

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

LOSING THE NON-HUMAN NOW AND AT THE END OF THE WORLD IN MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD* AND POWERS' *BEWILDERMENT*

From grief to contemplation

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This thesis is not the result of individual work, but of a cherished cooperation that stretches over years of thinking, reading, contemplating, and – simply – being, thanks to the non-human that permeates my life.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost two decades ago, Cormac McCarthy received the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Road* (2006). Called by George Monbiot “the most important environmental book ever written” (2007), McCarthy’s post-apocalyptic novel has continued to attract attention from artists and critics alike, leading to many conversations about the content and style of the novel, which was adapted into a movie directed by John Hillcoat (2009) and a graphic novel drawn by Manu Larcenet (2024). McCarthy’s novel depicts a father-and-son trip in a desolate landscape towards the South of an unnamed territory that evokes the US in the hope of better weather conditions. As descriptions go by, the novel constructs a scenery devoid of life. Any sign of vibrant nature is gone in this apocalyptic world: trees are dead, flowers and fruits are gone, and animals are but bones. As the sun has lost its radiance and as ashes cover the land and pervade the air that they breathe, the characters rely on each other and they make their way in a devastated land, wary of anthropophagic strangers. As the cause of the collapse it not made clear in the novel, the book is transformed “from a warning [...] into an outcome, where effects are of greater import than causes.” (Sheehan, 2012, p.91) Similarly, Johns-Putra describes the novel “as an end-of-times thought experiment rather than as a prophecy or warning.” (2016, p.521)

As no explicit explanation for the collapsed world is given in the novel, scholars have been attempting to search for clues in order to identify potential causes. While environmental concerns have been outshined in the past by causes such as nuclear, divine, or meteoric catastrophes, an increasing number of cli-fi readings of *The Road* (Johns-Putra, 2016, p.250) have appeared. Johns-Putra suggests that even though the novel is not explicitly about the climate crisis, such a reading or interpretation is made possible given the context of reception: a globally warmed era (p.520). They argue that the anthropocentrism that pervades the novel makes it “[mourn] the loss of human rather than nonhuman nature” (p.521). This has not stopped critics from building on the loss and cannibalism present in the text to highlight the environmental dimension of the novel, as they allow ecological loss to be perceived and as they represent dynamics of consumption that are discussed in terms of (un)sustainability.

Several scholars draw attention to cannibalism in order to tackle issues of consumption and consumerism, which are essential to understand the current environmental crisis. While Paul Sheehan argues that the cannibal is “the anti-capitalist par excellence” since he does not enter the logic of “limitless accumulation” but instead “survives by devouring his own kind, a

figure of pure, non-replenishable consumption” (2012 p.95), other critics define cannibalism in *The Road* as unecological. Dominy observes that anthropophagy transforms every survivor into a consumer and to a potentially consumed person (2015, p.147). Ethics of humanity then becomes ethics of consumption, as its inevitability imposes a choice upon how and what can/should be consumed (p.149). While cannibalism is a central part of the story, its reference to consumption is central to an ecological reading of the novel as Dominy labels it as “a critique of unchecked consumption of environmental resources and the products made with them.” (p.147) Huebert contends that the two main characters are not immune to engaging in cannibalistic behavior, as they “are ecological cannibals insofar as their eating practice quite literally involves travelling around scouring the remnants of an ecosystem that can no longer produce human food.” (2017, p.76) Further than that, as “ecological cannibalism is the familiar form of unsustainable consumption of natural resources that may lead to societal collapse and a situation of widespread starvation,” the man and the boy become “inheritors of the legacy of grocery stores, gasoline, and roads—a legacy that has turned the world into the corpse on which they now gnaw.” (p.76) As the novel is marked by consumption, be it in the form of cannibalism or in the remnants of a capitalist society, the text functions like a mirror on consumerist society, hinting at its consequences on the environment and the loss that is deemed to ensue.

While Johns-Putra points to the anthropocentrism of the novel, they still acknowledge a general atmosphere of loss. According to them, *The Road*’s “elegiac” tone “haunts [the narrative] with loss.” (2016, p.526) As Johns-Putra describes loss as “an ongoing state of being rather than a single event,” the novel’s emptiness “creates a vacuum that remnants of the past rush to fill”, be it with the man’s dreams and memory or tangible elements such as a bottle of Coke (p.526). Remembering what has been lost is itself tinted with loss. Not only “impartial” traces of the past “threaten to disappear altogether” – as the man’s memories and his knowledge of language slowly slip out of his hands, but the man’s telling of stories of the past are “scored by the loss of the present,” “because they are marked by the plenitude of the past” (p.527). In other words, vestiges of the past, on top of being fragile and finite, both represent what has been lost and the loss itself, hence creating a pervasive feeling of loss throughout the entire novel rather than an extraordinary and spectacular disaster. In their article “Eating and Mourning the Corpse of the World,” David Huebert (2017) argues that “environmentalist discourse—with its tendency to focus on futurity and the conservation of life—does not do enough to acknowledge the bare fact of loss” (p.68). *The Road*, in comparison, “dramatize[s] the losses of the future” and “compell[s] the reader to enter a painful memory of something that has not yet happened”

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(p.78), thanks to its elegiac tone. As the prose is punctuated with memories and dreams of green nature, the novel acknowledges a “loss to come” by celebrating life in “howlingly lyrical elegies for once-thriving animals and ecosystems” (p.68). These celebrations, which Hubert calls “elegiac mourning,” are a “literary technique that acknowledges the bare reality of loss rather than simply re-emphasizing the environmentalist drive to conserve.” (p.66)

Eighteen years after the publication of *The Road*, where are we? Despite the release of novels like that of Cormac McCarthy, the trajectory of the climate crisis is not budging. Far from the speculative experiment made by McCarthy, contemporary life is marked by loss, be it melted glaciers, mass-extinction, changed seasons, or landscapes transformed by floods and hurricanes. In tune with this pervasiveness of loss come novels that tackle the topic of environmental loss, such as Pulitzer-winning author Richard Powers’ *Bewilderment* (2021). Far from the loss to come depicted in a speculative future, Powers’ novel represents ongoing losses. Like in *The Road*, *Bewilderment* focuses on a father-and-son duo. While loss is observed and felt by the father in the first novel, it is the child, Robin, who is most impacted by the loss and death of the non-human in the second novel. While doctors and experts battle over diagnosing Robin, switching between autism, OCD, or ADHD, one thing is undeniable: the child’s love for the non-human makes him more acute and sensitive to their suffering. Since he struggles to fit amongst other children because of his deep affection for and reaction to the endangered non-human, Robin takes part in a program called Decoded Neurofeedback, which makes him train his brain on other people’s brains and eventually his late mother’s brain, leading to Robin’s emotional improvement. As science has its limit, Marco Caracciolo argues in his analysis of Power’s novel that “the uncertainty of neuroscience fuses with the broader uncertainty that surrounds the ecological crisis.” (2024, p.183) One thing is certain, however, the world in which Robin and his father Theo live is as marked by loss as that of *The Road*.

In the face of non-human loss, these two novels appear desperate to make this loss tangible, be it in the setting of *The Road* or in Robin’s emotional reactions in *Bewilderment*. As death needs the existence of connection for it to be grievable – if not meaningful, the two novels seek to revive the relationship between the human and the non-human, both before and after the death of either. This thesis seeks to uncover how *The Road* and *Bewilderment*¹ create and sustain a relationship to the non-human. In order to do so, it delves into two aspects related to loss: grief and the connection to the non-human.

¹ They will be respectively referenced as “TR” and “B” to avoid density.

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In the first chapter of this thesis, attention will be brought to thinkers such as Barnett, Craps, Cunsolo, Landman, Nixon, Heise, Haraway, and Tsing in order to outline the framework that will be used in the ensuing discussion of the two novels. In doing so, the theoretical framework highlights the importance of emotions in environmental studies, including the one that is of interest in this thesis: grief. As grief for the non-human is a political endeavor that relies on and creates connection between human and non-human, this thesis explores how both novels create and convey entanglement, cooperation, the multispecies, and kinship to understand the place of human animals on this planet. Finally, it introduces Barnett's theory on the importance of names in foregrounding human relationship with and grief for the non-human.

The second chapter engages in an analysis of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. In order to do so, three points are addressed. First, it studies the relationship that characters have with the non-human, be it via language to mourn the old world and name the new one or via their capacity to enjoy non-human landscapes. Then, it dives deeper in the possibilities that language offers as far as lost animal species are concerned, as it can not only engage in a work of mourning and remembrance thanks to memories and dreams of non-human animals but also make them survive both in the text and in the mind of the reader thanks to their constant presence in the text, be it in words, similes, or idioms. Lastly, the chapter proposes a resistant reading of the novel's landscapes, weather, and plants that reestablish a relationship to the non-human. As it seeks to go beyond the greenness of the non-human, the last section challenges previous readings of the text that have discarded the diegetic present world of *The Road* as empty and void of nature. As it looks beyond the novel's nothingness, the section unveils the varied landscapes, the presence and beauty of the weather, and the pervasiveness of plants that accompany the characters throughout their journey, while the sound of language draws attention to the non-human in the novel.

The third chapter focuses on Richard Powers' *Bewilderment*. The analysis uncovers the animal language of the novel, in similes, language, and proper names, that engages in a work of mourning and creates and deepens the connection between the human and the non-human. It also reveals, however, a dominant rhetoric of mastery and reason that severs characters from their emotions and connection to the non-human. The novel still manages to make room for relationships between the human and the non-human, as a multispecies reading of the text highlights how mutualism, kinship, and the humbling of the human species allow for an inclusionary code of care. Finally, building on the work of Barnett and comics specialist Szép, the analysis uncovers how Robin, amidst the objectifying rhetoric of science, engages in a

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subjective and corporeal mode of knowing the non-human, involving notes born out of contemplation and love as well as personal drawings that allows for ethical dwelling and connection to the non-human.

As these novels sparked personal reflections, written – and perhaps also read – on the screen of a computer for the purposes of getting a Master’s degree, a human being – in all their entanglement – sits on a chair, impatient to go outside, fueled by these thoughts. This thesis hopes to achieve the same thing for its readers than it did for its writer. It dreams of challenging ecological glaucoma and human exceptionalism and making room for one’s growing capacity to contemplate the non-human in all its greyness and togetherness. Let us enjoy it while it lasts, and mourn it when it does not.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. EMOTIONS AND GRIEF IN A TIME OF ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Emotions have little place in the environmental scientific community, Barnett observes (2022, p.11). As scientists were supposed to keep “the heart a long way from the brain,” as worded by Lesley Head and Theresa Harada in the title of one of their articles on the repression of emotions amongst Australian climate scientists (in Barnett, 2019), feelings have not permeated Western scientific traditions. They are making their way into scholarly discussions related to the climate crisis, however. Ecological emotions have a role to play in the climate crisis, as studies of ecological feelings explain that they can both be beneficial and detrimental to moving forward (Barnett, 2022, p.2). On the one hand, knowledge about the current climate emergency does not guarantee any environmental action (p.2). Knowledge does not imply care (p.2). On the other hand, ecological emotions are not sufficient to ensure positive action. They can be paralyzing, but can also lead to questionable measures being taken, such as restriction of movement and forced impregnation of endangered species (p.3). As emotions are both necessary but insufficient, studying and discussing them is crucial to navigating the current crisis.

In Barnett’s view, such undertaking is beneficial on multiple layers. First, being able to name one’s feelings is the first step in the journey of understanding them (p.4). Second, a better understanding of eco-emotions and how they make one interact with the world can improve one’s sense of agency and lead to more efficient behavior in a time of crisis (p.4). Finally knowing the workings of emotions can lead to better fostering those which lead one to care for “the earth and our collaborators in coexistence,” be it individually or collectively (p.4). Thus, taking a closer look at emotions can make one able to identify, understand, and nurture them.

While many attempts at naming new and old emotions have been made (see Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*, 2005; Heather Houser’s *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction*, 2014; Glenn Albrecht’s *Earth Emotions*, 2019), this study chooses to study one amongst the myriad of ecological emotions that are made available: grief. In recent years, grief and the associated mourning process have gained traction. While mourning ecology is often mentioned by eminent scholar figures such as Ursula Heise and Timothy Morton – understandably so, since loss is an inherent part of the climate crisis and environmental studies, grief is rarely addressed in its entirety. It is increasingly getting scholars’ full attention. The following section draws from – but not exclusively – the works of Steph Craps, Joshua Trey Barnett, and Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman to understand ecological grief. In order to do so, this section dives first into the

reasons that explain why ecological grief faces much denial before examining grief and mourning in general. Finally, it focuses on ecological grief and mourning.

DENIAL

As Cunsolo and Landman (2017) gather authors in a single volume to tackle the issue of ecological mourning, they seek to extend grief beyond the human. While they consider ecological mourning as a growing part of the human experience, they observe that is often met with denial and avoidance. According to them, this is rooted in humans' very implication in the Anthropocene. As one cannot but live within this geological epoch, one partakes in its structure in direct or indirect ways and hence fuels it with their own life and livelihood (p.6). In this sense, living means relying on the death of bodies that either have already died or will die in the future (p.6). As one's very existence is part of the destruction of the environment, feeling for this loss means embracing one's responsibility towards it. When faced with the burden that one's life can represent, they ask: "[h]ow do we even begin to think and feel *that*?" (p.6) In this sense, Cunsolo and Landman see this denial of emotion as caused by one's culpability and implication in the Anthropocene. One could nuance, however, that not every human being takes part in the Anthropocene to the same extent, as the alternative "Plantationocene" seeks to highlight for instance (see Tsing and Haraway).

Guilt, however, is not the sole source of ecological grief denial. In observing art and literature as "cultural laborat[ies] for articulating and dealing with grief related to environmental loss," Craps highlights three other sources of denial (2023, p.69). The first one is the idea of Earth mastery. Called "command-and-control Anthropocene optimists" by Rob Nixon (in Craps, 2023, p.70), some believe that the Anthropocene is not a harmful geological epoch, but, on the contrary, a new era of human opportunities (Craps, 2023, p.70). Among the examples cited by Craps, people frequently refer to human beings as gods in one way or another. Following this idea, human beings would be some sort of superior species, as they are both capable and responsible for taking good care of the planet that they are inhabiting (p.70). This glorification of human agency leans into techno-utopianism, as Stewart Brand says: "Don't mourn, organize." (in Craps, 2023, p.70).

The second obstacle is the wish to protect human life and way of living. Sideris sees that resistance is met in the desire to preserve humanity in its quality of advanced civilization, as well as in the obsession with survivalism (in Craps, 2023, p.70). This mindset seems to stand far away from any emotional acknowledgment of environmental issues. Here, in a way that is

similar to the obstacle of Earth mastery, the non-human is seen as an object that can be wielded and controlled by human beings, rather than sentient life to which they are linked. According to Craps, this way of thinking is the framework responsible for the climate crisis in the first place, in that they view nature as an inanimate object to be tamed, used, and commodified by human beings (2023, p.70).

The third source of denial lies in a more positive viewing of the non-human than the previous objectifying and emotionless ones. It is the illusion of nature's capacity for renewal. During the pandemic in 2020 and the ensuing limitation of human activity outside of the home, numerous images of nature making its way back into empty cities brought comfort to confined people (p.71). The public's belief in these "fabricated or embellished" pictures and stories betrays some level of naiveté, according to Craps (p.71). Whether they were real or fake, these images and the celebration of nature that they engendered in the public eye nurture the idea that the non-human can overcome centuries of human intervention and damage (p.71). This impression of easy reversal of environmental damage prevents people from facing the irreversibility of ecological loss, leading to a behavior of denial of human responsibility and avoidance of any environmental action (p.71).

FROM FREUDIAN MOURNING TO POLITICAL MOURNING

Talking about mourning and grieving cannot be done without mentioning Freud. As his text "Mourning and Melancholia" separates the healthy from the unhealthy way to deal with loss, grief is described as a "normal emotion" (Freud, 1953, p.152) while melancholia is labeled as a "morbid pathological disposition." (p.153) In the Freudian sense, the work of mourning is successful when it comes to completion: "[W]hen the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again." (p.154) According to him, mourning is a healthy process of grief that comes to an end, as someone gets over the dead (in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.9). They can either replace their lost loved-object with another object of attachment (Craps, 2023, p.72; see also Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.9) or internalize this object (Bulter in Cunsolo & Landman, p.9). In Freud's words, "all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to [the lost] object." (1953, p.154) In opposition to this finished process of mourning, Freud considers melancholia as pathological and unhealthy, as its unresolved quality leads to a kind of entrapment in pain and suffering that hinders one's capacity to normally function in society (Kristeva and Freud in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.9) Melancholia is the

“loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love,” it is the incapacity to move on (Freud, 1953, p.153).

In the introduction to *Mourning Nature*, Cunsolo and Landman (2017), in line with other thinkers, seek to go beyond Freud’s conception of mourning and grieving. Using the work of Derrida, they emphasize that mourning should not be about completion, but about continuation. Jacques Derrida sees Freudian internalization as a loss of autonomy for the mourned object (in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.10). The internalization recognizes the material death of the object, but removes its quality of otherness, which makes it disappear a second time (p.10). Derridean successful mourning lies not in the resolved and finished act of getting over the deceased, but in the living’s act of living, mourning, and remembering (Brault & Naas, in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.10). Mourning hence consists of a continued work of responsibility that results from the loss.

While the Freudian understanding of loss discards melancholy as an unwanted changed behavior and favors going back to “normal,” Cunsolo and Landman draw from Judith Butler’s work to embrace the change that follows the loss: “one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever.” (Butler in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.12) Be it in external or internal ways, one mourns not only the loss of the deceased but also the loss of “our former selves, the way we used to be before the loss.” (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.10) “Disorienting, surprising and completely unexpected”, this “mourning-as-transformation” entails a continuous state of vulnerability and uncertainty (p.10). In this sense, mourning is accepting the potentially permanent change that is created by the loss (Butler in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.12). One must deal with and accept the loss but also the uncertainty of transformation that goes alongside (p.12).

While the Freudian understanding of grief rejects melancholia, recent thinkers, Ursula Heise observes, “have sought to redeem it,” as “publicly expressing melancholia [...] can in and of itself turn into an act of political resistance.” (2016, p.34) The political force of melancholia and unfinished mourning has been identified in a modern elegy by Jessica Marion Barr (2017) for instance. In the face of events that caused a tremendous amount of loss such as the two World Wars, artistic responses “could only be anti-elegiac, or truly ‘modern’ elegies of perpetual, ‘ethical’ mourning.” (p.192) As “an insistence on remembering [and] on dwelling in the pain of unjust loss” is necessary to engage ethically with the loss and strive for history not to repeat itself (p.192), elegies could not enter the logic of completed mourning. Barr notes that

“the idea of resolvable and consolatory mourning was not only impossible, it was also unethical.” (p.192) As grieving is a political and ethical matter, scholars and artists alike seek to extend grief to the non-human, highlighting human responsibility in the loss of the non-human: “We owe them our grief.” (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.22) In taking this responsibility, human grief for the non-human “help to reconstitute these bodies as real, mournable, and grievable” (Cunsolo, 2017 p.181) and defines non-human life as “a life that will have mattered, a life whose loss can and will be registered as a meaningful loss.” (Barnett, 2019, p.292) As melancholia or continued mourning open doors for political and ethical engagement with loss, they leave room for resistance and connection to be nurtured and accepted in the face of loss and death.

Resistant mourning, as called by Clifton Spargo and Patricia Rae, is a political and ethical act that refuses any kind of consolation (in Cunsolo & Landman, p.14). In keeping one’s pain and grief close and alive, resistant mourning urges a sense of responsibility in the public debate (p.14). For Spargo, this type of mourning can criticize structures of domination and injustice, as well as highlight the death and loss that are deemed ungrievable by that very structure (in Cunsolo & Landman, p.14). Rae explains further that it not only points to what caused the loss, but also questions “the social forces that have prevented the work of mourning from being accomplished” (in Cunsolo & Landman, p.14). Using this resistant mourning, Cunsolo and Landman seek to “disrupt the dominance of human bodies as the only mournable subjects” (Cunsolo & Landman, p.16). Ecological mourning becomes a “form of resistance to the pressures, forces, and processes that are underpinning current practices of environmental destruction and commodification.” (p.15) As “mourning can stand as an opposition to both death and the commodification of the living” (p.15), grieving the non-human is a political and ethical response to loss that is both directed towards acknowledging the loss and protesting against what caused the loss.

Grief is a tool that can create connection and community. For Butler and Derrida, mourning is a “potent political force” (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.12), as it is interwoven in the existence of a political community. While Derrida argues that “there is no politics without an organization of the time and space of mourning” (in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.12), Butler sees in mourning the capacity of “we-creating,” as it reveals connections between beings and their ability to feel and be resilient together (in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.12). Loss can have a unifying power, as grief and mourning can be felt collectively. But having a common loss is not a prerequisite for connection, however. The capacity itself to feel pain is a tool with

which beings can overlook differences and recognize the suffering of others (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.12). To understand a community, one must not only look at what is mourned but also at what is not mourned, as mourning is a tool of identity-making (Butler in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.11). In other words, the community built by mourning also keeps some bodies on the outside of the mourning process, unworthy of grief. As Cunsolo and Landman highlight in Butler's work: "I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths from the melancholic background for my social world." (Butler in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.13). While many deaths go unnoticed and many bodies are not grievable, mourning can provide "political and ethical opportunities to expand discursive spaces to include bodies not mourned in dominant discourse" (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.13) In response to the absence of connection, mourning can be used as a political act of creating a relationship (Stanescu in Cunsolo & Landman, p.14).

While Butler's observation is anchored in the "social world," Cunsolo and Landman wish to expand this idea to the non-human realm. In doing so, the ungrievable bodies are not only those of gender, race, and ethnic minorities (Cunsolo in Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.11), but also those of the non-human, such as plants, minerals, and animals (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017, p.13). This shift is not without consequence, as this not only makes it possible to expose the connection between the human and the non-human but also to create or deepen this connection via shared vulnerability and loss (p.13). Far from the "individualizing, passive, and apolitical" conception of grief, Barnett sees ecological grief as a sign of affection towards the environment, rather than a predicament that must be healed and overcome (2022, p.16). Instead, grieving highlights a connection and acknowledges human's entanglement and relationships with which they have lost (p.19). Grieving shows that humans care, which can be mobilized prior to the death or loss. If one can feel grief and thus care for someone or something else, then one can imagine loss and undergo anticipatory grief, which in turn can lead to care or even action (p.20). In short, Barnett contends that grief can help humans foster relationships and connections, rather than simply being a form of pain that must be eliminated through the forgetting of the lost object, such as in Freud's view.

2. FROM DICHOTOMY TO MULTISPECIES

While Morton suggests that "[w]e can't mourn for the environment because we are so deeply attached to it – we *are* it" (original emphasis, Morton 2007, p.186), they still recognize that "we care for the ecosystem, which is in sum interconnectedness." (p.184) As the human attachment

for the non-human and the non-human itself are marked by connection and entanglement, one cannot be emotionally attached to the non-human without taking into account one's own connection to it. Thus, if one loses the non-human, one loses the relationship that it has with other non-humans but also the relationship between human and non-human. As grieving is "an expression of love for and connection to the natural world." (Craps, 2024, p.333) mourning must embrace connectedness not only because of the nature of mourning as explained just above but also because of the nature of the mourned object. The non-human is a "sum of interconnectedness" that includes the human. As the connection is at the heart of grief and mourning, this thesis will rely on the works of eminent scholars about interconnectedness, mutualism, multispecies, and kinship. From Anna Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) and Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) to Ursula Heise's *Imagining Extinction* (2016) and Rob Nixon's "The Less Selfish Gene" (2021), recent years have been marked with interest in connectedness and multispecies.

In order to understand these concepts, one should first look at the dominant opposite paradigm, as they seek to disrupt it. For a long time – and perhaps still so, nature has been reduced to an economic object separate from human beings. According to Tsing and Nixon, this separation and hierarchy is a heritage that comes from Western philosophy, enlightenment, neoliberalism, and colonial history. Nixon argues that settlers, upon their colonization of the Americas, have systematically imposed "on Indigenous lifeways a hierarchical world view in which Cartesian dualism and utilitarian economics prevail" (2021, p.367), which understood nature in terms of commodities-in-waiting. Since colonial perspectives considered nature as an item in the economic market, it only gained value when extracted and converted into commodities. Indigenous epistemologies, on the other hand, as well as the botany of cooperation share a refusal of putting human beings "above ecosystems in a posture of Earth mastery that vindicates Earth plunder." (p.367) Tsing makes similar observations on the role of human mastery over nature. They argue that Western philosophy has been feeding the idea of "Man's Christian masculinity, which separated Man from Nature." (Tsing, 2015, vii) As nature has been considered "grand and universal," "passive and mechanical," and as a "backdrop and resource for the moral intentionality of Man," this Man figure was directed towards "taming and mastering" this passive resourceful nature (vii). Even further than the idea of mastery that has "encouraged a view of nature as a romantic space of antimodernity" (p.5), this logic of separate commodified nature has been deepened by the workings of capitalism, and vice-versa. While both humans and nonhumans have been turned into "sources for investment" by the

economic history of accumulation of wealth, alienation has been a crucial asset to perpetuate to keep humans and nonhumans as pawns in the abstract market space (p.5). In Tsing's words, investors have "imbue[d] both people and things with alienation, that is, the ability to stand alone, as if the entanglements of living did not matter." (p.5) "[A]lienation is [a] form of disentanglement" that transforms humans and non-humans alike into "[c]apitalist commodities [...] removed from their lifeworlds." (p.133) In short, both scholars have shown that human mastery, as it is closely linked to colonialism and capitalism, has turned everything into commodities that lost their connection to each other, but which can recover their bond when closely looked at.

As the capitalist economy has been built on alienation, there is no wonder that individuality has become a dominant understanding of human beings. In their article, Nixon manages to transition from individuality to mutuality. As neoliberal philosophy has sought to "recast Homo sapiens as Homo economicus" (Nixon, 2021, p.361) in the idea that society could solely be understood through the economic lens, individualism has been asserted as "the sacrosanct, foundational unit of existence" notably by "Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and many right-wing think tanks" (p.352). It has been hinted above, however, that "individualism as an Enlightenment ideal [...] gave hierarchical precedence to men from the middle and upper classes who were white, heterosexual, literate, and propertied." (p.358) In response, Nixon advocates for a "countervailing science of selfhood [that] emphasizes permeability," as the concept of individual self is undermined by microorganisms and fungi that compose the individual, who "emerges as incorrigibly plural." (p.361) In this sense, Nixon emphasizes the "biological and ontological error [that] construe[s] the individual and the collective as opposites." (p.362) By using their observations on trees, which are part of a network of fungi and other trees, Nixon highlights the interconnectedness that constitutes the self, making permeability and entanglement a crucial component of individuals, as individuals might not even exist without them.

In going past alienated individuals, scholars seek to emphasize the entanglement and cooperation of which human beings are a part. Tsing and Nixon depart from observations made of the functioning of forests. In forests, "fungi and plant roots become intimately entangled in mycorrhizal relations," making it impossible for one to live and thrive without the other (Tsing, 2015, p.138).) Using the phrase "wood wide web" to describe the symbiosis present in forests, Nixon establishes the difference between parasitism and mutualism. While the former refers to only one of the parties benefiting from the relationship, the latter indicates that all parties find

what they need in the partnership (p.357), making “[a]ll flourishing [...] mutual.” (Kimmer in Nixon, 2021, p.367) While Nixon observes the forest to emphasize the mutualism and cooperation at play, Tsing makes the same comment but blurs the lines between species. As Tsing notes that “[m]utual benefits do not lead to perfect harmony” (Tsing, 2015p.139), they refer to a relationship called “entanglement.” As “[l]ife lines are entangled” in a forest (p.139), Tsing observes that matsutake pickers are able to see this entanglement, which leads to “a form of forest knowledge and appreciation without the completeness of classification.” (p.243)

In this context of entanglement and mutualism, the term multispecies is used to describe the cohabitation and cooperation of different species in the same space. Heise brings multispecies ethnography to the table in order to understand the place of humans in the non-human. The field explores the interactions and transformations at play between humans and other species, as “‘the human’ has been formed and transformed amid encounters with multiple species of plants, animals, fungi, and microbes.” (Kirksey, Schuetze, and Helmreich in Heise, 2016, p.195) Multispecies ethnography seeks to understand “‘human’ communities as in reality conglomerates of human and nonhuman species that shape each other.” (Heise, 2016, p.195) While Heise highlights the idea that humans are formed by other species, Tsing demonstrates that the multispecies do not solely work in the making of humans. Tsing notes that “all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water.” (Tsing, 2015, p.22) In this affirmation, they include both non-humans, such as beavers shaping the rivers and bacteria producing oxygen, but also human animals, as they take part in the world making of forests, for instance, in burning landscapes that made room for plants, animals hunting each other, and trees flourishing in burned landscapes (p.22). While multispecies is an effective tool to underline mutual shaping and coexistence, Tsing nuances the term in contending that multispecies is useful in the context of “moving beyond human exceptionalism,” but that it should not be the main unit to understand beings (p.162) In their understanding the forests, Tsing cannot take one “species” into consideration without the other that are attached to it, that these “species” really come into being and are themselves when they are in “assemblage” (p.162). Rather than coming together because of their individual particularities, “oaks, pines, and matsutake become themselves in assemblage.” (p.162)

Even further than assemblage and entanglement, Heise and Haraway suggest that the interconnectedness be understood in terms of familial relationship or kinship. As Haraway proposes “Make Kin Not Babie!” (2016, p.102), they try to move away from the understanding of the family in its genealogy and ancestry. In the journey towards ecojustice, Haraway

contends that we “need to make-with – become-with, compose-with – the earth-bound” (p.102). Heise draws from the work of multispecies ethnographer Deborah Brid Rose that humans are tied to other species through “cross-species genealogies that amount to an extended system of kinship, accompanied by the ethical obligations of family structures.” (2016, p.197) In doing so, one would not perceive threatened and endangered species as beings that are dying over there, but rather as “vulnerable and dying members of the family” (Rose in Heise, 2016, p.197). As both scholars urge humans to extend their understanding of their smallest unity of community – the family – they hope to stretch care and ethics to the non-human.

3. ON NAMING

In their work on naming and mourning, Joshua Trey Barnett (2019) shows the paradox that lies behind names, as they shape and influence how we see the world, but also as they are the entry point to mourning. According to Christine Oravec and Tracylee Clarke, naming reveals the way humans understand their surroundings, as it creates a socially shared construct of the world (in Barnett, 2019, p.289). Names “inform what we pay attention to” and “reveal and conceal the world at one and the same time” (Barnett, 2019, p. 289). In fields of rhetoric, Burke uses the metaphor of the screen to make sense of specific terms and terminology. Similarly to window screens, this metaphorical screen of names allows us to see the outside world while keeping things from going inside, such as insects (Burke in Barnett, 2019, p. 289). In this way, names, like a screen, filter the way we perceive things. Rather than offering a reflection of reality, they offer a selection and deflection of reality, making any aim of neutrality impossible (p. 289). Rhetorical scholars such as Michael Calvin McGee and Raymie McKerrow “argue that names exert rhetorical force” (Barnett, 2019, p.289). Naming is thus a tool of dominance, as it wields the power to designate, define, and construct the limits of what is designated (pp. 289-90). This sovereignty is highlighted in Jacques Derrida’s observations of the word “animal” (in Barnett, 2019, p.287). As the name is chosen by someone outside of the designated group, the named item or being is passive in the act of claiming the other (p. 287). In this case, “animal” is a word that humans “have given themselves the right to give” (Derrida in Barnett, 2019, p. 287), hence creating a stark contrast that separates humans from other animals. On the one hand, “animal” erases any perception of species differences amongst the non-human animal realm, as it can equally be used to point to mammals, birds, insects, or fish (p. 287). On the other hand, it functions in opposition to “human,” creating a terminological – and hence cultural – gap between animals and humans.

In their work *Mourning in the Anthropocene*, Barnett (2022) explains the ambivalence of naming further than in their previous work where they cited Derrida's example of humans powerfully naming non-human beings "animals." From the Genesis to colonization and current mass extinctions, naming goes hand in hand with a structure of dominance that names and renames things without consulting them or those who have named them before. Drawing on the work of environmental historian Lynn White Jr., Barnett underlines how Western Judeo-Christian tradition is rooted in human exceptionalism (2022, p.36). In the story of Genesis, the act of naming all the creatures created by God was performed by Adam, as every name he uttered when presented with these animals became their agreed name. As this was followed by Adam being granted sovereignty over all living things on earth, naming became associated with dominion. In this sense, "[n]aming is the primary act of authority," Barnett contends (2022, p.37). Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, also unveils naming as a tool of human mastery over the earth and even considers, as reformulated by Barnett, that "anthropogenic mass extinction begins with the human capacity, and perhaps propensity, to name things." (p.36) In Barnett's words, "naming is taming", as it creates fertile ground to scrutinize, categorize, organize, manage, use, and abuse that which is named, be it other beings or the land which humans inhabit (pp.36-7). Even if Barnett takes joy and pride in being able to name species that surround him when they wander outside, the scholar acknowledges that science has played – and perhaps still plays – a role in the current ecological crisis, as it follows a logic similar to that of Judeo-Christian naming. If control happens via naming, then Western science's fixation on discovering and naming species reveals a structure of authority. Even if identifying and naming new species happens in a context of genuine curiosity and hunger for knowledge, it is very much possible that it impedes the thriving of species (p.37).

On top of this masterful naming capacity, some humans have historically been known to rename things that were already named. According to Barnett, settler-colonialism follows the same logic of taming and naming by applying it to the land itself (p.37). In this historical case, attention is brought to imposing new toponyms, even though names given by Native Americans in Indigenous languages already existed prior to Western invasion and settlement. This systematic act of renaming reveals the consequences of colonial settlement on language. Firstly, new appellations exhibited new worldviews and shadowed preexisting ones. On the one hand, Western names are either merely used to reference things and places, or are marked with a European mindset showing a dry relationship to the land. On the other hand, names in Native

languages are filled with histories, knowledge, and ways of relating to their surroundings. More than a way to designate things, these names carry modes of being and relating. The example then given by Barnett is that of a stream flowing in Alaska. Called the Gold Creek in English and *Dzántik'i Héeni* – Flounders at the Base of the Creek – in Tlingit, the stream is tinted with different worldviews depending on the language used. While the English name refers to the potential wealth that can be found in the water, the Tlingit name evokes a place of encounter with fish. Whereas English conjures extractivism and the pursuit of wealth, Tlingit invokes a place where beings are at the forefront, a place full of life, Barnett argues (p.38).

Secondly, imposing new English names has participated in erasing Indigenous languages, and thus, ways of life. Upon European settlement, places in North America have been attributed English names. As these places already bore Indigenous names, new English toponyms often found their forms via the transliteration of Native American ones. In the process, Barnett highlights, toponyms have been distorted, losing the meaning and ecological wisdom that were embedded in these names – such is the case for the aforementioned *Dzántik'i Héeni* (p.39). Furthermore, the US government has been known to actively look for the disappearance of Native languages, as it forbade their usage in boarding schools. More than forcing the English language within the walls of these schools, they prohibited Native American children from using their languages with one another. By adding this active search for suffocating Indigenous languages to the broader colonial violence that aimed at eradicating Indigenous peoples, there is no wonder that these languages are withering away. As LaDuke estimates, “most North American Indigenous languages are expected to be extinct by the year 2050.” (in Barnett, 2022, p.39) In naming and renaming, Barnett contends, one holds the power to overshadow a language until its very dissolution (Barnett, 2022, p.39). As ways of life, knowledge, and connection are structured by Native American languages, their disappearance means the vanishing of their embedded modes of being.

Thirdly, losing these names means losing ways of connecting to the world. As Native peoples see their language wither away, they risk losing ways of understanding and relating to the land in the process. In this sense, systematically renaming places and more-than-human beings constitutes a general loss of both names and their historical, cultural, and social meanings. It appears, however, that this loss is not solely sustained by Indigenous communities. Barnett argues that “[w]hen settlers rename what has already been named, they constrain our collective ability to respect and learn from not just the names themselves but also the wisdom embedded within them.” (p.39) Systematic renaming has not only deprived Native people of their

connection to their surroundings, but it also has prevented settlers and their descendants from benefiting and learning from these ways of relating to the land. As traditional knowledge and wisdom are held within toponyms and other words, losing them means losing a pool of ecological understanding of the world (p.39). While this not only means that Native people do not have access to this ecological knowledge and ways of connecting to the world, this also signifies that people outside of these communities lose the possibility of understanding the world beyond their own language framework (p.39). When applied to the example of the stream in Alaska given earlier by Barnett, being only confronted to the English name Gold Creek implies that both Native people and non-Native people would only have access to an understanding of the stream as a place of potential wealth, hence missing the opportunity to grasp the ecological component conveyed by the Tlingit name. In sum, Barnett argues that, in losing Indigenous place names, we are collectively met with an impoverished baggage that prevents us from “engag[ing] in the work of earthly coexistence and [that] diminishes our ability to flourish alongside and with others.” (p.39) By imposing names when others existed before, everyone loses an ecological way of calling and seeing their surroundings.

Despite this objectifying and distancing process, Barnett focuses on a more positive side of naming. Rather than seeing names as a way of domination, they use names as a way of connecting to that which is named. When mentioning their going outside with their partner, Barnett recoils with joy the gratification that they feel when they are able to name this or that bird, as it means that they can recognize and point to them via language (2022, p.34). Rather than moving in a nameless environment, naming birds and plants allows them to feel connected to their surroundings. As names are intertwined with connection, they foreground the possibility to be impacted by loss. In this sense, naming holds a special place when it comes to mourning in that it destabilizes the chronology of mourning. In Derrida’s philosophy, the name is a double-faced coin. The name given to a “mortal existence [...] survives it. It signs its potential disappearance.” (Derrida in Barnett, 2019, p.290) Name is both the thing that outlives the death and the thing that announces it, as being named means “to be saved in advance from total loss” (Barnett, 2019, p. 290). A name is the trace of the being that allows it to live in memory despite its physical death. It prevents any absolute loss or absence from happening, as it guarantees survival by appellation (Derrida in Barnett, 2019, p. 290). This goes as far as understanding the act of naming as triggering the mourning machine. This chronology goes against the typical timeline of loss and grief. In the Freudian order of events, loss happens first and is then followed by grief, an emotion, and mourning, its expression. As a finite process, Freudian mourning ends

with a detachment from the loved object (Barnett, 2019, p.291). In this sense, Derrida's chronology of naming foreshadowing loss and mourning unsettles such a linear sequence of events (p.291). The same idea is found in his conception of friendship – or any relationship, for that matter. Relationships are characterized by the possibility that one of the parties will survive the other, see the other die and disappear (Derrida in Barnett, 2019, p.291). Relationship and mourning go hand in hand, placing the processing of loss well before that said loss happens.

This disturbed timeline puts names and relationships at the center of loss and mourning: they both establish the possibility of loss well before it happens – with a name that survives it and a person to experience it, while also creating fertile ground for ethical responsibility. Drawing from Derrida's work, Barnett invokes such ethics of mourning in an ecological way. Anticipatory mourning can foster care for vulnerable bodies and simply create awareness of their finiteness (Barnett, 2019, p.291). As Barnett puts it: "*mourning emerges as a specific sort of care for others that can be fostered and cultivated in advance of every possible loss.*" (emphasis in original, p.291) On a practical scale of prevention, care and awareness can lead to concrete action of conservation and protection (p.291). The ethicality of mourning does not just come to an end at the event of loss, it can be implemented after the loss. As Derrida's political mourning is a work of remembrance that is perpetuated after death in a way that does not seek to assimilate the lost object, ethical mourning consists in perpetuating the wholeness of the other, while still relating to it, still "letting the other, the wholly other, live on in our thoughts and our deeds." (p.291) Mourning and remembering are political and ethical.

Following the relevance of names in the process of relating to and grieving for beings, Barnett sees scientific names as fundamentally essential to mourning (p.293). As they have allowed for the remembrance of lost dinosaur species, scientific names, according to Barnett, make mourning extinct species possible. The naming of a species does not only outlive the mortal creatures it seeks to designate but is also the very reason for its existence as a species to those who name it – humans. Barnett argues that these names, which still follow eighteenth-century Carl Linnaeus bipartite structure, are indispensable for us to grasp the beings to which they point (p.293). These names make relating to species possible: discussions, feelings, questions, and stories cannot exist without the utterance of a name. In this sense, Barnett understands scientific names as the basis of care of species: one cannot mourn what one cannot name (p.294). More than a tool to identify the individual member of a species, scientific names point to ways of life that characterize such species. The loss of a species equates to the loss of

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its ways of being. In other words, naming, caring for, and mourning a specific species is to feel the loss of modes of being, moving, reproducing, and interacting within an ecosystem (p.295).

THE ROAD

1. RELATING TO THE WORLD

In making their way in the hostile setting of *The Road*, marked by ruins and ashen effigies, the man and the boy still find themselves relating to the world, however empty it has become. As the father is the witness of a lost collapsed society and his son is both an inheritor of his father's relation to the world and a pair of fresh eyes upon the grey landscapes, both characters relate to the human and the non-human in their own ways. The first part of this section draws from Kunsä's "'Maps of the World in its Becoming': Post-Apocalyptic naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" (2009) and their observations on the apocalyptic naming of the text and responds to and expands from three elements that the scholar brings into light: the absence of proper names in the novel, the new geography of the apocalyptic setting, and the child's naming capacity. As names and language, a heritage passed from the father to his son, help the characters with mourning death, navigating through the land, and understand the non-human, this analysis highlights that they are layered with the attempt – if not capacity – to control and master one's own journey and environment. The second part of this section focuses on the emotional relationship of characters to their environment, as one is glued to the loss and mourning of the past while the other shows the capacity to enjoy the present and extend care to the non-human.

GRIEVING WITHOUT PROPER NAMES

In *The Road*, proper names are not very common. Characters that are met along the road are usually nameless, save for one, who gives Ely as his name. By recalling a passage in McCarthy's *Outer Dark*, Kunsä contends that this name is the man's "attem[pt] to find a way out of hell" (Kunsä, 2009, p.60), as "people in hell ain't got names." (McCarthy in Kunsä, 2009, p.60) But as Ely reveals itself to be a fake name – a lie – the stranger is stripped down from any responsibility, hence avoiding any kind of punishment (Kunsä, 2009, p.60). In response, the man finds himself calling him "old man" – a sober and accurate description, as the "narrative rejects the lie that is 'Ely'" and the fake identity attached to it (p.60). The two main characters, the man and the child, are properly unnamed. Much like the old man, they are soberly named in the narrative as man and child or boy. By reading an excerpt where actions are numerous and quickly follow each other, Kunsä explains why proper names are unnecessary in the novel. Building from the accumulation of verbs, the scholar argues that "the passage's style demands that we judge the man, that we know him, by the nature of his deeds, not by the names he is called." (p.61). The same idea is extended in the proliferation of pronouns in the novel, as they

are used in numbers and sometimes without a clear and near referent: the reader is able to understand what is happening and who is talked about without the need for names (pp.61-2).

As one can easily understand the chain of events of the novel despite the absence of proper names indicating the characters' actions and reflections, one can also grasp the stakes of the novel without the need for names. In fact, their absence is far from preventing the reader from figuring out the content of the book. A father and his son travel on the road towards the south, while they avoid human encounters in case they want to feed on them. They are both hungry and cold, and their survival lies heavily in their codependence. The lack of their proper names does not prevent the reader nor the characters from understanding their finiteness. The novel is usually clear about who does what, but also about who might die. Even if the child and the man are stripped of any names, their impermanence is made tangible from the very start of the novel. It is made clear that these two characters are mortal, and that their survival is far from being guaranteed. The cold is threatening their lives as "[t]here'd be no surviving another winter here" (TR, p.2), and both characters are already in bad health conditions, with the man "coughing" (p.10) and the "boy so thin it stopped [the man's] heart" (p.39). As the father is so preoccupied with his son's survival, the novel echoes Derrida's idea that every relationship is shadowed by mourning. In a relationship, one is almost bound to see the other die, of which the father is well aware and which he tries to prevent. The reader is acquainted with the stakes of the novel: one of the nameless characters might die at any moment, leaving the other one to witness and suffer from the loss.

Even if proper names seem superfluous in *The Road*, language and names still have a hold on dealing with loss and mourning. By the end of the novel, the child is the one suffering from the loss of his father. Despite the absence of proper names, both in the narration and in the father-and-son dialogues, the child shows signs of grief and mourning. He weeps and seeks to cover his father's body, be it with leaves or a blanket, to acknowledge his passing and leave his body behind. But it should be noted, however, that the child mainly mourns his father via language. Even if the child does not have a name by which to call his father, he can still talk about and to him by calling him *Papa*. The child can grieve and mourn his father, even with the absence of any proper name. While their bond seems sufficient for father and son to be worthy of grief to each other, the son's mourning of his father is shadowed by the presence of names. Upon waking up next to the man's dead body, the child "knelt beside [him] and held his cold hand and said his name over and over again." (p.301) Even if *Papa* is not a proper name, it is still considered a name, as it is repeatedly used as such throughout the novel. Thus, language

and names still make their way into the processing of the loss of the father despite the absence of proper names. As the man encourages the child to “go on,” he does so not only by living but also by maintaining the dialogue that propels both characters during the entire novel. More than mourning his papa via an appellation, the child carries on a work of remembrance by pursuing communication with the man beyond his death. In any case, this shows that language, in *The Road*, is essential to the work of mourning. Even without any proper name, the child clings to *Papa* throughout the novel and even beyond the father’s death. Hence, the work of remembrance that is activated by continuing to talk to his father relies on language.

NEW GEOGRAPHY AND THE FATHER’S LOVE OF NAMES

Just like characters, be it that they appear briefly or that they are the main characters of the novel, places are not given any proper names in *The Road*. Kunska argues that these names have become obsolete and that their absence “forces the reader to imagine new possibilities” (2009, p.62). They contend that, as the post-apocalyptic world is drastically different from the pre-apocalyptic world, the names of places of the past are no longer relevant (p.63). As the past world no longer exists, using past names to point to places that do not exist anymore is meaningless. Here, Kunska gives the example of the states, which have become nameless, as they were a social and political construction that ceased to be (p.63). As “names of the past become meaningless,” the novel “offers a refiguring of meaning in the language of the new, post-apocalyptic world.” (p.63). Instead of vacant names, the novel presents a new geographic understanding of places in terms of water, shelter, or food that the characters must find during their journey if they want to survive (p.63). Leaving these names behind “allows the ruined places (and the ruined civilization [...]) to be left in the past,” which, according to Kunska, creates a fertile ground for renewal (p.64). As obsolete names are no longer used and as the novel manages to talk about post-apocalyptic land, “[f]inding a new way to talk about now-destroyed region implies the possibility of renewal.” (p.64) While “*The Road* frees both characters and reader from the chains of the old language” – without totally abandoning it, however, the novel gives language the ability of naming a new world and thus imagine new possibilities (pp.64-65). The father, however, does not let go.

While it is true that the reader is not given access to any names of the old world, save for the mention of London from where a brass sextant originated, the man and the child still show signs of attachment to place names. Despite this new geography highlighted by Kunska, the father relies heavily on a “tattered oilcompany roadmap” (TR, p.43) to guide their journey

toward the coast. More than a Cartesian way of understanding geography and the land, this map is also revelatory of the man's inability to put the old world behind, including names. As the characters are nearing the coast, the man enters a filling station where "he wrote the name of the town on their map with a pencil." (p.193) Their frequent use of the map also leads the boy to understand space in terms of names, as he "sat by the fire at night with the pieces of the map across his knees [and] [h]e had the names of towns and rivers by heart and he measured their progress daily." (p.229) In spite of their absence, names still have a hold of the post-apocalyptic world, or at least on the people who wander in it, as they seem essential to navigate landscapes toward their chosen destination.

THE CHILD, ADAM, AND THE LEGACY OF LANGUAGE

Despite their strong focus on the novel's letting go of names, Kunska still acknowledges the importance of language in *The Road*. As "post-apocalyptic language" is a "means of looking forward [...] by seeking the basic forms again," the novel "reconciles barbarous destruction with eloquent hope." (2009, p.69). In this sense, the boy manages to be the harbinger of new possibilities and of an optimistic onward continuation. As the boy appears as an "Adamic figure, a messiah not unlike Christ himself," he is increasingly capable to name things of the new world (p.65). On top of "naming himself 'the one,'" the child addresses the man as Papa throughout the novel, even when the good guys who he meets at the end name the man his 'father' (pp.66-7). Rather than simply confirming that the man is his father, the child insists on 'Papa' (p.67). Because the child is able to name things as they are, just like Adam is able to name species that are brought before him, and because he is able to read and write, Kunska argues that the boy "can go forward, beyond the novel's end, to write a new story of the new world." (p.67). The novel indeed does not stop with the father's death. Despite the novel's being told from his focalization, the text continues for a few pages after his passing. As "[t]he father gives his son language" (p.69), the boy carries the legacy of words and names. This transmission of language shows two more things: names are highly ranked in the hierarchical order of knowledge, and the father is the authorial figure of knowledge, who bestows not only knowledge but its organization.

In discussions with his father, it is apparent that the child does not have knowledge of every word in the English language. While this is a common experience for anyone, especially a child, one can observe that the child's lack of vocabulary ranges from not knowing some phrasing and idioms, such as "as the crow flies," to not being able to name particular earth

events or elements. The child is picking up on phrases, however, as he surprises his father and makes him smile when he uses idioms out of the blue: “[w]arm at last” (TR, p.155), “long term goals” (p.170), and “the odds are not in their favor” (p.259). This goes to show that the child is a work in progress, as he displays both ignorance and knowledge. As he navigates landscapes and language, the child is found asking his father questions about items or phenomena. Throughout the novel, the boy asks his father “what is it” or some other variant (p.19, p.27, p.40, p.250, for instance). In observing the dialogues that follow this question, it is clear that the child has no knowledge of the names attributed to “it” nor does he know the concept that lies behind the names.

The father is the one who has knowledge of both names and concepts, which allows him to navigate landscapes without being surprised by natural phenomena, to recognize natural items, and answer the child’s questions. When experiencing an earthquake, the child is scared since he does not know what is happening, while the father is serene and can reassure the boy, without showing any trace of fear himself. As they have reached the coast, lightning shoots through the sky, to which the father simply replies “It’s okay. It’s lightning. Come on.” (p.250) While the child is clearly not familiar with lightning, since he asks “What was that, Papa?” (p.250), the father’s knowledge allows him to quickly dismiss the natural phenomenon and invite the child to do the same and continue walking. Names, thus, seem to come with an understanding of the thing that lies behind them, which in turn makes it possible to walk without fear.

The same logic applies to morels and the dam that the characters encounter, as knowing their name is a prerequisite to go into further detail about *what they are* exactly. In other words, names come before meaning. When the child asks what these things are, the father first replies with their name – morels and a dam – before the child can go further and ask “What’s morels?” (p.40) and “What’s [a dam] for?” (p.19). Only after the name is given can the question of definition be tackled: “They’re a kind of mushroom.” (p.40) and “It made the lake.” (p.19). Whether the child, in his what-is-it-questions, wishes to understand things and concepts rather than simply learn their name, the father gives him sequential and sparse answers in any case, preventing him from quickly understanding the world. Once the child gets a general idea of what these things are, he can finally feed his curiosity by asking follow-up questions: “Will the dam be there for a long time? [...] Do you think there could be fish in the lake?” (p.19) and “Can you eat them? [...] Are they good?” (p.41) As understanding things of the world requires

several ordered steps, the father, by simply answering with names, indicates that names come first, before any definitions and signs of curiosity can enter the conversation.

In these four cases, every question is punctuated by “Papa,” showing the importance of the father’s knowledge in order for the child to understand the world that surrounds him. In *The Road*, knowing a name seems crucial if one wishes to grasp the concept that lies behind the word. As the father is the only authority that the child turns to in order to have access to knowledge, the man is the one in charge of the way said knowledge is delivered to the boy. As the father has proven himself to be attached to names and to be trying to prevent himself from forgetting them, as he orders himself to: “Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember.” (p.31) Therefore, the order highlighted above – name, definition, subsidiary information – is imposed by the father. In doing so, the man ensures that his son is the recipient of a legacy that prioritizes names as the primary means to understand the world in which they live.

Language in *The Road* as a legacy and transmission has been observed by some scholars studying the novel. In their reading of *The Road*, De Bruyn (2010) uses Robert Harrison’s lexification and dislexification to understand the role that language plays in the novel. As language threatens to fade along with disappearing objects, dislexification points to a “cultural amnesia” and a “massive loss of memory” which is “attendant upon ecological devastation.” (p.784) The child, however “carries the legacy of his ancestors, [and] he carries that legacy into the future” (p.784) As he “shows a promising linguistic creativity,” and as the end of the novel showcases a “re-lexifying gesture” with new “good guys,” De Bruyn reads that “words may again become our bond” and that “humans may still find shelter in language” (pp.784-5). This thesis adds that words, rather than enabling “the dead [to] maintain their hold on the worlds they have handed down to their descendants” (Harrison in De Bruyn, 2010, p.783), allow for the living to hold onto the dead. As words and names manage to evoke the environment and animals, the non-human world clings to the novel to prevent any absolute absence. Thus, lexification, rather than solely enabling the bond between humans to flourish, also maintains or creates the bond between the human and the non-human. What matters, therefore, is not the humans that were once pronouncing these words, but the referent of what is now dead in the novel and which, thanks to words that name the dead, enables the signified to survive. As “the worlds our words once inhabited reinhabit in turn the words that outlive them” (Harrison in De Bruyn, 2010, p.783), the dead are given a chance of both surviving through language and of being remembered in their physical death.

AGENCY AND CONTROL IN WORDS AND NAMES

The legacy of language is more than a transmission of a medium of communication. It is also a heritage of knowledge structured by a hierarchy where names play an important part. Language, especially in the form of names, proper or not, is a tool of knowledge that is closely linked to power, agency, and understanding of the world. As hinted in Derrida's reflection on the names given to animals by humans, names hold the power to determine the other. In the case of Ely, names get even more power. As Derrida suggested that the human capacity to name animals put humans in a dominant position, once a being is given a name, using that name can put someone in a similar dominant position.

I couldnt trust you with it. To do something with it. I dont want anybody talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there. I mean, you could talk about me maybe. But nobody could say that it was me. I could be anybody. (TR, p.182)

In his refusal to give his real name to the man, Ely highlights the power that names hold. Ely refuses that anyone gets the possibility to talk about him, and thus have power over him. As no one can talk about him while precisely referring to him, Ely is detached from anything that could be said about him, making him totally independent and untouched by anyone.

Names also prove themselves to be tools for mastery in the maps that the two characters carry with them. As humans have lost the possibility and ability to master the non-human – as it is almost completely vanished and dead, perhaps names and maps are the last things that the man and the boy can resort to in order to have some power over their fate. More than allowing their own agency, however, the names present on these maps and the fact that the characters use them to navigate the landscapes goes to show that names define space, distance, and movement. While Kunsu emphasized a new nameless geography based on shelter and food, these maps prove that the characters hold onto names to understand their journey. Here, names are mingled with maps, measurement, and progress, which gives the impression that the characters still entertain a reason-based understanding of their surroundings, at least as far as their moving from place to place is concerned.

Finally, names are presented as the primary identifier of things. As nothing can exist without a name, the characters, especially the child, cannot relate to his environment if he does not know the names that surround him. For humans to master their fear of a meteorological element or to be able to use their environment to survive, they need names to understand their surroundings, at least in the legacy that the father passes on to his son. Thus, names in *The Road* enable humans to understand, see, and relate to the world, making language not only a tool of

mastery of one's surroundings but also something on which the characters heavily depend to be able to function and survive.

ETHICS OF CARE AND ENJOYING LANDSCAPES

THE FATHER AND LOSING THE PAST

Throughout the entire novel, the father appears as a witness of the lost world, who both clings to the past while wishing he did not feel the loss. This conflicting stance is reflected in critics' discussions on the relationship that the father has with mourning the past and lost world. Huebert and Hellyer both invoke Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia to make sense of the father's attitude toward loss. In channeling Freud's idea of melancholia that one "feed[s] on the lost other that has been manifest in the self," Huebert argues that "the man's highly melancholic relationship to the lost former" makes him "a metaphorical cannibal insofar as he incessantly feeds on his own memories" (2017, p.81). According to Huebert, the recurring elegies of the past do not help the man process loss, as they only perpetuate a cannibalistic anthropophagy. At the same time, the man is in part hostile to the green past, at least when it appears in pastoral dreams that deflect him from his alertness. Hellyer takes this reluctance into account, as they argue that the father oscillates between both Freud's mourning and melancholia, since he seems to "belie[ve] that the only possible responses to loss are a suicidal attachment to the lost object or the assertion of complete detachment from it" (2012, p.55). The association of his wife with a "call of languor and of death" (p.17) pitted against his wish that his "heart were stone" (p.10) fits Freud's distinction. The father, in other words, seems to follow Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia, for memories and elegies lean more towards painful melancholia rather than Barnett's positive and productive work of remembrance, and for the man wishes to feel nothing and move on, as per the Freudian complete mourning.

As the man is clinging to the past, he seeks to resist against his memory loss, while becoming unable to create new connection to his environment. As he tells the child that "[y]ou forget what you want to remember" (TR, p.11), the man acknowledges the fragility of his memories, and, later, tries to make them stronger and prevent them from slipping away from him: "Make a list. Recite a litany. Remember." (p.31) While his melancholia makes for a great work of remembrance of the lost non-human, it also prevents him from finding new objects of attachment, just like described by Freud. As caring for the child and surviving are his strongest

motivations, the man, unlike the child, refrains from feeling too much towards the non-human and thus from engaging in new relationships with landscapes or animals.

CHILD & PRESENT ATTACHMENT/EXPERIENCING THE PRESENT

As the man cares for nothing but the survival of his son, he has little room for his own ecological awareness and relationships. As this chapter demonstrates in its last section, the father – or at least his focalization – almost suffers from “ecological glaucoma,” as the novel’s descriptions and the father’s observations are heavily focused on the deadness and the nothingness of the non-human world. The child, on the other hand, proves himself rather observant, since he is able to contradict his father’s nothing-conclusions. The child is not only able to open his eyes to his non-human environment, but he is also able to relate to the non-human world in a more positive way than his father. The boy reveals both ethics of care and the possibility of a positive connection with the non-human.

In their reading of *The Road*, Johns-Putra (2016) notes that the boy challenges his father’s selfish and violent ethics of care. As the necessity of protecting the child comes before anything else, the father automatically transforms anyone who is not the child as a potential enemy. In *The Road*, caring means harming those who are not the object of care, creating for the father “a brutal inability to care for anyone else [than his son],” which, according to Johns-Putra, comes to “resemble a selfish stubbornly masculinist mission to save something of himself” (p.532). The boy, on the other side, “is the bearer of his own ethic of care.” (p.532). In asserting himself as someone who cares, he not only insists that he can care back for his father but also that he cares in a non-exclusionary way that goes beyond the nuclear family (p.532). There are alternative ethics of care to the father’s, argues Johns-Putra, as the “good guys” that the child meets at the end of the novel keep out of the road – contrastingly to the father, which “suggests an alternative code of behavior and, possibly, an alternative ethics.” (p.534) Much like these newly met people, the boy is able to care outside of his reduced nuclear family of two. Just like the “good guys” show “an interest in the welfare of others beyond kinship,” the boy is able to extend care to people whom he does not know, hence “question[ing] the code of exclusionary care that underwrites the father-son bond.” (p.533) As the boy is able to care outside of his family, this analysis observes that this not solely involve human beings: more than caring for people met on the road, the child cares for non-human beings.

As dogs roam around the characters in two instance, the child manifests his worry about the safety of the dog. In the present time, the conversation between father and son goes like this:

We're not going to kill it, are we Papa?

No. We're not going to kill it.

He looked down at the boy. Shivering in his coats. He bent over and kissed him on his gritty brow. We won't hurt the dog, he said. I promise. (TR, p.86)

This scene conjures the memory of a previous encounter with a dog:

The boy looked after her and then he looked at me and then he looked at the dog and he began to cry and to beg for the dog's life and I promised I would not hurt the dog. (p.91)

In these instances, the child refuses the fatherly exclusionary code of ethics that Johns-Putra highlights in their article. As the child begs the father for the dog's life in both cases, he questions the relationship that the characters have with the animal. Since the child's automatic reaction focuses on the life of the dog, it seems that the behavior by default is harmful and deadly. In erupting in supplications and cries, the boy seeks to disrupt the ordinary mode of relating to the dog and insists that it should live. The difference in the position where the child and the father stand should be highlighted. The child is the one bringing the topic of ethics towards the dog, by insisting that it must not be harmed. The father, on the other hand, promises the child that he or they will not hurt the dog. The fact that the man needs to make a promise to his son leaves trails of the idea that things may have been otherwise had the child not intervened. Rather than obeying his own ethics of care as far as dogs are concerned, the father follows his son's code of ethics. Instead of asking whether the man will kill it or not, the child, by using the negative – "We're not going to kill it, are we Papa?" – does not ask a question about the man's intentions but rather ensures that they will not harm the dog. The child does not ask what is going to happen to the dog before giving his opinion on the matter: he takes control of the situation and shares his wishes before the father can display any sign of his own ethics. The use of "we" here, acknowledges the fact that the child includes himself in ethical understanding of and relationship with others. The father, even though his ethics of care are displayed throughout the entire novel as he seeks to protect the child, is not the only individual who can have and engage in ethics. While Johns-Putra highlighted that the child was able to break the bond of the father's exclusionary code of care towards other people that they meet on the road, these encounters with dogs show that the child goes even beyond the human. The boy engages in inclusionary ethics of care that leaves room for non-human animals. The father, in contrast, only cares for the child and excludes both other humans and non-humans in the process.

On top of this capacity to engage in ethics of care towards the non-human, the child is able to nurture a positive attachment to his environment. In doing so, the boy shows the possibility of going beyond the apparent emptiness of grey and ashen landscapes. More than

dead places where dead trees stand and dead grass lay, *The Road*'s landscapes can still be appreciated by human beings. This analysis delves into two instances where the child fosters a positive relationship with his environment. In the first case, the boy gets attached to a waterfall and its vicinity, which he qualifies as such in addressing his father: "This is a good place Papa" (p.41). Upon their discovery of the waterfall, the child is amazed at the view as he exclaims "[w]ow" and as he cannot "take his eyes off it." (p.38) This admiration or incredulity is followed by the close observation of beautiful stones by the boy:

He squatted and scooped up a handful of stones and smelled them and let them fall clattering. Polished round and smooth as marbles or lozenges of stone veined and striped. Black disclets and bits of polished quartz all bright from the mist off the river. (p.38)

The synesthesia of this passage reinforces the child's amazement. Touch is invoked by "scooped up" and the presence of *hand*- in "handful" and is followed by smell and then hearing with the stones "clattering." The rest of the excerpt describes in specific detail the forms, patterns, and textures of the stones, completing the experience with sight. Finally, when the pair find morels and eat them, the child eventually puts a label on this location: "a good place."

The child's second dipping of his toes in the water exudes much enthusiasm. In this second instance of positive experience with landscapes, the child is "clutching himself and dancing" (p.232) and then "running down the beach [...] [r]unning naked and leaping and screaming into the slow roll of the surf." (p.233) Instead of his father suggesting "Do you want to go in?" (p.39), the child directly asks "Can I go swimming?" (p.233). The boy takes the initiative to enter into a direct interaction with the landscapes and shows great signs of excitement as he runs and dances and screams on the beach and in the ocean. Rather than a space where one looks for food, objects of survival, and traces of potential threats, the child demonstrates that it is possible for the non-human to be stripped of any goal other than simply enjoying contact with the environment.

The father behaves rather differently than the child. While he is able to enjoy landscapes, he only does so to a certain degree. Survival and his care for the boy remain the father's main preoccupations throughout the entire novel, including these scenes of positive experiences of the environment. Upon their discovery of the waterfall, the father "stood and watched the boy" while the boy watches the waterfall and lets out "[w]ow" (p.38). Unlike his son whose eyes are set on the non-human and who is amazed at what he sees, the father only cares about the child, his eyes glued to the human and to his reduced nuclear family. Furthermore, the father decides to leave out of the blue:

We cant stay, he said. It's getting colder every day. And the waterfall is an attraction. It was for us and it will be for others and we dont know who they will be and we cant hear them coming. It's not safe. (pp.42-3)

The attractiveness of the waterfall, from a quality, becomes a shortcoming. While this gives the impression that the natural spot has the inherent potency of making people come its way, this also results in the final decision that the father makes, which is to leave. The appeal of the waterfall is not sufficient for the father to be willing to stay. Wonder becomes danger and the characters must leave. In the end, what the father retains from this spot is not the morels, the shiny stones, or the foaming waterfall, but the danger that welcoming non-human landscapes represent. The father actively refrains from his attachment to the non-human in order to focus on his primary goal of care and survival.

Though the experience of the ocean is not marked by this need to move away from landscapes, the father keeps the non-human at a distance. As both characters have been imagining that the sea is blue, the father “see[s] the disappointment in [the boy’s] face.” (p.230) While the father says “I’m sorry it’s not blue,” the child replies “[t]hat’s okay,” showing that the father will keep his distance from the seas and hold on to the disappointment of things and colors that no longer are, whereas the child is able to go beyond that first negative impression and enjoy the natural landscape. Despite his liking of the sea, the father “[does not] want to have to come in after [his son]” (p.233). This heavily diverges from the father’s going in the water with his son at the waterfall spot. Even if the father does not assimilate the sea with danger, he still puts a distance between himself and the ocean – this time a physical distance rather than a psychological distance of worry. However, like for the waterfall, the father is less concerned by the non-human than the human. Whereas the child is enjoying the sea, running and screaming in the water, the father can only focus on the child. Because his caring for the child is his entire reason for living, the man, even if he can enjoy natural landscapes, only briefly does so, as his fixation on the boy reframes his gaze onto the fragile figure: “So white. Knobby spinebones. The razorous shoulder blades sawing under the pale skin.” (p.233) Thus, despite the father’s admission that he likes the sea, the positive feeling that he experiences eventually comes to an end as it is erased by his preoccupation with the boy.

This section has studied how the characters relate to the world that surrounds them. Language is essential for the characters to have agency within the desolate landscapes, as it allows them to grieve, have a sense of space, and understand the non-human world. As far as the characters’ ethics and capacity to connect to the non-human are concerned, the father is a

figure or melancholia that seems unable to connect beyond his exclusionary care for the child, while the child only knows the present time and enjoy and care for the non-human. Under the Freudian lens, *The Road* is a perfect example of the distinction between melancholia and mourning. While the father is obsessed with the loss and is unable to enjoy non-human landscapes, the child, unburdened by the loss, can swim happily and carelessly in the cold ocean. Rather than choosing between the two stances, the reader, as does Robin in a way in *Bewilderment*, should prefer the synthesis of both behaviors, embracing the awareness of loss while still being able to foster connections to the non-human, which are the foreground for feeling loss.

2. MAKING THE ABSENT PRESENT

Be it in general presentations of the novel, or in deeper and further analyses of its content, scholars have found themselves inevitably describing the destroyed biosphere of McCarthy's *The Road*, in which a man and a child tirelessly walk the road toward the coast. The natural world is gone, "the absence of living flora and fauna" is noticed (Stark, 2013, p.73) But more than pointing to the lack of green nature, academics highlight the inability of the land to (re)create life, as landscapes are described as "sterile and devoid of life" (Stark, 2013, p.73), as "nearly unable to sustain any vegetation or animal life" (Wright, 2014, p.509), and as "[n]o plants grow [...] and, save a single dog, no animal survive." (Kunsa, 2009, p.57) In short, there is a "total absence of greenery or of hope for regeneration or salvation in the natural world" (Godfrey, 2011, p.167). As Godfrey draws on John C. Hampsey's argument that "McCarthy's novel [...] de-romanticize[s] the individual's relationship with nature" (in Godfrey, 2011, p.167), their observation goes even as far as to consider that "McCarthy pushes the text past 'de-romanticization' and into utter annihilation of the natural world as it was once known, except in memory." (Godfrey, 2011, p.167) What Godfrey describes as the absence of any "comprehensible or understandable 'natural' world" (p.167), De Bruyn uses "denatured world" (2010, p.777) to point to it. In any case, life has disappeared from the land, leaving behind only "ruin of nature itself" (De Bruyn, 2010, p.778) and its "detritus" (Stark, 2013, p.73). The novel does indeed point to a lifeless atmosphere, as these two threefold enunciations indicate: "Barren, silent, godless." (TR, p.2) and later on "Cold. Desolate. Birdless." (p.230) As both of these wordings assert, the non-human in *The Road* is more defined by that which is absent than by that which is present. The two-hundred-page jump indeed creates an echo – if not a rhyme, of -less which describes the diegetic world by that which it lacks: the creator and its creation.

Drawing from Joshua Trey Barnett's work on names as a means for the political work of remembrance, this thesis will delve into the excavation of non-human animal names in *The Road*. Despite the well-documented absence of life amongst the apocalyptical landscapes of the novel, there are, in fact, many animal names within the text. Mainly through the narration and thus the father's focalization, but also through the child's voice, animal names seem to cling to the novel, transforming the narrative and dialogues into sites of remembrance. Be it for the characters or for the reader, this active mentioning of animals despite their quasi-disappearance acts towards the creation and preservation of a relationship that links human animals to non-human animals via language. As Barnett contends, names foreground the possibility for feeling

towards the other, caring about and for the other, thus enabling mourning and grief to exist towards the non-human. This chapter aims to point how names and language can advocate for the existence of non-human animals in the reader's mind, hence trying to bring them closer in spite of the loss. In doing so, the novel creates an automatic, though arguably simplistic and unilateral, relationship with non-human animals grounded in language. This analysis will dive into the linguistic possibilities that *The Road* deploys in order to name animals and make them persist despite an unwelcoming landscape. First, it will show how memories of the past go beyond the simple reminder of absence that they highlight in naming animals. It will then focus on visual triggers such as objects, bones, and images, as well as the lack of visual triggers, as both can invoke animals in text and mind. Finally, this analysis will pay attention to language more generally, as animals make their way into similes and idioms as to escape absolute disappearance.

OUT OF SIGHT, (NOT) OUT OF MIND: INVOKING NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

Animals are invoked by the novel's constant insistence on their absence. As the father's dreams and memories relentlessly bring him back to a time of abundance, greenery, and animal life, the stark contrast of coming back from his reveries or waking up can only highlight what is no longer there. In his memories of a time "[s]o long ago," for instance, the man recalls a "foreign city," some "books and papers," a "woman at a table," as well as "a cat at the corner [which] turned and crossed the sidewalk and sat beneath the cafe awning." (p.199) This reminiscence is quickly followed by the man standing 'in the charred ruins of a library' some "years later." (p.199) The juxtaposition serves both as an emphasis on what was before, and what no longer is. While the focus here does not seem to be on the cat, but rather on culture, libraries, and books, – the man observes "blackened books" and their "heavy bloated pages," the novel still manages to create a general sense of loss (p.199). Since books are mentioned in both temporalities, it is easy for the reader to understand their loss. It should be noted, however, that books are the only element that links the two observations of past and present, as nothing else from the man's memories can be found in the library. The cat is not as lucky as the books, as it cannot find its echo in the ruins of the world. And thus, the cat, along with the foreign city and the woman, disappears altogether from any comparison between before and after the apocalypse. But the novel, on top of writing the animal in all letters and invoking its presence in both text and mind, dedicates special attention to it with three verbs for the animal to exist, be the subject of actions, and therefore dwell in the reader's mind a little longer.

In many cases, the appearances of animals are accompanied by the time indicator “once”. As the narration and the characters proceed on their journey, the father recalls memories of the world prior to the unnamed event. One can then read the man situating himself in landscapes of the past, as those of the present seem to inevitably find their echo in his memory. Early on in the novel, as both characters have started their trip towards the South, the man stops and stands on a bridge “[w]here once he’d watched trout swaying in the current” (p.30). Upon walking along and observing a river a while later, after the man’s having “dropped a white stone into the water,” the narration invokes the man’s past as “[h]e’d stood at such a river once and watched the flash of trout deep in a pool” (p.42). As the man and child eventually reach the coast, their camping by the seas resonates with the father’s “waking once on such a night to the clatter of crabs in the pan” (p.234). Finally, the enigmatic invocation that hums as much mystery for the reader as did “all things [which] were older than man” is initiated by “[o]nce there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains.” (p.306) More than a timestamp for the narrative to make sure that such a beautiful scene happened in a time prior to that of the apocalyptic pilgrimage, the adverb stands as a tool of dissimilarity between the present and past temporalities. If there once was something, it indeed no longer is now. Therefore, these animals, along with the experience of sighting them or hearing them are enclosed in the past without the novel leaving a doubt of their absence in the present time of the diegesis. Despite this insistence, the novel resists their total disappearance. From the moment *once* makes its way into the text, the accompanying reminiscence of the past allows space for work of remembrance and for animals to dwell, sustaining the connection between non-human animals and human animals via the narrative voice.

On other occasions, non-human animals are summoned by the novel in the present time of the diegesis even without any animal present in the flesh. Be it by their association with objects, bones, or drawings, animals linguistically install a foothold on this ashen and barren land, despite their physical disappearance. As the father tries to find loot in an abandoned house and he sees a “mousetrap” or as the boy notices a “mounted deerhead” on the wall of a grocery store, the text reveals objects linked to now-absent animals. Even if both objects are intertwined with the death of animals, their being mentioned brings animals to the page. While the object of decoration is a direct trace of previously alive deer, the trap is distinctly distinguished from any flesh. Even if the mousetrap only refers to a wooden plank and a death mechanism, its utterance in the narration defeats the purpose of the trap. Rather than being an agent of death like its referent, the very sign mousetrap acts as a birth-giver. The word mouse is indeed very

much present on the page, despite the use of an object that leads to the disappearance of mice referents. As far as the deerhead is concerned, it points to two things at the same time. On the one hand, it reminds the reader, if not the child, that there was indeed a time when animals, deers in this case, were alive and could be hunted before becoming part of a building's interior decor. On the other hand, the part of an animal that is its head points to the rest of its body by metonymy. By pointing to a head, the text creates the possibility for the rest of the body to exist. While the deerhead is only part of a whole, the word contains the animal in its entirety. Thanks to only a head, the entire word deer is present in the novel, hence building a library of animals. In short, words that are synonymous with animal death actually manage to include these animals in the text and make them present.

Beside these objects that invoke animals within their internal structure, animal names find their way into the novel via the mentioning of their carcasses or pictorial representation. As both characters walk along the sea, they are met with "ribcages of what may have been cattle" (p.231), "[t]he bones of seabirds" and "the ribs of fishes" (p.237). Despite the absence of any animal attached to these bones, the novel irrevocably cites the names of those to which the bones once belonged. In these examples, the text refuses to let go of animals and to simply observe bones lying along the shore on the sand. It instead seeks to desperately – or hopefully – recall animals despite the unavoidable proof of their death. Far from any possibility of having fled into a more pastoral world, safe from the ruins that the man and child cannot escape, the presence of animal bones insists on their death, hence making them very much present in the narration.

On top of this invocatory capacity, bones also have strong imaginary powers. As bones are what is left when animals are gone, they function in a similar manner to that of words. In being able to summon animals by name and thus in mind, words are able to go beyond the death of their referent. Names remain unchanged despite the consequences of the apocalypse in the novel. Like bones, words stick to the world, unbothered by the disappearance of fleshed animals. Even if bones and words are reminders of the death of animals, they provide the opportunity for them to leave animal traces in the diegetic world and in the text. By metonymy, as being part of a whole, bones offer the forever possibility of hinting towards the entity of which they once were a constituent, as they seem immune to the fire and the dimming away of the world in *The Road*. Just like words cannot exist without being connected to the idea to which they refer, the signified, bones cannot lay in the desolate landscapes without bringing the observer back to the flesh and blood animals that were attached to them. Bones offer the possibility for

flesh to crawl back upon them and (re)create creatures in the minds of those who see them. Rather than merely the tangible proof of the absence of animals, bones allow for animals to inhabit the novel, as well as the reader's mind.

The same goes for graphic representation of animals. It should be noted that the child, when given the occasion, has proved himself inclined, or at least capable, of representing an animal as he "had found some crayons and painted his facemask with fangs." (p.13) But a more significant animal iconography lies in the tattoo worn by a man encountered on the road. When the man comes face to face with a stranger who wanders in the weeds in search of a spot where he can relieve himself, a description of this new threat lingers on his beard before veering on "a tattoo of a bird on his neck done by someone with an illformed notion of their appearance." (p.65) Much like Magritte's pipe in *La Trahison des images* (Magritte, 1929), the stranger's tattoo is the depiction of a bird, rather than a bird, just like there is only but the representation of a pipe in Magritte's painting. But this logic is put into question when Michel Foucault writes "la fonction d'un dessin aussi schématique, aussi scolaire, que celui-ci, c'est bien de se faire reconnaître, de laisser apparaître sans équivoque ni hésitation ce qu'il représente." (Foucault, 1973, p.18) In short, the purpose of a drawing is, in fact, to be the very thing that it represents, rather than pointing with an arrow to an object situated elsewhere (p.19). Whether the tattoo is a representation or a bird, the word *bird*, unlike the tattoo, is recognizable as each letter is well formed on the page and as there is no misspelling to be found. Even if the word is only a sign, and not a referent, not an actual fleshed bird, *bird* is a two-faced coin made of its signifier, i.e. its physical representation in letters on the page, and of its signified, i.e. the mental understanding and representation of the bird. In either case, even if no fleshed bird is pointed to, apart from the human flesh on which the tattoo is drawn, there is, in fact, a bird in the narrative's linear text.

SUMMONING NON-HUMANS OUT OF THIN AIR

While the aforementioned examples (the deerhead, the mousetrap, the bones, and the tattoo) refer to observable proof or item that summons animal names into the text, there are instances where no direct visible clue leads the novel to name animals, in this case, a dog and a squid. This leads us to believe that an animal can be included within the text without any visual trigger. This is especially important, considering that, as non-human animals are dead, they cannot be seen by characters: even their absolute disappearance from sight cannot prevent animals from being included in the narrative. As some critics have insisted, without digging any deeper, on

the presence of a dog, this analysis, cannot ignore the encounter. Please consider the following excerpt:

Then in the distance he heard a dog bark. He turned and looked toward the darkening town. It's a dog, [the father] said.

A dog?

Yes. (TR, p.85)

The barking, here, even if it is not an observable clue in the strict sense, is perhaps a more straightforward invocation than the examples given above. Instead of a taxidermied head, a deathtrap, remains or drawings, the dog sound emanates right from the animal, creating a direct link between the animal and the appearance of its name within the narrative. The word *dog* is present at every level of enunciation. It is first evoked by the narrator through the father's focalization ("he heard a dog bark"). It is then mentioned out loud by the man. It should be noticed, however, that the man, rather than addressing his son to share his identification of the dog, simply states it as it is: "he said." The man does not *tell*, he *says*. He does not tell the child that it is a dog, but gratuitously and simply utters its name. Then, it is the child's turn to voice the word in response to the father. Names are summoned in every place possible.

This example deserves a slight digression. While one could imagine that it is the first time that the child hears of dogs, since his answer ends with a question mark, it is not the case. After the characters hear the dog, the narration switches from an external narrator to an internal narrator, and relates the focalization of the father, as he recalls a dog that he, his wife – referred to as an enigmatic *she*, and their son encountered before and which followed them along the road for a few days. The text reads: "The boy looked after her and then he looked at me and then he looked at the dog and he began to cry and to beg for the dog's life and I promised I would not hurt the dog." (p .91) This sentence shows that the boy does know of dogs, meaning that the repetition of *dog*, far from being a question of knowledge or the absence of it, is an insistence on the animal. But even further than that, the sentence, much like its paragraph, which contains three more *dog* utterances, adds to the general hoarding of *dogs* in the text. While the first example shows a dialogue between the narrator and the characters, which could justify the presence of *dog* at several levels, the second one is a frank accumulation that evades any logic of diversity. Far from using pronouns, synonyms, or hypernyms to create variety in referring to the dog, the text instead insists on spreading the word in its short entirety on the page. While this repetition of *dog* is triggered by a visible dog, it feeds the general atmosphere of accumulation of names, be it for animals in general or for dogs in particular.

As dogs relentlessly appear with and without the need for any visual stimuli, the novel shows that there is no need for animals to be seen in order to be included in the text. The same goes for another animal: the great squid. While the image and the word dog were activated by hearing its barking, the presence of the great squid in the ocean is not provoked by any stimulus of the senses. As the man and child have reached the south coast and as they are venturing into new landscapes, the boy even experiencing running in the sea for the first time, the novel follows the father's focalization: "He thought there could be deathships out there yet, drifting with their lolling rags of sail. Or life in the deep. Great squid propelling themselves over the floor of the sea in the cold darkness." (pp.233-4) Here, the mention of the great squid is totally uncalled for, save for what the landscape awakens within the man. As the verbs "thought" and "could" indicate, the mollusk is an entirely imagined invocation. What the deep floor of the sea has to offer perhaps, is the lack of proof of both the presence or absence of animals. With no referent whatsoever, the great squid only exists as a sign for the man and for the reader, the presence of the signifier, the word, ensuring that of the signified, the great squid propelling themselves over the floor of our minds.

LIKE AN ANIMAL: PRESENCE VIA SIMILES

As the presence of the great squid in the novel shows, language is capable of summoning animals without the need for them to be present. This is also the case with similes, as they enable non-human animals to make their way into the narrator's observations. Thus, even if the road is empty of any animals, the novel is not consequently deprived of their presence, as similes, like the other instances mentioned above, are able to name them and include them in the text fabric despite the lifelessness of the diegetic world. While there are similes that complement the non-human world, as some boulders in the landscape are "like the shapes of bears" (p.30), it should be noted that similes are often used to point to human beings. The child is often compared to animals, as he is described as "sleep[ing] under the tree like some hibernating animal" when the father awakes in their "den," which is surrounded by snow (p.103). His behavior is associated with that of animals, as the father has "trained him to lie in the woods like a fawn" (p.124) and not move until the man returns, or as he "lick[s] the lid of the tin" of tunafish "like a cat licking its reflection in the glass." (p.205) The father is not immune to animal similes, however, as he and the child try to fill tins with gasoline and "crouch[...] over the tank like apes fishing with sticks in an anthill for the better part of an hour until the jug was full." (p.229) By using animal similes to describe human beings and their behavior, the text draws similarities between non-human and human animals. In these cases,

humans engage in behaviors that are deemed typical of fawns, cats, and apes. If similes are indeed able to draw one closer to animals, then perhaps their use in *The Road* is an attempt at creating the possibility to extend ethics and care to them. If similes were able to link non-human animals and human animals together, making them radically comparable and thus considering them equals, the rhetorical device would be a strong tool to pave the floor towards empathy and understanding of non-human loss. From then on, the work of feeling loss, grieving, and mourning would be a walk in the park. But things are more complicated than that.

While Steven argues that “[i]n *The Road*, the division between animal life and human life has receded” thanks to animal comparisons (2012, p.67), Todd McGowan is more critical of animal similes: “when we are comparing humans to animals, we are really attesting to the radicality of the distinction between them.” (2018, p.195) In his discussion on animal similes, McGowan contends that “[t]he use of the animal metaphor articulates in a disguised form the violence of an absolute break between subjectivity and animality.” (p.178) As the scholar considers that animal similes in general mismatch characteristics of their animal and that accuracy in comparisons is an exception rather than a given (p.182), his argument lies in the idea that “[w]e do not describe the everyday or typical actions of humans in animal terms but reserve these metaphors for the excess of our subjectivity.” (p.178) Having recourse to animal similes comes to show that excess is both seen as extraordinary to the point of needing animals to describe it and as a product of nature rather than human subjectivity (p.182). McGowan’s view can find its match in *The Road* in the simile used by a man who names himself Ely and whom the duo meets on their journey. The stranger says: “I’ve not seen a fire in a long time, that’s all. I live like an animal. You don’t want to know the things I’ve eaten.” (TR, p.183) Here, the animal simile is used to show how unhuman-like the man has come to behave because of the new state of the world, which is reinforced by the opposition between his lifestyle and fire, a great symbol of humanity. In general, however, the novel seems to use animal similes in a quiet manner compared to the similes introduced by McGowan. Instead of clichés and exaggeration such as “mad dogs,” “hungry wolves,” and “wise owls” (McGowan, 2018, pp.181-183) *The Road* does not equate humans to animals, but rather tries to show what behavior they both share. Hence, the child does not possess some extraordinary characteristic that would be culturally associated with fawns but rather joins the non-human animal in a behavior that is typical of them. More than being compared, humans and animals share behavior in a manner that seems devoid of any excessiveness. These similes appear to do the opposite of

underlining the human subjectivity observed by McGowan, as they shove away human exceptionalism.

The use of similes including non-human animals in *The Road*, draws, in fact, humans and animals slightly closer to one another, however different they may be. Even if the possibility of comparing two things or beings means that those two things or beings are radically not the same, the rhetorical device is an attempt, however fruitful, to bring them closer to each other. Though one can debate on subjectivity distancing itself from animals, the simile does physically, if not conceptually, bond the two items that are compared together. The presence of *like*, even if it is an obstacle between the components of the simile, creates the inexorable need for the presence of the second part. *Like*, in short, summons the simile into existence and therefore creates the possibility for animals to be brought to the page, and at a short distance from humans, as the four-letter word enforces a relative immediacy of the comparison. The presence of similes in *The Road* is thus a testament to the reluctance of language to let animal names fall into oblivion and to let them disappear from human lives.

What all these examples demonstrate is that language has the power to invoke animals by simply evoking them. The novel is not only capable of conjuring animals but is also self-reflective on the matter. Let us consider the following excerpt, in which the man and the boy discuss their distance from the sea. The father estimates:

Well. I think we're about two hundred miles from the coast. As the crow flies.
As the crow flies?
Yes. It means going in a straight line.
Are we going to get there soon?
Not real soon. Pretty soon. We're not going as the crow flies.
Because crows dont have to follow roads?
Yes.
They can go wherever they want.
Yes.
Do you think there might be crows somewhere?
I dont know.
But what do you think?
I think it's unlikely. (TR, p.166)

And a few lines later:

After a while the boy said: There's not any crows. Are there?
No.
Just in books.
Yes. Just in books.
I didnt think so. (Pp.167-8)

Crows fly at the very center of these passages. The text unfolds its reflections on crows in three distinctive steps. First, the dialogue summons crows by using the idiom “as the crow flies.” When the boy replies with a question, the dialogue focuses on understanding the idiom. The father takes time to explain it to the boy, though one could argue that the child fills the gap in the father’s explanation by stating clearly the relationship between the crow and the meaning of the idiom. As the father only focuses on the meaning of the expression, the child extracts the crow from its idiom and dissects the phrasing in order to understand the correlation between the meaning of the idiom and its use of crows. More than a tool deprived of any sign of life and used solely for linguistic purposes, the crow becomes an animal again. This switch enables the dialogue to go to the second step, as the father and son discuss the possible existence or extinction of crows in their ashen world. The father first avoids the question, and then expresses uncertainty before admitting the absolute absence of crows in the sky. While this ends with a death sentence for crows, the conversation eventually lingers on the possibilities that books have to offer. “Just in books” has a dual interpretation. On the one hand, it reinforces the absence of flesh and blood crows, as none can live in real life if crows can only exist in books. *Just* indicates the reduction of possibility for birds to exist. On the other hand, this creates the hope for books to create a world, perhaps only in the two dimensions of the pages, where crows can survive. In this sense, their comment on books, even if it seems pessimistic at first glance, actually paves the way for resistance against disappearance. Despite the lack of animals in the diegetic world, the novel, just like the character’s comment predicted, makes crows exist within the text, as the word is repeated seven times.

In *The Road*, language does not let go of animals. While these constant reminders of the disappearance of animals can be read as a lament over their death, this thesis argues that, in reviving animal names, the novel allows a connection between namer and named. As citing names is a means to prevent someone or something from absolute and total disappearance and death, *The Road* seems drawn to mention that which has vanished from the world. While names play an important part in this recalling and reviving and make it possible for the novel, the characters, and the reader to engage in a work of remembrance, however painful it is, the novel also insists on dwelling on and with these memories and names. The emphasis on the absence indeed creates ... presence. Despite the loss of the non-human, *The Road* entertains a disembodied and abstract ecosystem. Thus can begin or continue the nurture of memory, remembrance, and awareness of loss, as holding the dead in mind keeps them close and ensures a bond, if not a relationship or even kinship, to work its way beyond death.

3. LANDSCAPES BEYOND NOTHING

In their reading of *The Road*, Danta (2012) notes the strong presence of the color grey within the novel. With 81 occurrences, grey does in fact make its way into the text as the main adjective describing landscapes, to the point of creating a “crisis of luminosity,” as worded by Danta (2012, p.14). As they focus on the opening sentences of the novel, Danta perceives how the simile “[l]ike the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world” (TR, 1) manages to set the tone of this greying place: “the world is like an eye that is slowly losing its sight.” (Danta, 2012, p.10) As they consider that the unnamed catastrophe is related to an overexposure “to a destructive form of light,” they argue that its consequence is “an irreparable loss of luminosity, a dimming away of the world, an ecological glaucoma.” (p.11) As their chapter rarely refers to ecology, it is difficult to make sense of this labeling of the absence of light. What does *ecological glaucoma* is supposed to mean? Does it point to the impossibility of looking at nature because it has disappeared? Or because any light is gone and characters are thus becoming blind? Or does it point to the inability to look at nature because we are no longer able to see it as such? One could argue that ecological glaucoma, rather than solely pointing to *The Road*’s rhetoric of luminosity and greyness, could instead be used to define primary readings of the novel that tend to dismiss the non-human as absent from the novel. This does not come as a surprise, however, as grey is far from being considered an ecological color. While this thesis does not seek to analyze the novel in its colors, it aspires to bring light to what has diegetically and extra-diegetically disappeared. It aims to uncover what remains unseen in these “barren” (TR, p.2) and “desolate” (p.230) landscapes.

It is no surprise that one sees the non-human and ecosystems in *The Road* as non-existent, as “dead,” “ashen,” and “grey,” are omnipresent in the text. In their book *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green* (2013), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed) gathers sixteen chapters revolving around colors in order to move away from the “reducing [of] ‘ecology’ or ‘ecocriticism’ to ‘green.’” (Buell, 2013, ix). In this “dispute with green exclusivism,” (x), Cohen contends that “[g]reen dominates our thinking about ecology like no other, as if the color were the only organic hue, a blazon for nature itself.” (2013, xix) As green is, consciously or not, a “synonym for sustainability” as well as “the favored color of ecocriticism,” Cohen notes that, by “[b]lending the romantic, the pastoral, and the georgic, green ecologies tend to dwell on the innate plenitude that nature offers, mourning its commodification and disruption.” (xx) This

representation of nature echoes the previously mentioned idea that some have a conception of infinite and always regenerative natural world. This delusion has also been pointed to by Timothy Morton, who seeks to challenge our conceptualization of nature, as they notice that “[n]ature is what keeps on coming back, an inert, horrifying presence and a mechanical repetition.” (2007, p.201)

According to Morton in their *Ecology without Nature*, this green and living nature is a heritage from the Romantic period, as “[n]ationalism, a quintessentially Romantic ideology, continues to motivate environmental art seeking to re-enchant the world.” (2007, p.97) Following German Romantic idealism, one can observe the construction of the nation as “homeland,” which relies on poetics of the sublime and of “nationalist fantasy,” according to which nature, dazzling and shining, appears “sublime, ‘there’ and yet fundamentally beyond representation.” (p.97) Cohen similarly links green nature to Romanticism and considers “bright green” as a “romantic color through which individuals commune with nature and arrive at personal revelations and solipsistic calm.” (Cohen, 2013, xxi) Much like the nationalist conception of nature within the confines of its homeland, this idea of nature reveals an idealized understanding of nature and its wilderness. Nature then becomes a “purified place to which one travels rather than dwells always within: separated from the human, empty, foundationally pure.” (xxi)

Moving away from this perfect green nature, Cohen himself partakes in the exercise of discussing one of the colors that make up *Prismatic Ecology*: grey. While there is no mention whatsoever of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* in their chapter, Cohen’s thoughts strikingly match the post-apocalyptic novel. The evocation of grey meets *The Road* in such an uncanny way that the following passage deserves to be included in its entirety:

Grey is the fate of color at twilight. As the sun's radiance dwindles, objects receive less light to scatter and absorb. They yield to the world a diminishing energy, so that the vibrancy of orange, indigo, and red dull to dusky hues. A grey ecology might therefore seem a moribund realm, an expanse of slow loss, wanes, and withdrawal, a graveyard space of mourning. Perhaps with such muted steps the apocalypse arrives, not with a bang but a dimming. Or maybe ashen grey is all that remains after the fires of the world’s end have extinguished themselves, when nothing remains unburned. (Cohen, 2013, p.270)

These lines, which introduce Cohen’s thoughts on the color grey, echo both Danta’s observations on greyness and some of the novel’s contextual elements. “Dwindles,” “diminishing,” “slow loss,” “waned,” and “dimming” all relate to Danta’s crisis of luminosity, as light and the world fade away together. *The Road*’s being far away from sensational and

excessive panic apocalypse corresponds to Cohen's description of a potential fall: "muted" and "dimming." And the gloomy perspective of the end of the world resonates with the novel's burning land and ashen sky, as the grey ashes of the past world are all that is left.

Marco Caracciolo argues, however, that the ubiquity of grey in the novel, and its stark contrast with colorful dreams, makes it easier for the reader to imagine the storyworld (2018, p.232). In this sense, Caracciolo sees the color under a more positive lens, as "[t]he absence of color acts as a unifying backdrop to readers' mental imagery [...] creating a strong sense of physical presence." (p.232). Rather than a tool of evaporation, as described by Danta, Caracciolo qualifies grey as tangible and concrete. The scholar acknowledges that the landscapes of *The Road* are characterized "through the negation and subtraction of color," hence meeting Danta's views that things are disappearing, and thus interprets the "the denial of color [as a] dramatic contrast between the pre- and the postapocalyptic world" (p.232). Be it a synonym for the fading away of the world, or a tangible proof of the loss engendered by collapse, grey is considered, in either case, as a symbol of loss, disappearance, and absence.

Rather than this grim, dim perspective on grey, Cohen tackles the faded color in a more optimistic mindset. Following what Cohen hints at being called "disanthropocentrism," (2013, p.272) the scholar argues that grey, understood in terms of "depletion and lifelessness" (p.270), is a product of an anthropocentric view of colors. Not only is grey culturally seen as a mirror of human emotions, as apocalyptic grey ashes are the symbols of "the earth grey[ing] to mourn with us, to lament the absence of our tread" (p.270) but the grey is also understood through human lenses. Twilight and light fading out are not synonymous with death and life stopping altogether:

The grey hour is liminal, a turning point at which owls, mosquitoes, monsters, and the wind thrive, when stone cools for a while and persists in its epochal process of becoming dust, when animals and elements continue indifferent to our proclivity to think that an evening's color drain is a metaphor for human impermanence, a cosmic acknowledgment of our little fits of melancholy. (p.270)

Perhaps the predominance of green in our environmental thinking makes us blind as to what happens when the sun light weakens. As humans are mostly night-blind compared to some non-human beings, one should not forget that the world does not stop when one's eyes are closed and everyone goes to bed.

When Cohen suggests that "[t]he apocalyptic imagination has difficulty discerning the vibrancy of grey" (p.271), it is difficult not to be reminded of *The Road*. As the landscapes are

that of grey ruins, there is no wonder that a positive embracing of its non-human is difficult. De Bruyn draws from Robert Harrison, however, that “ruins usually hint at survival as well as destruction” (2010, p.778). As ruins have been seen “as metonyms of what they once were in their integrity” (Harrison, 2003, p.6) and as they reveal that destruction comes with survival, “not so much of the ruins themselves as of the earth on which they stand or fall” (p.15), the grey ruins, dead trees, and dead landscapes of *The Road* become a place of presence and survival rather than absence and death. This thesis argues that nature, despite being grey and unwelcoming, is still very much present in the novel. It urges the readers to train their gaze to go against the culturally dominant greenness of the environment to be able to see one’s surroundings, however bleak, as part of said environment. In recognizing what is left in the ashen world of *The Road* as nature and part of the environment, grounds for ethics of grief can be established.

This section seeks to highlight the ecological side of *The Road*, so that one can learn to see nature beyond green plants, which in turn can help foster relationships with the ecological dimension of the novel and prepare the work of mourning and remembrance in a post-apocalyptic thought-experiment setting. In order to do so, this section delves into five aspects of the novel’s environment. First, it will resist and show places of resistance in the novel against the apparent nothingness of the diegetic world, before scrutinizing the familiar techniques and the variety of landscapes depiction. This section then focuses on the importance of the weather both in environment and the novel, and will draw attention to the ubiquitous plants in the text, which survive thanks to names, seeds, and ashes. Finally, it emphasizes the physicality of the text, which highlights critical places and strengthens the presence of the non-human and the environment in the novel while resisting against the tendency.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS NOTHING

No one can be blamed for not seeing a positive ecological dimension to *The Road*. As “nothing” occurs 81 times and its adjacent “nothingness” three times, and as “dead” shows up 83 times, there is no wonder that McCarthy’s landscapes seem so empty (23 occurrences) and devoid of life. The novel indeed states clearly “no sign of life” three times. And yet, the novel still stretches across hundreds of pages, creating a large-scale antithesis between emptiness and fullness, absence and presence. This broad antithesis finds itself represented in several smaller ones, as the father for instance, often observes and sees nothing, even though there are, indeed, things. This section reveals that, beyond the text’s or the characters’ branding the world as

nothing, there is resistance against emptiness through the contrastingly present landscapes, winds, water, smoke, and rain. As the father quickly dismisses elements for which he is not looking as nothing and as he becomes blind to the fullness that surrounds him, the child shines through his ability to see.

As both characters have become prey to unlawful anthropophagic beings, the father, who is in charge of their practical survival, is always on the lookout. As his job is to take care of the child, he must always be observant. Many times, the father examines his surroundings in search of potential assailants' traces. When the man and the boy find a place near a cascade and the boy wishes to stay there for a while, the father "check[s] for any sign of other visitors" but "f[inds] nothing." (TR, p.42) While it is clear that the man is looking for traces and finds none, the conclusion of his search is followed by "[h]e stood watching the river where it swung loping into a pool and curled and eddied." (p.42) Even if *nothing* seems like an appropriate response, its juxtaposition with the contemplation of the landscape creates a stark contrast. As the sentences compel the reader's attention via its repetition of cumulative *and*'s, its consonance of *d*'s in "and curled and eddied" (emphasis added) and the addition of verbs that complement the river (swung, curled, eddied), the text creates a sense of collection and accumulation that leaves no room for nothingness.

While this example is coherent in its use of *nothing*, since it is made clear as to what it refers (the absence of trace), the following passage is not. Its gratuitous use of nothing to describe the surroundings does not find immediate and explicit legitimation.

What is this place, Papa?
Shh. Let's just stand here and listen.
There was nothing. The wind rustling the dead roadside bracken. A distant creaking. Door or shutter. (p.111)

In this excerpt, the father stops for a moment to listen. The reader understands that he is watching out for anything suggesting the presence of other human beings as there are "[n]o tracks in the random patches of melting snow." (p.111) When "nothing" is used, however, it is not said explicitly what the father is looking for in his examination: he just stands and listens. As this reason for listening to their surroundings is only implied, the effect of what is actually in the text is a contradiction. The narration states that "[t]here was nothing," but is followed by the "distant creaking" of a "[d]oor or shutter" and by the rustling of the wind. Where there is nothing, there is not one thing, but two. Because of the absence of a specific element for which the father is looking in the air, any evidence of anything else is dismissed and is labeled as "nothing."

While the two previous examples show that the narration uses the word *nothing* to qualify the absence of specific elements – sometimes (un)justifiably so, and not without the text resisting this systematic blindness – the man is not immune to this recurrent dismissal into nothingness either. As the two characters progress in their journey, they happen to walk by a dam, and the boy asks his father whether “there could be fish in the lake” (p.19). As the father is quick to answer with “No. There’s nothing in the lake” (p.19), one could be tempted to believe him. The direct answer to the child’s question is that there is no fish in the lake, but it is not the exact information that the father gives. Rather than simply extending the general absence of animals in the fallen world to the lake, the father goes as far as considering the lake as absolutely empty. There is no proof, however, that the lake is empty. As the father describes the dam to the boy, explaining that it was used for electricity and that it transformed the river into a lake, he also mentions that the dam will probably be there for hundreds or thousands of years, since it was built with concrete. If the lake is still there, as indicated by the fact that the characters talk about it and that it depends on a construction that is far from gone, then it raises the question: Is there truly nothing in the lake? Whether one considers that there is water in the lake, or that the lake is water, it is confusing to read that there is nothing else than water – which is already something. There surely must be rocks and mud paving the floor of the lake, as small detritus and ash float around in the water, and as fish bones, despite the absence of fish, have sunken to the floor not to be moved again.

Further than that, the man, in losing his credibility of evaluation and sight, steps down from his position of a well-observant person, only to see the child rise in his ability to see beyond *nothing*. The father’s capacity to perceive things is damaged when he fails to see in the landscape elements for which he is intentionally looking. As the father is seated and is looking through his binoculars in search of human traces, his examination comes to a stop after the text goes “[n]o smoke, no movement of life” (p.82): he tells the boy that he sees nothing. When handed the binoculars, however, the child manages to notice smoke past some buildings. As the boy “adjusted the wheel” of the glasses and as the father can only but ask “[w]here” and “[w]hat building” (p.82), it is clear that the man has failed somewhere along the way. If the child’s adjustments made it possible for him to distinguish the smoke, then perhaps the father’s glasses adjustment indicates that he is not able to manipulate the object. Or, if it is not a question of handling the glasses, then his failure to use the binoculars stands as a metaphor for his own inability to correctly see the world as it is, and thus to identify its components, including the

non-human. Whether it is the binoculars or the man's eyes that need to be adjusted, the result is all the same: nothing.

The child, on the other hand, is capable of seeing beyond his father's *nothing*-labels, be it in this example or in the following one.

He got the binoculars out of the cart and stood in the road and glassed the plain down there where the shape of a city stood in the grayness like a charcoal drawing sketched across the waste. Nothing to see. No smoke. Can I see? the boy said. Yes. Of course you can. The boy leaned on the cart and adjusted the wheel. What do you see? the man said. Nothing. He lowered the glasses. It's raining. Yes, the man said. I know. (p.7)

Once again, the father observes and sees nothing. While the text resists his nullifying gaze by making art out of landscapes, the father seems untouched by this attempt. Even if the man's eyes meet a "shape," a "charcoal drawing," and the waste landscape transformed into a sketch, more than paying no attention to it, the man tries to make it disappear into nothingness. When the boy's turn to look comes, he is first influenced by his father's remark, as he answers his father's question with "[n]othing." He adds, however, as if to correct himself or to add nuance to his statement, that it is raining. The man's "[y]es [...] I know" is quite striking. As the boy's observation is an antithesis to the father's, the man's confirmation that there is something to be witnessed shows an internal contradiction. In short, while dismissing the landscapes altogether, the father is able to register the information that it is raining, without deeming it worthy of being classified as something other than *nothing*. This automatic discarding of things into nothingness echoes the idea of "ecological glaucoma" that this thesis wishes to point to. For the reader to see the ecological dimension of *The Road*, they need to resist the novel's propensity towards void and vacuity.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Even if nothingness pervades the entire novel, the text resists this logic of diminishment. As demonstrated above, the word *nothing* usually does hide things. *The Road* does not solely rely on this word to unveil the antithesis of presence-absence, its plentiful content, and the non-human world. Far from being the backdrop of a mere setting, the novel's landscapes and non-human world are at the forefront of the book. Even if one forgets that they are part of nature, as they do not fit green standards, landscapes are an undeniable part of the novel, since the road on which the characters walk winds its way across them. In order to underline these landscapes, the novel has recourse to a number of strategies. From using patterns that may be familiar to the reader such as the frontier journey, the rhythmic depictions of the land, and the romantic

imagery of the novel to minute depiction of a wide variety of landscapes, the novel eases the reader in the observation of the ecological side of the novel.

THIS SEEMS FAMILIAR: EASING THE READER INTO THE LANDSCAPE

According to Godfrey, *The Road* shares characteristics with the “archetypal frontier journey” and “us[es] western tropes to move [the] narrative forward.” (2011 p.167). As these tropes lead to uncovering grey and ashen lands, they move away from “the conventional frontier narrative of discovery and exploration of bountiful new territory” (pp.166-7). Instead of the green pastoral, the characters are met with a barren landscape and the reminder that this idealized pastoral is long gone. Therefore, the frontier-quality of the journey highlights losses rather than discoveries. Furthermore, as the novel finds a “familiar rhythm of landscape description,” old and new geographies are placed next to each other, which induces tension in the narrative, Godfrey observes (2011, p.168). As it puts side by side elements of the pastoral – or elements so familiar that they can be qualified as pastoral, such as the river valley in the distance or the meadowlands, and the ashen, blackened, barren world, the novel “creates both an intimate and decipherable landscape and a picture of terrifyingly unknowable terrain.” (p.169) In this sense, the frontier journey and familiar rhythm of description only highlight the desolation of the land.

The present study wishes to rely on these observations while presenting a more positive outlook. Instead of familiar tropes turned to dust, the novel uses the frontier journey as a familiar set of tools and ideas that sustains the relationship between humans and the lands on which they walk. By using familiar ways of describing the land, *The Road* achieves two things. First, it employs recognizable patterns that are able to draw the reader’s attention to the natural world. However grey and ashen the environment has become in the novel, the reader’s mind is guided to it, as the non-human is desperately trying to make it aware that grey nature is, in fact, nature. Second, the familiar patterns of land show the capacity for language to invoke landscapes. As the novel names elements of the diegetic world, it infuses words with the ability to conjure the non-human world. The familiarity of words, rhythms, and description patterns, this thesis argues, keeps the reader grounded in the landscapes of the novel. These devices control the reader’s eyes and train them to do something that they know and master – scrutinizing a landscape, but applied to a changed recipient. Instead of looking only at green nature, the novel cultivates the reader’s capacity to look at post-green nature while still being able to label it as the natural realm.

On top of this familiar frontier component, *The Road* relies on romantic imagery to ease its readers into observing its landscapes. Throughout the entire novel, the characters are found in states of immobile observations of their surroundings. Be it in the search for specific objects that could be helpful for their survival or in fear of finding human company, the man and the boy are *looking*. The man “stood watching the river swung loping into a pool and curled and eddied” (TR, p.42) and “looked at the dry grass where it moved and at the dark and twisted trees in the rows.” (p.95) With the boy, they “stood listening” (p.37) to water flowing nearby and decide that “[they]’ll take a look” (p.235) at anything of value on the beach. This systematic examination of landscapes might not appear as bearing the marks of romanticism, but it takes part in a general contemplation of landscapes that sometimes strongly evokes a Romantic imagery. Such is the case with a scene that happens at the beginning of the novel: “At the top of the hill they stood in the cold and the wind, getting their breath.” (p.6) The reader is left with the image of a man on high ground, looking over the vastness that spreads before him.

This scene strongly echoes Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818). In their observation of the painting, Belleville-Douelle (2023) notes that the central man is a solitary figure whose identity remains hidden, as there is no face to be seen (website, no pagination). As the man and the rocks on which he is standing are painted in dark, there is a stark contrast built between him and the monochromatic, faded, and almost colorless nature. As details are blended in the pale colors of the background, contemplating nature is difficult for the viewer. Finally, they point out that the title, the translation of which is rather complex, refers to a moving individual, be it a traveler or a hiker. Even if there is no mention of contemplation in the title, the man is facing, if not watching – it cannot be said because of the hidden face – the landscape before him, inviting the viewer to do the same (Belleville-Douelle, 2023, no pagination).

This image indeed shares a lot with *The Road*. As the protagonists remain unnamed and unidentifiable – save for a sparse *man* and *boy*, they are almost as faceless as the painting’s central figure. The pale colors and the difficulty of making out details in the landscapes find their mirror in the landscapes of the novel, since the ashen air, the ubiquitous greyness, the fading light, the ecological unawareness that lies behind *nothing*, and the pared-down language make it an arduous task to fully engage with the landscapes. Nonetheless, like in the painting, the reader and viewer are invited by these human figures that top rocks and hills alike to stop there for a second and take in the country that lays before them while their breath is going back to normal. The pause on the top of the hill that the man and boy make finds its root in the

romantic imagery of contemplation of landscapes. In using this familiar trope, *The Road* uses once again a tool with which the readers are acquainted in order to train their gaze to look at the non-human world.

LANDSCAPE? PRESENT!: VISUALIZED VARIED ENVIRONMENT

In their reading of *The Road*, Caracciolo argues that the scarcity of objects found in the ruins of the world actually benefits the reader's mental representation of the novel, as "the rarer and more isolated these objects appear, the easier it becomes to visualize them" (2018, p.232) Even if the text highlights the absence of elements and details of the old world, Caracciolo's philosophy that "less is more" focuses on the impact on the reader as "McCarthy's sparse style of spatial description *encourages* the production of mental imagery." (original emphasis, pp.232-3). In this sense, the concise descriptions of landscapes work in the same way as the meticulous placing of objects. As the diminishing of the world removes the text of any excessiveness, empty landscapes become easier to visualize. Since there are fewer elements to decipher in the landscapes, the reader's mental imagery can only grow into a concrete and tangible understanding of the non-human world.

From the very beginning of the novel, "the man w[akes] in the woods" (TR, p.1), and right after the imagery of darkness that inaugurates the text, *The Road* lays out its non-human world. The man "squat[s] and studie[s] the country to the south" (p.2) as he introduces the trigger that justifies the entire journey: the weather. Right after that, he takes his binoculars and "glasse[s] the valley below" (p.2). The text follows the man's eyes on "[t]he segments of road down there among the dead trees." (p.3). When they get on the road:

He shifted the pack higher on his shoulders and looked out over the wasted country. The road was empty. Below in the little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds. (p.4)

The use of space indicators such as *in*, *south*, *below* (twice), *over* (twice), *down there*, *among*, and *along* shows how much attention and focus the novel directs towards the construction and description of landscapes. These words, however, bear no meaning whatsoever without elements of the landscapes to accompany them. As many of them are prepositions, they encourage the presence of natural and human-made elements of the surroundings, though they are not strictly necessary, as *The Road*'s pared-down style allows for isolated words and phrases to live by themselves. In any case, *country* (twice), *valley* (twice), *trees*, *river*, and *shore*, all indicate different areas of the landscape. However bleak they are described – *wasted*, *dead*, *grey*, these places add up throughout the entire novel, building the diegetic world brick by brick.

The first pages of *The Road* are characterized by descriptions and observations of the non-human world, paving the floor for the rest of the novel to include topographic elements that characterize the characters' journey. Even if the man and the boy walk on the road – as the title indicates, space does not stop at the border to the blacktop. As tarmac crosses landscapes and connects places together, the human-built road cannot be a part of the novel and walked on without summoning these landscapes and places. And this is exactly what the novel does, as it includes a rather wide variety of sceneries. The narrator points to vast areas of land, such as “the valley bellow” (p.2) and the “wasted country” (p.4) mentioned above, but also, put simply, the “land” (p.3). The text observes the haze that hangs “[b]eyond the edge of the fields” (p.189) and the dead lilac and hedges that the man faces when he “turn[s] and look[s] out at the waste of the yard.” (p.26). It also places “[a] burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadow-lands stark and gray” (p.6). The novel includes humid areas, even when they are dried. The reader can encounter a “vast low swale” (p.296) or a “raw red mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned.” (p.6) Sometimes, these bits of landscapes are simply cited: “[a] marsh where the dead reeds lay over the water” (p.189), “[a] dead swamp.” (p.293) In other cases, they are more fully integrated in complete sentences: “The road crossed a dried slough where pipes of ice stood out” (p.293). Landscapes include even more watery landscapes and places that are associated with watercourses. As the journey goes on, the narrator notes that “[t]he bridge spanned the river above a rapids.” (p.45) and that “[a] wind was coming down the gorge” (p.45). The characters “came out along the rim of a deep gorge and far down in the darkness a river.” (p.37) while, nearby, there are “[h]igh rock bluffs on the far side of the canyon with thin black trees clinging to the escarpment.” (p.37) Finally, when the man and the boy reach the south coast, the description of landscapes matches what one might expect of this type of region as the narrator focuses on “the shore of the cove” (p.230) and the “ocean vast and cold and shifting heavily” (p.230). The father and his son “slept in the sand and listened to the roll of the surf in the bay” (p.233) and “left the cart in the bracken beyond the dunes” (p.230). In the midst of emptiness and despair lie minute and tangible descriptions of landscape that make the non-human of the novel present under every step that the characters make and beyond every bend of the road.

IN THE AIR: THE BEAUTY OF THE WEATHER

As it has been made clear that landscapes are a part of the environmental dimension of *The Road*, one should not forget that this part of the non-human realm cannot be imagined without its meteorological environment. As Christensen identifies the weather as “an

oppressively omnipresent character” (2014, p.199), rain, snow, wind, and fading light indeed permeate the entire novel and are something that can be lost. A ray of sun can never shine through the clouds again. Rain can stop being synonymous with the growing of plants. The wind can cease to gently caress one’s cheeks. The scholar observes that “humans no longer interact with the weather,” as “folk wisdom or science” and “traditional patterns and cycles” are no longer useful to the man and the boy (p.199). Christensen’s observation shows that the weather as one knows it and the relationship that humans have with it can disappear and be lost. While the novel manages to highlight this possibility of loss as far as the sun and regular seasons are concerned, it should be noted that every element that is described as dangerous, like the cold or the rain, is as ecological as warmth and dry weather. As the weather is at the forefront of the novel, the text managed to show its close connection to landscapes, as well as to beauty, and the human beings that breathe its air.

In fact, the weather is very much embedded in the environment, which strengthens the presence of the natural world and the non-human in the novel. For instance, wind and coldness are included in descriptions and physical perceptions of landscapes. The wind carries the ash, which is a strong characteristic of the two characters’ surroundings, as “[t]he soft ash blow[s] in loose swirls over the blacktop.” (TR, p.2) The wind is elevated from mere currents of air to “loose swirls” in union with the ash. When the father and the son discover a waterfall, they watch the water fall into a pool and “could smell the water and they could feel the cold coming off of it.” (p.38) As the man wakes “in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night” (p.1), the weather and the woods are almost considered equal parts of his physical situation and experience. It is said right away that these weather conditions are not sustainable for the man and the boy, since their journey sets off because “[t]here’s be no surviving another winter here.” (p.2). Then again, “winter” and “here” are glued together to make the division between place and weather impossible. Characters cannot walk on the road without walking through a climate.

It is manifest that meteorology, a pervasive element of landscapes, has a great impact on characters, since it is the very reason for their departure in the first place. Even if it is a threat to the characters, the weather can be seen in a more positive light and evoke beauty, contemplation, and connection. The apocalyptic setting gives the general impression that everything is bleak and that the weather does not do any favor to the two characters’ survival, snow and rain become death threats for the man and the boy. Even if they are “carrying the fire,” snow and rain come with an irremediable cold that could lead to their death at any given moment. Despite that, the novel displays the ability to draw attention to the weather by means of

antitheses. In this line of thought, the antithesis noted in the contradictory labeling of nothingness should be pointed out: “There was nothing. The wind rustling the dead roadside bracken.” (p.111) Here is another example:

He woke to the sound of distant thunder and sat up. The faint light all about, quivering and sourceless, refracted in the rain of drifting soot. He pulled the tarp about them and he lay awake a long time listening. If they got wet there'd be no fires to dry by. If they got wet they would probably die. (Pp.13-4)

While this excerpt could be read as a pessimistic standpoint on the weather, as the conclusion of the observation is deadly, this analysis chooses to focus on a brighter side. Rather than a contemplation gone wrong, this passage illustrates that beauty can be seen in the weather. As sight and hearing complement each other to create a synesthetic experience of rain and thunder, the water, however deadly, still holds the possibility of being observed. Far from Danta’s “crisis of luminosity” (2012, p.14), this scene allows for an atmospheric show of light to happen, even if said light remains “faint.” Despite this diminishing adjective, the light is “all about” and “sourceless,” which gives the impression of infinite and ubiquitous presence. It’s “quivering” and “refract[ing]” gives it agency. With its refraction in the rain, light not only creates a sparkling image, but also a place where clouds and lightning come together and get closer to the man.

This promiscuity of the weather and the characters is very much apparent in moments of breathing. As the weather is cold, the father and the son breathe white clouds. When the man “stood on the bridge and shoved the last pile of wood over,” we can see “his breath white in the glow of the firelight.” (TR, p.76) Breathing is both taking air into the body, and leaving traces of the body into the air, as expiring projects water from the lungs in the process. More than a physical human mechanism, however, breathing also happens in relation to the environment. In the romantic imagery mentioned earlier, the text goes: “At the top of the hill they stood in the cold and the wind, getting their breath.” (p.6) When the description of where they stand stops with the wind and adds that the characters are breathing, wind and breath become intimately close. Weather and body join in a moment of pause. Their juxtaposition creates the possibility of interaction between the atmosphere and humans. Breathing is taking the environment in, as both the human and non-human leave a part of themselves in the other.

PLANT THE SEED

PLANTS: BLOOMING OF NAMES IN A DEAD ENVIRONMENT

Despite the earth not being able to grow plant anymore, *The Road* manages to keep plants in its text. Even if green plants have turned to grey dead skeletons, the novel still holds onto these plants, even if they are imbued with the desolation of the post-apocalyptic world. Plant names are everywhere throughout the novel. A work of excavation is necessary in order to understand the scope of literacy deployed by the text in this dead landscape. “Rows of black and twisted brambles” can be found along the road (p.20), and “dead brambles” climb the walls of the house where the man grew up (p.24). “A tangle of dead lilac” persists in the yard attached to that house (p.24). The man and the child have “piled a mat of dead hemlock boughs over the snow” as they establish camp against a boulder (p.31). Brackens are mentioned multiple times, as they “tore through the crumbling bracken” to run away from strangers who stopped their truck not far from the characters (p.63), or as “[t]he wind rustl[es] the dead roadside bracken.” (p.111) The man leaves “the cart in the bracken beyond the dunes” (p.230) and seeks bootprints and “los[es] the track on the better ground beyond the bracken” (p.271). “[P]rivet” (p.112) surrounds the house where humans are caged to be fed on later. “Dead ivy along a stone wall” (p.124) can be found near “the ruins of an old apple orchard” (p.125). There are fields where “the dead sedge was drifted nearly out of sight” (p.103). The characters walk through woods “that once held may-apple and pipsissewa.” (p.40) And then the text simply goes: “Ginseng.” (p.40). Near “[t]he raw dead limbs of the rhododendron [which] twisted and knotted,” they find and taste “morels” (p.40). When the father examines a cabinet in search of food, he finds seeds of “[b]egonia” and “[m]orning glory” (p.140). The road makes its way “through a jungle of dead kudzu” and a “marsh where the dead reeds lay over the water” (p.189). The father spots a field of what might be cotton and notes the shifts in the trees that accompany their journey as “[t]he country went from pine to liveoak and pine. Magnolias.” (p.209) As they move away from the coast, they walk amongst “ashen effigies” of “ferns and hydrangeas and wild orchids” (p.296).

All these examples are gathered in order to demonstrate that beyond the ecological crisis that emanates from the landscapes, the text itself engages in a consistent work of remembrance as it cites plants and fungi regardless of their death and greyness. As plants are named on many pages, the non-human manages to cling to language and the novel, making them very much present despite their lack of vitality. In doing so, the text makes possible for a relationship to

be built between plants and humans, and thus make their loss – or lack of vitality – comprehensible to the readership: plants as common as ferns and brambles should not be taken for granted. In a landscape as empty and dead as that of *The Road*, these plant names are not isolated traces of a once-green nature, but rather solitary pillars of resistance, ready to be found by the attentive reader.

SEEDS: PLANTS GROWING IN THE MIND

Even if *The Road* meticulously incorporates names of plants in its text as to carry them beyond the collapse, there is no debate as far as their ability to spread and flourish is concerned. As scholars have noted, and as the novel presents its landscapes as “barren,” the earth does not have all mighty regenerative powers. These names, however relevant they are in a work of remembrance or work of awareness, do not equate plants with the promise of their life and propagation across the ashen landscape. Amidst this pessimistic outlook on the possibility for nature to crawl back into the diegetic world, two instances do hint at the revival of plants – the first being the presence of seeds in the novel. On two occasions, the man finds seeds when he is searching places for food and useful items. As he enters a barn in an apple orchard, the man finds hay below which there is “a handful of seeds from [these bales of hay]” (p.125). As the man eats them, the text suggests that “[t]hey had to contain some nutrition” (p.125). A little while later, when he investigates a garden shed, the man finds “[p]ackets of seed,” of begonia and morning glory, and “stuck[s] them in his pocket” while the following question lingers: “For what?” (p.140). These seeds hint at the very idea that plants can no longer grow, as the question “for what?” indicates that they are no longer able to fulfill the purposes that they were serving when the ground was still able to grow plants. Other than some energy, thus, these seeds seem rather useless.

Despite this absence of apparent purpose and the lack of certainty regarding their nutritional intake, then man still shoves these seeds into his pockets or his mouth. In keeping these seeds close to him, the man holds onto items that embody the capacity of nature to rise and thrive, to regenerate, even if they can rather remind the man of the impossibility of natural growth. As the man keeps them close, seeds become a physical trace of the work of remembrance, since they are the tangible proof of something that has disappeared. Just like names are the skeletons of living things that outlive the death of the flesh, seeds are the reminder that plants were once able to thrive. Not only do they refer to the plants that could have been, hence mourning these plants, but they also represent the regenerative powers of nature. In

drawing the attention on these seeds and their loss of purpose, the novel manages to mourn the capacity for nature to live and flourish, rather than simply grieving individual and physical species of plants.

These seeds, even if they can no longer be carried by the wind until their next home or if they can no longer be put into the soil by humans tending the land, can still wield their creative powers and grow plants. Though they cannot grow into the ground, seeds are planted inside the reader's or the character's mind so that plants and flowers can burgeon and bloom, be it in a hopeful belief of life to be restored, or in a work of remembrance. The novel sows seeds of imagination by keeping seeds in the narrative. Just like names, and in a similar way to the animal bones mentioned in the earlier section, seeds cannot be imagined without the plants that they might have become. They are a physical trace of death that wields strong imaginary power, as they force plants into existence despite the barren land and the lost ability to grow. In the aforementioned examples, seeds go hand in hand with hay, morning glory, and begonia, because what are seeds if not the possibility of a specific plant? Seeds, regardless of their capacity to fill an empty stomach, become food for thoughts, as they are linked to plants that can thrive on the page and in the mind of the reader and the man. Furthermore, seeds, on top of pointing to plants, also invoke the idea of growing altogether. Thus, as seeds highlight nature's lost capacity to flourish, they also allow for this flourishing to be imagined in the reader's or character's mind, as seeds become plants once again.

In short, the presence of seeds in the novel achieves two things. On the one hand, they stand as the reminder that nature is not a green immortal entity that remains unbothered with changes in the world. In this sense, they engage in a work of remembrance, as they acknowledge the possibility of losing natural subsistence and propagation altogether and as they urge for humans to come to grasp this loss. On the other hand, they partake in the work of remembrance, not by highlighting loss, but by underlining existence. As seeds are associated with the plants that they can become, invoking seeds cannot be done without invoking the plants that they can or could have grown into, nor the very process of growing into plants.

ASHES: THE PROMISE OF REBIRTH

Alongside seeds, which signify the possibility of birth while being the tangible trace of the loss of renewal, ashes are the second hint at revival as they also possess a strong imaginary power. Ashes, like seeds, are ghosts that serve both as a reminder of the dead and the living. While they are proof of something that once was, they also prevent, by their presence, absolute

loss from happening. Just like names in Barnett's theory, ashes encourage the work of remembrance of the old world, as they are linked to unknown and unburnt previous self. While ashes are the remains of the burnt dead, they also embody the possibility of the soil's renewal. As ashes are known to be a ground fertilizer, their ubiquity, more than a symbol of death, transforms every place where they land, not into a cemetery, but into fertile lands. Furthermore, they invoke the figure of the phoenix, which can be reborn from its ashes. Finally, behind all the descriptions of a burnt land, buried in a word that signifies death, lies the name of a tree. In depicting water, the ground, the sky, and places that they visit as inevitably covered in and incorporated with ash, the text carries the linguistic possibility for nature in its portrayal of death and destruction. In every corner of the diegetic world, the ash tree ensures that life lies in death. As the word *cinder* is not used a single time in the entire novel, only *ash*, in its double meaning – burnt ash and ash tree, points to death and life at the same time. Just like seeds hold the possibility for renewal, in the long-distanced future or in the mind, the pervasive ash maintains the prospect of regeneration.

TOUCHING LANGUAGE

In *The Road*, words are spotlights amidst a bleak, dark, and grey atmosphere of nothingness. As this thesis has demonstrated, however, there is far from nothing in the novel, as its 307 pages are glued together to form a book. One might in fact be found in the position of reading the physical version of the novel and would go from one page to the next, flipping the paper between one's fingers and witnessing the character's journey in a grim wasteland. This physicality makes *The Road* all the more real and tangible, despite its insistence on nothingness and death. Aside from this body of paper, however, the novel finds other ways to assert its existence, not by its outside physicality, but by some physicality coming from within the novel. The first sentence of the novel sets the tone: "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him." (p.1) The man's first action after waking up is touching the child, and he will continue to do so, by holding him many times over, be it out of love, reassurance, or to warm him against the coldness of the air. As far as the writing style is concerned, the frequent use of *and*'s in the novel works toward an extension of sentences. As they cumulate *and*'s, sentences refuse to experience the diminishing to which the world is already subjected. Be it a desperate attempt against the vanishing of language, or a purposeful resistance against the apparent fading of the world, the numerous parataxes make sentences spread and stretch over a space that is primarily qualified as empty,

hence filling the void left by the collapse. This gives the possibility for the novel to create room for language to spread its wings across the pages.

While the use of parataxis is a work of resistance against nothingness, there is another form of physicality within the novel that directly guides the reader's eyes toward the novel's environment and non-human: a haptic style. The novel adds layers of physicality to language and words by giving them an acoustic dimension. In doing so, *The Road* grabs the attention of its reader and directs it towards critical places in the novel. With the regular use of sound plays, the novel seeks to strengthen language and add phonic presence to its writing. On top of creating a sense of music and poetry, this gives substance to words and makes them rise away from the two dimensions of the paper into the third dimension of the reader. Sounds bring emphasis to words in the hope of making the reader more aware of them. By doing so, the novel resists any form of glazing over its writing and style, as the echoes created by the sounds of language add another level of presence of words and make it impossible for the reader to ignore or escape from them. The haptic language works as an unbreakable bond between the reader and its reading material, giving special weight to the parts of the novel that are imbued with sound.

Be it in memory and dreams or during the post-apocalyptic time, depictions of the non-human are marked by sound. When they establish camp near the sea, the father "remember[s] waking once on such a night to the clatter of crabs in the pan" (p.234). The alliteration of *c*'s gives a physical dimension to the hearing experience that the man is recalling, making it all the more vivid. One of the densest occurrences of consonance, however, lies in the reminiscence of a time when birds still flew in the sky and seasons still gave rhythm to the passage of time:

In that long ago somewhere very near this place he'd watched a falcon fall down the long blue wall of the mountain and break with the keel of its breastbone the midmost from a flight of cranes and take it to the river below all gangly and wrecked and trailing its loose and blowsy plumage in the still autumn air. (p.19)

As this entire paragraph follows the father's pessimistic statement that there is nothing in the lake, which was formed by a dam, there is a stark contrast between the radical absence of animals in the present time and the vertiginous sentence that Hubert describes as "mimicking the experience of watching a falcon soar through the sky" (2017, p.79) The consonance of *l*'s, also called a liquid consonant, creates a fluidity that matches the falcon's flight.

This poetic soundscape is not solely associated with green memories of a lost time, as alliterations and consonance also make their way into the post-apocalyptic journey. As the text describes the characters' hiding from rain to no avail, the man and the son "[hold] the tarp over

them in the dull drizzle” (TR, p.20) The stuffiness of *d*’s seems to give more weight to each drop of water falling onto the characters. While this emphasizes the unpleasantness of the rain for their cold wet feet in their ruined shoes, this also draws the reader’s attention towards the water falling from the sky, as it participates in the landscape of the non-human world, however troublesome it is for the two human beings.

The portrayal of grim places and the human fragility felt before the threat of snow does not prevent the novel from playing with sounds: “Burnt forests for miles along the slopes and snow sooner than he would have thought.” (p.29) *T*’s, *s*’s, and *n*’s accumulate and transform the weather and landscapes into poetry. Later, when the “snow fell nor did it cease to fall,” (p.101) the father reflects upon the hardship of their journey, wondering if the boy could continue, as the *f*’s, *s*’s, and *n*’s rise above this type of concern. This is followed by: “The snow whispered down in the stillness and the sparks rose and dimmed and died in the eternal blackness.” (p.101) In these three examples, the whistling *s* of “snow” trickles down the sentences, creating both consonances and alliteration in “forests,” “slopes,” “snow,” “sooner,” “cease,” “whispered,” “stillness,” “sparks,” and “blackness.” While cold temperatures and snow are making the characters vulnerable, the air blown by the consonant alleviates the heaviness of the consequences that snow can have on the man and the boy. With the help of sound plays, the novel infuses dark landscapes with poetry. While this allows for beauty to lie underneath the ashes of the burnt world, this also draws the reader’s attention to the ecological dimension of the novel by making it physically palpable.

Grieving a dead environment is an important task. It should not prevent one from noticing one’s environment and connecting to it, however. While acknowledging loss is crucial to engage in the work of mourning, so is connecting with that which is not dead – yet. Going beyond green nature and the nothingness of the road is the starting point of a more positive relationship to the environment – an existing one, for that matter, which in turn can prepare one to losing and grieving this anti-glamorous non-human, should it disappear. In being confronted with the novel, the readers become “beachcombers [...] who walk along the beach looking for things of value that might have washed up.” (p.235) More than walking on the beach, the reader walks alongside the two characters during their entire journey and must look for anything of value not in the usefulness of tools, tarps, and canned goods, but in the environment and non-human that give shape to the entire novel. By being named, the environment is brought “into the foregrounds [...] it stops being the environment. It stops being That Thing Over There that surrounds and sustains us.” (Morton, 2007, p.1) Thus, the novel not only mourns the green

nature of the past, but also manages to bring attention to post-green nature. In order to foster a relationship between the non-human and the reader, the novel emphasizes the environment thanks to the resistance of antitheses against nothingness while familiar rhythms of descriptions, the frontier journey, and romantic imagery participate in the broader materialization of the non-human landscapes. As the weather becomes one with the environment while still holding the possibility of beauty and closeness to human beings, plants, seeds, and ashes flourish in the reader's mind while the novel grips them through its physical language. Ultimately, what makes this work of awareness and mourning-in-advance possible is the language of the novel. As air is present in the wind and in language, "[t]he ashes of the late world [are] carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void," filling the emptiness of landscapes with traces of the past, while the novel still holds onto its ecological dimension "[s]ustained by a breath, trembling and brief" thanks to the narration and language that keep post-green nature from disappearing in spite of the collapse (TR, p.10).

BEWILDERMENT

1. KEEPING ANIMALS CLOSE

Unlike in *The Road*, animals have not been wiped out of the planet in *Bewilderment*. Their lives are heavily threatened, however, be it because of industrial farming, viruses, climate change, or even tourism and sightseeing. Despite that, animals are heavily present in the novel. Their presence varies from being flesh-and-blood beings to infiltrating physical objects and dematerialized numeric spaces, making them trickle the everyday lives of Robin and Theo. In *Bewilderment*, animals appear in the form of objects such as jewelry that Alyssa used to wear, an “owl pendant” and “wolf earrings” (B, p.61), or as a “logic toy [...] [of] a wooden bird you were supposed to free from a nest made of a dozen sliding wooden pieces.” (p.235) More than in physical objects, animals have also reached technology, as the password to access the family tablet is Robin’s “mother’s favorite bird [...] flying backwards.” (p.213) While animals have not totally disappeared in the novel, they are not necessarily present in great numbers in the characters’ surroundings, which Robin strongly deplores: “*Only two percent of all animals are wild? Everything else is factory cows and factory chickens and us?*”² (p.69) It is thus clear that any animals that the characters encounter during the novel are part of a small percentage of animals that are more or less free from humans. In facing their potential disappearance, *Bewilderment*, much like *The Road*, incorporates non-human animals in its language. In doing so, it prevents animals from absolute and radical disappearance. While McCarthy’s novel keeps non-human animals alive through language in the face of their – almost – total extinction, Powers’ *Bewilderment* engages in a preemptive work of mourning, as animals are dying but not dead yet. Language indeed enables animals to be called in the mind and the air. In being named or referred to, animals are activated in a work of remembrance that starts before their extinction. The novel thus mourns not only the future and ongoing death of endangered animals but also the disappearance of animals from human life. Animal language not only engages in a work of remembrance before animal death, but it also mourns the loss of animals roaming free. In order to do so, the novel deepens the linguistic bond between human animals and non-human animals by including animals in similes, in the novel’s prose and dialogues, and in the characters’ names.

Like *The Road*, *Bewilderment*’s style is full of animal similes, which ensures their presence in the text. In this sense, the novel tries to compensate in style for the lack of presence of animals in human life, making them live in language via similes. When Robin turns nine, his father presents him with a cake, which, because it is not vegan, Robin hesitates to eat. In his

² The emphases in *Bewilderment* are not mine. They indicate that Robin is talking.

father's eyes, Robin looks "like a timid squirrel, not sure whether to take the outstretched goodness that he craved or to flee back into the woods." (p.11) The narrator compares Robin or related events to animals. Trying to put on an old blazer is "like squeezing a butterfly back into the chrysalis" (p.148) and loud noises coming from Robin's room are "like a small mammal had gotten into the walls of Robin's bedroom and was making a nest between the studs." (p.289) Robin also plays the simile game, as he compares his late mother to a salamander: "*I think she's like a salamander or something [...]. Because she's fast, and she loves the water.*" (p.68) The biggest simile, which also blends with a metaphor, is the likening between Robin and the mouse Algernon from *Flowers for Algernon* (1966). As the father and son listen to the audiobook in the car, Robin discovers the story for the first time. As mouse and human alike become part of an experiment that augments their brain capacity and intelligence, only to regress and die, the plot of the 20th classic becomes a metaphor for the trajectory that Robin follows in *Bewilderment*. From cerebral enhancement to regression and eventual death, Robin and Algernon experience a similar journey. This overarching metaphor is mixed with a simile, as Robin notices his own decline: "*Dad. I'm going backwards. I can feel it. [...] Like the mouse, Dad. Like Algernon.*" (B, p.285) The entire structure of the novel is associated with an animal. As actions, characters, and plot are compared to animals, the novel ensures their presence in the text and their presence in the lives of the characters.

While similes are a straightforward way to invoke non-human animals in language and in the text, the novel directly uses animal language, breaking the distance installed by the four-letter word *like*. *Bewilderment* uses various techniques to achieve this, as it describes human bodies with animal parts and summons animals in the forms of verbs or associated verbs. In the first case, Robin's body is pointed to by animal-related body parts. Thus, when he throws a tantrum, he does not use his fingers to get at his father, but instead "[sinks] his claws in [Theo]" (p.226). In order to designate the world that surrounds humans, Robin has his "[p]aws up in the crisp air" (p.226). The second case of animal language involves verbs that explicitly contain non-human animals in their formation. For instance, Robin and his father "crab-walked upstream" (p.23) in a river. Later Robin threatens "to rabbit-punch [Theo]" (p.101), "wol[fs] down half of a hummus-avocado sandwich" (p.155), and "squirrel[s] away his covert treasures in his room" (p.244). Finally, some verbs do not contain animals but still manage to hint at animals by association. When Robin and Theo are making their way in a stream, the father suggests: "Crawl. Channel your inner amphibian." (p.22) In using "crawl," the text goes against the erect stance that is culturally associated with human beings. Later, when Robin jokingly

threatens to eat his father, he “growl[s] deep in his throat and bare[s] his teeth at [him].” (p.168) Regardless of the positive or negative connotation of being associated with animals in one’s actions, the novel includes animals in language and ensures their presence in human mundane life and in a world that witnesses their disappearance and absence.

But perhaps one of the strategies that keeps non-humans even closer to humans is to put their names inside human names. In doing so, not only does the novel ensure that the non-human remains called into mind every time humans are called, but it also makes non-human part of human identity. Robin’s name takes its origin in the homonymous bird, which is his mother’s favorite bird. During their first date, Alyssa and Theo went birding, one of Alyssa’s hobbies. As Theo held the binocular and noticed a robin, he dismissed his find, while Alyssa marveled at the bird, stating that the “robin is [her] favorite bird” (p.13). Robin’s name, on top of finding its roots in the animal realm, also emanates from his mother’s love for the bird. His name represents the loving and caring bridge between human animals and non-human animals. Alyssa similarly holds the non-human in her name, as she is named after the “[s]weet alyssum” (p.173) While it is not clear whether Alyssa kept her maiden name or not, the family name, shared at least by Robin and Theo, is Byrne, which is “derived from Bran—raven in Irish.” (p.15) Even Robin’s fake name in a documentary is related to the non-human: “Jay” (p.226). Behind this name lies Theo’s demand to the interviewer: “You are not allowed to use his real name or say anything that would make him easier to identify.” (p.223) This comment reveals indeed that names help identify the person who stands behind them. As names and identity are closely linked together, placing the non-human inside human names, and thus the identity of characters, connects the human and the non-human. Their non-human names not only function as a preemptive work of remembrance in calling the non-human to prevent its disappearance but also as a work of inclusion. As the origins of these names are made clear in the novel, calling their name keeps the connection between human and non-human alive. In doing so, the novel makes it impossible to call the characters without bringing up their entanglement with the non-human.

2. DON'T PANIC: EVERYTHING IS UNDER CONTROL

As we have seen earlier, animal language is frequently used to refer to the characters of the novel. It should be noted that animal language also describes emotions or emotional behavior. When discussing the possibility of putting Robin under medication, Dr. Currier's comment is met with Theo's shock: "The word [antidepressant] filled me with animal panic." (p.160) Besides the father, people in general are subject to animal emotions. As Theo rehashes a memory of Alyssa, it is explained that the woman is preparing to travel across the United States to promote rights for the non-human: "That meant playing on the animal emotions of lawmakers." (p.154) In these two cases, animal words stand for a deep-felt emotion that lies beyond the realm of reasonable emotions, as if animal emotions were one step further from humanity and one step closer to animality. This is especially the case when it comes to Robin. In fact, when Robin showcases strong emotions, be it sadness or anger, the novel uses animal-related vocabulary to describe him. Robin reacts with violence, as he screams, cries, kicks, bites, punches, and lunges in fits of rage, despair, and pain. Once, as Theo tries to negotiate between Robin staying at home and going to school, Robin loses his temper: "He lunged at me, howling. We fought. He tried to claw my face." (p.97) As the use of "howling" and "claw" indicates animal behavior and body, Robin's violent emotions are put in the realm that stands beyond reason and the human. While animal language is generally used in a neutral way, it conveys here exaggeration, hyperbole, out-of-the-ordinary feelings, and violence.

Bewilderment connects the intensity of emotions to animality as if emotions were something that lay behind the humanity of humans, walking down its evolutionary line back to when they were primal animals. Be it in order to show that humans are of animal descent or simply to highlight that they are human *animals*, the novel links strong emotions to the animal realm. Cary Wolfe's species grid (2003) is useful to see what is at play here. According to this framework, animals and humans can either be animalized or humanized and each category that these tags create is subject to a certain degree or absence of violence and brutality. In the heritage of a humanist hierarchy that creates a social and interspecies hierarchy that valorizes and puts the man – synonymous with authority and autonomy – above other beings, the species grid highlights that being animalized equates to being subject to violence and sacrifice while being humanized is a comfortable and painless status (pp.100-1). Animalized animals are in the worst position, as they undergo logical and linguistic marginalization and objectification, as well as the corresponding material exclusion and exploitation (p.101). From cattle to rats that

are “in what we eat, what we wear, and the testing of the products we buy,” these non-human animals are prisoners in a structure that legitimizes their objectification and sacrifice (p.101). Humanized animals, such as pets, on the other hand, are able to avoid this structure of marginalization and violence, as the human features that are attributed to them make them closer to humans, and further from animals. On top of these categories stand humanized humans, “sovereign and untroubled,” while animalized humans, as they are not human enough, are subject to brutalization and are conceptually closer to animals than to humans (p.101).

This last category is of interest for this analysis, as they refer to humans stripped of their humanity. As the humanized human is a figure of reason, calm, authority, science, logic, and independence, the animalized human is its inverted mirror. As it is deemed emotional, agitated, wild, dependent, and stripped of any acceptable logic and way of being, this category corresponds to the novel's dealing with emotions. As deep emotions are described as “animal” and materialize in screams, cries, and tantrums, Robin in particular is often portrayed in an animalized way, making him an animalized human. To his outbursts can be added that he is still a child, which goes hand in hand with being under the authority of his father. Robin is a misunderstood, emotional, and dependent child who does not fit in the adult world. The pattern of exaggerating Robin's emotions makes his behavior beyond reason and control, beyond human. As this animalization is not fit for the modern world, Robin struggles to find his place on an endangered planet. On top of entering a program that seeks to assuage his emotions, the text reveals a rhetoric of control, measure, and science that seeks to tame Robin's behavior and way of relating to the world. In creating an opposition between reason and emotion, the novel exposes the rhetoric that represses emotions and thus severs the emotional connection to the non-human and the environment. To uncover this denial of emotions – and thus connection, this section discusses the DefNec program and its logic of control, objectification, and commodification of emotions before unveiling how the father, a humanized human figure, fails to feel and connect to the non-human.

TAKING CONTROL OF THE BRAINSHIP

Since emotions make Robin unable to function in an acceptable way in society – let us be reminded that he throws his thermos at another child at some point, his father, pushed by Robin's school, searches for ways for his son to navigate this world more easily. In doing so, the novel reveals an imperative put on the child's shoulders to learn to control his emotions, to be calmer, and to feel *less*. As the child is trained out of his animalized emotions, the novel

showcases not only a rhetoric of control, but also of annihilation of feelings altogether, as the goal is not for Robin to feel better, but to avoid all the negative consequences that strong emotions entail. Since Robin's attachment to the non-human causes unwanted emotions, the scientific program isolates emotions from the non-human to make them fit in a sterilized and artificial place that is Currier's lab. From controlling emotions to erasing them and from objectifying emotions to commodifying them, the novel displays a rhetoric of mastery that disconnects humans from their emotions.

As Robin enters Dr. Currier's lab, it is made apparent from the beginning that these neural feedback sessions aim to bring the child back into a state where he has control of himself. Theo indeed searches for a "treatment short of drugs that will calm him down" (B, p.114) and Currier explains that his program consists of "train[ing] him how to attend to and control his own feelings, the same way behavioral therapy does" (p.114). As training and control are the basis of the program, Currier explains: "Anything happening to his brain is something he's learning to do himself, by reflection, concentration, and practice." (p.115) Here, the accumulation of the three factors of improvement creates a rhythm that conveys discipline, self-control, and willpower, so that the brain can finally be a master of itself and its emotions. The list is not simply a list, but a dogma that dictates a type of behavior that must follow precise rules of restraint and order. As the séances go on, the effects on Robin are visible, which Robin's teacher summarizes in a few words that hint at the logic behind this emotional learning: "Robin's creativity is growing, along with his self-control." (p.128) The DefNec program meets a societal imperative that Robin must follow: self-control. As his emotional outbursts are not accepted by other people, the only way for Robin to be praised by his teacher is to be able to control himself, be disciplined, and be calm. Only then is Robin accepted, when he is able to leave his unhuman and uncontrollable emotions behind, as only measure, reason, and discipline are deemed acceptable for humans to function in society.

While the primary goal of the program is for Robin to learn to control his emotions, the novel shows that the attention is, deliberately or not, diverted away from emotions. Rather than facing Robin's emotions and dealing with the causes of his troubles, Theo is concerned with avoiding the social consequences of his son's behavior, while Currier is on a path toward erasing emotions altogether – regardless of their usefulness in pointing to critical issues such as the climate crisis and species extinctions. Theo searches for a way to "get [Robin's] principal off [his] back." (p.114) Even further than control, Dr. Currier's program ultimately aims at effacing emotions altogether. When introducing the idea to Theo, Currier explains that the

program is initially thought out to “desensitiz[e] people with PTSD.” (p.102) As his pitch for the experiment is that “pain can be trained away” and that “[w]e could learn to live here, on Earth, without fear” (p.240), it becomes clear that the program is directed toward the ideal of emotionless humanity. The idea that lies behind “desensitiz[e],” “trained away,” and “without” is a search for the suppression of emotions, feelings, and pain. This utter rejection of emotions falls in line with the concept of humanized human that glorifies rationality and mastery over affect, in spite of any utility that they can have. Far from an attempt to find solutions to the problems that cause Robin’s or other people’s emotional reactions – a suffering planet in the child’s case, the attention is put only on masking the symptoms of his ill-being. Rather than addressing the problem, everyone in his entourage, be it his father, Dr. Currier, or his school, only focuses on erasing any visible sign that indicates that something is wrong. Not only does the program not attend to the real cause of Robin’s strong emotions, but it does not help him go through them, experience them, and accept them, as it only aims at self-control or best: erasure. As Robin’s treatment is layered with the drive to not be bothered by teachers, emotions, and the real causes of the child’s emotions, the novel portrays the program as an attempt to avoid dealing with the emotional consequences of the climate crisis.

This analysis has shown so far that the DefNec program and the way emotions are portrayed in the novel are embedded in an imperative of mastery and containment, rather than dealing with emotions and their consequences. As emotions have entered a world of scientific manipulation, they fall under the idea that their taming is scientific progress. The scientific objectification is perfectly laid out in the novel’s first introduction to the program:

The Currier Lab was exploring something called Decoded Neurofeedback. It resembled old-fashioned biofeedback, but with neural imaging for real-time, AI-mediated feedback. A first group of subjects—the “targets”—entered emotional states in response to external prompts, while researchers scanned relevant regions of their brains using fMRI. The researchers then scanned the same brain regions of a second group of subjects—the “trainees”—in real time. AI monitored the neural activity and sent auditory and visual cues to steer the trainees toward the targets’ prerecorded neural states. In this way, the trainees learned to approximate the patterns of excitation in the targets’ brains, and, remarkably, began to report having similar emotions. (p.101)

Here, people become researchers, subjects, trainees, and targets. Emotions, which are only relevant brain regions, “prerecorded neural states,” “patterns of excitation,” “emotional states” created by “external prompts,” and “neural activity,” can only be “scanned,” “monitored,” steered, approximated, and reported. The lab becomes an artificial space where emotions are prompted and directed by “auditory and visual cues,” rather than experienced in response to a natural environment of sound and colors. Emotions are no longer a brain event that is felt by

human beings, but a tangible object that can be measured by fMRI and can interact with artificial intelligence. As emotion is stripped from its humanity, the program is only but an “empathy machine” (p.109). Under the technological and expert eye of science, emotions are dehumanized, in that they become objects to be dissected, measured, tweaked, and adjusted.

Eventually, this program goes beyond science and follows the path of mastery toward progress and commodification. As the scientific endeavor moves away from the gratuitous chase of knowledge, the text reveals how emotions become objectified to the point of entering a capitalistic logic of growth that is not separated from the economic market. From the beginning of the presence of DefNec in the novel, it is apparent that the program exists in a society that relies on money to function. The experiment existing thanks to “big grant money” (p.102) and the use of “sidehustle” (p.102) to describe what Dr. Currier has in mind for the future of the project both indicate that DefNEC cannot be understood without its sponsors or without the economic implications that might derive from it at some point or the other. When Currier wishes to license the program and introduces it to “journalists and people in private industry,” Theo “stumble[s] on private industry,” though he knows that “[e]verything on this planet had been commodified” (p.198). As the text clearly uses the word “commodified,” there is no doubt that emotions are but an object in a big economic realm. It is made clear, here, that DefNec is embedded in an economic network where money and the pursuit of profit are central, making it impossible for a scientific project to exist outside of the monetary realm.

More than the adjacent pursuit of money and the embeddedness of the program in an economic society, the logic at play within DefNec itself follows principles akin to capitalism. The outcome of the sessions in which Robin takes part is understood in terms of results, as his brain behavior is made legible on a “scorecard” (p.114). After a few séances, Currier “insists”: “But we’ve seen real progress [...]. You can’t deny that. More than anyone expected.” (p.160) While progress is at the center of his observations, leading to see that Robin’s brain activity is measured and compared to his previous performances, the co-text of this word says as much as the word itself. As Currier *insists* that progress cannot be overlooked, that it is quantified by “real,” that Theo must see it, and that the progress exceeds expectations, everything indicates that so much progress is more valuable than anything. Progress is precious and is even better than good results. This obsession with improvement even lies in what the program has not yet achieved: “We’ve barely glimpsed the potential of these techniques. Only the future will reveal their full possibilities.” (p.240) Progress shapes not only the present understanding of the experiment but also its future, as it seems that it aims to achieve more and work to its fullest.

Eventually, Robin himself is considered an asset, as he is a “high-performing decoder” (p.197) and the ultimate argument for the project to keep its funding. Thanks to him, the “AI keeps learning [...] and getting more efficient the more Robin interacts with it.” (p.170) From results and future results to Robin's capacity, the program is understood in terms of progress and high performance, which become the main value of the project.

THE FATHER AS THE HUMANIZED HUMAN

While Robin is often animalized and discredited because of his intense emotions, Theo is the perfect figure of the humanized human: he is an adult man, biologist, and academic. Independent, this man of reason is distancing himself from emotions and the unreasonable. As far as introspection is concerned, Theo appears to be quite reticent to the idea of diving into his psyche and emotions, especially grief. As he and Alyssa are entering Dr. Currier's program for the first time, they both have to answer a questionnaire on their inner life. As they have to reflect upon their habits of drinking or whether they have ever experienced depression, Theo admits: “I'd given up on understanding my own hidden temperament a long time ago.” (p.103) Later, when Robin reminds him of the death of his father, the text goes: “I didn't much want to remember my father.” (p.190) Be it that the father does not wish to be reminded of his father as a person or that he is knee-deep in denial, Theo is shown as a figure who is reluctant to dwell on grief and introspection. As he moves away from emotions and favors science, Theo becomes an isolated figure, incapable of feeling his own emotions, but also connecting to his own family and the planet on which he lives.

Despite being a humanized human drawn to logic and reason, Theo, as any normal human being, is still subject to emotions. His emotional side, however, is small in comparison to his affinity for knowledge and reason. In cases of awareness of his feelings, the humanized human insists on being differentiated from them. In short, emotions, when felt by Theo, are, just like in Robin's case, excluded from the human realm where brain and rationality reign. In the instance mentioned above, when Theo is “filled [...] with animal panic” (p.160), the man does not simply experience panic, but a feeling that finds its roots in the animal realm. In his recollection of taking part in Dr. Currier's experience, Theo is given the emotion of grief, meaning that he needs to put himself in a grieving state in order for the machines to map his brain. During this experiment, Theo's experiencing grief is described as detached from reason in two ways. First, emotions are not deemed part of the world of logic: “The things that swarmed me were utter, irrational nonsense.” (p.107) Second, they are separated from the area of reason,

the brain, and associated with the body: “Truth is, I’m profoundly superstitious—not in my head, which science has retrained, but in my limbs. [...] Way too easily, my body embraces my worst imaginings.” (p.106) As the brain and body are but one thing, the connection of emotion, orchestrated in the brain, to the body could be a great insight. The species grid and the broader division between emotion and reason do not allow for such a positive reading. Here, emotions are labeled as a bodily experience as opposed to a mind experience, in a context where mind, logic, and rationality prevail, and where emotions are demoted to “utter, irrational nonsense.”

IN OUTER SPACE: PLANETS AS A DISTRACTION

In an online interview about his novel, writer Richard Powers commented on the meaning of the chapters dedicated to imagining new planets based on real laws of physics, chemistry, and biology (*A Chat With Richard Powers About Bewilderment*, 2021). Describing them as “imaginative interludes,” Powers explains that these excursions into space intercut the straightforward story and break the pattern of a progressive form of storytelling, as they do not feed into the plot and do not propel it forward. Despite this apparent uselessness, these space interludes are actually bedtime stories that emotionally draw the characters together. Powers describes them as metaphors for the hopes and fears of the characters at the given moment of the novel. These speculative planets are places where father and son can share their emotions and connect to each other but they also are one of the very few things that manage to calm Robin. As they can soothe the characters, Powers notes that these planets are enabling the characters to escape and see the circus of the Earth better. While the author’s reflections on their novel are valid observations, this section tries to put these planet excursions and looking at outer space in general into question. It argues that planets are used as a way of disconnection rather than connection since it conveys Theo’s inability to connect with and know his own family and his (in)voluntary looking away from Earth.

In *Bewilderment*, the space interludes have an ambiguous relationship to emotions. They are indeed reflective of the characters’ emotions. Perhaps the most striking example of their resonance is the planet that is mentioned right after Theo’s holding Robin for the last time, as his cold body stops shivering: “There was a planet that couldn’t figure out where everyone was. It died of loneliness.” (B, p.323) As the vertiginous loneliness described in space can find its echo in the pain that the father undergoes as he loses one of his most cherished beings, planets and emotions align in the novel. These planets are also able to serve as a distraction, however. As they are useful to assuage Robin’s strong emotions, the interludes are a break from the harsh

reality of animal suffering and human disconnection from nature. Because they focus on life, space, and speculative images, these planets divert the attention of the novel and the characters from the very planet on which they stand. When Robin learns the fact that there is only a small percentage of wildlife while the rest is bred for human purposes, he pleads his father: "*New planet, Dad. Please.*" (p.69) As the new piece of information is too much to handle for Robin, planets come as a consolation that tries to erase or mend the emotional wound. His father also considers planets as an escapism, since he suggests one to Robin after another tantrum. Upon learning that a large population of cattle has been dying due to brain contagion, Robin loses his temper. As Theo has nothing but good intentions toward his son, he pities and regrets that Robin experiences such pain: "I should never have brought him to visit this planet." (p.291) He thus proposes a new planet to the child: "Robbie. There are other places." (p.291). While Robin refuses to look away from the Earth this time, the father's comment reveals the possibility for speculative planets to be a diversion from the Earth. As the Earth is deemed too painful at the moment – to the point that he almost wishes for Robin not to experience it at all, the only way that the father finds to deal with the situation is to look away from the problem and dive into momentary denial.

As visiting imaginary planets enables the mind to move toward space and away from the Earth, such excursions do not only enable one to look away from the problems that happen on Earth but also from the good things. As Robin and his father walk around the neighborhood – an "adventure" as Robin calls it (p.181), the child surprises Theo with how much he can recognize and identify birds by their singing and chatting. From this amazement stems the question "Are you studying them somewhere?" (p.182) As Robin's knowledge of the natural world heavily comes from his observation of it after he started the DefNec program, the answer lies far from the father's assumption. Robin does not study birds and their voices, he simply "*listen[s] and like[s] them.*" (p.182) This answer resonates like a shockwave for Theo as he compares his son's attitude to his own: "Where had I been, during all that listening? On other planets." (p.182). Here, planets, away from the contemplation of nature in its scientific possibilities, unearth Theo to the point where he cannot recognize the ambient soundscape of his neighborhood. He has been too caught up in flying through space to note, like, hear, and recognize the flying beings above his head. Robin makes a similar observation, questioning the need to look for life in space while there is so much to see and know on Earth: "*How would we ever know aliens? We can't even know birds.*" (p.270) The human species seems more curious to discover beings from another planet without even knowing the beings that inhabit their own

home. While these two examples do not strictly refer to the Byrnes' bedtime stories, they do reflect on the characters' and other people's tendencies to look away from the Earth in search of life, even if life is very much present around them. In this sense, space and planets prevent Theo and others from seeing and connecting to the non-human and the environment that surround them.

FATHER AND SPACE KNOWLEDGE

In the novel, planets are used as metaphors for the known and unknown. As Theo is an expert in the field, his knowledge of outer space planets is rather extensive. This is why the father is able to create speculative places, as each of them relies on collected data about other planets and scientific principles. The planet excursions stand at the junction between known and unknown, as they are based on true facts but are imagined nonetheless. His knowledge comes short, however, when the planet at which he wishes to look at is his own, the Earth, or his close ones. While it has been said that the planet excursions were used in the novel as a metaphor for the character's interiority, the word *planet* in general is used to refer to the interior world of characters. Thus, as Theo is trying to put himself in a state of grief, he is flooded with things that "he [feels] [...] as if, on some planet, they had really happened" (p.107) Be it that Theo draws from his understanding of grief, his empathy, or his memories, the planet to which he refers stands as an internal personal space of life.

There are other instances, however, where interiority and planets are utterly unreachable for Theo, despite his space expertise. As it is made clear from the beginning that Alyssa and Robin are two very particular people, often misunderstood by people who do not like the non-human as much as they do, Theo is not immune to being one of those people who do not entirely get them. As he acknowledges that he "never [knows] what passe[s] through [his] son's singular head at any given moment" (p.122), it is apparent that Theo is aware of his inability to understand his child totally. The comment that interests us here is the following one: "I know less about the planet he lived on than I know about Gliese 667 Cc." (p.122) This reflection reveals the large gap between the father's understanding of a faraway planet and the interiority of his own son: Theo knows more about a distant planet than about Robin, who is only a few meters away from him and with whom he shares his daily physical life. Theo makes a similar observation about his understanding of his late wife: "I never knew my wife of a dozen years. She was a planet all her own." (p.200) His insecurity of not fully knowing Alyssa ends up materializing in Currier's eyes shying away from him, leaving Theo to understand that the two

people were having an affair. Later, Theo even wonders whether Robin is his biological son: “Aly. Is he mine?” (p.205) As Theo embodies reason and knowledge, his affinity with planets and space is ultimately not enough for him to know his own family. Theo thus stands as a figure isolated from his own planet and family, as his knowledge is insufficient for him to establish a connection to them.

As performance, results, and progress lie underneath a path of self-improvement, one can wonder whether the DefNec program and emotions are actually compatible. The circle is indeed complete: the very logic of human mastery over the non-human that lies behind the concept of Anthropocene and that is responsible for the ill imposed on the environment and its inhabitants is the same logic that is applied to solving – or suppressing – Robin's emotional inner life. The novel, both in style and in content, displays an attempt at controlling and taming emotions, especially if they materialize in strong outbursts such as in Robin's case. Robin's grief and attachment to the non-human are not welcome in a society where reason reigns. While his reaction to losing animal lives and animal ways of life are forced to be controlled, tamed, and even suppressed, his emotional life is recuperated by a scientific program in which his emotions are objectified and commodified. As the father figure shows, however, science has its shortcomings. His being humanized leads him to dismiss his own emotions and to not be able to understand them, while his focus on space stands as his own failure to observe his own planet and understand his own family.

3. CONTEMPLATION AND INTERCONNECTION

MULTISPECIES IN *BEWILDERMENT*

As we have seen earlier, animals are everywhere in the novel thanks to their presence in the language used in the text. As the subsequent section has demonstrated, however, the novel shows a rhetoric that uses animal language to delegitimize emotions and exposes discourses that rely on mastery and reason, which reveals isolation and loss of connection to the non-human. As Barnett mentions Derrida in their discussion on animal names and species names in general, names can be seen as a human tool that ontologically differentiates humans from animals. As the act of naming the other betrays that the naming party has power over the named party, animal names could hold the same logic of mastery and control unveiled in the previous section. As the first part of the analysis of *Bewilderment* has demonstrated, however, animal language is used to bring non-human animals closer to human animals, even to the point of making them part of their actions, stories, bodies, and identities. The novel goes even further into establishing a connection to the non-human thanks to the multispecies dimension of the text. In referencing the ideas of mutualism, kinship, human humility, this section highlights the rhetoric of ethical entanglement present in the novel.

In a straightforward way, characters in *Bewilderment* mention the mutualism and cooperation at play in order for human beings to exist. In a recollection of a moment of complicity between Theo and Alyssa, Theo, who is a biologist, explains to Alyssa that she does not love him: “You don’t love me. You love my microbiome.” (p.77) This rational way of understanding hormones and feelings allows Theo to explain that “we [need] a hundred times more bacterial than human DNA to keep the organism going.” (p.77) Robin also notices this “bizarre collaboration” (p.77), as he shares his discovery with his father that “*plants do pretty much all the work*” (p.252) and humans benefit from it. As mutualism brings beings and things together, the novel blurs the line between species and between individuals, seeing them in terms of connectedness and coming together rather than separate isolated beings that can live on their own.

Furthermore, characters in the novel deepen this interconnectedness into kinship. It is made clear, however, that this ability to see the non-human as kin is restricted to a short amount of people. Only Robin and Alyssa display such a tendency, and each instance suggests that such

a way of thinking is not dominant. When Theo and Robin watch a recording of one of Alyssa's testimony, they can hear her say that "[t]he first people who lived here knew: all animals are our relatives." (p.64) As her comment on kinship is preceded by the mention of knowledge of Indigenous people, the idea of connectedness is put back in a historical context that has dismissed and erased Indigenous knowledge, precisely with a logic of alienation and commodification that shares nothing with kinship. Later, when Theo remembers what Alyssa used to say: "if some small but critical mass of people recovered a sense of kinship, economics would become ecology." (p.208) The use of the conditional here is striking, as it is not certain whether people can restore this lost bond. As the economy can become ecology – under strict circumstances that are far from easily attainable, the text shows that economy and ecology cannot cohabit at the same time. It is either one or the other. And right now, the framework of the economy is dominant. Finally, when Robin is filmed for a documentary, the interviewer comments: "To spend time with Jay is to see kin everywhere, [...] I, for one, would love to hear that feedback." (p.230). In this example, the interviewer makes clear that seeing kin everywhere is not a common understanding of the world, but something very specific to Robin. As "[t]o spend time with Jay" illustrates that one cannot see kin unless Robin is here to be a mediator and show the way, the phrase stands at the beginning of the sentence, hence building a shield for the interviewer against the possibility of naturally being able to see kin everywhere. The same obstacle-logic can be found in the second part of the comment, as the interviewer hides behind "for one" and two commas, so as not to make themselves too close to the possibility of challenging their dominant worldview. Despite the fact that only a minority sees the non-human as kin, the novel manages to resist the dominant view in making some characters aware of their entanglement.

Third, as the multispecies makes its way into the novel, it seeks to question human exceptionalism, which largely justifies the control and mastery of humans over the non-human. In order to shed light on the human exceptionalism that is represented in the novel, the comment that Theo makes on people who do not look keenly on life in outer space is useful: "If we academic elites found that life arose all over, it wouldn't say much for humanity's Special Relationship with God." (p.257) While this comment targets life in space and not life on Earth, which still holds many secrets, it still points to the belief that humans are *special*. *Bewilderment* tries to shake this human entitlement by using downgrading vocabulary, not in the sense of degrading humans, but of grading them down on the hierarchical ranking of beings. In saying that animals are humans' relatives, Alyssa emphasizes that "creatures [...] do not belong to us"

and that humans are in a position of “stewardship” instead of control (p.64). Humans are not owners, and while the word “stewardship” hints at management, its inclusion of “steward” leaves the possibility of care and service. As Theo explains the presence of microbiomes and bacterial cells in humans, Alyssa comments that “we’re the scaffolding [...] [a]nd they’re the building” (p.77) Being laid out as such, humans are nothing but a structure, while bacterial cells are its substance and content, making humans empty skeletons. Finally, Robin’s observation that plants are essential for humans to be able to live, he dismisses every being that benefits from plants: “Everybody else is just a parasite.” (p.252) Rather than God’s protégés, humans are associated with the repulsive connotation of parasites, which depend on others and are far from the human ideal of mastery. It should be noted that each of these humblings of the human species goes hand in hand with the mention of collaboration and kinship noted above. Thus for humans to consider themselves as dependent on other beings and being part of an interconnected non-human family, they must be stripped of the assumption that mastery, ownership, and self-sufficiency are part of the human condition. The novel shows that humans must gain the humility to understand that they are part of a horizontal – not vertical – relationship with their co-beings and the non-human in general if they want to embrace being part of the entangled multispecies.

As Alyssa and Robin are able to see human animals in their humble dependence and connection to the non-human, they are able to include the non-human in their ethics of care. Rather than exclusionary care, they engage in inclusionary care. Alyssa left a prayer in her wake: “May all sentient beings be free from needless suffering.” (p.72) This prayer, more than a way of carrying the mother’s legacy, is a call to break from an exclusionary code of care, as the one mentioned by Johns-Putra to describe the man’s priority of taking care of his son in *The Road*. There is a similarity to be observed in Theo’s caring for Robin, as he gives priority to his son: “the entire species might have been on the line, and I’d still worry first about my son.” (p.275) Even if this does not include harming anyone coming their way like in the dangerous post-apocalyptic world of *The Road*, this comment still puts the child in the higher rank of the list of things and people to care for. The obsession with the child still shows that an exclusionary code of care might be engaged in. This prayer, however, is a radical resistance against any exclusionary code of ethics, as it is not directed to the self or to the small unit of the nuclear family, but to every sentient being.

When Robin walks in front of the capitol in protest against the lack of action in the face of mass extinctions, he bears the sign “HELP ME I’M DYING” (p.146). While Theo is “offset by

[his] dismay at the slogan” (p.146) and a stranger shows their disapproval of the sign, the novel manages to present it as provocative and shocking for people who are not Robin. The slogan can be understood in three different ways. First, it creates shock, as the concern that was directed towards the child is redirected towards the non-human, hence making the child a lure to get attention. Second, the “I” and Robin stand as a metaphor for the non-human. According to this understanding, the sign urges to care about the non-human while Robin is merely a baseline. If one cares about the life of the child, then one can redirect the same attention and behavior toward the non-human. Third, the slogan challenges the understanding of human individuality, as Robin is not a metaphor for the non-human, but part of a structure of interconnectedness that makes their relationship metonymous. Robin is part of the non-human and the non-human is part of Robin, which means that mentioning or caring for one of them entails doing the same for the other. This makes Robin’s claim nothing but the truth: as the non-human is dying, so does the mutualism and interconnectedness that make it possible for him to live. As the child brings the attention to him first, tension emanates from this slogan that actually hints at the non-individual. In terms of response, this tension can be accepted or rejected, and it is shown that the stranger rejects the tension, since he does not stop and think about his own entanglement or that of Robin, but rather scolds Theo about his parenting. Whether the slogan succeeds or fails, the tension is still present on the page. While “me” and “I” are at the center of the slogan, they seek to perturb the dominant understanding of humans as individuals. Attention is drawn to the individual, to Robin, but is redirected outside of the individual way of grasping Robin as a person, as it embeds him in his relationship of entanglement with the non-human.

From this perspective, mourning in the Freudian sense in the multispecies world is impossible. As mentioned earlier, Freud considers the work of mourning as a complete process of getting over the dead and moving on. In this context, getting over the death of the non-human would mean that one wrongly supposes that the human can live without the non-human. Humans, as we have seen, cannot be seen as isolated individuals and cannot be detached from the non-human. In losing the non-human, humans lose a part of themselves. Thanks to the entanglement present in the novel and Robin’s awareness of his interconnectedness, the novel shows the possibility of fostering one’s relationship with the non-human hence cherishing not only the non-human but also one’s connection to it. This paves the way for a continued work of ethics and care towards the non-human before and after any loss, rather than the complete Freudian mourning that seeks to rupture the connection to the loved object. While Robin’s emotions and behavior could be labeled as melancholia according to Freud’s theory, they should

instead be understood as political resistance that holds onto one's entanglement despite an isolating and alienating society.

SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Be it before he enters Dr. Currier's program or after, Robin has always been a curious child. He frequently asks questions about life on Earth as well as in outer space but also makes a point to keep a trace of life on paper. He is often mentioned drawing and writing and keeps a notebook with him. While Robin is heavily influenced by the dominant way of knowing and naming the non-human, he still manages to grasp the world in a personal way that seeks to move away from the objectifying and organizing understanding of the world. Far from the mastery that sometimes lies behind science, Robin paves the way for non-invasive and horizontal knowing of the non-human that involves more connection than mastery over objects. Driven by his love for contemplation and the non-human, Robin finds a personal way to know and connect to the non-human. Drawing from Barnett's interest in phenology as a way of connecting to and grieving the non-human and from Eszter Szép's observations on the ethics of drawing lines with the body, this analysis exposes how Robin finds his own way of relating to the non-human.

NOTE-TAKING

In his work on mourning the non-human in the Anthropocene, Joshua Barnett not only suggests names as enabling the work of mourning but also a practice called phenology. Described as "nature's calendar" and as "concerned with cyclical and seasonal natural phenomena", phenology consists in "witnessing, recording, and archiving the on-goings-on of plants and animals, of habitats and ecosystems, of weather and climate" (Barnett, 2022, pp.71-72). Be it animals' whereabouts, the growing and withering of flowers and leaves, or the frosting and melting of ice, phenology seeks to observe that which would be unobservable if not paid attention to (p.72). In a world of environmental turmoil, phenology is a practice that can shed light on the breaking of patterns and on ecosystem disturbances, as it makes its practitioners more alert to ongoing and slow changes around them (p.75). In this sense, Barnett argues that people are increasingly delving into such practices, without even realizing it, as they observe the impact of the climate crisis in their very backyard and relay it in databases or on Instagram (pp.74-75). This, according to Barnett, "like names, prepares us for the work of ecological mourning." (p.75) Quoting phenologist Aldo Leopold that "[o]ne of the penalties of ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds" (in Barnett, 2022, p.76), Barnett seeks to underline the consequence of knowledge, but also its necessity for grief. As one observes

meticulously the non-human and develops knowledge about the earth on which one lives, one becomes more aware and emotionally sensitive to presence, absence, change, distress, or imbalance (Barnett, 2022, p.76). As Leopold states “[w]e grieve only for what we know,” (in Barnett, 2022, p.78), Barnett associates “knowledge and sorrow, wisdom and grief” (2022, pp.78-79). Knowledge, loss, and grief are therefore linked to one another.

While Robin does not exactly engage in phenology in his observations and note-taking, exploring this practice is useful to understand Robin’s endeavor in comparison. According to Barnett, phenology, which “lets something be seen that we otherwise might not notice,” consists of three steps: witnessing, recording, and archiving (B, p.85). As far as witnessing is concerned, Barnett defines it as “the moment of observation” rooted in the present which “shed[s] light on both what appears and what fails to appear *now*” (original emphasis, p.85). The importance of observation propels human beings outside of their home into the physical outdoors (p.86). Barnett insists, however, that “phenology calls for something more intense than passive watching.” (p.87) Phenology is an active practice where one needs to train their eye and their ear to correctly recognize and identify one phenomenon or the other (p.87). Thus, the witnessing part of phenology entails an active and accurate observation of outdoor events. In Barnett’s view, witnessing “draw[s] us into more intimate relationships with our earthly cohabitants,” hence creating “a crucial precondition of an ethically oriented ecological grief.” (p.87) It is not only that observing has a greater chance of leading one to know, relate to, and perhaps love what one observes, but it is also that being the witness of the non-human creates the possibility of witnessing its absence (p.87). There is no guarantee indeed that what has been observed before will continue to be observed in the future. (p.88).

The second step of phenology, recording, chronicles these accurate observations. In contrast to the now of witnessing, recording is oriented in the past, as it “constitute[s] a relatively durable trace of what was *once* present, what *once* appeared.” (original emphasis, p.88) Recording, just like witnessing, requires preciseness and exactitude, which, according to Barnett, “draws phenologists into more intimate relationships with the more-than-human beings and ways of being,” keeping records creates a sense of intimacy and care towards what is observed” (p.89). In order to store information, however, one needs to be knowledgeable about what one witnesses, as knowing the names of plants, non-human animals and natural events is essential to writing about them (p.90) In this sense, keeping “sloppy records” makes “little sense,” according to Barnett (p.90).

Finally, archiving is the last step of the phenomenology endeavor. While witnessing and recording are respectively set in the present and in the past, archiving is oriented towards the future (p.91). Even though they file traces of the past, archives are a tool that opens the possibility of the future. On the one hand, Barnett draws on Derrida's discussion on archives to highlight that one's tendency to keep archives is set in an attempt to "safeguard [...] a trace – indeed, often only a textual trace – of what might yet be lost" (p.90). In this sense, archives are a token of the past used in the future to prevent something from falling in absolute disappearance – in a similar manner than names. On the other hand, Barnett considers archives as a revelation in hindsight. As records reveal only information at a certain point in time, "one cannot predict what [they] will reveal in the decades and centuries to come." (p.92). As an isolated record cannot show much information about broader events, archives come as a zoom out of the singular events to see a bigger picture.

ETHICAL LINES

In their discussion on lines in comics, Eszter Szép (2020) draws from the work of Lynda Barry to reveal the vulnerability that lies underneath lines. They highlight that the line is connected to the drawer in more than one way, as it is not only the result of a hand gesture but also of thoughts and personal experiences (p.59). In this sense, the image created by the line is a "structure of personal experience and not simply a picture." (p.59) On top of being a bodily mark, the line is also a "spontaneously born trace of a thought process." (p.63). Thus, the line drawn by an individual is the expression of both their mind and their body, which complements the vulnerability that can be found in the content of comics. While these observations on lines involve the comics medium, they can be transposed to drawing in general. Szép notes that "[u]nlike literature where – in typical cases – the meaning of the text remains the same with the change of, for example, fonts," (pp.123-4) the lines present in drawings and comics are irreplaceable, as they hold the presence of their drawer. A line cannot be redrawn without its meaning being changed, making drawing inherently personal.

The effects of lines on both the reader and drawer go even further when Joe Sacco's crosshatched haptic style is commented on by Szép. According to them, Sacco's condensed drawing style makes room for a new temporality where reader and drawer alike can dwell, which is described as a "dynamic, attentive, spontaneous and unfinished activity that was connected to the concept of vulnerability by Rosalyn Diprose" (p.112). These haptic surfaces spring from a slow process that "emphasi[zes] the drawer's embodied presence in his art" and

that “enables caring, dynamic and creative interaction between the parties involved.” (p.112) As the crosshatching present in Joe Sacco’s drawings slows time and grabs the attention of the reader, it brings them in the same ethical position as that of the author as they both dwell with the communities and the non-human environment that are represented in the graphic novels. Szép notes that the haptic surfaces “invite the reader to practice what Bryson has called glance: to spend time with the images and contemplate, and to be part of, together with the drawers, a potentially transformative practice of dwelling with the Other.” (p.133) But the drawer is perhaps the person who is the most involved in the dwelling with what is represented by these lines. In fact, Szép describes the activity of drawing as “offer[ing] ways for establishing a mental, emotional, ethical, and embodied companionship with what is being drawn.” (p.117)

ROBIN’S CONTEMPLATION AND PERSONAL DRAWING

While the archiving step is not insisted upon as far as Robin’s notebooks are concerned, witnessing and recording are essential in his connection to the non-human. As phenology relies on a moment of active and accurate observation that leaves room for intimate relationships with the non-human to be built, Robin’s contemplation of the non-human is crucial to his relating to the world. Robin’s observation and identification of bird species or other non-humans are characterized by accuracy and preciseness, as his father is sometimes in a difficult position when he cannot match his son’s precision: “A resident so common even I knew its name. ‘Junco, I think.’ *Dark-eyed or slate?* He turned to me, sure I could tell him. I couldn’t.” (B, p.171) Despite his attention to detail and exactitude, Robin does not engage in a rigid scientific endeavor. As his father notes that Robin’s “interest had turned to love” (p.171) and as Robin states that he does not study birds but “*just listen[s] and like[s] them*” (p.182), it seems that love and contemplation drive Robin’s observation, rather than a systematic witnessing like that of phenology. As love has trained Robin’s eyes to see the non-human, he can not only spot the non-human but also notice the smallest details about it. When explaining why he calls a scarlet oak his “redhead tree,” Robin highlights something that his father had never seen before: “There, on the underside, in the junction of the side veins and the midrib, were tiny patches of red hair.” (p.171) Robin’s love for the non-human draws him closer to it, making him able to see and notice it without difficulty.

As his father gets more curious about his son’s inner world and his eerie connection to his late mother, he looks in his notebooks without asking Robin. Titled “PRIVATE OBSERVATIONS OF ROBIN BYRNE” (p.179), Robin’s notebooks could be described as scientific

records, as Robin “dr[aws] maps and diagrams” (p.213) or dissects “a grass stem with all the parts labeled” (p.180). The reader learns with Theo’s spying that Robin, far from following order and method, observes and takes notes with the flow of his curiosity and amazement, leaving his books to be “devoted to drawings, notes, descriptions, questions, speculations, and appreciation – the proof of other life.” (p.179) In allowing his mind to go everywhere it wants to go, Robin manages to observe without order. Robin feeds on science and facts but appropriates the material and transforms it into something personal. As his father notes from the drawing of the grass stem that Robin had “copied the names from somewhere, and yet the seeing was all his” (p.180), it becomes apparent that Robin infuses facts with his own self and his curiosity, moving away from the mastery and taming that systematic and rational science has proven itself to be in the novel.

As Robin’s notebooks tend to veer away from a controlling understanding of the non-human, his drawings go one step further. Robin’s drawing practice goes against any form of systematic, regulated, and well-planned research, as he often draws from real life when he has the chance. These conditions make it impossible for the child to impose the rhythm of the drawing on the non-human. When Theo and Robin visit an aquarium, the father notes that “the stingray [Robin] wanted to sketch wouldn’t hold still for its portrait” (p.8) Robin cannot immobilize the animal to draw it, which does not stop him from putting his pen to the paper. He finds himself drawing in the conditions imposed on him by his environment and his subject of observation. The absence of any control or rules is especially characteristic of his drawing style. Theo often observes these drawings, considering them masterpieces, but still highlights their originality. Robin’s frog is “byzantine in both shape and pigment” and any “difference between the drab original and his surreal copy didn’t trouble Robin.” (p.91) Furthermore, “[t]he perspective was skewed, the surface texture clumsy, the outlining naïve, and the colors out of this world.” (p.91) When commenting on the quality of the drawing, the text goes: “Some were more skillful than others. But they all vibrated” (pp.95-6) As Robin’s drawings move from any need to respect rules of accuracy, perspective, consistency, or mastery, they are stripped from any logic of taming and enclosing the non-human that they represent. While the original version is labeled “drab,” his version is said to be varied and vibrant, hence matching the life that he likes so much.

Robin’s notebooks are imbued with himself. As the title of his notebooks indicates, the observations are his and no one else’s. On top of having a very personal approach to the non-human that he observes, Robin also puts his self on the page via his drawings. In one of the first

scenes where the reader can witness Robin draw, the child is drawing the birds to which he is inherently connected: the robin and raven (p.15). As Szép contends, drawing is an activity that leaves traces of the body, making Robin as present on the page as the non-human that he represents. Body and mind come together on the paper, exposing anyone who sees these drawings to Robin's physical and mental experience. Robin's mind translates to the pages not only in the subject that he represents or the questions and remarks that he writes next to his drawings but also in the very way he traces lines and chooses colors. The text illustrates that by contrasting Robin's vision to his father's: "Where my own eyes had seen only gray-black lumps in the frog's photo, Robin saw wild swirls that required half of his glorious rainbow tool chest." (p.91) Robin reports his amazement for the non-human thanks to his drawing style. Thus, the byzantine shapes and swirls of colors represent as much the non-human as the human that drew it, transforming the page into a place where both can meet and connect, adding another layer to their entangled relationship.

Most importantly of all, Robin's drawings are a place of ethical engagement. In two ways, that of slow dwelling and acknowledging loss, his drawings are a call for an ethical relationship with the non-human. On the one hand, they create a separate temporality of dwelling that makes the drawer, Robin, withdraw himself from the fast pace of his life to go into a deep state of contemplation. In a practical way, this means that "Robin stop[s] every hundred yards to sketch a patch of moss or swarming ant nest" (p.19) making him walk slowly and stop, hindering any form of destination-oriented walk. This also involves him spending long periods of time drawing – instead of doing his homework – which surprises his father: "I still don't see how a nine-year-old held still long enough to paint them." (p.96) Dedicating time to the non-human constitutes a form of dwelling, be it in walking or in sitting and drawing, that creates room for ethics and compassion. As Robin decides to "paint every endangered species in America" (p.88), he not only wishes to raise money but also begins the creation of drawings that reflect the vulnerability of the non-human, embodied in each of his painting traits and brushes. As "the colors shouted, *Save us*" (original emphasis, p.96), Robin's drawings manage to convey both the life of these beings and their simultaneous endangerment. As Robin shares a part of himself on the paper, both his vulnerability, as a lover of the non-human and as a member of an interconnected relationship with the non-human, and the vulnerability of endangered species find a physical form in the lines of the paintings. If, these paintings are "the portrait of [...] creature[s] whose passing few humans would mourn" (p.92), then Robin engages in a work of remembrance via his drawings since the drawings will outlast the species

that are represented on the paper. In the meantime, however, these drawings highlight the possibility of an ethical relationship to be built in dwelling with the non-human. As Robin shows and deepens his connection to the non-human in his drawings, they are the testimony of his relationship to the non-human, which is radically necessary for it to be found worthy of grief. Thus, the paintings represent animals, Robin's relationship to these animals, the fact that these animals can go extinct, a dwelling place for ethics, and that someone cares.

While there is a clear rhetoric in the text that values the individual humanized human, *Bewilderment* leaves room for other modes of knowing and relating to the world. The novel embraces conceptions such as the multispecies and entanglement, humbling humans back into a position of interconnectedness and kinship. Thanks to his contemplation of the non-human world, Robin replaces science with love, and measurements with haptic drawings that make him dwell with the non-human and share a place of vulnerability. In both cases, entanglement and haptic drawings allow Robin to ethically connect with his co-beings.

CONCLUSION

One could argue that the novels' reluctance to let the non-human go is part of a broader denial of the death of the non-human. Indeed, as language keeps the non-human alive by mourning its loss, does it not help the reader avoid entering a place where the non-human is, in fact, absent and lost? As continued works of mourning keep the non-human alive in memory, can loss even exist and be perceived as a threat? What is there to fear in the climate crisis if everything can be saved by language and memory? What this discussion has revealed is not necessarily the reluctance of language to let go or language entertaining the illusion of the non-human living eternally in the human mind but rather the language resisting losing the connection to the non-human. More than preventing the death of non-human life, the novels seek to prevent the death of the human relationship with the non-human.

Language is not everything. Both *Bewilderment* and *The Road* have demonstrated that language can be imbued with mastery and control. It can be a tool of understanding that structures knowledge in putting the names of things at the forefront of relating to the non-human, making language unavoidable if the man and the boy wish to grasp their surroundings in *The Road*. Names define and control both the human and non-human, hence leaving the possibility for language to tame other human beings and measure landscapes. In exploring scientific endeavors and the dominant valorization of reason and logic, *Bewilderment* shows that language can be used in an objectifying and commodifying manner, moving away from emotions and from any connection to the non-human. As the fathers appear close to these uses of language and science, they tend to fail to enjoy and relate to the non-human in more intimate ways. The children, in comparison, display the capacity to enjoy and contemplate their surroundings, oblivious of the distance that reason puts between humans and the non-human. As words as powerful as *grey*, *nothing*, and *empty* can make one blind to the environment and the non-human, the prose of *The Road*, in all its diversity of landscapes, plants, and weather, screams at the reader to pay attention to the pervasiveness of the non-human and seemingly dead landscapes. This ecological glaucoma can also be found in *Bewilderment*, as the rhetoric of planets points to the lack of knowledge of the non-human and being distracted from what is happening on Earth, making the father unable to connect and know his own planet and family.

Conclusion

In the face of such blindness and rhetoric of distance, both novels refuse to abandon the non-human. Despite their total loss to come in *The Road* and their ongoing loss in *Bewilderment*, the texts sustain the presence, remembrance, and connection to the non-human, be it with animal language or with contemplation of the non-human, which includes this appreciation of one's own entanglement with the non-human. In order to prevent non-human animals from total disappearance and sustain a connection in spite of their absence caused by either death in *The Road* or decreased population in *Bewilderment*, the two novels insist on incorporating them in their style. As non-human animals make their way into similes, words, and names, they are constantly conjured by the texts, ensuring both their presence and their existence in the characters' lives. This technique, more than ensuring a work of remembrance and mourning, sustains the presence of the non-human and their connection to humans via language. The novels also create and deepen the human relationship with the non-human via entanglement and contemplation. In order to do so, the novels open a haptic dimension in the act of observation. Rather than a human figure standing at a distance from the non-human, the novels find possibilities to involve its reader in the contemplation through haptic language for *The Road* and opens the possibility for ethics of observation that go beyond the scientific knowledge of the non-human and instead promotes a curious, personal, and embodied observation that foster ethical dwelling with the non-human. In doing so, the novels abolish the distance and separation between observer and observed. As the characters and the reader contemplate plant and animal species, landscapes, and ways of life, they also celebrate their coexistence on earth.

In a broader sense, this thesis calls its readers to engage in a work of resistance, not only in continued mourning and feeling the loss of the non-human, which politically makes it grievable and part of our community, but also in fostering contemplation practices. As the climate crisis is marked by uncertainty and anxiety, one must be able to observe and appreciate the non-human. Far from entering a mindset of denial, this encourages readers to accept the certainty of loss while cherishing both the lost and the still-present non-human. This is a request to not fall into an ecological glaucoma and to extend one's grief, care, and appreciation of post-green nature and entanglement. Fostering the capacity to contemplate the non-human, despite leading to increased emotional distress in the face of loss, is the promise of a life grounded on earth in all its highs and lows. As Baptiste Morizot points to a "crisis of sensibility" and "extinction of the experience of nature" in that human animals experience an "impoverishment of what [they] can feel, perceive, and understand of living beings" (2020/2022, p.6), the reading of *The Road* and *Bewilderment* calls for the readers to train their senses into taking the time to

Conclusion

be with the non-human. Following the novels and the characters, this thesis wishes for readers to be able to find humility in the contemplation that takes place not above but within the non-human, and to enjoy and be amazed at the cold foam of a waterfall, the light reflected in drops of rain, hairy leaves, and the high-pitched melody of a bird.

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