog*, I first want to discuss director LQ Jones’ involvement in the Western genre. Before directing *A Boy and His Dog* in 1975, Jones was a working actor who spent most of his career working in both television and film Westerns starring in such films as *The Wild Bunch, Major Dundee, Hang Em High and Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, just to name a few. In television, he guest starred on shows such as *Laramie, Wagon Train, The Virginian, Rawhide* and *Gunsmoke*, among others. Jones in his acting career picked up an intimate knowledge of the Western genre and its representation.

In an interview with Jen Yamato from Rotten Tomatoes, Jones says: “the thing that bothers me about Westerns, on which I’m a fair expect’ cause I’ve done about three hundred of them…a Western is a very simple morality play. The good and bad should be evident, and you must let them work it out. But it must stay simple.” For Jones, the simplicity of the Western formula is the key to the Western appeal as it tells a story that is both easy to follow but has untold complexity.

However, as I stated in Chapter 2, as a post-apocalyptic movie, the actual plot of *A Boy and His Dog* has little to no connection to the traditional Western story. Instead of cowboys, dance halls and John Wayne, you have telepathic dogs, cannibals, and Don Johnson. Even though the film’s plot does not overlap with the Western, Jones appropriates the Western

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aesthetic and landscape to create the post-apocalyptic wasteland that is portrayed in *A Boy and His Dog*. It is in this wasteland that the connection between the two genres becomes explicit.

The film begins with footage of numerous nuclear bombs going off and a transition to text telling the audience that World War IV lasted for five days. The first images of Vic and Blood that the audience sees are them hiding behind a destroyed automobile in an endless desert. The transition from atomic bombs going off to Vic and Blood roaming the desert made sense for both the film’s the story and production. In an interview with Christian Nelson of *Camera in the Sun*, Jones states that the desert setting in the film was a lot cheaper than what the studio wanted to do, adding that “…they were going to build it for...750 (thousand) for three square blocks. The final sets for *A Boy and His Dog* covered 4 ½ square miles. That’s a little bit of difference, we brought in 52 tons of debris to scatter about the sets…and our budget was $ 450,000.”

Instead of building an incredibly expensive set, Jones set the film in the desert and brought debris to season the landscape.

An excellent example of this seasoning is seen in the numerous broken telephone poles that have been placed throughout the desert. Not only is it a good visual image but it also implies that communication has broken down, which reinforces the isolating nature of the Western landscape. Cawleti in discussing the aesthetics of the Western states that “it’s openness, freshness and grandeur also play an important role in the Western, thus, the open prairie around the town serves not only as a haven of lawlessness and savagery, but as a backdrop of epic magnitude and even, at times, as a source of regenerating power.” However, it is in the desert that the hero acquires the skills to survive and even thrive as I discussed in Chapter 1. In setting

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the film in a literal desert, Jones not only appropriates the Western landscape, but he also develops the metaphorical desert that plays a big role in the post-apocalyptic genre.

A recurring tenet of the post-apocalyptic genre is the forced removal of individuals from safe and secure locations into never ending chaos that takes on the form of a desert. This desert/chaos forces individuals to scramble to survive. In *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction*, author William Katteberg argues that post-apocalyptic settings are not only literal deserts but also metaphorical deserts. “Whether the result of weapons of mass destruction, natural disaster, human venality, or accident, post-apocalyptic settings create a ‘desert’ in which people are thrown from the familiar and must confront alien dangers and seek new opportunities.”

In the collapse of the state, formerly safe and secure locations become unforgiving and dangerous. It is in this danger that these same places become places full of potential that in turn mirrors the Western landscape. In discussing the relationship between danger and regeneration in the Western landscape, Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* states that “in its rocky aridity and climatic extremes the Great Plains landscape embodies the hostile savagery of the Indians and outlaws, while its vast openness, its vistas of snow covered peaks…suggest the epic courage and regenerative power of the hero.”

In both the real desert of the Western and the metaphorical desert of the post-apocalyptic, the hero encounters the possibility of regeneration. This regeneration is then tied to acquisition of skills as seen in the creation of the universal savage. An excellent example of this regeneration is the character of Max. He loses his family and as a result, he roams the wasteland helping groups. It is in this roaming the wasteland that he works towards the possibility of regeneration. It is through

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214 Cawelti, *The Six Gun Mystique*, 69-70
regeneration that the hero acquires the skills to not only survive but thrive in the “desert”. In *A Boy and His Dog*, Vic encounters two deserts: one literal and one metaphorical.

The Real and the Metaphorical Desert

Above ground, Vic inhabits a literal desert that is dry, dusty, dangerous and where he must be on guard always. However, it is in this dangerous location where civilization begins the process of regeneration. This process of regeneration is slow but steady as seen in the construction of small camps of survivors. It is in the creation of these small groups that civilization is starting to rebound. When Vic follows Quilla June into Topeka, he encounters a metaphorical desert that is just as deadly as the literal desert. Topeka gives the illusion of civilization and the illusion of regeneration.

Instead of civilization, Vic has found a dictatorship that is propping up a perverted and warped interpretation of 1950’s Americana where one is killed if they run afoul of the leadership. Topeka’s relationship to murder echoes the above ground in that survivors are gunned down for little to no reason. Metaphorical deserts are not only limited to the traditional Western landscape as seen in the case of Topeka but instead can inhabit any space. Formerly bustling cities become graveyards as nature overtakes the remains. In discussing the transformation of cities in post-apocalyptic media and the construction of metaphorical deserts, Katteberg in *Future West* states that “in stories set in urban areas, the collapse of society and the breakdown of the modern technological infrastructure turn cities into deserts with the wilderness reclaiming much of the built environment. In the absence of social and technological safety nets, human nature in all its foibles and potential is revealed.”

In both the above ground and in Topeka, the metaphorical desert exists as the connective tissue between the post-apocalyptic genre and the Western genre.

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215 Ibid., 166.
In creating the division between the wasteland and Topeka, Jones reinforces the division between the frontier and civilization that is so inherent in the Western genre.

Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* discusses the use of Western topography arguing that it “helps dramatize more intensely the clash of characters and the thematic conflicts of the story. These dramatic resources of setting can of course be more or less skillful by the Western writer or film director, but even at their flattest have they a tendency to elevate commonplace plots.” In the case of *A Boy and His Dog* the use of the Western landscape does not elevate the plot but it helps to elevate the post-apocalyptic aesthetic that Jones creates.

This aesthetic can be somewhat difficult to tie down due to the near infinite variety in apocalyptic events. However, like the Western, there are specific landscapes that elevate the genre. In “Surrounding by Decay: Apocalyptic Fascination in the Modern World” Alyssa Ryan in discussing the recurring portrayal of the end of the world argues that “although some narratives include alien invaders, natural disasters, zombies, or a host of other explanations for the apocalypse, these representations typically feature destroyed or overgrown cities dotted with dilapidated, decaying buildings and a significant change in population or daily life.” At the center of this aesthetic is the idea of creating something foreign and yet familiar to the audience. In looking at an overgrown city in the post-apocalyptic genre, the audience can encounter something that is familiar while at the same time encountering something that is foreign. In the case of *A Boy and His Dog*, the audience encounters the desert while at the same time encountering the wasteland this division shows in the sets for the film. In choosing the sets for the film Jones made the conscious choice of finding a location that was nearly void of life. In his

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words: “we had spent so much time and so much money, we had to find what we considered the right place. How many trees did you see in the picture above? Zero. How many blades of grass did you see? None. So, this is what I wanted, because I sat down and tried to figure out.” 218 Jones shot the film at Coyote Lake, a dry lake bed in the Mojave Desert. He chose Coyote Lake after learning what would happen if hundreds of atomic bombs all went off at the same time:

Once it starts, it’s (water) going to go inland just as far as it needs to. And when it retreats, what’s gonna be left? A Mess and mud-mud being the operating phrase. So, if it is now X number of years later, the mud has dried. Therefore, I have desert. So, I went to a place where it had at one time been a huge lake, and we used that. 219

The near void of life sells the post-apocalyptic wasteland and what it means to live in it.

At the same time, the emptiness of the desert contrasts against the claustrophobia of Topeka as Vic inhabits both places in his journey. In discussing the adaptability of the landscape in The Six Gun Mystique John, Cawelti argues:

[The] western landscape is uniquely adaptable to certain kinds of strong visual effects because of the sharp contrasts of light and shadow characteristic of an arid climate together with the topographical contrasts of plain and mountain, rocky outcrops and flat deserts, steep bare canyons and forested plateaus. 220

It is in the image of Vic and Blood traversing the wasteland that one can draw a direct line to Ethan Edwards traversing the Great Plains looking for his niece. The film both opens and ends with Vic and Blood making their way across the wasteland creating the feeling that the wasteland never ends as it is always in the background of the shot. The relationship between movement and the landscape plays a pivotal role in the Western formula 221. This relationship is important due to the openness of the landscape, which allows the director to use it like an

218 Nelson, “Camera Q&A: L.Q. Jones on A Boy and His Dog, Westerns & more”
219 Ibid.
220 Cawelti, The Six Gun Mystique, 68.
221 A great example of this use of movement can be seen in The Searchers in how the film both opens and ends with the protagonist moving to and from civilization. Shane, the Mad Max sequels and The Book of Eli are just a handful of films that use this motif of movement to illustrate the landscape.
additional character. Cawelti states that the “special openness of the topography of the Great Plains and western desert has made it particularly expressive for the portrayal of movement.

Against the background of this terrain, a skillful director can create infinite variations of space ranging from long panoramas to close ups and they can clearly articulate movement across these various spaces.”

The openness and emptiness of the landscape forces the viewer to focus on the movement on the screen as it contrasts against the emptiness of near void of life. In discussing social space, Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* states that “space appears as a realm of objectivity, yet it exists in a social sense only for activity- for (and by virtue of) walking or riding on horseback, or traveling by car, boat, train, plane or some other means…in one sense, then space proposes homologous paths to choose from, while in another sense it invests particular paths with special value.”

Both the Western and the post-apocalyptic genre invest in particular paths through the landscape.

The *Mad Max* series of films always ends with Max going into the wasteland after saving the day. *The Book of Eli* supplements this motif by having Solara go into the wasteland to return home to save her mother. Unlike Vic, Eli and Max, Solara has a clear-cut plan on what to do and where to go. Cawelti discusses the use of movement when he argues that “no matter how often one sees it, there is something inescapably effective about that scene, beloved of Western directors, in which a rider appears like an infinitely small dot at the far end of a great empty horizon and then rides towards us across the intervening space.”

What makes this motif so effective is that it can exist without any other elements in that it is a completely visual image, one that does not require text or sound to deliver its meaning to the audience.

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222 Ibid., 69-70.
223 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 191
224 Ibid., 70
In his interview with Rotten Tomatoes, Jones also points out that a Western can work without sound:

*A Boy and His Dog*, as we put it together, I could sit and watch it with no sound and know exactly what was happening on the screen, which is what it should do, which Westerns used to do…they are not intellectual pictures. They are very simple people, simple truths done simply.\(^{225}\)

However, in *A Boy and His Dog*, the simple truths of the Western are translated into the chaos of the post-apocalyptic wasteland. Although the visual motifs remain, the simple stories that Jones praises the Western genre for are missing in his directorial debut with the dance hall girl and the railroad being replaced with a murderous robot and an underground society that created a warped sense of 1950’s Americana.

Even though the plot is not a traditional Western, Jones still uses his career as a Western actor to create one of the most standard post-apocalyptic settings: the desert that serves as an effective setting for the film’s story and its production. Its story is affective as it implies that the world has ended, and nothing remains other than desert. Lefebvre in discussing empty space states “empty space in the sense of a mental and social void which facilitates the socialization of a not-yet-social realm is actually merely a representation of space.”\(^{226}\) Within the post-apocalyptic genre, space is considered empty due to a lack of socialization. The adoption of empty space is effective production wise as it is more cost effective than building new sets (as discussed above).

Jones’s use of the desert in the film fits with the idea of wilderness within post-apocalyptic stories. In *Future West*, William Katteberg discusses the idea of the wilderness in the post-apocalyptic genre stating:

\(^{225}\) Jen Yamamoto, “LQ Jones on *A Boy and His Dog*: The RT Interview.”

\(^{226}\) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 191.
whether set in the desert spaces of the American West or in the remains of cities, post-holocaust settings function as wildernesses where normal institutions, community networks, social customs, political processes, and law give way to ad hoc, often vigilante practices.227

It is in the desert of A Boy and His Dog where Jones makes the contrast between law and order explicit in the differences between the wasteland that exists aboveground, and the underground facility, Topeka. While above ground represents unabashed chaos, Topeka represents fascism, where people who do not follow the rules are brutally murdered. This division between chaos and (extreme) order is an important binary in the post-apocalyptic genre. The need to re-establish control over the wasteland leads to dictators who rule with an iron fist. Katerberg in Future West analyzes how post-apocalyptic fiction questions Frederick Jackson Turner’s idea of progress. “More than Turner, who believed that science and technology could take the place of the frontier West as the key source of American progress, it questions the story of progress; instead of progress and freedom, there is a dialectic of (often despotic) order and (often terrifying) chaos.”228 In the absence of order will be chaos and in the absence of chaos will be order.

At the center of the post-apocalyptic space is a desire to return to something that no longer exists. Katerberg in discussing the cyclical return to the primitive argues that “but the cynicism and despair common to these stories also reveal how the weight of modern history has reshaped this mythic sensibility…such cyclical returns may be our fate, post holocaust literature suggests, but the lesion is one of despair, cynicism, and melancholy as often as it one of hope for progress.”229 This cyclical return to the primitive fits within a larger contradiction of space. Lefebvre in discussing this contradiction sates that “inasmuch as the capacity to produce space produces only reproductions, it can generate nothing but the repetitive, noting but

227 Katerberg, Future West, 168.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid., 169.
repetition…and mimesis (simulation, imitation) becomes merely a reproducibility grounded in received knowledge, technology and power, because reproducibility is what ensures the renewal (or reproduction) of existing social relations.\textsuperscript{230} The cycle of apocalyptic destruction in turn recreates the same space that caused the end of the world.

The post-apocalyptic genre creates these extremes due to the extreme landscape. In popular culture, post-apocalyptic societies are often pigeonholed into one or the other. Although there are examples of change (e.g. Furiosa in \textit{Fury Road}). Jones discusses this division between chaos and order states in an interview:

\begin{quote}
[A]nd I know pretty much what you’re like when you tell me what frightens you the most, or what you find the most repulsive. I myself, I’d rather be dead than live down in Topeka. But that’s my division…You want to be controlled- cared for, of course, but controlled – or do you want to do it yourself.\textsuperscript{231}
\end{quote}

It is in dictatorial control that many post-apocalyptic societies eventually collapse. LQ Jones in setting \textit{A Boy and His Dog} in the desert helped to create one of the standard post-apocalyptic film settings: the desert. Although the plot does not resemble a traditional Western, Jones’s use of Western visual motifs and aesthetics helps to bring together the Western and the post-apocalyptic genres. The film had an indifferent box office result, but it became a cult hit that directly inspired many different post-apocalyptic films and video games. More importantly, it inspired George Miller, a doctor, to create his own post-apocalyptic film titled \textit{Mad Max}.

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Mad Max: The Global Gunslinger}
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While \textit{A Boy and His Dog} portrayed a wasteland devoid of law and order, \textit{Mad Max} portrayed a state trying to hold on to order while collapsing. The protagonists of both films exist on opposite ends of the spectrum with Vic inhabiting the savage and Max inhabiting the cowboy

\begin{footnotes}
\item Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 377.
\item Nelson, “Camera Q&A: L.Q. Jones on \textit{A Boy and His Dog}, Westerns & more”
\end{footnotes}
hero who is trying to keep order. However, where *A Boy and His Dog* and *Mad Max* share similarities is in the budget. While LQ Jones made *A Boy* for $450,000, George Miller made *Mad Max* for $350,000, a shoestring budget. In crafting the film, Miller lacked the career experience that Jones acquired during his decades working in Westerns but, given his personal history, he came to use many of the same visual motifs and aesthetics that were used in *A Boy and His Dog*. First, before Miller directed *Mad Max*, he was an emergency room doctor who saw numerous deadly injuries brought on by the lack of a speed limit and unsafe driving.

In an interview with Paul Byrnes of Australian Screen, Miller discusses the impact that his childhood experiences had on the story of *Mad Max*. “Chinchilla itself is west of the Darling Downs. Completely flat lands. Loamy soil. Heat haze. Burnt land. And with a very intense car culture…and there were those long flat roads where there were no speed limit and people would just go.” The adjectives that Miller uses to describe where he grew up share similarities to the traditional Western genre landscape.

The dry, dirty, dusty and barren Western landscape of John Ford became the dry, dirty, dusty and barren apocalyptic wasteland of George Miller. The movement of cowboys through Monument Valley was translated to become V8 Interceptors through the Australian Outback as highway patrol officers and motorcycle gangs stood in for heroes and savages. As I discussed in Chapter 3, as a translated gunslinger, Max’s ability is not with guns but in driving. The use of movement across the screen is incredibly important in the film as the film begins with Max running towards danger and the film ends with him running from danger.

It is with vehicles, with the desert landscape as a witness, where the transformation of Max from police officer to burnt out drifter takes place. It is in the death of his family having

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been run down and killed by a motorcycle gang that transforms Max. However, a lot of the filming Miller had to do was on illegally closed roads. In an interview with Paul Byrnes, Miller conveys that in the filming of *Mad Max*:

> We did close roads without permission. We...in those days there was no...there was a legal twilight zone, I mean there’s not thing in the law to give permission to go and drive a car and smash it in the street. I mean no-one had made these kinds of movies at the time.233

To get the right amount of destruction, Miller had his own car destroyed in the beginning of the film to create the aesthetic of destruction. This aesthetic creates a visceral feeling in the audience watching these automobiles getting destroyed while at the same time creating the world of *Mad Max*. In *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film*, Roslyn Weaver argues that “the flat and empty landscape confronts viewers and offers characters no respite or escape from the violence of the villains...the land becomes another enemy, enclosing those who seek it as refuge or attempt to leave it.”234 The world of *Mad Max* is a world predicated on the car. The film opens with the Main Patrol Force (Highway Patrol) chasing down the Nightrider, an outlaw who stole a police car. The chase itself begins in a proxy of the Western frontier, a dry, dirty, dusty and mostly barren landscape.

However, the chase quickly moves into populated areas that stand in as a proxy for civilization. Yet, none of the patrol officers can catch the Nightrider until Max dispatches him due to his skill. In discussing the relationship of movement between the antagonists and protagonists in Western, Cawelti argues that “the townspeople are static and largely incapable of movement beyond their little settlement. The outlaws or savages can move freely across the

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233 Ibid.
landscape. The hero, though a friend of the townspeople, has the lawless power of movement.”

Max dispatches the Nightrider and brings order back to outback but it does not matter since he is fighting against the inevitable. Max’s status as a gunslinger is created in this film as even though he dispatches the Nightrider, society is still collapsing around him and there is nothing he can do to change that.

It is in this collapse that Max negotiates his identity as a police officer. “Look. Any longer out on that road and I’m one of them, you know? A terminal crazy…only I got a bronze badge to say I’m one of the good guys.” As Max negotiates with his identity as a police officer and what it means to keep law and order, society is collapsing around him, and to show this collapse, Miller changes the aesthetic of the film from the populated city to the sparsely populated outback. As the nation state begins to succumb to the apocalypse event, the perception of law and order changes in tune as the outback becomes a lawless wasteland.

As Max’s descent into burnt out drifter progresses throughout the film, fewer people are showing up, until it is only Max left on the screen. The aesthetic of Mad Max both follows and challenges the historical setting of the Western genre. Cawelti discusses the historical relationship between chaos and order by arguing that “the relatively brief stage in the social evolution of the West when outlaws or Indians posed a threat to the community’s stability has been erected into a timeless epic past in which heroic individuals…stand poised against the threat of lawlessness or savagery.” The Western is centered around this construction of the past where civilization is always ready to take over.

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237 Cawelti, The Six Gun Mystique, 66.
Miller inverts the traditional Western story where civilization extinguishes the frontier, to the frontier dispatches civilization. Miller also inverts the Western story by setting *Mad Max* in the future for both story and production reasons. In setting the film in the future, Miller could use the trope of science fiction as a precautionary genre warning the viewers of what could happen to the landscape in the future. According to Miller, “we set the film in the future mainly because once I’d basically contrived the story, which was very, very intense in its incidents, it felt like it was just too hyperbolic…so we thought if we set it in the future we might sort of…it might take on a soft of movie fable-type quality.” In setting the film in the future, Miller juxtaposes the foreign and familiar, a trope that plays a big role in the post-apocalyptic genre.

Miller sets the film soon, specifically making sure not to give a year, so it could be anytime soon. By failing to create a chronology, Miller relies on the familiarity of the world to the audience. At the same time, he creates a foreign scenario in that the nation-state is collapsing due to a lack of natural resources. For the audience, they see a familiar world paired with a foreign scenario. Even though the film is set in the immediate future, the aesthetic that Miller uses echoes the American West. At the heart of the post-apocalyptic genre is the merger of the Western and Science Fiction: Science Fiction destroys the world while the Western embodies the post-apocalyptic landscape. These two genres are also pointing in different temporal directions. While the Western is pointed towards the past, Science Fiction for the most part is pointed towards the future. In his book *Frontiers Past and Future*, Carl Abbott discusses the relationship between the two genres stating:

> [E]ach specific story- such as the narrative of homesteading by families and small communities- has served as a template for many works of science fiction. The result is

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238 Byrnes, “George Miller Interview”
bodies of fiction that link concrete aspects of nineteenth and twentieth-century America to the twenty-first century and beyond.\textsuperscript{239}

More importantly, this linking of the future and past transcends the American West in that the story of Max although fitting the gunslinger mythos also fits within numerous different mythologies from around the world. In his words:

In Japan, they called it a samurai movie and said, you must know Kurosawa. I’d never heard of Kurosawa. In France, they said, oh it’s a Western on wheels. In Scandinavia, they said he’s a Viking. And basically, I began to realize that somehow there as something else going on there and that was the realization that there is a collective unconsciousness going on.\textsuperscript{240}

Unlike \textit{A Boy and His Dog} that had middling box office success and later became a cult hit, \textit{Mad Max} was a financial success earning more than $100 million worldwide in gross revenue. Although the film originally received polarizing reviews, it has grown in critical acclaim. More importantly, Miller was able to take the world that Jones created in \textit{A Boy and His Dog} and refine it to make it more commercial.

The world that Jones created is the landscape of the Western covered in the detritus of civilization. Jones consciously played up the foreign nature of the post-apocalyptic genre and met with audience abstraction. A more commercial version that makes a more direct link to the Western genre. Per both Jones and Harlan Elision, the writer of \textit{A Boy and His Dog}, Miller consciously took the aesthetic to make \textit{Mad Max} and the subsequent sequels. In an interview with Christian Nelson from a camerainthesun, Jones explains that:

George Miller was the guy who directed \textit{Mad Max}. I didn’t like it that much, but I liked the next one better, \textit{The Road Warrior}. But they asked him, how did you come up with the idea for \textit{The Road Warrior}? and he said, it’s very simple. I just picked \textit{A Boy and His Dog} and went commercial…but he was right and I’m wrong.\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{239} Carl Abbott, \textit{Frontiers Past and Future: Science Fiction and the American West} (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 30.
\textsuperscript{240} Byrnes, “George Miller Interview”
\textsuperscript{241} Nelson, “Camera Q&A: L.Q. Jones on A Boy and His Dog, Westerns & more”
In *The Road Warrior*, Miller makes the connection between the Western and the post-apocalyptic more explicit. In appropriating the world to make *Mad Max*, Miller cements the Western aesthetic in relation to the post-apocalyptic genre. Although *A Boy and His Dog* predated *Mad Max*, *Mad Max* became incredibly influential not only due to its adoption of the Western aesthetic but also due to its cost. For decades, it held the Guinness world record for the most profitable film grossing over one hundred million dollars on a $390,000 budget. Although Miller starts to use the aesthetic in *Mad Max*, he perfects the Western aesthetic in *The Road Warrior*.

Miller himself saw the first film as a rehearsal for *The Road Warrior* stating that “*Mad Max* was a rehearsal for *Mad Max 2* and I think every film that you do is a kind of a rehearsal for the next one. So, you’re developing your technique and you’re trying to fathom film language.”

It is in the post-apocalyptic wasteland where Miller starts to tie down the connections between the two genres. As I stated in my analysis of *The Road Warrior* in Chapter 3, Max has become a drifter who finds himself involved in a conflict between settlers at an oil refinery and bandits. However, in *The Road Warrior* is no longer just the landscape but it also the clothing, the characters and the plot are all directly tied to the Western genre.

**The Gunslinger in Black Leather**

For clothing, Max and the settlers are using B Western motifs surrounding the color of clothes and morality. White hat represents good and a black hat represents bad. As I have stated earlier it is in *The Road Warrior* that Max fully inhabits the gunslinger character in that he is a mercenary who wanders the wasteland trying to escape his personal failures. In filming *The Road Warrior*, Miller shot the film at Broken Hill, isolated mining town 800 miles west of

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242 Byrnes, “George Miller Interview”
Sydney that dealt with a shrinking population due to mine closures. In discussing his choice of the town to produce *The Road Warrior*, Miller states:

> I mean it’s wonderful also, shooting in the desert. And we were one of the first films into Broken Hill which, as you know, is a mining town so it had a lot of infrastructure…and it’s since then become quite, you know, quite a location for people because you’ve got access to the desert with a fairly decent urban center.\textsuperscript{243}

The desert is key to the film due to the oil refinery standing in for the motif of the isolated town beset by marauders and bandits. Cawelti discusses the relationship between landscape and plot stating that “the townspeople hover defensively in their settlement, threatened by the outlaws or Indians who are associated with the inhospitable and uncontrollable elements of the surrounding landscape.”\textsuperscript{244} Instead of Native Americans and bandits attacking a small isolated town, it is instead raiders in bondage gear attacking settlers at an abandoned oil refinery. However, Miller is using the Western formula and making subtle tweaks to the characters. Although Max fits the archetype of the gunslinger in his actions throughout the sequels, he also differs from the archetype in a key way.

> Although Max carries a shotgun, he rarely uses it due to a lack of ammo. Instead, he uses it to intimidate individuals like the Gyro Captain. Instead, his supernatural skill is in his driving ability. He is the only person who could drive the tanker at the end of the film. Yet, it is these subtle tweaks that made *Mad Max* more commercially successful than *A Boy and His Dog*. In relying more on Western archetypes, Miller created a post-apocalyptic story that was both foreign and yet familiar to the audience. In *Mad Max* and the subsequent sequels, the audience already knew the signs and symbols of the gunslinger making it easy for the audience to buy into the world.

\textsuperscript{243}Byrnes, “George Miller Interview”

\textsuperscript{244}Cawelti, *The Six Gun Mystique*, 66.
The post-apocalyptic genre relies on the construction of foreign and familiar to construct the wasteland. One must straddle the line as if you go too far you can end up alienating your audience as seen in *A Boy and His Dog*, which although using the Western aesthetic was too foreign for audiences who rejected it. The film was portrayed as misogynist, violent, and pornographic but Jones never cared about the reaction stating: “half of the people adore it. Half of the people detest it. And I don’t care whether it’s either one for you because if I can make you mad, then I’ve earned your money. If I can titillate you, then I’ve earned your money.”

For Jones, the backlash surrounding the film ended up being a silver lining since it drove people to see the film. However, unlike *Mad Max* who grossed over $100 million dollars, *A Boy and His Dog* became a cult hit.

Jones and Miller had the same problem in trying to market each one of their films. Both used the Western aesthetic, but each director marketed their film in a distinct way. For Jones, he focused on the titillation of the film while contrasting shots of the above ground with Topeka. Miller on the other hand focused on shots of automobiles and violence to sell the film. For *Mad Max*, Miller leans on the gunslinger archetype and imagery to sell the character of Max specifically focusing on Max’s status as a police officer and his attempt at trying to keep order. Even though Miller appropriated the Western aesthetic from *A Boy and His Dog*, he reigned the foreignness of Jones (telepathic dog, electroejaculation, etc) and instead used familiar touchstones.

*Mad Max* does not take place in the year 2024 after World War IV. Instead it takes places soon where humanity is running out of gasoline. The familiar touchstones that Miller adds are Western archetypes. Max in the original film is a lawman who becomes a gunslinger after the

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245 Jen Yamamoto,” LQ Jones on *A Boy and His Dog*: The RT Interview.”
death of his family. While Toecutter represents the savage archetype. Abbott in *Frontiers Past and Future* in discussing the merger between the Western and Science Fiction states that “the first is through imitation and direct borrowing from the Western, that distinct genre of novels, movies, and imagery that revolve around cowboys, outlaws, lawmen, and other strong individuals set against the large, seemingly empty West of the 19th century.”

The post-apocalyptic aesthetic that Miller uses is a continuation of the merger between the Western and Science Fiction. Miller in constructing the plot of the film had the three groups essential to the Western formula: protagonist, antagonist and townspeople. In pairing down the plot, Miller used color to differentiate between the groups.

Although having completely different box office success both *A Boy and His Dog* and *Mad Max* were two of the most influential films in the post-apocalyptic genre. *Mad Max* and its subsequent sequels have a dramatic influence on the portrayal of the post-apocalyptic in popular culture. This influence is not only found in films like *Waterworld, Tank Girl, Doomsday* and many more but in artists ranging from Billy Idol to Tupac to Beyoncé and in television shows, literature and video games. Both films were also incredibly influential in the creation of *Fallout*, the computer role-playing game that has spawned seven sequels. The game relies heavily on construction of underground bunkers that share similarities with that of Topeka while taking visual cues from the *Mad Max* series.

The desert has become a standard setting for post-apocalyptic cinema due to low production costs along with the story implications of devastation and isolation surrounding the end of the world. It is easier and cheaper to shoot a post-apocalyptic film in the desert and imply that the world is over than it is to create sets that replicate this idea. The absence of civilization in

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both films is directly linked to the apparent absence of sustainable life in the desert. Lefebvre in discussing the relationship between social space and empty space states that “space is conceived of as being transformed into lived experience by a social subject, and is governed by determinants which may be practical or biosocial…of any historically generated space, however, it would be more accurate to say that it played a socializing role than that it was itself socialized.”²⁴⁷ Yet, the desert is not an empty space as it socializes individuals to live within it.

Stake Land: Horrors of the Post-Apocalypse

Even though the desert as absence has become a standard setting for post-apocalyptic cinema. the near infinite variations of apocalyptic make room for all sorts of settings (including., oceans, jungles, space, etc.). These variations can be seen in films such as Waterworld (1995), Oblivion (2013), and Passengers (2016), etc. The film Stake Land (2010) offers an inverse environment to the desert wasteland devoid of life provided by the films discussed above. Stake Land portrays a wasteland that is flush with nature but is still nearly devoid of humanity. Stake Land portrays a post-apocalyptic wasteland that is brought on via a pandemic of vampires that nearly wipes out humanity. In the aftermath of the pandemic, humanity has been forced to create small rural pockets to survive. At the same time, radical evangelical militias have been formed who see the vampire pandemic as the Lord’s work.

The budget for Stake Land was $625,000 and like the first two films it had to make aesthetic choices brought on by its low budget. But, instead of retreating to the desert to create a wasteland, director Jim Mickle shot the film in forested areas and in rural towns to create the post-apocalyptic aesthetic. In an interview with Cleaver Patterson from Starburst Magazine, Mickle discusses the shooting locations and what he was looking for stating that “we shot on my

²⁴⁷ Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 190-191
dad’s farm where I grew up in Pennsylvania, so we were constantly writing for places and things we knew we had close by…we wanted to make a film about Americana and not about an apocalypse.” In shooting the film, Mickle shot locations that he knew could work for the aesthetic that he was creating.

Americana and nostalgia play a pivotal role in the film in a different way than *A Boy and His Dog*, which also used the same concepts. In the case of *A Boy and His Dog*, Jones uses Americana in the creation of Topeka to both harken back to an earlier time while at the same time justifying the dictatorship in Topeka. *Stake Land* plays it straight via the construction of these small communities. It is in these communities that survivors must take care of one another or be eaten alive by vampires. It is a return to a simpler time, a time that the Western genre explores in depth. It is in these small communities where civilization is continuing. At the same time, it is also where civilization is the most vulnerable.

Although the film is post-apocalyptic, Mickle first envisioned the film as a horror film with vampires and then tacked on the post-apocalyptic setting towards the end of writing to tie the diverse elements together. *Stake Land* was originally envisioned as a web series set in the modern day. In an interview with Ryan Turek from Comingsoon.net, Mickle in discussing the genesis of the idea states that “it was a webs series and it took place in modern day and there was almost like an FBI conspiracy that there were vampires, but they were trying to cover them up.” The post-apocalyptic genre with its debt to the Western served as the connective tissue

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that brought the numerous parts together under a cohesive banner. In an interview with Paul Devine from The Peoples Movies, Mickle discusses the hybridity of the film stating:

I adore the western genre, and part of Stake Land comes from the fact that it’s difficult to pull off a Western these days. We obviously are fans of apocalyptic stories and found that the two genres fit and complement each other quite well. The idea was to play the future not as a high-tech sci-fi vision, but as a look back to the depression and even to pioneer days.250

The film at the same time is a Western, a road film, and a horror film. Each genre listed has their own tropes and archetypes and Mickle uses all three in constructing the film. The hybridity of the film as a post-apocalyptic Western also works with the film as a post-apocalyptic horror film and the production choice to film in forested areas helps to heighten the tension and isolation. The isolation of the small town harkens back to the Western genre while the forest creates tension because of the ever-approaching threat of vampires. It is in the use of the post-apocalyptic genre where Mickle can in turn use the various archetypes and tropes of the Western to sell horror. The vampires serve as proxies for the savage archetype in that they are mindless, bloodthirsty killers who only want to kill. However, they are not the only threat. The main antagonist of the film is The Brotherhood, a militia who view the vampires as god’s work use them for their nefarious reasons. In the great horror tradition, it is not the monsters that you need to worry about but fellow humans. This trope is also essential to the post-apocalyptic genre and the breakdown of the social contract. Although the vampires are a constant threat, the main antagonists are The Brotherhood who assault, kill and rape across the wasteland. Instead of trying to rebuild civilization, The Brotherhood opposes anyone who disagrees with their worldview and will either kill or use the person as vampire bait. Claire Curtis in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract analyzes the antagonists of post-apocalyptic fiction

stating that “inherent in these accounts is the necessary Other: the groups of people who do not
react so well to the cataclysm...these people, who seem to band up far more quickly than our
survivors, are bent on continued destruction (despite the total irrationality of this).” In a
pivotal scene of the film, The Brotherhood using helicopters drop vampires into a settlement
nearly wiping out the population. This scene echoes the attack on the frontier settlement by
Native Americans or outlaws in the Western. Unlike in a traditional Western, there is no link
back to civilization. Instead, there is nothing but wilderness and omnipresent vampires.

However, it is in these small towns where there is still hope of a better future. This belief
of small towns containing hope is itself a continuation of the homesteading narrative found in the
Western genre. In discussing the construction of these narratives, Carl Abbott in *Frontiers Past
and Future* states that “homesteading narratives start literally from the ground up, considering
the ways that individuals respond to deliberately chosen new places and how they do or don’t-
work together among themselves and with their neighbors.” In both the Western frontier and
the post-apocalyptic wasteland, it is in these small towns that civilization is both created and
spread from.

After meeting up with Mister at the beginning of the film, Martin in a narration states that
there are “pockets of civilization. Towns locked down behind fences and guns holding the night
away” He continues: “…cults spread like wildfire across the Southern states. Waiting for the
messiah, but he never came. Death came in its stead and it came with teeth.” Although the
vampires are the apocalyptic event that ended the world and the origin of the film, you can still

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251 Claire P. Curtis, *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We’ll not go Home Again* (Plymouth: Lexington
Books, 2010), 43.
253 *Stake Land*, Blu-Ray, directed by Jim Mickle (Belladona Productions, 2010), Blu-Ray (Dark Sky Films, 2011).
254 Ibid.
easily remove them and still have a successful story. Due to the low budget and the fact that the film was independently made, the story and the characters needed to be able to stand on their own without the support of genre tropes.

In an interview with Patrick Day from Hero Complex, Jim Mickle in constructing the film and relationship between the story and budget states that “we had to figure out a way to make it work at an independent level. What worked on *Mulberry Street* was to strip out horror stuff and get our characters working. So, if all these actions or horror scenes fall on their face, we’ll still have a cool story people will be into. All this genre stuff is icing on the cake.”

In the case of *Stake Land* if the horror tropes were not working, Mickle could then focus more on the Western aspect of the film. Instead of Mister and Martin roaming the wasteland hunting vampires, it could be them dispatching bandits or raiders (i.e., members of the Brotherhood). It is the film’s hybridity that allows for the possibility of change. The characters are constructed in a way that fits within each specific style of film (Western, road, or horror). It is in this mixture of films that this portrayal of the post-apocalypse is created. In the interview with Hero Complex, Mickle discusses the relationship between Americana and the post-apocalyptic: “the idea of going out and making a low-budget movie with creatures was interesting. But at some point, this became a different post-apocalyptic movie. This is actually what America will look like if it does go under.”

Failure is a concept that is endemic to the post-apocalyptic genre. It is the failure of the pre-apocalyptic nation state that brings upon the post-apocalyptic wasteland. However, the Western genre on the other hand is a genre that promotes progress and success. John Cawelti discusses the relationship between the Western genre and progress and success. In his words:

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256 Ibid.
“two ideals have shaped the central political and social attitudes of most Americans. They have each given rise to a central hero figure and a myth which is celebrated repeatedly in public rituals.”257 The question then becomes; how does the post-apocalyptic genre balance these two mutually exclusive ideas involving failure and success?

Macro and Micro: The Individual and the Institution at the End of the World

Many post-apocalyptic films position failure at the macro level and success at the micro level. Even though the state has collapsed (at the macro level), civilization has begun to rebuild in small communities (at the micro level). Hope is not found at highest level but instead is found at the smallest level in individual interactions. Although the Western formula is based on the ideals of progress and success, the Western formula throughout the twentieth century redefined these two concepts in relation to the Western as sensibilities surrounding the Western are constantly changing. According to Cawelti: “…as we approach the present the ritualistic affirmation of progress and success becomes more and more ambiguous and strained.”258 It is this ambiguous and strained perception of progress and success that the post-apocalyptic genre imports.

In the case of Stake Land, the protagonist, Martin, watches as his family is murdered, his mentor is killed, and another member of his group is forced to become a vampire. However, he manages to survive the threat of vampires and of the Brotherhood. Despite these “failings”, there is hope for a better future. Hope is something both the Western and the post-apocalyptic genre share. For the Western, it is the hope for civilization to conquer the frontier. The post-apocalyptic genre relationship with hope is multifaceted. After the apocalypse, civilization recedes that in turn allows the frontier to advance. Yet, it is in the frontier that post-apocalyptic civilization is

257 Cawelti, The Six Gun Mystique, 102.
258 Ibid., 106.
constructed, and it is in the frontier that hope exists in the post-apocalyptic genre. This hope can take on many different forms: hope of civilization reappearing, hope of a better future and hope of returning to the pre-apocalyptic are just some of the different forms.

In the post-apocalyptic genre, hope is tied to progress, and success and this relationship can be embodied different ways. Clean water, food, shelter is just some ways that this relationship can be portrayed. If the potential is better than the current situation, hope will always exist in the post-apocalyptic genre. A recurring embodiment of hope in the post-apocalyptic genre is that of a location and all three films in this chapter use this embodiment in one way or the other. In *A Boy and His Dog*, Vic and Blood exist in a Hobbesian wasteland and there is nothing but violence. Blood spends most of the film trying to convince Vic to go “over the hill” and Vic is reticent to go. “Over the hill” is both a literal and metaphorical location for Vic and Blood. For them, there is nothing in their current location and their only hope is to leave the wasteland and go searching for something better.

At the same time, “over the hill” is a metaphorical location as it becomes fetishized abstract space. Vic and Blood have no idea what they will find and instead are basing their hopes on nothing. More importantly, “over the hill” becomes abstracted into a flawed symbol. In *The Production of Space*, in analyzing the abstraction of space, Henri Lefebvre states that “the error or illusion-generated here consists in the fact that, when social space is placed beyond our range of vision in this way, its practical character vanishes and it is transformed in philosophical fashion into a kind of absolute.”

This abstraction of space also occurs in *Mad Max* as in order to escape the pain of his family being brutally murdered, Max drives into the wasteland not knowing what he will encounter or what will happen. This same abstraction appears in the sequel

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259 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 93
The Road Warrior when Max encounters settlers who are willing to drive twenty-five hundred miles on a belief of finding a location free of bandits and murders. The settlers have put all their hope on a rumor portrayed on a postcard. Lefebvre in discussing space states that “space is a living morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure…to picture space as a frame or container into which nothing can be put unless it is smaller than the recipient…this is probably the error.” In this case both Max and the settlers put their faith in a space that may or may not exist and this faith is something that is shared throughout all of the films in this chapter. When Max becomes a temporary part of the settlers, an old man tells him their plan “ya have to come sonny, this is where we are going…Paradise, two thousand miles from here. Fresh water. Plenty of sunshine. Nothing to do but breed.” Stake Land also used this abstraction of space as seen in the location of New Eden. New Eden is portrayed as a haven away from both the vampires and the Brotherhood. However, they have zero proof of that and do not even know if it even exists. In discussing the errors surrounding space, Lefebvre argues “the theoretical error is to be content to see a space without conceiving of it, without concentrating discrete perceptions by mean of a mental act, without assembling details into a whole reality, without apprehending contents in terms of their interrelationships within the containing forms.” Hope like New Eden becomes both abstracted and fetishized as Martin cannot conceive New Eden.

The concept of hope becomes something that is both ephemeral and essential in the post-apocalyptic genre. Hope as a concept becomes split into both the micro and the macro. Although New Eden might be vampire stronghold, but Martin and Peggy have one another. The same with

260 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 94.
262 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 94.
“over the hill” and Vic and Blood. Even though hope does not exist on the macro level, it does exist on the micro level. Hope within the genre is always portrayed as an abstract idea of something far away. It is never close to the survivor. On the other hand, the survivors are constantly surrounded by the trauma and baggage of the apocalyptic event.

As discussed in Chapter 3, trauma plays a pivotal role in the post-apocalyptic genre due to the construction of the metaphorical apocalypse. Each character in Stake Land has undergone a metaphorical apocalypse. For Martin, he witnessed his family being slaughtered by vampires and this trauma leaves a residue on his character. As James Berger argues, “in this generalized sense of trauma and survival, the survivors are everywhere, marked with the imprints of catastrophe but without clear knowledge of what exactly the catastrophe was.”

The metaphorical apocalypse happens on the micro level while the literal apocalyptic event happens on the macro level. Although Martin has met up with Mister and formed a partnership, the trauma endured by both impacts the characters and their relationship. In the case of Mister, it directly impacts his perception of the world. Both Martin and Mister are haunted by the trauma of the end of the world. Berger is also helpful here, as discusses how trauma can itself act as a symptom for a larger disease. “Trauma is what returns, and it returns as symptom, which is itself a reenactment of trauma. The existence of the symptom, like the presence of the ghost, is a sign that the trauma is still active, still has power to wound and disrupt.”

It is the trauma of the apocalypse that both impacts the characters and the landscape.

In filming Stake Land in Pennsylvania, upstate New York and the Catskill Mountains, Mickle illustrates how the remains of civilization are always under attack by nature. Once

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263 James Berger, After the End: Representations of the Post-Apocalypse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 49.

264 Ibid., 79.
occupied houses with happy families become natural mausoleums as nature overtakes them bit by bit. What was once nature will become nature over time as the frontier begins to swallow up the remains of what was once there. Yet, it is out of the ruins that a new world will emerge eventually. The wasteland is no longer a vast desert devoid of all life within a fifty-mile radius but instead is nature run amok.

Whether the film is shot in the desert or in the forest what ties the aesthetic choices that were made to portray the wasteland are multiple factors such as clothing, story, plot, and setting just to name a few. For the wasteland to be believable to the audience, the director needs to pick a location that will imply the end of the world. An unbelievable location can hurt the suspension of disbelief for any audience. However, story is only one factor when it comes to aesthetics. A major factor is cost. All three films in this chapter were either independent films or studio films with low budgets. Although this chapter looks at the relationship between small budgets and post-apocalyptic films, there has been big budget post-apocalyptic films made by studios. *I Am Legend* (2007), *World War Z* (2013) and *Oblivion* (2013) each one with a budget over one hundred fifty million dollars. Another example is *The Book of Eli*, a film in chapter 3 had a budget of eighty million dollars. In comparison, *A Boy and His Dog* had a budget of four hundred fifty thousand dollars in 1975, *Mad Max* had a budget of three hundred ninety thousand dollars in 1979 and *Stake Land* had a budget of six hundred twenty-five thousand in 2010. There exists a spectrum within the post-apocalyptic genre.

What these big budget films have in common is that they have Hollywood stars in them. Will Smith, Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise and Denzel Washington are respectively the protagonists of each film. *I Am Legend* is set an empty New York City to ratchet up the tension of being the only human left alive. *World War Z* is jumps across continents to save humanity from zombies.
Oblivion is set on a post-apocalyptic Earth that is manipulated by aliens. Two big budget post-apocalyptic films that imitate the low budget aesthetic of A Boy and His Dog are Mad Max is Mad Max: Fury Road that had a budget of one hundred fifty million dollars and The Book of Eli. However, that is a cheat since the film was directed by George Miller, the director of Mad Max. The Book of Eli on the other hand merged the post-apocalyptic genre with the Western as seen in the characters, plot and location.

Although big budget films may not imitate the aesthetic, both A Boy and His Dog and Mad Max have influenced blockbuster directors. James Cameron, Guillermo Del Toro, David Fincher and Robert Rodriguez have all discussed their love of Mad Max and of The Road Warrior. James Cameron discussed how both Star Wars and The Road Warrior got him interested in directing stating that “I wouldn’t say studying them in the sense of putting them on the VCR and going backwards and forward, although I did do that with The Road Warrior. That picture was one of the few pictures- I have this curious reaction sometimes when I see a film- it’s almost like a Jungian experience where I’m seeing a film that I have already seen in my mind.”

In his career, he is responsible for the two highest grossing films of all time (Titanic and Avatar). Although the aesthetic for the most part has been relegated to lower budget films, the films themselves have inspired big budget Hollywood directors.

The key difference between the low budget and the big budget in the post-apocalyptic genre is how the construction of hope is portrayed and how this is tied to the future. In A Boy and His Dog, LQ Jones leaves “over the hill” consciously vague due to the four hundred fifty-thousand-dollar budget. This in turn abstracts it and plays into the trope of having hope as something that is just outside the vision of the protagonists. This also reinforces the perception of

a utopia always out of reach of the protagonists. This also allows the audience to create their own interpretation of what “over the hill” could be. On the other hand, you have *The Book of Eli* due to its eighty-million-dollar budget could portray Alcatraz and give a concrete vision of a potential future. The construction of hope within the post-apocalyptic genre is an abstract concept that allows for interpretation. For the films explored in this chapter, the directors had to made aesthetic choices based on cost.

It is these aesthetic choices that helped to better enhance the world by leaving the world up to the audience to imagine. In *A Boy and His Dog*, director LQ Jones shot the film in the desert and dumped fifty-two tons of garbage to create the post-apocalyptic aesthetic. A viewer can look at the small subsection of the desert and infer that the rest of the world also looks like that. The aesthetic that Jones created in the desert contrasted against the clean and controlled Topeka. Instead of trying to create a complete picture of the world, Jones allowed “over the hill” to remain an abstracted space.

This fetishized space becomes almost Edenic to the survivors. “Over the hill” and New Eden in *Stake Land* become symbols of hope. In both films, these abstract places are described like they have not been touched by the apocalypse. In *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Neil Smith in discussing the relationship between nature and production states that “the point here is not nostalgia for a preproduced nature, whatever that might look like, but rather to demonstrate the extent to which nature has in fact been altered through human agency…If we must, we can let this inaccessible nature support our notions of nature as Edenic, but this is always an ideal, abstract nature of the imagination.”266 The issue then becomes is whether or not the abstracted and fetishized space live up to expectations. Both *A Boy and His

Dog and Stake Land never show the audience what the abstracted space looks like. In A Boy and His Dog, the film ends with Vic and Blood walking towards the horizon. Stake Land on the other hand show Martin and Peggy finding a sign for New Eden and smiling. For both films, the directors leave it up to audience to create their own endings for the character. However, Mad Max complicates this relationship due to the non-linear structure of the character.

While the protagonists of A Boy and His Dog and Stake Land might be able to settle down, Max cannot as he is being chased by the ghosts of his dead family. Max’s life becomes a series of stories as he becomes a burnt-out drifter in the wasteland. Director George Miller made Mad Max on a shoestring budget and the film ends with Max driving into wasteland. The sequels take the story of Max and turn him into a mythological figure. Each film begins with Max driving into a new part of the wasteland and ends with him driving out of the wasteland. The sequel to Mad Max was The Road Warrior and had a budget of four million dollars. Beyond Thunderdome, the third Mad Max movie had a budget of ten million dollars. The fourth Mad Max: Fury Road had a budget of one hundred fifty million dollars.

Even though each successive film had a bigger budget, Miller kept the low budget aesthetic of the first film and expanded upon it. Max as a character can never stop as he is being chased by the trauma of his dead family. In all four films, Miller shoots in different locations and by doing this, it gives the audience different perspectives of the post-apocalyptic wasteland. The refinery, Bartertown and The Citadel all expand upon Miller’s original low budget construction of the wasteland while leaving room for imagination. Due to Max’s status as a mythological figure within the wasteland, the audience can in turn create their own interpretation of the wasteland.

Although the post-apocalyptic genre has its origins in the low budget films, it exists on a spectrum ranging from small independent films to big blockbusters and everything in between. As
a budget on the film expands, it gives the director more opportunities to expand the world through
the process of world building. On the other hand, the smaller the budget a movie has, the more
specific it must be in creating the world. For the films, *A Boy and His Dog* and *Mad Max*, directors
L.Q Jones and George Miller needed to portray a post-apocalyptic/dystopian wasteland on a
shoestring budget. Both directors saw the desert landscape as the answer due to barren nature of
the biome.

In setting the film in the desert, it allowed both directors to leave the world building to the
audience. If one specific part of the wasteland looks like a desert, there is a good chance that most
of the wasteland will also look like a desert. Both *A Boy and His Dog* and *Mad Max* although
having similar settings had completely different impacts on popular culture. While *A Boy and His
Dog* was released to criticism surrounding the treatment of women, it eventually settled as a cult
classic. *Mad Max* on the other hand was a smash success grossing over one hundred million dollars
on a budget of $400,000 Australian dollars. Due to the smash success, filmmakers started to copy
the aesthetics of *Mad Max* for two reasons: the world and for cost. In the subsequent sequels,
Miller plays up the bandits and the collapse of society. More importantly, both Jones and Miller
showed how the desert could be used as a low-cost stand-in for the wasteland as it shares a lot of
key similarities.

In filming the desert, the director also engages with the Western genre connotation
surrounding the desert as a site of regeneration and conflict. In using the desert as the site of the
wasteland, it creates a template for future directors to follow and to expand on. At the same time,
it also allows for costs to stay low. However, it does lead to the possibility of the homogenization
of the post-apocalyptic wasteland. If everyone is shooting in the desert, it creates one dominant
perception of what the wasteland can be. Yet, the desert is not the only interpretation of the
wasteland that exists in low budget films. Jim Mickle in Stake Land offers a different interpretation that is not based on the desert but based on Americana. Instead of shooting the film in the desert, Jim Mickle shot the film in rural Pennsylvania that in turn offered a more colorful palette for the wasteland on a $625,000 budget. Unlike the two earlier films, Stake Land needed a more vibrant location due to its hybridity.

Stake Land is a post-apocalyptic horror western filled with bloodthirsty vampires. The aesthetic of the desert wasteland would not fit within the story that Mickle was trying to tell. The desert wasteland of the first two films amplify the remote and empty nature of the wasteland. In a world of vampires and radical evangelical militias, the desert does not work because of the miles of empty land. In shooting in forested areas, Mickle could ratchet up the tension by making it difficult to distinguish between a regular human and a vampire. At the same time, the low visibility can lead to panic as portrayed in the film when the Brotherhood airdrops vampires into a settlement.

Like both LQ Jones and George Miller, Jim Mickle had to make choices both aesthetically and on production. Instead of trying to portray a post-apocalyptic world set in the future, Mickle has the characters wear normal clothes. This not only saves money, but it also shows the audience that the apocalypse is right around the corner. Both A Boy and His Dog and Mad Max take place in the far future. To save money, Mickle shot the film on his father’s farm and locations nearby to stretch his budget. On both the big budget and the low budget spectrum of the post-apocalyptic genre in film exists a variety of post-apocalyptic wasteland. However, low budget films tend to homogenize an aesthetic due to the costs of producing a film.

Low budget post-apocalyptic directors often to have make aesthetic choices to lower costs as seen in all three films analyzes in this chapter. These aesthetic choices allow the
audience to fill in the gap with their imagination. The director plays upon this imagination with
the construction of abstract hope (over the hill, New Eden, postcard). Portraying the end of the
world in a post-apocalyptic film is the second most important thing that the director can do. The
first is ensuring that one has enough money to make the film in the first place.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE NEVER-ENDING FRONTIER:


Listen, are we helpless, are we doomed to do it again and again...Spain, France, Britain, America burned into the oblivion of the centuries, and again and again and again?
-Walter M. Miller *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

The clocks stopped at one seventeen. There was a long shear of bright light, then a series of low concussions. I think it’s October, but I can’t be sure. I haven’t kept a calendar for years. Each day is grayer than the one before.
John Hillcoat *The Road*

Time is the great equalizer when it comes to life as what is constructed will eventually return to nothingness. The cliché perception that nothing lasts forever is explored throughout numerous genres. However, the post-apocalyptic genre’s relationship with this perception of time is a complicated one, and this is due to the genre’s parentage: The Western and Science Fiction genres. Both genres portray space and time differently. On one hand, the Science Fiction genre portrays a future space that is foreign to the audience. On the other, the Western genre portrays a past space that is familiar to the audience. At the merger of these two genres is the post-apocalyptic genre. The genre itself is pointed towards a future time while at the same time being pointed towards a past space. The merger between the Western and Science Fiction inherently complicates the genre’s relationship with space and time.

The Western is a genre that is inherently located in the past looking back at a romanticized and idealized interpretation of American expansionism during the 19th century. The frontier has been conquered and now audiences are “looking back” at how it was conquered through a romantic and idealized lens. It is through this lens that the Western formula is constructed. John Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* discusses the period of the Western stating that “the Western story is set at a certain moment in the development of American civilization, namely at that point where savagery and lawlessness are in decline before the advancing wave of
law and order.”267 This specific time that Cawelti discusses only briefly happened in the actual West but it served as the foundational piece for the Western formula. Within the Western genre itself, the history of the actual West is nonessential. What matters is how the Western genre has rewritten the past to create a familiar space. This familiar space is a space of progress in that civilization always wins over the frontier and that progress never stops. For the most part, the Western spatial temporality is hopeful that civilization will continue to conquer the frontier as it did in the past.

While the Western points towards the past, Science Fiction points towards the future. The genre itself encompasses all of time and space but is mostly pointed towards the future. Paul Carter in The Creation of Tomorrow: Fifty Years of Magazine Science Fiction defines the genre as “an imaginative extrapolation from the known into the unknown, in a technological era; future technology becomes one of the more spectacular unknowns.”268 For the genre’s first decades, the exploration of the unknown was framed positively in that technology could impact humanity. However, this positive light would be permanently dimmed in the aftermath of World War II.

On August 6th, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. What was once seen as science fiction became science fact and chilled the genre’s positive perception of technology. Technology was no longer sorely a tool of progress but also now a tool of destruction. It changed the spatial temporality of the genre from hope of the future to fear of the future. Vivian Sobchack in Screening Spaces: The American Science Fiction Film analyzes this new fear of science in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by stating that “after Hiroshima, SF writers were neither as optimistic about nor as unafraid of science as they had previously

been, and their stories and novels reflected their age and anxiety.”

This fear of the future is manifested in the archetype of science as a double-edged sword with science having both the power to create and destroy. This perception of science as a double-edged sword plays a pivotal role in the creation of man-made apocalyptic events. Nuclear weapons, sentient AI’s scarcity of natural resources, environmental destruction, and much more. Similar to the horror genre, the true monster is not science but humanity who constructs the doomsday device in the first place.

If the Western genre looks back hopefully to a self-contained past, then Science Fiction looks fearfully towards an uncertain future. It is at the merger of these various spatial temporalities that the post-apocalyptic genre is located. The post-apocalyptic genre is set in a future that might be tomorrow or in a thousand years. It is in this future that civilization is destroyed by an apocalyptic event. In this destruction, the frontier re-asserts itself and the space that is created is pointed towards the past to the frontier of the Western. In having a genre pointed toward opposite temporalities, the present within the genre is not actually the present due to no accurate chronology.

Time becomes incredibly difficult to measure in an apocalyptic scenario as the nation-state collapses. An excellent example being the Mad Max quartet, as discussed in Chapter 3. In watching the films in release order, time progresses as communities become cities that eventually become nation-states. Yet, there is no accurate timeline as the director made a conscious choice not to provide one. The lack of an accurate timeline makes it easy to watch the trilogy of sequels in any order understand them. The lack of a timeline is pivotal in the post-apocalyptic genre as it represents a hard division between the pre and the post-apocalyptic. The apocalyptic event

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represents a hard break in chronology in that there is a distinct rupture that cannot be repaired. The division between these two-time periods is reminiscent of the perception of time in both the Western and Science Fiction. The survivors of the post-apocalypse look fondly towards a pre-apocalyptic world while looking fearfully towards an uncertain future. What makes the future uncertain in a post-apocalyptic scenario is the fear of repeating the same mistakes that destroyed the world in the first place. Fear in the post-apocalyptic scenario is not only mobilized around repetition but also around survival.

Survival was almost guaranteed for protagonists who lived in first world nations. Yet, items like food, water and shelter become almost non-existent in a post-apocalyptic scenario. A bottle of water that costs one dollar and fifty cents becomes as priceless as gold. In trying to avoid repeating the past, survivors grab onto the ruins of the old world and by doing this contaminate the potential future that a post-apocalyptic scenario can offer. By failing to move away from the trauma of the past, the ghosts of the old world in turn start to haunt the new world and work to undermine the potential of the wasteland.

The greatest threat to civilization is not atomic weapons, sentient AI’s, man-made plagues and much more but it is man itself. Any potential the future may have is undermined by a focus on the past. In discussing the potential of the American West as a post-apocalyptic wasteland in *Future West*, David Katteberg says that the potential of the wasteland is both an opportunity and curse stating that “if not exactly “primitive”, because modern or futuristic technology, may still exist, survivors are thrown into a state of nature that provides an opportunity for experimentation. It is both a curse and an opportunity.”\(^\text{270}\) It is in the post-apocalyptic scenario that experimentation can happen that can create something new.

Although the world is spinning, the survivors are stuck in a never-ending loop. It is the loop of destruction and regeneration that I call the civilization/frontier binary. The loop consists of the destruction of civilization followed by the regeneration of the frontier. The frontier is then swallowed up by civilization which in turn destroys itself again allowing the frontier to regenerate. Although the survivors are living in the wasteland, in reality they are still parked. To start moving through time again is to break out of the loop and to break the loop is to destroy the connection to the old world. All four films that I will discuss in this chapter engage with this cycle of destruction and regeneration in different ways and how this engagement with this cycle complicates the temporality of each film.

In this chapter, I will be analyzing *Snowpiercer* directed by Bong Joon-Ho, *The Road* directed by John Hillcoat, *The Rover* directed by David Michod and *The Postman* directed by Kevin Costner. All four films engage with the relationship between the civilization/frontier binary and temporality in different ways. I will begin my analysis with the film *Snowpiercer*, for it serves as an excellent example of the temporality of the post-apocalyptic genre while at the same time offering a solution to the cycle of destruction/regeneration.

*Snowpiercer: The Train That Never Ends*

Unlike other films in my dissertation, *Snowpiercer* does not offer wide open vistas and miles of open, desolate and natural land but instead offers a tiny, claustrophobic and metal setting. In the aftermath of a botched solution to global warming, the last survivors boarded a train that encircles the frozen earth. Returning to the well-worn tropes of science fiction, science itself acts as a double-edged sword in that it ended the world (through the botched attempt to solve global warming) while at the same time saving the survivors from certain death (with the train). In the aftermath of the apocalypse, the train remains the only space left for humans to
inhabit. Yet, it is a space that is tight, compact and closed-off, making it impossible to create something new. The train is a literal embodiment of the old world. The setting of the train subverts the relationship between the apocalypse and nature. The creation of open land (that is nature) and thus the frontier through the apocalyptic event is complicated in *Snowpiercer*, which offers abstract space instead. Henri Lefebvre states in *The Production of Space* that:

Abstract space functions objectally, as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships: glass and stone. Concrete and steels, angles and curves, full and empty. Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body.”

In the film, nature is effectively erased under tons of ice and snow. By erasing nature, the train remains the only space, and it is a space that is heavily regimented.

After the survivors boarded the train, they were segregated via ticket price. Those who had an expensive ticket were closer to the front of the train. On the other hand, those who had a cheaper ticket were sent to the back of the train. It is through ticket prices that an impenetrable class system has been created. This class system is itself a remnant of the old world and in response to this class system, revolutions are created that attempt to seize the train but always fail, as the revolutionaries can never move beyond the idea of the train. In discussing the relationship between revolutions and space, Lefebvre argues that “a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses.”

Although revolutions are constructed upon the train, they in turn never lead to a new space because there is no space to create. When Curtis, the leader of the revolution reaches the front of the train, he talks to Wilford, the leader of the train who tells him that “you must tend

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272 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 49.
the engine, keep her running. Look Curtis, beyond the gate. Section after section precisely where they have always been and where they always will be all adding up to the train.” Instead of destroying the train and breaking the loop, Curtis in turn becomes part of the system because he cannot believe that there is anything beyond the train. In other words, he has fetishized the abstract space of the train because he cannot see past the train. To create something new there must be space and the abstract space of the train obfuscates everything. In analyzing the fetishizing of abstract space in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that “users spontaneously turn themselves, their presence, their lived experiences and their bodies into abstractions too. Fetishized abstract space thus gives rise to two practical abstractions: users who cannot recognize themselves within it, and a thought that cannot conceive of adopting a critical stance towards it.” This fetishizing of abstract space is employed in the post-apocalyptic genre via the fetishizing of the old world.

Curtis, instead of destroying the train, becomes the next ruler as Wilford is going to step down. In becoming the next ruler of the train, Curtis is continuing of the fetishizing of the old world. This fetishizing is responsible for the conditions on the train: the impenetrable caste system, the manufactured revolutions, the heavily armed police etc. These processes are being used to keep this self-contained fetishizing of the pre-apocalyptic state alive. In discussing the change of power in relation to revolution in *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson states that true revolutionary change almost never happens but instead “in fact, there are very few, if any… leaderships which have not clambered up into … worn, warm seats…like the complex electrical system in any large mansion when the owner had fled, the state awaits the new owner’s

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274 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 93.
hand at the switch to be very much its old brilliant self." Although there is a new ruler at the front of the train, nothing actually changes and the status quo continues. The train keeps circling the earth, the back of the train is subjugated to help the front of the train and the pre-apocalyptic state based on class distinctions keeps existing. Yet, the construction of time in *Snowpiercer* is complicated as two different time streams become evident. These two different perceptions of time are directly tied to the apocalyptic event.

**Natural Born Killers**

First, the train itself represents the unbroken continuation of the pre-apocalyptic world, and students in the train are taught history. In the teaching of history, a clear continuation is created. Second, the attempted solution to global warming happened in 2015 and the film itself is set in 2031. Both perceptions of time seem to be frozen solid both literally and figuratively. It had been sixteen years since the train was first boarded and the old-world order is still in charge. Sixteen years after the world froze over, and at a first look, nothing has changed. At the beginning of the film to instill fear into the populace at the back of the train, a protestor’s arm is forced outside the train for a minute. The arm is taken back inside and smashed with a sledgehammer to invoke fear since the arm was frozen solid. The implicit message to the back of the train is that nature is deadly, and the outside is hostile to humans.

This fear of nature ties into Neil Smith’s construction of nature in *Uneven Development* and how it intersects with revenge. “The idea of revenge by nature carries something of the dualistic implication inherent in mastery but nonetheless, the essentialist point is a marvelous insight given the context (to which Engels elsewhere in the same work succumbed) of nineteenth

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However, nature is where the survivors have the best chance of creating something new. It is in nature that the metaphorical and literal loop of the train can be derailed. The film ends with the train derailing, and the survivors who are children born on board the train encountering nature for the very first time. Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* in analyzing the potential of nature argues that the “finiteness of nature and of the Earth… has the power to challenge blind (ideological) belief in the infinite power of abstraction, of human thinking and technology, and of political power and the space which that power generates and decrees.” Nature challenges the creation of abstract space and the blind belief in the space of the train.

Curtis could not see past the train but instead was limited to looking at the train as the only space left when the space of the train intersects with numerous other spaces. In planning the revolution against Wilford, Curtis states that “yeah, from here right to the front of the train, everyone in one stroke. We control the engine, we control the world.” However, to seize the means of controlling the train, the revolutionaries need to go through numerous different spaces that are not only abstract spaces but also social spaces. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre defines social space as “not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity- their relative order and/or (relative) disorder.” Although the train is abstract space, the people living on the train create their own representation of the train and this representation can be wildly different as those living in the back have a completely different

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277 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 330.
278 Jo-Hoon, *Snowpiercer*.
279 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 86.
representation than those living in the front. All of these social spaces overlap each other, and the overlap between the spaces serve as an illusion of boundaries. In each social space, the movement of time is perceived differently, and the boundaries of each space are represented by a series of doors. In analyzing the use of visible boundaries in separating social space, Lefebvre states that “visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity.”280 It is these visible boundaries that set up the social status on the train. An individual who lives in the middle of the train inhabits a completely different social space than one who lives in the back. However, this social space is the continuation of a space that has already been destroyed. The pre-apocalyptic world has effectively been destroyed but the train remains figuratively freezing the inhabitants from ever moving on. To move on, there must be a clean break and this break is then represented in the destruction of the train.

The film ends with Curtis almost accepting Wilford’s proposal until he finds out that the train runs on child slavery. Instead of accepting the offer, Curtis sacrifices his life to derail the train nearly killing everyone on board. The only survivors are two children who climb from the wreckage to see not only the sun but also a polar bear. The polar bear itself represents the fact that nature has not been completely wiped out, but it still exists and affords hope. In Uneven Development, Neil Smith discusses the relationship between nature and hope arguing that “where nature does survive pristine, miles below the surface of the earth or light years beyond it, it does so only because as, yet it is inaccessible. If we must, we can let this inaccessible nature support our notions of nature as Edenic, but this is always an ideal, abstract nature of imagination.”281 In this Edenic ideal that humanity can then begin again but there is

280 Ibid., 87
281 Smith, Uneven Development, 81.
always the fear that humanity will consciously or unconsciously repeat the same mistakes that
doomed it in the first place. However, there is hope at the end of Snowpiercer. The survivors are
children who have no memories of the pre-apocalyptic state. It is this generation that has the best
chance of escaping the system that produced the apocalyptic in the first place since they were not
there. Discussing the destruction of capitalism, Smith states that “to the extent the capitalist
development levels the urban-rural dichotomy and thereby destroys the foundation for its own
economic history, it prepares the way not only for its own defeat but for the development of a
wholly new economic history built on a new foundation.”282 Just as the destruction of capitalism
creates the foundation for something new so does the destruction of the train.

In destroying the train, space is reconfigured as there is now a clear-cut demarcation from
the pre-apocalyptic world to the post-apocalyptic world. Yet, this line of demarcation itself is
problematic as the destruction of the train is an apocalyptic event for the children born on the
train. Within this demarcation where time can start to create distance between the old world and
the new. Snowpiercer, on the other hand, portrays a future where that line of demarcation is
never cut, and the old world continues to circle the globe like an undead zombie waiting to be
put out of its misery. It is in this zombie train that intergenerational trauma starts to haunt the old
and the young as they are figuratively frozen in place. Yet, it takes the destruction of the train to
figuratively and literally move on from the old world. Snowpiercer represents one potential
interpretation of the relationship between time and the post-apocalyptic genre. Although the
world has ended, there is still a chronology progressing in time. The next film I will be
analyzing, The Road (2009), does not even have that as the world has ended and no one knows
how or even when it happened.

282 Ibid., 149
While *Snowpiercer* portrays survivors enclosed in a train circling a harsh and frozen world, *The Road* portrays a world that has experienced an extinction event wiping out nearly all forms of life and covering the world in ash. *The Road* is a straight adaptation of the Cormac McCarthy novel *The Road*, and since it is an adaptation I will also be using the novel as a source for this section. In describing the wasteland that The Man and The Boy are traversing McCarthy states that “just beyond the high gap in the mountains they stood and looked out over the great gulf to the south where the country as far as they could see was burned away.” 283 In response to the extinction event, humanity has turned to cannibalism to survive.

In *The Road*, there is no hope of a better future, and this feeling of hopelessness impacts the worldview of the survivors. Both the novel and film never explain what caused the end of world and instead leaves it intentionally vague to avoid creating any preconceptions about the wasteland. Each apocalyptic event uniquely scars the wasteland. For example, a side effect of a nuclear apocalypse is radiation, and this irradiates both flora and fauna. By avoiding these preconceptions, McCarthy shifts focus from the apocalyptic event to the wasteland. In describing the apocalypse, McCarthy states that “the clocks stopped at 1:17, a long shear of light and a series of low concussions.” 284 By leaving the apocalyptic event vague it makes it difficult to measure time and to create that clear line of demarcation between the pre-apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic. There is a general sense of vagueness in both the novel and he film as characters lack names and are instead identified by who they are. The Man, The Boy, Old Man, The Gang Member, The Veteran, and the Motherly Woman are all characters in the film and the book. In the world of *The Road* names connote familiarity and that is something that no longer

284 Ibid., 52.
exists in this Hobbesian state of nature. At the same time names are used to create a genealogy that is now useless as the world is now dead and children are now killed and eaten as food. In this wasteland, the only thing one can do is survive and that leaves no room for rebuilding civilization. Although hope does not exist on the institutional level, it does exist on the individual level as seen in the characters of The Man and The Boy. The Man and The Boy serve as the protagonists of the story who are trying to survive. Like other post-apocalyptic stories, there exists a chronological divide in that the father lived through the apocalyptic event and is trying to teach the boy about the old world.

Why are there state roads?
Because they used to belong to the states, what used to be called the states
But there are not any more states?
No.285

The problem with this knowledge is that it is completely meaningless to the son, as all the signifiers constructed by the pre-apocalyptic society have been destroyed. In The Road, the old world is represented by The Man and the new is represented by The Boy. As survivors’ progress through time, the space of the pre-apocalyptic society starts the process of breaking apart as something new occupies that space. In discussing trial by space Lefebvre argues that “it is in space, on a worldwide scale, that each idea of value acquires or loses it distinctiveness through confrontation with the other values and ideas that it encounters there…more importantly- groups, classes, or fractions of classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as subjects unless they generate or produce a space”286 In the aftermath of the apocalypse, the values, signifiers and identity of the pre-apocalyptic society have been destroyed but nothing has been constructed to replace this space.

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285 Ibid., 63.
286 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 416.
To fill this space, The Man attempts to teach The Boy about the old world, but the old world cannot come back as it is irrevocably broken. McCarthy describes the post-apocalyptic wasteland through the metaphor of maps: “maps and mazes of a thing which could not be put back…not be made right again.”\(^{287}\) Because they cannot be put back together, they in turn need to die off and *The Road* is in transition between two worlds, the new and the old. A recurring trope in the genre is separating survivors based on their age and if they can remember the end the world. The new world and the old world cohabitate for a while until the old-world fades away as represented in the death of The Man at the end of novel/film. However, the death of The Man can be portrayed as essential as it represents the final death of the old world. In “Maps of the World in Its Becoming: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*,” author Ashley Kunsa discusses the metaphor of The Man embodying the old world arguing that “eliminating the old suggests the coming of the new and creates a space in which the new world can be imagined and called into being.”\(^{288}\) Both the new and the old world cannot co-exist in the same space. At the same time, this space is constantly going through upheavals as it is shifting. If *Snowpiercer* represents the last grasp of the old world, *The Road* represents the slide from civilization into the frontier. It is in this new frontier that space and time are reconfigured to create something new. It is in this transition that time itself is reconfigured as the line of demarcation between the pre-apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic world solidifies. This strict line of demarcation begins with the apocalyptic event that creates an unrepairable connection to the old world. In *After The End*, author James Berger states in relation to the severing of the pre-apocalyptic world that “the new, post-apocalyptic world is a world of traces and symptoms

\(^{287}\) McCarthy, *The Road*, 287.

pointing back towards the event. The event cannot be grasped or recovered yet cannot be escaped.” This world of traces and symptoms is represented in *The Road* via their relationship with time.

The Man and The Boy have been traveling the wasteland for a long time, but they do not know how much since they can no longer measure the time. The world for them has figuratively been frozen as each day is a repeat of the previous day. In describing the world and the time, The Man states that “I think it’s October, but I can’t be sure. I haven’t kept a calendar for years. Each day is grayer than the one before. It is cold and growing colder as the world slowly dies.” This perception of time being figuratively frozen intersects with the perception of hope in the post-apocalyptic genre.

A recurring theme in the genre is that even in the worst scenarios is that there is still hope for a better future. It may be hard to find but it still exists as portrayed in the presence of children. In the presence of The Man, The Boy is protected, and their relationship is mutually beneficially for both. For The Boy, he receives training and for The Man, it gives him a reason to live. As they travel across the wasteland, they encounter the remains of children who have been eaten due a lack of resources. In the wasteland, there is no flora or fauna, therefore survivors have turned to cannibalism to survive. In discussing the breakdown of society, The Man states that “within a year there was fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. There has been cannibalism. Cannibalism is the great fear.” Cannibalism signals not only a lack of food sources, but also no hope of a better future. The only hope that remains is the coast. The coast is an abstract idea where they hope there will be food and it will be warmer, but at the end, they

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290 *The Road*, directed by John Hillcoat (2929 Productions, 2009), Blu-Ray (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010)
291 Ibid.
have no idea what they will find there. However, this hope is undermined when The Man dies of an infection leaving The Boy all alone.

William Katteberg in discussing the intersection of hope and despair in post holocaust literature in *Future West* argues that “such cyclical returns may be our fate, post holocaust literature suggests, but the lesson is one of despair, cynicism, and melancholy as often as it is one of hope for progress.” Although McCarthy portrays a world without hope, he ends the novel with small hopeful signifiers. At the end of the novel/film The Boy is adopted by a family who takes him under their wing and who will in his words continue to hold the fire. In portraying the world, The Man and The Boy saw the world as a battle between good and evil with the protagonists on the side of good and the cannibals on the other side.

Are you carrying the fire?
Am I what?
Carrying the fire.
You’re kind of wierded out, are you, kid?
Well, are you?
Yeah, I’m carrying the fire.

Although the adoption represents hope on the micro level, McCarthy also creates hope on the macro level in the return of flora and fauna. With the return of fauna, humanity can start to rebuild as they represent a stable food source. During their travel, The Man and The Boy encounter trout high in the mountains that are beginning to move down. As McCarthy posits: “On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming … of a thing which could not be put back.” With the return of the trout, the survivors can start to rebuild civilization as the trout represents not only a stable food source but also the return of the Earth to equilibrium. Like *Snowpiercer*, the survivors of *The Road* are figuratively frozen in

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293 Hillcoat, *The Road*.
time due to a lack of hope. However, the end of both stories is centered around the construction of hope with children at its core.

However, hope in the post-apocalyptic genre is representative of a future. If you have no future, then you have no hope. In *Snowpiercer*, Curtis helps to derail the train because he has no hope for the future. In *The Road*, The Man dies leaving The Boy all alone. Hope for the future is not seen in the current generation but instead in the next generation as represented in children.

Yet, this hope is complicated in both sources. In *Snowpiercer*, the children survive the train derailment but lack skills to survive in the arctic wasteland. In *The Road*, The Boy survives after the death of The Man due to the skills that he learned. Hope in both films is something that is both possible and precarious like the post-apocalyptic genre.

Yet, these symbols of hope ranging from the micro level to the macro level represent the slow but steady progression of time. *The Road* represents the second step in the civilization/frontier binary of the frontier swallowing up the ruins of civilization. However, the end of the film gives hope that civilization is starting the cycle over again in that the frontier is swallowed whole by civilization. However, the fear of this cycle is that the same mistakes will be made again and cause the cycle to repeat. Both *Snowpiercer* and *The Road* portray a post-apocalyptic world going through a figurative thawing as time starts to progress again. The specter of the old world has finally been diminished enough for the new world to start to grow and create something new. However, this process of creation calls upon a sacrifice. In *Snowpiercer*, the train had to be destroyed for something new to be created. In *The Road*, The Man had to die for The Boy to create something new. The destruction of the train and the death of The Man do not only represent a sacrifice but also a clear demarcation of time between the pre-apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic. They serve as a starting off point for time to start to
progress again. While the first two films in this chapter offer a thawing of the post-apocalyptic wasteland, the next film *The Rover* offers the inverse in that it is a world that is figuratively freezing in the aftermath of the apocalypse.

*The Rover: Ennui in the Australian Wasteland*

*The Rover* (2014), directed by David Michod, is set in Australia ten years after a global economic collapse. The protagonist Eric has his car stolen by some bandits and he spends the entire film trying to get his car back. During his journey, he picks up Reynolds, a brother of one of the bandits who he forces to help him. The apocalypse event in *The Rover* is not sudden but is happening over a period. At first glance, *The Rover* and *Mad Max* seem to be inhabiting the same space. Both films are set in the Australian outback after an economic collapse that is slowly destabilizing the state. At a deeper look, both films engage the apocalypse in different ways. While George Miller in *Mad Max* creates a frenetic energy based on the use of vehicles, Michod in *The Rover* creates a world that is both slow and vigilant where one must always be aware of their surroundings. The deepest point of difference can be seen in the perspective of both protagonists. In *Mad Max*, Max is a police officer trying to keep order in a crumbling nation-state who loses his family at the end of the film. In *The Rover*, Eric is just a man who is trying to stay alive in a lawless wasteland. Unlike Max, he lost his family long ago.

Law and order as a concept no longer exist for Eric due to what happened to his family. Unlike Max who lost his family to a biker gang, Eric murdered his wife after he found her cheating on him with another man. This event broke him but what impacted him more was not the death of his partner but the fact that no one cared. After being arrested by soldiers, Eric confesses about the death of his wife stating “that hurt me. I never had to explain myself. I never had to lie to anyone. I never had to confess to anyone. I didn’t need to run and hide. I buried
them in a hole and I went home…and that hurt me more than having my heart broken- was knowing it didn’t matter.”295 Unlike Max who is trying to keep law and order in a crumbling dystopia, Eric knows that it is a meaningless gesture because law and order is collapsing all around him. The failing to investigate and arrest Eric for the murder of his wife completely altered his perspective on life. When he is told that he is being sent to Sydney for the murder of soldiers, Eric doesn’t believe the officer.

    You’re going to Sydney
    Why?
    Because that’s the way it works. You get sent to Sydney.
    Why don’t you just shoot me?
    I’d find that enjoyable
    Then why don’t you do it? That’s what everyone else is doing296

For Eric, it makes sense just to shoot him because he no longer believes in law and order and it is easier for the officer. On the other hand, the officer still believes in the process and more importantly in the state. This is his job and he is getting paid for it. However, it is all moot when he and the other soldiers are gunned down by Reynolds to save Eric. The death of the soldiers does not only represent the death of law and order but also severs the connection of the capital to the frontier. The only person who can help Eric is himself because for the most part the police no longer exist.

    In the construction of any post-apocalyptic wasteland, the destruction of the nation-state is essential, and in the destruction of the state comes the destruction of authority. In discussing the destruction of authority in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We’ll Not Go Home Again, author Claire Curtis argues that “the apocalyptic event, through its destruction of official manifestations of authority (politicians, police, military), reveal humans fighting against

295 David Michod, The Rover (Porchlight Films, 2014), Blu-Ray (Lionsgate, 2014)
296 Ibid.
one another for their survival…this world demands eternal vigilance." An excellent example of eternal vigilance is represented in individual interactions.

When Eric first encounters Reynolds, he is bleeding out and in an immense amount of pain. He then takes Reynolds to a local store looking for help but instead encounters an armed shopkeeper. The shopkeeper forces him to disarm before even talking to him. In the collapse of the nation-state comes the collapse of the social contract. The inability to trust fellow human leads to paranoia, which will inevitably lead to violence as the only way to survive.

This violence leads to the creation of a state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short and where might equals right. In analyzing the state of nature, Curtis states that the “state of nature produces conditions that make it impossible for humans to flourish. They might be able to survive, but they cannot progress. They cannot produce the hallmarks of human society: agriculture, transportation, trade, architecture, invention, learning, art and the delights of communal living.” The survivors in The Rover are just surviving and not thriving. Or in other words, they are starting to be frozen in place as there is no future anymore. The only future remaining for the survivors is the same exact day repeated until death. It is the lack of a future that directly impacts the actions of Eric throughout the film.

He is a solitary man with one goal and he spend the rest of the film trying to accomplish this goal: to bury his dead dog that is in the back of his car. After accomplishing this goal there is nothing left for him. In discussing his situation with the soldier who arrested him Eric muses on the lack of possibility stating that “it’s just a feeling of possibility, you know what I mean? It’s a feeling of something like a future…that’s a powerful feeling. Do you know what I’m talking

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298 Ibid., 40
about? This now doesn’t feel like that. This doesn’t feel anything like possibility anymore.”

The way this conversation is framed is intriguing because Michod has Eric discussing the macro level while having the soldier focusing solely on the micro level. “Mate, makes no difference to me. I don’t care what direction things are moving. What the fuck are you even talking about? So long as I’ve got somewhere to be every day is all I need to think about.” However, the failure to look at the bigger scope leads to the state of nature in the first place.

Yet, it is in the state of nature that the survivors can start to come together to create society. In *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction*, Curtis argues that the state of nature in post-apocalyptic fiction “…cannot simply be a violence-fest, rather it needs to reflect human equality, the mutuality of desire and potential for human flourishing in civil society.” The state of nature is the endgame of the post-apocalyptic wasteland in that the survivors will come together and try to create something new. *The Rover* has not reached that point, but it is getting there. Like *Children of Men* and *Mad Max*, *The Rover* portrays a slow apocalyptic event transpiring over years. In *The Rover*, the global economic collapse has effectively made Australian currency worthless. This in turn leads to a series of events that destabilized the Australian government. Michod illustrates this global economic collapse by having the merchants that Eric and Reynolds interact with reject Australian currency. This helps to illustrate the event without showing the collapse. Instead of taking Australian currency, the merchants want American currency because they believe that it is still worth something. In an argument with a merchant, Eric offers Australian money only to be rebuffed

What’s wrong with Australian money?
Take it or leave it.
It’s paper. It’s worthless.

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299 Michod, *The Rover*.
300 Ibid.
301 Curtis, *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction*, 43.
Nothing worth’s anything, mate, so it’s worth whatever I say it is.
It’s a piece of fucking paper.
Yeah, and a diamond’s a piece of fucking rock. Take it or leave it.302

While Eric sees the money as a piece of paper devoid of value, the merchant on the other hand still believes that the money has value. What we have is two different perspectives looking in opposite directions. With Eric, the world has ended both literally and figuratively, therefore he has no value for money, but he has to play within the system since everyone confers value upon the currency. In the world of The Rover, the United States of America might not even exist anymore, but the money is still worth something because survivors believe in it. In the case of The Rover, capitalism played a pivotal role in the apocalypse and even in the post-apocalyptic it remains. In Uneven Development, Neil Smith discusses the temporary nature of capitalism stating that “…capitalism must develop as part of itself the very force that can reveal how unnatural and vulnerable this mode of production is, and how historically temporary it can be.”303 In the wasteland of The Rover, capitalism makes no sense, but no one has envisioned a new form of exchange. The merchants are trying to keep capitalism alive only to find out that it does not work in a state of nature. A transaction can only be completed if both sides engage in good faith. This good faith does not exist in the world of The Rover, as people take what they need and ignore the consequences. An example of need overriding good faith can be seen when Eric arms himself in his hunt for his car.

He encounters a merchant who is selling weapons and will not accept Australian dollars. Eric does not want the gun, he needs it. To get the gun, he kills the merchant because he needed the gun more than the merchant. The death of the merchant reinforces the idea that Eric has moved past capitalism but more importantly, he has moved past the crumbling societal norms

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302 Michod, The Rover.
303 Smith, Uneven Development, 84.
while the merchants are still trying to prop up the system. It may be an indication of the
“inevitability of revolt” that Smith discusses in his work: “…it is a law of nature that the human
animal, deprived of the means to fulfill its natural needs, will react to this deprivation, sometimes
violently and sometimes also socially organized.”304 The death of the merchant in The Rover is
justified due to the state of nature. Eric needed that gun and to acquire it, he killed the merchant.

In Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, Claire P Curtis in discussing the relationship between the
state of nature and human nature states that “Hobbes argues that human beings in the state of
nature have the right to anything to survive and while humans might kill another or take food
that another has procured (but does not own, and so one cannot steal) the motivation to survive
does not reveal any inherent evil in human nature.”305 Eric’s need for the gun to get back his car
weighs more than the merchant’s need to make money. Since capitalism in the world of The
Rover has been effectively destroyed, the survivors are instead dealing with what is left. The
global economic crisis forces survivors to re-evaluate what it is valuable and what is not and for
many, this process is the only thing they have left. Although the crisis might have started in
Wall Street, the impact is being felt in the Australian outback. In Uneven Development, Smith
analyzes the destruction of nature in relation to capital by arguing that “the globe is to be
ransacked by inexorable economic forces just because the books on Wall Street cease to add up:
the furthest villages plundered because the economic system has stopped making sense.”306 Even
though the system makes no sense, it is so entrenched that people will continue to believe in it.
Even though capitalism ends civilization while killing itself in The Rover, that does not mean
that it is gone. Like a zombie, it returns to pilfer the wasteland that it created. Smith discusses

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304 Ibid., 85
305 Curtis, Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, 41.
the contradictions of capital: “better in the process of restoring itself after one plague the region makes itself ripe for another. At the very least, uneven development is the geographical expression of the contradictions of capital.”

In destroying civilization, capitalism creates bountiful soil to exploit as represented by the return of the frontier. Capitalism’s search for profit exploits both civilization and the frontier.

Although capitalism has caused the end the world, it will play a pivotal role in shaping the new frontier because it has not been destroyed, due to capitalism’s ability to adapt to new environments. In analyzing capitalism’s ability to transform space, Smith argues that “capitalism is always transforming space in its own image, but in periods of expansion this amounts to the filling in of patterns more or less set at an earlier period.”

In the absence of a set space, capitalism will revert to an earlier period and in the case of The Rover this construction of capitalism directly ties to the Western genre. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis that served as the apocalyptic event, capitalism reverted to an earlier state that works in the lawless frontier. Going back to the core tenet of this chapter, the post-apocalyptic genre like capitalism reverted to an earlier frontier, specifically the Western frontier as the survivors tried to hold on to whatever they could. This lifeboat that the survivors hold onto merges both the past and present and the only person who can see the curvature of the loop is Eric who has lost everything. Eric knows that there is no future or past but only the present ever repeating. The question then becomes what do you do if you believe that there is no future because nothing ever changes?

The illusion that nothing changes is embodied in the construction of space. The setting of The Rover ticks all the checkmarks of a Western film ranging from the miles of empty land to the dry, dusty and barren location. In discussing the contradiction of time in relation to space in The Rover

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307 Ibid., 202
308 Ibid., 208.
Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre states that “the contradictions of space, without abolishing the contradictions which arise from historical time, leave history behind and transport those old contradictions, in a worldwide simultaneity, onto a higher level.” The Rover, although being set ten years after a global economic collapse, is more of a dystopia than the post-apocalyptic film and this is directly due to the role of hope in the film.

Unlike the first two films in this chapter, hope for the most part does not exist in the film. Eric ends the film alone burying his dead dog while Reynolds is killed by his brother. For all intents and purposes The Rover portrays a dead world walking and waiting for the full impact of the apocalypse to hit. Things are getting worse every day and there is no room on the horizon for improvement, just more destruction.

David Ketterer in New Worlds for Old in discussing the plot of science fiction looks at a progression from utopia to dystopia to apocalyptic to post-apocalyptic and he states, “the extent that such fictions imply a steadily worsening state of affairs, this phase develops naturally into the second phase, accounting for fictions in which the world is either threatened with destruction or variously done away with.” Utopias lead to dystopias than in turn lead to apocalypses and finally into post-apocalypses.

The Rover portrays a world that is in transition from a dystopia into a full blown post-apocalyptic wasteland, and it is in this transition that time starts to figuratively freeze in place. As this process happens, the potential of the future is then replaced with the illusion of the never-ending present in that one day is replaced with the same exact day repeated for infinity. A key part of the post-apocalyptic genre is hope for a better future and the protagonist of The Rover has

309 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 129.
no hope for a better future because he cannot see the future as better. The only thing he can see is the inevitable decline of society. However, *The Postman* not only offers hope of a better future, but also one that rebuilds pre-apocalyptic society.

*The Postman*: Tracking Number Not Required

*The Postman* (1997), directed by Kevin Costner, is an oddity in the post-apocalyptic genre due to the positionality of hope. Unlike many post-apocalyptic films, hope in *The Postman* is not seen in the creation of something new but instead in the reformulation of something old. *The Postman* is set in 2013, fifteen years after an undisclosed apocalyptic event nearly wiped out all technology. In the aftermath, a militia named the Holnists spread across the Pacific Northwest creating a system of terror led by General Bethlehem.

In the aftermath of the apocalypse, communities reverted to the Western genre construction: small outposts of civilization surrounded by the never-ending frontier. This in turn isolates the communities from one another making them easier targets for the Holnists. The unnamed protagonist of *The Postman*, in escaping from the Holnists, finds a mail truck and uses the mail and the uniform to scam the inhabitants of Plainview, Oregon out of a meal. In getting a meal, he starts to make up grandiose lies about the restored United States and how it is based in Minneapolis and that Richard Starkey is the President. During his time at Plainview, he inducts Ford Lincoln Mercury into the Post Office. For the protagonist, the scam represents a warm meal but for the residents of Plainview, the idea of a restored United States serves as a beacon of hope. This idea gives them strength to resist the Holnists.

*The Postman*’s relationship to hope is inverted from other post-apocalyptic films. In both *Snowpiercer* and *The Road*, hope for a better future was found in children as they offer the best potential to resist the corruption of the pre-apocalyptic world. *The Postman* inverts this by
having the Postman, played by Kevin Costner, being the source of hope for the better world. This symbol of hope attracts young adults towards the possibility of what the figure of the Postman offers. This inversion also changes the relationship between death and hope. In the film, young adults are dying for The Postman and what he represents: the reconstruction of the old world. Instead of creating a new world, communication via the post office serves as a stepping stone for rebuilding the world. In the aftermath of the apocalypse, communities became incredibly isolated. It is through the post office that communities can start to rebuild lines of communication.

The endgame of the film is to reconstruct the United States, that is, to reconstruct an imagined community where individuals see themselves progressing through time. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson discusses the role of the newspaper in the progression of time arguing that “we have seen that the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even world events into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also, how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time.”\(^{311}\) In the case of the mail, it can also serve as a connection between the two worlds as seen when the Postman enters Pineview, Oregon.

He has a letter for a Mrs. March from her sister. The letter not only represents closure for Mrs. March, but it also gives her hope, and this is represented in the letter she gives The Postman when he leaves town: “It’s to my daughter Annie. She left five years ago. She was only fifteen. The last I heard, she was living up north.”\(^{312}\) If he can find Annie and where she is living, then that would be another community known to Pineview and with which they could communicate.

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\(^{312}\) Kevin Costner, *The Postman* (Tig Productions, 1997), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009)
It is through the post office that the various isolated communities begin to be knitted together into a cohesive whole that resembles the United States. Specifically, the restored United States.

The hope of *The Postman* is not to create something new but to return to what had worked in the first place. Instead of wanting a clear demarcation between the old world and the new world, communities needed an unbroken connection between the two worlds. In discussing the emergence of nationalism in the New World and the position of the colony in relation to the metropolis, Anderson states that “the aim was not to have New London succeed, overthrow, or destroy Old London, but rather to safeguard their continuing parallelism.”

The Postman is the connecting point between the two different nation-states and the film ends with a reconstructed United States based on the foundation that The Postman constructed. It is in the reconstruction of the past that hope is found and not in the uncertain “new” future represented in the Holnists. In the film, it is implied that the Holnists caused the apocalypse and can capitalize. Coming out of the apocalyptic event, they are already prepared and quickly swarm the frontier. However, the future that the Holnists have created is an interpretation of the past, specifically feudalism.

When occupying Pineview, General Bethlehem describes the relationship with the people in town as “a feudal system, like the Middle Ages. With lords and vassals. That’s you and me. Those lords, they had some ideas.” At the same time, the Holnists and General Bethlehem also fit within numerous archetypes within the post-apocalyptic genre. Mick Broderick, in the article “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster,” analyzes the binary between good and evil in the post-apocalyptic genre, including the archetypal evil forces: “their community is dominated by patriarchal law, but normally in the form of a younger, autocratic

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314 Costner, *The Postman*
and ruthless tyrant who commands a band of (mostly, if not exclusively) male troops.” The Holnists hit every point in the description, and it takes the death of General Bethlehem to collapse the ranks.

However, in the post-apocalyptic wasteland of The Postman both the Holnists and the Postman do not offer anything new but instead offer reiterations of what has already happened. In returning to a past interpretation of society, The Postman is doomed to repeat the same apocalyptic destruction because it offers nothing new. The United States failed during an apocalyptic event and so will the restored United States. What the Postman offers the survivors is a nostalgic interpretation of the past and the survivors glom on to this interpretation. Yet, this interpretation is inherently flawed because it does not fix the ideological problems that caused the apocalypse to happen in the first place. Katteberg in Future West in discussing the slight possibility for change in the post-apocalyptic genre states that “hope for change in humanity, however thin, lies less in technology or religion than in the end of ideologies.” The film ends with The Postman dispatching General Bethlehem and setting the foundation for the rebuilding of the United States. The film ends with society being rebuilt and a statue of The Postman being dedicated by his daughter Hope.

However, the question then becomes: What happens to society thirty years from that point? If civilization destroyed itself once that does not preclude humanity from reaching that point again. This fear of repetition is not acknowledged at the end of the film and the acknowledgement of this fear does not fit within the world of The Postman, which is a world that is always getting better. During his visit at Pineview, he tells the residents of the new President

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316 Katteberg, Future West, 362.
and his slogan. “His name is, uh Richard Starkey. From Maine. He has a saying. ‘Things are
getting better, getting better all the time.’” This saying becomes the rallying cry for those who
believe in the post office and this belief spreads across the frontier even reaching California.

This belief that things are “getting better all the time” intersects with the Western genre
plot points of progress and success. Within the Western genre, progress and success intertwine
with the progression of civilization across the frontier. At the center of this progression is the
Western hero. In *The Six Gun Mystique*, John Cawelti describes the hero as “the pioneer who
struggles against hardships to advance civilization. Initially, the heroic pioneer was the farmer
who faced the dangers of nature and the Indian to bring civilization to the frontier.” The
Postman was this pioneer who advanced civilization. It is in his travels to start the post office and
his battles with the Holnists that civilization can finally grab a footing in the post-apocalyptic
wasteland. In order to keep spreading civilization, the Pioneer must defeat the savage, and in the
defeat of the savage, civilization can spread unencumbered. The film mirrors this conflict in the
battle between the Postman and General Bethlehem. A key theme of the film is that of progress,
and this theme puts it at odds with other post-apocalyptic films.

Selective Regeneration

The film’s focus on progress intertwines with Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis,
specifically that of progress, demonstrating the film’s Western foundation. For a large majority
of post-apocalyptic fiction, the theme of progress intersects with the archetype of technology as a
double-edged sword. Or in other words, progress is what destroys civilization in the first place.
In *Future West*, William Katteberg discusses the relationship between progress and the post-
apocalyptic genre: “instead of progress and freedom, there is a dialectic of (often despotic) order

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317 Costner, *The Postman*
and (often terrifying chaos).” In the films that I considered earlier in this chapter, the world is not getting better every day for the inhabitants of the train in *Snowpiercer* or for The Man and The Boy in *The Road* or for Eric in *The Rover*. However, *The Postman* does away with this dialectic and instead focuses on a return to a simpler time that is reminiscent of a desire to return to the wilderness.

It is through the wilderness that civilization can be rebuilt. And through the apocalyptic event, the wilderness is cleansed. The apocalyptic event fixes the problem inherent to the Western genre in that the frontier was never empty but, was instead full of indigenous tribes who either needed to be conquered or exterminated to make way for white settlers. The apocalypse acts as a shortcut in that a new frontier is already emptied for the white survivors to come in and spread civilization. The two main organizations within the film, the post office and the Holnists are mostly white. The Holnists practice race segregation in that they refuse to conscript Asian and African-American soldiers.

The post office, although having Ford Lincoln Mercury, an African American man as The Postman’s second in command is still predominately white. It does raise the question of who gets to regenerate in the wilderness? Katteberg in discussing this desire to return states:

This pattern, of holocausts that serve as “cleansing exercises” and return post-frontier America to the primitive wilderness, reveal the deep-rooted cultural logic embodied in American myth history. But the cynicism and despair common to these stories also reveal how the weight of modern history has reshaped this mythic sensibility. However, *The Postman* ignores this cynicism and instead plays it straight and embraces this cultural myth. Civilization in *The Postman* is not reconstructed back east but is constructed in the American West, which has

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319 Katteberg, *Future West*, 169.
320 Ibid.
loomed large as a site of national reconstruction for decades. Carl Abbott analyzes the use of the American West in post-apocalyptic stories arguing that “these same routes and places that loomed so large in the nineteenth century reappear in science fiction that tries to imagine the rediscovery and resettlement of North America after disaster and depopulation. When society collapses, head west to reconstruct it.”321 A key tenet of the post-apocalyptic genre is the belief that what has happened will happen again. White settlers setting across the western frontier and constructing civilization in the 19th and 20th centuries echo the survivors of apocalypse reconstructing civilization in the post-apocalyptic American West. What has happened will continue to happen due to the myth surrounding the American West, a historical site of destruction (i.e., the place of the atomic testing and the place where entire tribes were decimated) and regeneration (i.e., the site of the reconstruction of civilization).

However, in The Postman, the West is only a site of regeneration disregarding the destruction and this is due to how the film engages with the trope of hope. Abbott in Frontiers Past and Future in discussing the regenerative properties of the American West states that “in the American cycle of history, these very different books agree, the West is future. When we anticipate the course of global disaster, we commonly imagine saving remnants surviving in the West or trekking westward to reestablish the American project.”322 The concept of Hope plays such a pivotal role in the film that The Postman names his daughter Hope. At the end of the film, she christens a statue of her dad as a symbol of hope. However, the hope that the film engages with is not something new but the rehashing of the frontier myth. This is put at odds with the potential that the genre offers.

322 Ibid., 181.
A key tenet of the post-apocalyptic genre is that of creating something new out of the destruction of the old. It is in the construction of the new that the survivors can move past the influence of the old world. Post-apocalyptic communities who take inspiration from pre-apocalyptic communities eventually collapse under the burden of the old world. The question then becomes, how does one reach that new and better world? *The Postman* fails to answer this question and instead states that it is better to rebuild what is flawed rather than build something new. However, in the film, the post office works and serves as the basis for a new world. In *Future West*, Katteberg describes visions of a better world by stating that they “remain, notably those that emphasize pluralism and ecological harmony. But the old means to get there, embraced by modern reformers and revolutionaries, seem exhausted and compromised.”\textsuperscript{323} The modern society that emerges at the end of the film is not a new society but is a refurbished society based on a lie. However, this lie snowballs into a rebuilt civilization within thirty years. The lie represents a better future than the current situation. It represents time moving in a direction where every day is different than the last. In discussing the between utopias and apocalypses Katteberg states that what “the apocalyptic loses in terms of strictly rational extrapolation and fulfillment, it gains in terms of promise, radical hope, and a more fully rounded understanding of human experience and potential transformation.”\textsuperscript{324} Even though the post-apocalyptic community might be inherently flawed in its execution, it does not matter because of the promise and hope it represents. The film in its portrayal of the post-apocalyptic wasteland disregards anything that compromises this vision of hope because the film fails to offer anything new to cure human nature’s tendency to implode. *The Postman* is a re-hash of a re-hash of the frontier myth without ever expanding upon it in any sizeable way. In relying on Western tropes,

\textsuperscript{323} Katteberg, *Future West*, 164.  
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 177
Costner falls into the same pitfalls as the Western genre. Instead of having The Postman confront his shortcomings and his deception, he dies and becomes a mythological figure for the new civilization. In discussing the failure of Western authors to explore the cost of progress in the construction of heroes, John Cawelti in *The Six Gun Mystique* states that “instead of exploring the cost of success and progress, the creators of Westerns made their heroes into men of honor, physical strength and skill who were fully capable of withstanding the pressures and frustrations of their marginal social positions.”

The truth surrounding the Postman does not matter as much as the myth surrounding him. It is this failure to critique the frontier myth that served as a factor of the performance of the film.

*The Postman* was both a critical and commercial flop bringing a total of $17.6 million dollars on a budget of $80 million dollars. However, its hopeful interpretation of the end of the world fit in line with the perception of the apocalypse in the 1990s. In “Doomsday America: The Pessimistic Turn of Post 9/11 Apocalyptic Cinema,” authors John Wallis and James Aston describe the attitude surrounding apocalyptic films in the 1990’s thusly: “a defining characteristic of the 1990s cycle was a view of cataclysm—whether that be alien invaders, superviruses, approaching asteroids or other forms of natural disaster— as merely a problem that could be overcome through human courage and ingenuity allied with science and technology.”

*The Postman* embodies this characteristic and this is why the interpretation of the apocalypse no longer fits within the modern day.

The feeling of hope that *The Postman* embodies is replaced with the feeling of despair and in the belief that humanity cannot be saved. This shift from hope to despair was solidified

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after the September 11th attacks. In discussing the paradigm shift in the apocalyptic films after 9/11, Wallis and Aston state that the “post-9/11 cycle may be viewed as radically inverting this faith in human ability and science and technology in several ways, introducing a sense of pessimism.”327 This sense of pessimism is directly responsible for the positionality of hope. In the first three films of this chapter, hope does not exist on the macro level but instead on the micro level. Or in other words on the individual level. There is no hope on the institutional level as seen in both Snowpiercer and The Rover as the state is either a zombie or in the slow process of collapsing. The Postman’s sunny perception of a hopeful future does not fit within the despair and pessimism of the current post-apocalyptic standard. This is due not only to the fact that The Postman offers a return to the frontier myth but more importantly it offers a future. It may be an impossible future, but it does give hope. The wasteland of the film is a discrete period with a starting and an ending point. It does not give the illusion of the never-ending frontier like other post-apocalyptic films.

The progression of time in post-apocalyptic films is directly tied to the construction of hope and whether the survivors can see a future for themselves. All four films in this chapter engage with this relationship between time and hope in a different way. In Snowpiercer, hope and time are compromised by the environment. The survivors of a botched attempt to cure climate change find themselves upon a train that circumnavigates the globe. The train itself is separated by ticket price with survivors segregated by class. Survivors in the back of the train are exploited and this exploitation takes on many different forms.

To maintain equilibrium, the leader of the train manipulates the back of the train to start revolts that are then put down with maximum force. This manipulation of revolt creates the

327 Ibid
illusion that nothing ever changes, and nothing will ever change. In the construction of this artificial despair, the back of the train is kept in line. If nothing will ever change, then why try to change it? However, hope for the future is not found in the survivors who survived the apocalyptic event but in the children. The manipulated revolt that the leader of the train constructs succeeds. However, the leader of the revolution cannot see past the train. The only future available to the survivors in the back of the train is to destroy the train and the film ends with the derailing of the train with all involved killed except for two children. These children represent not only a new generation but also a potential future outside the wasteland. The Road picks up this thread and extends it in the characters of The Man and The Boy.

Like Snowpiercer, the protagonists try to survive in a hellish environment but unlike Snowpiercer, no one knows what ended the world. At the same time, time has become unmeasurable for the survivors as each day merges with the next. In the film, the survivors have entered a Hobbesian state of nature where life is nasty, brutish and short. In the wasteland, hope is found on the small scale specifically in the relationship between The Man and The Boy. It is also at the individual scale where change is the most dramatic. The film ends with The Man succumbing to an infected wound leaving The Boy all alone in the wasteland. Yet, The Boy finds a new family that takes him in. In the first two films of this chapter, children not only offer hope but offer a pathway to a potentially better future as they are not corrupted by the failure of the old world. However, this hope of a better future does not apply to a nontraditional apocalyptic event like a global economic collapse as seen in The Rover.

Unlike Snowpiercer and The Road, the apocalyptic event of The Rover is not due to a sudden explosion or a freak scientific accident but instead is a global economic collapse whose impact is slowly reverberating across the world. It is a slow burn of an apocalypse and it affects
people in different ways. In the case of the protagonist, Eric, he murdered his partner after finding her in bed with another man. Her death provoked no response from the police and this event fundamentally changes his worldview. While other survivors try to create a semblance of everyday life, Eric knows that it makes no difference. He cannot see a future but instead sees himself frozen in time living out the same day until he dies. At the same time, he is a man on a mission who will kill anyone getting in his way. Yet, the mission itself, burying his dog, is mundane. He just gets tied into a series of unfortunate events that culminate in the death of soldiers, merchants and incompetent criminals. The film ends, and he buries his dog but there is nothing left for him in the frontier other than watching civilization slowly crumble around him. 

*The Rover* creates the illusion of time freezing by giving the characters no hope for a better future. The world has ended but everyone is believing it hasn’t, and they continue through the motions. These motions are ultimately superfluous, but people die to go through them as seen in the soldiers who patrol the ever-lawless outback. In the case of *The Rover*, apocalypses overlap with the literal apocalypse overlapping with Eric’s metaphorical apocalypse in the murder of his wife. Unlike *Snowpiercer* and *The Road*, there are no symbols of hope but instead *The Rover* is littered with symbols of decay such as broken cars, lack of police services and boarded up houses. The final film in this chapter inverts the despair and pessimism of the first three films and instead offers a sunny and hopeful future as seen in *The Postman*.

*The Postman* breaks from the first three films in some key differences ranging from the positionality of the symbol of hope, the reconstruction of society and the film’s full-throated embrace of the frontier myth. Instead of having children be the symbol of hope, hope of a better future is embodied by an adult man who in the process of scamming a community out of food reconstructs the post office. The post office represents the possibility of a better future in a
present controlled by the Holnists. In the dispersal of post offices and the restarting of mail delivery, isolated communities attacked by the Holnists start to unite into a congealed whole to create the restored United States of America. The two factions eventually meet with The Postman defeating General Bethlehem, the leader of the Holnists. Thirty years after the victory, the United States has been rebuilt and civilization has once again conquered the frontier. The frontier in *The Postman* does not give the illusion of a never-ending frontier but instead is a discrete time period that has a concrete ending. Time cannot give the perception of freezing if thing keep getting better all the time and this saying is part of the film’s perspective on the post-apocalyptic genre. Although the world has been destroyed, there is hope on the institutional level for a better future. Or in other words, there is hope in the past for a better future as the film embraces the frontier myth and the transformative powers of the frontier in the creation of a better future.

In the aftermath of an apocalyptic event, time does not literally stop but figuratively as history is deconstructed due to the creation of a solid line of demarcation. This line separates the pre-apocalyptic from the post-apocalyptic. For the survivors of the apocalypse enter into a world that is terrifying and full of both horror and death. The survivors then look towards the past for inspiration and in the inspiration, they find comfort. The past that the survivors find is a past that is corrupted to the core.

All four films in this chapter discuss this intersection between the future, the present and the past in different ways. While *Snowpiercer* and *The Road* offer glimpses of some sort of future, *The Rover* offers nothing other than the slow decay of civilization. Finally, *The Postman*’s portrayal of the future is in fact a portrayal of the past in its embodiment of the frontier myth. In the post-apocalyptic genre, the past isn’t the past. It is not even the present or
the future. Instead all three timelines occur simultaneously while they intersect with one another. Time has not stopped, it is simply in a holding pattern.
CONCLUSION

Cass lived to see Hoover Dam in its Old-World Glory, humming with power the likes of which the Mojave had never seen. Vegas burned brighter than ever, Securitrons filled the streets, and Cass’s heart skipped…just for a little. Her last words were to the Dam- and to herself “We were going full speed ahead…but facing backwards the whole time”
-Chris Avellone *Fallout New Vegas*

You know, hope is a mistake. If you can’t fix what’s broken, you’ll, uh…you’ll go insane
-George Miller *Mad Max Fury Road*

Tales about the end of the world can be messy, as seen in the films covered in this dissertation. The apocalypse, like a chameleon, can take on many forms ranging from a lack of resources to nuclear winter to man-made ecological disasters. The various ways of envisioning the apocalypse still create the same thing: a wasteland. The term “end of the world” itself is a misnomer in that the world itself does not end. What does end is a specific interpretation. The collapse of this interpretation leaves a void that must be filled. Therefore, we see the survivors of the apocalypse try to articulate a new interpretation.

The post-apocalyptic genre positions itself in the middle of these two interpretations of the world (that is, the one that existed before “the end” and the one that developed “after”). In being positioned between the two, the post-apocalyptic genre finds itself stuck in the middle between past and future. This relationship between past and future becomes complicated via the possibility of repetition, of repeating the same event/behavior over and over. Within the post-apocalyptic genre, repetition is focused on the past, specifically rebuilding what has been destroyed and trying to rebuild the pre-apocalyptic society. This rebuilding of the past becomes complicated as it violates the key tenet of the genre: to begin again. The violation of this tenet not only occurs in the story but also in the production of these films.
Genre films rely on formulas that allow the audience to know exactly what to expect. A genre film that avoids the established formula for its kind can lead to abstraction that will cause the audience to reject the film. The genre with the strongest formula is that of the Western whose infinitely simple but complex formula dominated popular culture for most of the twentieth century. The Western relied on a formula that could easily be adapted to different stories and characters. However, the recurring narrative of the Western is the battle between civilization and the frontier, where civilization conquers the frontier. Although the Western genre declined in popularity in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, a sizeable number of archetypes (gunslinger and savage), motifs (hat color = morality), and tropes (civilization v savagery, women as symbols of civilization, etc.) have entered popular culture.

It is in the decline of the Western genre that the post-apocalyptic genre started to appropriate and translate these archetypes, motifs, and tropes to fit within the genre. It is through the Western genre that the post-apocalyptic genre could (re)create a foundation that was familiar to the audience, while introducing foreign premises. Although the world might be set in an apocalypse caused by solar radiation using Western archetypes, tropes and motifs, the audience has a familiar foundation for the survivors to deal with the crisis and with each other. This dissertation is located at the intersection of the Western and the post-apocalyptic genre where this dissertation and its analysis is located.

Although this intersection has been beneficial to both genres, it also violates the key tenet within post-apocalyptic texts: beginning again. Instead of creating a brand-new world, the post-apocalyptic genre, in adapting and transplanting Western genre components, finds itself haunted by the baggage of the Western genre. This haunting of the post-apocalyptic genre compromises the possibility for a new world. With the possibility of a new world diminished, the chances of
repeating the apocalyptic event increase as those who fail to learn from the apocalypse may end up recreating the apocalyptic event. This baggage of the Western genre haunts all parts of the post-apocalyptic genre ranging from plot to production, and its impact is most profound in the creation of characters. This impact is felt in the translation and adaptation of Western genre archetypes in the construction of characters as seen in both Chapters 1 and 2.

An essential part of any Western genre story is the villain who inhabits the archetype of the savage. While the hero in the story fights for civilization, the savage fights for the frontier. This battle against civilization is a losing one, and the savage can be portrayed in one of two ways: peaceful or violent. Either way, the savage must be dispatched to make way for civilization. It is important to note that the savage has racial connotations within the Western genre due to the portrayals of Native Americans within the genre, which became part of its identifying formula. The post-apocalyptic genre appropriated the savage archetype and, in this appropriation, seeks to remove the racial connotations surrounding the archetype. By removing the racial connotations, the archetype becomes a universal representation. This universalization of the savage archetype in the post-apocalyptic genre is itself part of a larger shift in representation from Native to White. The universalized savage archetype is built around the perception of whiteness as normal while the Haitian zombie is directly tied to slavery and the Haitian Revolution.

The dominant construction of the zombie in popular culture is derived from the figure of the zombie in Haitian folklore. The Haitian zombie is a zombie that is directly tied to labor and race, a direct product of the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian zombie and the universalized savage archetype are mutually exclusive and cannot co-exist due to their positionality surrounding race. The figure of the zombie changed with the release of Night of the Living Dead.
in 1968 directed by George Romero that whitewashed the figure of the zombie. By making the zombies white, Romero could in turn critique whiteness and the idea of normal. In shifting the racial connotations of the zombie from black to white, the zombie in turn shifts from the exotic to the generic. In becoming generic, the zombie becomes a blank slate for writers. This interpretation of the zombie became the dominant construction due to its availability. By adopting the Romero zombie as the dominant zombie, it in turn widens the perception of race in the post-apocalyptic genre (e.g. Ben in Night of the Living Dead).

This widening of perception also comes into play in the use of the savage archetype by predominately white protagonists. Unlike the Western genre where characters tend to be constrained by archetypes due to the simplicity of the formula, the post-apocalyptic genre is far more fluid when it comes to archetypes. A character in a post-apocalyptic genre may inhabit multiple archetypes at the same time and switch between archetypes. An excellent example of this switching can be seen in the character of Max from Mad Max: Fury Road. He starts the film as the savage after being driven insane by the death of his family. At the same time, he inhabits the role of the gunslinger that offers him the skill to help Furiosa and the war wives. Throughout the series of films, Max is constantly switching archetypes.

Shifting representation of the savage archetype from Native to White. Opens the floodgates for differing representations of people of color in post-apocalyptic cinema. A fantastic example of this differing representation is the character of Ben in Night of the Living Dead. Ben, an African-American male is the only individual who knows what is going on during the zombie outbreak. He is the only one with a plan on how to kill the zombies attacking the farmhouse. However, his status as the hero of the film is directly tied to positionality of the zombies in the film as white. In positioning the zombies in the film as the other, Ben has value
to fellow survivors due to his knowledge. As the zombie outbreak is stopped, Ben is forced into the role of the other and the film ends with Ben being shot and killed by a white militia who mistook him as a zombie. The possibility of change in the post-apocalyptic genre in relation to race is complicated due to the position of the savage archetype in both the Western and the post-apocalyptic genre. This complicated relationship is also embodied in the use of gender norms in the post-apocalyptic genre.

As the post-apocalyptic genre has taken from the Western, the Western influence continues to directly impact the genre. This can be seen in the contradiction surrounding gender norms in the post-apocalyptic genre, which can be tied directly back to the Western. Mainly, within the Western genre, women for the most part represent the coming of civilization to the frontier and the potential closure of the frontier. The portrayal of women as symbols of civilization also creates a dichotomy between white women and women of color who become marginalized to make way for white women.

This dichotomy is based on differing professions in the Western, and the contrast between the schoolmarm and the dance hall girl, for instance. In a traditional Western, the hero rejects the dance hall girl to be with the schoolmarm that in turn signals the end of the frontier. The characteristics of the schoolmarm in the Western are threefold: monogamy, chastity and middle-class respectability. The Western hero in saving the day and marrying the schoolmarm in turn destroys himself because violence and savagery has no place in civilization. If the Western hero is hyper-masculine, then his love interest must in turn be hyper-feminine. This construction of hyper masculinity and femininity works in the Western genre due to a highly refined formula with a clear ending (civilization conquering the frontier).
On the other hand, this construction of masculinity and femininity acts as a straightjacket in the post-apocalyptic genre as it limits what characters can become. An excellent example can be seen in the character Quilla June from *A Boy and His Dog*. In the film, she embodies the schoolmarm archetype to lure Vic down to Topeka, so he can diversify the genetic material of the community. At the same time, she also uses her sexuality to advance her desire to become part of the ruling class. When she returns to Topeka with Vic, her wishes are ignored by the committee who do not keep their end of the deal. Although Quilla June has ambition, she is still constrained by the gender norms of Topeka. Both Chapter 1 and 2 analyze how the baggage of Western archetypes and gender norms limit the possibility for new stories. By pigeonholing characters into archetypes, the genre sacrifices the foreign for the familiar and completely disregards the tenet that is supposed to drive it: to begin again. At the same time, by using archetypes, the genre creates a formula that prioritizes the past over the future. The ghost that is haunting the post-apocalyptic genre can also a metaphorical ghost as seen in Chapter 3 and the link between the post-apocalyptic genre and post-colonialism as portrayed in the *Mad Max* series.

The baggage of being haunted is an essential part of the character of Max Rockatansky, the protagonist of *Mad Max*. In the first film, he watches his family get run down and killed. This event forces Max to flee into the desert to escape the trauma. The character and the series represent two different types of apocalyptic events intersecting. The death of Max’s family represents the metaphorical apocalypse in that a traumatic event can end someone’s world, but the world continues to spin. While he is going through this metaphorical apocalypse, the world is literally ending around him due to a lack of gasoline. As the series progresses, Max attempts to outrun his trauma only to be driven insane by it.
This construction of a metaphorical apocalypse in the *Mad Max* series can be applied to colonialism and how post-colonialism is a metaphorical post-apocalyptic wasteland. In other words, the process of colonialism is itself an apocalyptic event that leaves baggage that stays with the nation past colonization and into the post-colonial nation state. This baggage impacts the construction of the post-colonial nation state as it subconsciously mirrors the colonial state. By mirroring the colonial state, it is in turn recreating the same system of inequality that was obliterated in the collapse of the colony. As Max wanders through the Australian wasteland, he encounters communities that are doomed to failure. In *Beyond Thunderdome*, he encounters Bartertown that is run by Aunty Enity and Master Blaster. Bartertown runs on methane gas that is farmed via exploited workers. Bartertown itself recreates the colonizer/colonized binaries in labor and is destroyed at the end of the film.

In *Fury Road*, Max finally encounters a post-apocalyptic nation-state led by a dictator named Immortan Joe. Immortan Joe rules at the Citadel, a location that reinforces colonial thinking via vertical hierarchies, exploitation of natural resources and its treatment of the workers. Similar to *Beyond Thunderdome*, the Citadel is destroyed metaphorically as Immortan Joe is killed opening up the possibility of a new leader. The construction of the post-apocalyptic nation-state is undermined by an urge to rebuild what has been destroyed. It is here where the contradiction of the post-apocalyptic nation state is created. By rebuilding what is destroyed, the foundation is laid for the same destruction to happen again. The process of repetition within the post-apocalyptic genre in relation to both characters and communities slowly poisons the genre’s capabilities to create a sense of newness.

Instead of a blank slate where there is nothing, there is now a palimpsest where the traces of a forgotten picture remain. These traces instill a compunction to finish the picture only to miss
the entire point of a blank slate. By finishing the trace, the cycle of destruction and regeneration continues to happen. This fear of repetition is not only limited to the story side of the genre but also to the production side in the creation of a homogenous aesthetic as seen in Chapter 4.

Although there are big budget post-apocalyptic films that have A-list movie stars in them, a large subset of post-apocalyptic films are low budget affairs that have serious questions about how to portray the end of the world. If the post-apocalyptic wasteland represents a clean slate, the question then becomes how does one represent that on a shoestring budget? The answer for many low-budget post-apocalyptic directors is to set the film in a traditional Western setting and add items that magnify the wasteland (junk, telephone poles, burned out cars, etc.).

That traditional Western setting is the desert which serves a double meaning within the Western genre. On the one hand, it represents a violent place without law and the symbols of civilization. On the other, it represents a site of regeneration in that individuals are fundamentally changed by the experience. This site of regeneration intersects with the post-apocalyptic genre’s use of the savage archetype. In the wasteland that the survivors of the apocalyptic event gain the abilities to both survive and thrive. The desert checks many boxes for the post-apocalyptic filmmaker on a budget. It is barren, dry, and dusty creating and building the illusion of the wasteland. At the same time, the desert also allows the director to re-use Western motifs to enhance the story to create a familiar lens to watch and interpret the film. *The Road Warrior*, the second *Mad Max* film is a post-apocalyptic film, but director George Miller uses again western motifs such as hat color to interpret the story. These motifs are then translated to fit within the story.

Within the Western genre, the hat motif is a well-acknowledged shortcut to display morality (or lack thereof) in characters. The character who wears the white hat is the hero and the
character who wears the black hat is the villain. Post-apocalyptic films have taken this color scheme and extended it. Mainly, instead of hat color, the color of clothing and how much skin is covered now represents good (white) and evil (black). For the most part, the amount of skin coverage and color of clothing has only been applicable for men, but there have been examples of this motif with women (e.g. Furiosa and the war brides in *Fury Road*). While the war brides are dressed in white, Furiosa is dressed in black with black face paint.

When the protagonist Max encounters a conflict between the settlers and the bandits at the beginning of the film, he does not fit within either group due to his clothing. The black clothing alienates the settlers while the lack of skin being shown alienates the bandits. These translated motifs then influence the story of the film. In the case of *The Road Warrior*, the story matches the motif as Miller adapts the classic Western *Shane* to fit within a post-apocalyptic wasteland. *The Road Warrior* represents the continuation of the Western aesthetic that Miller first started in *Mad Max*.

*Mad Max* was an independent film made on a small budget that broke numerous laws in its production to get the aesthetic that Miller wanted. Although the film was made for four hundred thousand dollars, it became a smash hit. It was through its status as a hit that it helped to define what the post-apocalyptic wasteland “looked like” in film. Along with *A Boy and His Dog*, *Mad Max* defined the post-apocalyptic wasteland as a desert. By being set in the desert that both films tie themselves to the Western genre in multiple ways ranging from characters to landscape. Through this relationship to the desert that post-apocalyptic films can place an artificial limit to the stories that they are able to tell.

Although the desert as a wasteland has become a popular representation of the post-apocalyptic world, it is worth noting that this is not the only interpretation of the wasteland. One
example I offered in an earlier chapter is *Stake Land*. Instead of empty deserts consisting of barren vegetation, *Stake Land* is shot in rural Pennsylvania consisting of highly forested areas. This new setting works due to the hybridity of the film. Director Jim Mickle in shooting *Stake Land* mixes three distinct genres: Western, road film, and horror. While the desert worked in the previous films to enhance the isolation of the protagonists and the empty nature of the wasteland, the desert setting is a non-starter due to the erasure of tension.

In shooting in heavily forested areas, Mickle can increase the tension due to low visibility. Monsters only work when they are rarely seen, and *Stake Land* is not only a Western but also a horror film with vampires. At the same time, *Stake Land* is not set in the far future like *A Boy and His Dog* or *Mad Max* but is set soon (about five to ten years from our current reality). This can be seen in the clothing of the characters. In wearing contemporary fashion, it gives the impression that the apocalypse just happened. Like Miller, Mickle shot the film on a low budget of $625,000. To save money, he shot the film in locations that he knew could work for the hybridity of the film.

The three films discussed in Chapter 4 although being set in different locations are also directly impacted by the Western genre in distinct ways and this complicates both the production and the story of the film. A key complication found in each film is its relationship to time and how the post-apocalyptic genre’s relationship to time is inherently complicated due to its status as a hybrid genre. This relationship is explored in Chapter 5.

Although the post-apocalyptic genre is incredibly popular right now, its origins can be traced back to two distinct genres: The Western and Science Fiction, both genres have been around for at least a century. While the Western genre offers the post-apocalyptic genre archetypical characters, settings, and story, among others, Science Fiction offers the post-
apocalyptic genre the apocalypse -the actual event that destroys the world. Yet, both genres offer more in relation to temporality. The Western genre is set in a distinct time period (1865-1910) with a distinctive formula and characters that fit within that formula. Science Fiction, on the other hand, does not have a set period. Instead, it can range from the beginning of time to the end of time and is known for appropriating genre characteristics to fit within the genre. Combining the Western and Science Fiction genres together creates the post-apocalyptic genre, but it also creates a problematic relationship to time.

Unlike the Western genre that has a linear relationship to time, time within the post-apocalyptic genre is portrayed cyclically. What has happened will continue to happen due to how time intersects within the genre. This relationship is due to how time is portrayed in both the Western and in Science Fiction. The Western genre relies on a nostalgic interpretation of the past that relies on binaries to tell the story (good v evil, frontier v civilization, savage v hero, etc.). Or in other words, the Western genre sells the audience a familiar interpretation of the past.

Science Fiction offers two distinct interpretations of the future: a future that is to be hoped for or a future to be feared. More importantly, Science Fiction sells the audience on a foreign interpretation of the future. This foreign interpretation of the future can take on many different forms including everything from laser swords to alien worlds. What makes these different interpretations foreign is the fact that these ideas do not currently exist in the real world. At the same time, this interpretation of the future can be both good and horrible as a key trope of Science Fiction is technology as a double-edged sword. In the future, humanity may have the power to terraform planets to become hospitable. Yet, this same technology can be used for destructive purposes. Through the lens of Science Fiction, the future is a foreign concept that can both be wonderful and scary at the same time.
The post-apocalyptic genre merges these two interpretations to create a present that is both foreign and yet familiar to the viewer. This construction also explains why survivors after an apocalyptic event do not look towards the future but instead look towards the past for guidance. It is a nostalgic interpretation of the past that the survivors base their new civilization on. It is in these nostalgic interpretations of the past that histories of colonization, imperialism and genocide are whitewashed out of existence to sell this interpretation.

Instead of looking towards the future for inspiration, survivors will inevitably look towards the past because it is what is known to them. Even if the past has failed, survivors will still turn to what they know over what they do not, and it is this simple act that systematically undermines the post-apocalyptic genre. In a genre whose key tenet involves creating something new, very few do and instead recreate the same system that has already failed.

The main goal of this dissertation has been to illustrate the bridge between the post-apocalyptic genre and the Western genre. While authors such as William Katteberg and Carl Abbott connected the two genres, they mostly focused on themes that the two genres shared that created an implicit connection between the two genres. Adding to their contributions, this dissertation argues that the connection between the two genres is not implicit but is explicit. The post-apocalyptic genre does not only share similar themes but also character archetypes, visual motifs, specific landscapes and visual imagery. This is because that post-apocalyptic genre consciously appropriated and translated Western genre components to fit within the post-apocalyptic wasteland. By doing this, the post-apocalyptic genre became something that is both foreign and familiar to the audience.

Nevertheless, this interpretation is limited to films that make a conscious effort to use the Western formula in its characters and settings. Films like Snowpiercer or Children of Men, which
eschew Western genre characters and setting, limit the applicability of this intervention into post-apocalyptic cinema. Although Snowpiercer is analyzed in the previous chapter, it shares almost no similarities with any other film. Instead of wide-open vistas with miles of land in each direction, it instead offers a claustrophobic train circling a barren and icy globe. The main character does not fit within a Western archetype and the story ends with a train derailing and killing everyone on board except for two children. It shares almost no similarities to the Western complicating the use of the dissertation to analyze it.

Although the Western foundation has remained popular due to films such as Mad Max and A Boy and His Dog, directors have started to consider other locations. They have also begun to look at other genres or the combination of other genres. Going back to Stake Land, this post-apocalyptic Western/Horror/Road Movie becomes complicated due to the multiple tropes that Director Jim Mickle uses. Although I have analyzed the film as a derivative of the Western genre, I do that at the expense of archetypes and tropes from both horror and road movies. The limitation of my research is that I fail to look at the implications of other genres upon the post-apocalyptic genre. Although the post-apocalyptic Western is popular, a similar point can be said about the relationship horror elements and the post-apocalyptic wasteland. In A Book of Eli, there is an elderly couple living in the wasteland trapping, killing, and eating fellow survivors. The post-apocalyptic genre is a hybrid genre, and, in this dissertation, I have only focused on one part of that hybridity. Horror is one such route, but another could be Science Fiction, specifically looking at apocalyptic fiction and what ends the world instead of looking at the aftermath. In examining the hybrid genre, one must look at all the intersections instead of focusing solely on one and following that intersection to the end. Throughout this dissertation, a key tenet has been the concept of the foreign yet familiar. This is something that was both
strange but also something known to the audience. This concept itself has its basis in genre films like the Western, Horror, Romantic Comedy and more. When a viewer sits down to watch a genre film, they are expecting a film to fit within their perception of that specific genre. A genre film must walk a tight rope between familiarity and abstraction. If a film is too familiar, then it risks being cliché and trite.

On the other hand, if a film is seen to be too foreign then it risks the possibility of abstraction and having the audience walk out. Genre films position themselves right in the middle of this conflict to ensure that they make the most money. However, this concept of the foreign yet familiar is itself complicated by the post-apocalyptic genre. The annihilation of all civilization is not the end of the world but instead is the end of a specific interpretation of the world (the one with which we—or the characters in it—are familiar). The slate is wiped clean and the post-apocalyptic survivors can create something new.

Repetition can be a positive thing in genre films as audiences for the most part do not want something new but instead want to watch a re-interpretation of something they have already seen. Repetition undermines the key tenet of the post-apocalyptic genre of beginning again with a clean slate. A clean slate cannot exist with a bridge between the old and the new world. A famous quote that is unattributed is that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. By failing to understand this, the post-apocalyptic genre will continue to portray a world that is heading to its inevitable destruction. Throughout this dissertation, a recurring idea that I raise is that of the clean slate. The idea of the clean slate is that in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event that all links to the old world are destroyed and the survivors have to create something new. The post-apocalyptic genre sells itself on this idea of the blank slate, but the genre never actually shows this blank slate. Instead, a mixture of the old
and new world is consumed in that the old world, even though destroyed, continues to haunt the new. If we were to take this idea of a blank slate to its logical conclusion, we would find a world that would be unimaginable to us both in its scope and its form of living. Directors, writers, and producers although creating post-apocalyptic stories - are in fact producing stories with familiar touchstones that lead to this mixture of the old and the new.
REFERENCES


