"THE TRACE BEYOND THE HUMAN:" EXPLORING NONHUMAN OTHERNESS AND HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AND POPULAR LITERATURES

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Dedicated to my nonhuman feline companion, Mordecai, and to all eco-others with whom

I share this planet

Abstract

Central to this examination is the questioning of the "culturally normal fantasy"

(Haraway 267) of humanity's pre-eminence in the current age known as the

Anthropocene through the investigation of representations of humanity and non-humanity

in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and Alan

Moore's *Saga of the Swamp Thing*, and Jeff Lemire's *Animal Man*. These works question

the alleged centrality of humanity, while offering new configurations with which to

represent and understand the human in relation to the planet and its nonhuman

inhabitants. Foundational to this interrogation of the human is the theoretical framework

of posthumanism and ecocriticism, which see human exceptionalism as the discourse that

enables the systemic destruction of the planet's ecology and the exploitation of--and

cruelty towards--nonhuman animals. Contemporary literatures, especially those which

employ apocalypticism, are best able to represent and critique the practices which

currently threaten the planet and its inhabitants.

Finally, I humbly thank Mordecai, for her never-ending tenderness and companionship. This project started with you, after all.

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Introduction:

The Challenges of Posthuman and Ecocritical Theory

Globally, there has been a recent increase in the discussions surrounding human intervention in the climate of the Earth, the environment as a whole, and the uses of animals in industry and entertainment. These discussions are present in a diversity of political and ideological circles, in news reports, in the heated online forums following these reports, in conferences, in animal cruelty treatises, and perhaps most predominantly, in scientific findings. With the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) "Fifth Assessment Report" released in November 2013—supported by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—a consensus on the reality of climate change has been confirmed, despite many of the naysayers of the political right who maintain staunch opposition to scientific research substantiating such conclusions, usually in order to sustain alternative and often mutually incompatible agendas. However, in addition to the IPCC's findings confirming climate change, additional research now also supports the human-induced (anthropogenic) qualities of climate change, resulting from over 125 years of consistent industrial activity in developed nations, including a heavy reliance on harmful chemicals used for and during resource development, such as oil extraction and refinement, hydraulic fracturing, chemicals used during wartime (Agent Orange, teargas), for agriculture (DDT, Monsanto's genetically modified toxic seeds), and general manufacturing of machines and products used by humans such as vehicles, household appliances and products (including the still used chlorofluorocarbons), clothing manufacturing, and so on. The

IPCC's "Fifth Assessment Report" opens with the Executive Summary and a direct

statement regarding climate change as predominantly anthropogenic:

> Human activities are continuing to affect the Earth's energy budget by changing the emissions and resulting atmospheric concentrations of radiatively important gases and aerosols and by changing land surface properties. Previous assessments have already shown through multiple lines of evidence that the climate is changing across our planet, largely as a result of human activities. (IPCC 121)

The concentrations of gases mentioned above are known as greenhouse gases—

specifically carbon dioxide (CO^2), methane (CH^4), and nitrous oxide (N_2O)—proven

adverse to the Earth's atmosphere when in large quantities. Evidence supporting the

above conclusion derives from empirical observations of the atmosphere, oceans, land,

and cryosphere (ice and snow sheets covering portions of the Earth's water and land)

from *in situ* observations and ice core measurements. These observations and calculations

have found an increase in the concentrations of greenhouse gases, spanning the last two

hundred years, corresponding to the exponential increase in industrial activity and

population growth since the Industrial Revolution (121).

    A popular criticism against such findings, usually made by politically and

ideologically driven parties who anticipate economic threats in light of such data, follows

a circuitous argument highlighting the regulatory cycles of the Earth and natural

progressions towards global cooling and warming, as well as a disinterest and lack of

regard for the impact of human activities on the environment in favour of economic

interests and gains.[1] However, such obtuse pseudo-arguments that are not based on

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[1] Chase, Steven, and Barrie McKenna. "Canada 'more frank' about climate change, Harper says." *The Globe and Mail.* 09 June 2014. N.p. Web. 11 June 2014.

scientific and empirical data point to a larger issue of a scientific illiteracy and the

consummate dismissal regarding adverse ramifications wrought by human activities on

the planet.[2] Alongside scientific findings which demonstrates the correlation between

human-industrial activity, a changing climate, and the consequent destruction of habitats

and biodiversity, the centrality of humanity is being questioned in the midst of such

caustic interactions. That such a report exists, which presents detailed findings on

anthropogenic impacts on the planet, signals a change in the discussion regarding the

impact of humanity within the environment as a whole. This, in turn, leads to an

overwhelming array of questions regarding the ethics of human/natural activities in

general. However, the rhetoric of the human complicates the simple question of why

many humans are so inclined towards such behaviours, and, moreover, find these

behaviours and activities justified despite the damage wrought on the environment. The

history of humanity's self-imposed exemption from the natural world follows a fairly

long and complex trajectory that begins during the Renaissance, gains momentum during

the Enlightenment, and forges through the Industrial Revolution, until it reaches the

current age of advanced capitalism and gross ecological disparities across the globe.[3]

Eilperin, Juliet, and Scott Clement. "Tea party Republicans are biggest climate change deniers, new Pew poll finds." *The Washington Post.* 01 Nov. 2013. N.p. Web. 14 July 2014.

[2] Nyhan, Brendan. "When Beliefs and Facts Collide." *The New York Times.* 05 July 2014. N.p. Web. 14 July 2014.

Mooney, Chris. "Conservatives Don't Deny Climate Science Because They're Ignorant. They Deny It Because of Who They Are." *Mother Jones.* 26 June 2014. N.p. Web. 14 July 2014.

[3] A more detailed delineation of this trajectory, as well as its far-reaching implications, is discussed in Chapter 1.

It is not without reason that I begin with a discussion on climate change, as well as the likelihood of a sustainable and safe future on this planet for all inhabitants, human and nonhuman alike. It is precisely because of these increasing threats and the evident, as well as scientifically confirmed dangers that exist on Earth today that the rhetoric of the human is being questioned. The serious predicaments of Earth's inhabitants as a direct result of human exceptionalism is becoming ever clearer in a time when climate change, oil extraction, overfishing, animal exploitation and cruelty, habitat destructions, population growth, the reliance on dangerous agricultural chemicals, as well as the continued threats of nuclear war and disasters, are leading to intense and dangerously dire ramifications.

Also known as anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism is the position that of the Earth's vast biodiversity, the human species, *Homo sapiens*, alone occupy the central position of all life on Earth, thereby allowing the complete ownership, dominance, and exploitation of all other life forms contained therein. Additionally, human exceptionalism sees humanity as exceptional in both senses: first, that humanity has transcended, through a long process of evolution, the bonds of human's nonhuman origins to achieve the unique capacity of consciousness (Wolfe 89), hitherto considered the only known species in the universe to hold claim to such a quality. Indeed, the literal translation of *Homo sapiens* is "wise man," indicating that the capacity for reason is what differentiates humankind from the rest of the primates, such as apes and chimpanzees, who share a common ancestor. In this sense, human exceptionalism positions humans as central due to their unique ability to communicate directly, think abstractly, and inherit and

disseminate cultural knowledge inter- and trans-generationally, also known as cultural

transmission.[4]

Secondly, human exceptionalism claims that humanity, including human values

and nature, are qualitatively dialectical to those of other species due to their alleged lack

of consciousness and critical sentience; this difference essentially exempts humanity from

regarding nonhuman others as subjects, and discursively fosters a dialectic of difference

that enables dominance, exploitation, and fear. Again, such an understanding has been

challenged by observations demonstrating the sentience of nonhuman mammals such as

whales and dolphins, among a myriad of others, who have recently been granted status in

India as nonhuman persons, making India the first nation in the world to do so (Adams).

In these instances, whales and dolphins have been observed to contain the capacity for

strong social bonds, for self-awareness, in addition to the ability to communicate

complexly and abstractly, culturally transmit knowledge, use tools, and suffer, in essence

very comparable to human behaviour (Adams). As such, empirical observation and

scientific data have subverted humanist understandings of subjectivity as belonging only

to humans, ultimately demonstrating that the alleged centrality of humanity is wholly

discursive and historically relativistic in nature; in other words, humanity bears no

intrinsic right to the dominion of the Earth.[5]

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[4] This definition is challenged by animal rights theory (as I will show primarily
with a discussion of Cary Wolfe) which defends many nonhuman species as embodying
the same qualities that previously had distinguished humans from animals, the loose and
problematic term applied to most other forms of nonhuman life. Such a challenge
problematizes the very conceptual roots of human exceptionalism by demonstrating that
humans are in fact not as exceptional as once deemed.
[5] This is in opposition to Christian biblical mythology, responsible for much of the
discourse of anthropocentrism that has dominated the Western world, which situates man

Ecocriticism and posthumanism regard anthropocentrism as the discourse which enables the systemic destruction of the planet's air, water, land, and atmosphere, as well the exploitation of and cruelty towards nonhuman animals. Because posthumanism and ecocriticism take issues with the human as exceptional and the practices that result from such an attitude, anthropocentrism is currently facing critical examination on ethical and practical grounds across a variety of disciplines, including scientific and environmental studies.

Posthumanism's questioning of the human problematizes the binary of human/nonhuman, and seeks to deconstruct the conceptual divide between human and nonhuman to encourage an acknowledgement of diversity that respects difference and accedes the mutual interconnection among species. Rosi Braidotti, in her text *The Posthuman,* situates posthumanism as a "generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'anthropocene,' the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet" (5). As such, both posthumanism and ecocriticism are theorized as the frameworks which problematize human exceptionalism and question the bifurcation of nature into the exceptionalist dialectic of human/nonhuman in which the human is privileged in order to conceive of new configurations of inter- and intra-species compatibility and understanding. Likewise, Wolfe suggests that theoretical paradigms of the human must be rethought in relation to the cultural practices of domination and

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as purveyor of the earth: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (King James Version, Gen. 1:26).

exploitation, without denying the material existence of humanity which is embedded within and around nature. The posthuman approach does not see the relationship between human and nonhuman as belonging to a stringent dialectic wherein exploitation is expected and prescribed by the hierarchy of human/nonhuman, but rather acknowledges the interconnectedness of all species with a deep respect for the diversity and multiplicity of nonhuman otherness.

Posthumanism sees the discourse of human/nonhuman functioning as a way to interpret and construct nature simultaneously, as this binary sees nature as a space that exists organically and separately from humankind, allowing for a very self-referential and self-generative worldview that favours humanity. Donna Haraway, in *When Species Meet,* contends that the "culturally normal fantasy" (267) of human exceptionalism is "the premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies" (267). In Haraway's inference, she argues that humanity does indeed belong to a network of interconnectedness that is not shaped by humanity alone, but necessarily includes the innumerable nonhuman others visible and invisible to the human eye that allow for the diverse existences to which each species is undeniably linked. Unlike human exceptionalism, posthumanism acknowledges a central non-humanness of humanity, a point which Haraway celebrates:

> I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all … I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions; better put, I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with* many. (Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 156)

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This acclamation of the multiplicity of existences residing in a solitary human

destabilizes the humanist notion of the human as singular and autonomous, and concedes

a plurality of existences that comprise a single human subject. Haraway's statement here

affirms that her consciousness, her ability to exist, and *become with*, is partly a result of

the many existences, regardless of their claim—or lack thereof—to consciousness, and

are responsible for her, and other humans', existential and sentient claim to being.

Accompanying posthumanism, I am also employing ecocriticism, a close

theoretical relation to posthumanism, to articulate more clearly the impacts of human

intervention with the environment. While posthumanism situates itself against the

practices of humanism, ecocriticism engages directly with literature to embark on new

analyses of literary representations of nature and nonhumans. Ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty,

whose definition of ecocriticism is brief and simple, describes the ecocritical practice

thusly:

> Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious
> perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and
> economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach
> to literary studies. (Glotfelty par. 1)

Glotfelty continues that for an accurate ecocritical reading, several questions must be

posed, such as the following:

> How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play
> in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with
> ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat
> it? … How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to
> what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and
> popular culture? … What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary
> studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is
> possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines
> such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics? (par. 2)

Ecocriticism assesses the critical approach to ecological crises as represented in literary texts (Garrard 205), alongside a posthuman examination of the human and nonhuman demonstrated "throughout human cultural history" (Garrard 220), focusing primarily on the Industrial Revolution until the present. Glotfelty avows that despite the varying branches and degrees of ecocriticism, "all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (par. 3). This acknowledgement of the vital interconnection makes ecocriticism an integral component of posthuman theory as well.

Primarily, Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* will be foundational in my own ecocritical analyses of contemporary and popular literatures to explore "the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production" (10). Garrard argues that a reconceptualization and reconsideration of 'the human' is a "key task for ecocriticism" (445), very similar to posthumanism, as ecocriticism attempts to move "towards postmodern concerns such as globalisation, and the numerous 'nature cultures' that render the conventional binary opposition of culture and nature redundant" (431). Glotfelty describes the ecocritical practice as having "one foot in literature and the other on land," (par. 3), while the theoretical practice of posthumanism, focuses on the "negotiat[ion] between human and nonhuman" (par. 3).

Moreover, by examining the relationship between literature and the environment, ecocriticism also necessarily examines the "literary *representation* of nature and … the power of literature to inspire its readers to act in defence of nature" (Coupe 4094). The central focus in ecocriticism is, of course, nature. Defined, nature is "the physical power causing all the phenomena of the material world … including plants, animals, landscape,

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etc." (4094-4106). As such, human behaviour, which necessarily includes human culture, is regarded by ecocriticism as simply "a dimension of nature" (4118). Ecocriticism, "debates Nature," Laurence Coupe writes, "in order to defend nature" (as quoted in Wake, Malpas 4118). Reducing the wide scope of Nature into a concept that is more inclusive of ecological diversity and plurality, nature, as opposed to Nature, enables a keener understanding of the environment and humanity's relationship to it. Poet Kenneth Burke, hugely influential to William Rueckert, who coined the term *ecocriticism* (Coupe 4165), was earnestly aware of humanity's conflicted relationship with nature, which he describes in his "Poem":

> BEING BODIES THAT LEARN LANGUAGE
> THEREBY BECOMING WORDLINGS
> HUMANS ARE THE
> SYMBOL-MAKING, SYMBOL-USING, SYMBOL-MISUSING ANIMAL…
> SEPARATED FROM OUR NATURAL CONDITION
> BY INSTRUMENTS OF OUR OWN MAKING
> GOADED BY THE SPIRIT OF HIERARCHY…
> AND ROTTEN WITH PERFECTION. (Burke, as quoted in Wake and Malpas, 4191-4202, original formatting kept)

The instruments Burke mentions suggest the instruments' relation to the capacity for symbolic processes, and that this capacity is what fundamentally separates humanity from nature. The symbolic practices of humanity are likewise connected to hierarchical thinking, which allows for a conceptual and practical implementation of anthropocentric values. Burke's suggestion that humans are wordlings—creatures of symbolic action— also indicates that humanity remains bound to nature, despite its abstract undertakings to mediate the environment for its own benefit, which Coupe accedes: "human beings are both *a part of* nature and *apart from* nature" (4231). Moreover, Coupe acknowledges that the latter remains predominant in contemporary human culture, commenting that this lack

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of connection to nature directly leads "to human alienation and natural degradation"

(4231). Coupe writes:

> For just as human discourse detaches itself from its biological environment, so
> technology – made possible by language and rationalized by language – assumes
> proportions and powers hostile to that environment. There is nothing wrong with
> symbol making, nothing wrong with tool-making; but divorce these activities from
> the sense of ultimately being part of nature and you have the makings of ecological
> disaster. (4231).

Burke's influence on Rueckert's ecological criticism led to a criticism of humanism and

its relationship to the environment. In many ways, ecocriticism advocates a revitalization

of the human in connection to nature; and this relationship is seen as crucial, as it requires

critical sustainability as well as the reappropriation of symbolic action to manage this

relationship with care and without the privileges of human exceptionalism. Ecocriticism's

exploration of symbolic action, primarily through literature, explores the idea of language

and discourse as that which condemns nature yet has the ability to sustain it, primarily

through this reappropriation of the symbolic practices used toward ecological exploitation

and destruction. As language is, Coupe writes, "so often taken to indicate human

superiority over other species" (4242), language also has the potential to return this

superiority to its conceptual origin to emphasize the social construction of such an idea,

which is a prime function of posthumanism's and ecocriticism's critical praxis.

Understanding the evolutionary requirement for language is the first step to

understanding both the necessity of language for survival and seeing its origination from

nature, and not from any superior design of humanity. Additionally, language is not

exclusive to humans but is employed by a multitude of nonhuman animals (Shettleworth

277). However, Coupe maintains that in "forgetting that human culture is an extension of

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the culture that we call nature, we forget also that once language was a means of having a dialogue with the earth … not of talking about it from a privileged distance – a distance which encourages exploitation" (4242). This systemic amnesia regarding nature permits a continual exploitation of nature and maintains anthropocentric ideals in human culture; however, such a view likewise enables a long-term destruction of the privileged species, for as anthropologist Gregory Bateson writes, "The creature that wins against its environment destroys itself" (as quoted in Coupe 4266).

Though ecocriticism and posthumanism are fairly recent theoretical and critical developments, the concept of being in dialogue with the Earth is not so novel an idea. Ecological sentiments in literature are traced as far back as Romanticism and the literary convention of the pastoral, which Coupe describes as "celebrat[ing] the idyllic rural life and loves of shepherds … with the emphasis on simple pleasure in a natural setting" (Coupe 4125). William Wordsworth, in particular, used the pastoral, according to Jonathan Bate in his seminal work *Romantic Ecology*, to "forge a radical version of pastoral that entailed environmental and social responsibility" (4125) in a similar way that contemporary ecological literature provokes ethical accountability regarding human intervention with the environment. However, the pastoral in contemporary ecological literatures is often critiqued as this form is typically affirmative of the human and justifies anthropocentric hierarchies imposed on the natural landscape (4125). Yet, the pastoral may also be used as a way to critique these hierarchies, functioning to emphasize the vital relationships within nature, and between human and nonhuman. Though Romantic treatments of the environment are fundamentally different from that of current ecocritical

texts, the movements are comparable in their critiques of industrial and anthropocentric master narratives regarding the natural world.

In exploring the relationships between humans and nonhumans represented in contemporary and popular literatures, I am also examining the political and social relationships between literature and nature, and the ways in which a text is situated subsequently affects the way the physical environment is regarded. Like posthumanism, ecocriticism challenges the binary of human/nonhuman and looks towards a new understanding of the human—the posthuman—to *become with*, as Haraway puts it, species and nature in a discourse of inclusion and interconnection.

Related closely to the field of posthumanism is animal studies, a branch of ecocritical and anti-anthropocentric criticism, that likewise seeks to decenter the human in order to acknowledge the multiplicity and interconnectedness of all species. Furthermore, animal studies examines the representations of animals across disciplines to renew acknowledgement of the diversity of nonhuman life, as well as to generate a respect for nonhumans. Animal studies examines representations of nonhumans cross-culturally and cross-disciplinary to discern the complexities of relations amongst nonhuman species, and between humans and nonhumans.

Jacques Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* takes issue with the singularity of the term 'animal' (which can be applied to that of nonhuman), which he sees as necessarily implicating all species of animals without distinguishing between the variety of species included within the term, instead preferring the term *l'animot*. He argues that the binary of human/animal poses a violence on the plurality of animality,

leaving the discrete qualities of species robbed of their multiplicity and marginalized into a singularity offered by the term 'animal.'[6]

Related to the need for the reconception of human and animal is a similar need for the reconception of ecology and environment where more post-anthropocentric agency (Callus, Herbrechter 3965) will be able to occur with increasing freedom. For theorists like Wolfe and Haraway, such advances will require new forms of "ecocriticism that challenge views of human 'dominion' over the world [by] acknowledg[ing] the multitude of interactions and mutual interdependencies between humans, nonhumans, and their environment" (3965). Wolfe also maintains that humanism's theoretical frameworks initiate the construction of the "normative subjectivity—a specific concept of the human—that grounds discrimination against nonhuman animals … in the first place" (Wolfe 118), thereby justifying the exploitation of nature and maintaining an elevated position within it. This cyclical referentiality between the justification of exploitation and the modeling of this exploitation after the semantic and cultural binary of human/nature advances a discursive behaviour that cements a very specific way of thinking about the natural and constructed world, seeing it as fundamentally separate from humanity. For

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[6] As such, my thesis will avoid the use of the term animal, opting instead for the term 'nonhuman animal' or 'nonhuman other,' which in itself poses significant problems and stands, euphemistically, for much the same term as 'animal.' While the term 'nonhuman' is an inadequate term to represent the diverse plurality of all existences, it will be employed to signal a shift in the discussion of the dicourse of humans and the treatment of nonhuman animal life by humans. However, this thesis does not provide the breadth to draw the extensive distinctions among and between species of plants, animals, and other forms of nonhuman species; therefore, I will justify my use of the overarching term 'nonhuman others' as one that concedes the multiplicity and discreteness of species of life including plants, mammals, animals, bacteria, etc. and which serves simply to distinguish it (that is, say, all of animality) primarily from its alleged opposite, that of 'human.'

Wolfe, these ways of thinking must be confronted, and this will inevitably aid in the "decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates" to change the very nature of thought "in the face of those challenges" (109). Wolfe testifies that "the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist" (109). As a corollary of this, conceptions of both human and nature must also undergo redefinition as a way to destabilize humanism's paradigmatic approach to constructing the human and its relationship within all other networks whether natural or constructed.

Nature, accorded by posthumanism, is not divided into a dialectic that necessitates its own exploitation, but is exploited primarily as a result of anthropocentric ideology which, by choosing to exploit a specific area of nature, colludes against a vast and interconnected network of inter- and intra-dependent relations within one or many ecosystems. Consequently, by situating human against nature and nonhuman animals in the human/nonhuman divide, it is clear that in sustaining a destructive discourse of division and difference as is the case with anthropocentrism, it may lead to an inadvertent destruction of the binary itself, as both human *and* nonhuman will be carelessly destroyed if such attitudes persist with the fervour they currently experience. In ceaselessly exploiting the nonhuman, as well as nature, the environment, and the atmosphere, the human too becomes exploited and altered. In a paradoxical twist, anthropocentrism collapses in on itself and does the very opposite of what it projects to do: protect, sustain, and empower the human. The practical applications of human exceptionalism as demonstrated by consistent industrial activity over the past two hundred years is now singlehandedly dismantling its own vision of the human as supreme and dominant. Human exceptionalism is failing.

Appropriate to the study posthumanism is the analysis and exploration of representations of nonhuman otherness and human exceptionalism in popular and contemporary literatures, which are responding to the changing status of human in global and environmental relations, and are likewise reconceptualizing contemporary and future visions of humans and nonhumans, as well as nature and the environment. Literature has been articulating these fears for some time, but it is only within the past 70 years that the fears are more clearly aligned to anthropogenic impacts on and within the planet. However, contemporary and popular literatures, such as the texts included in this study— Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake,* Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing,* and Jeff Lemire's *Animal Man*—sophisticatedly convey these anxieties in a myriad of genres and forms, and are rooted in both the theory and the information surrounding environmental degradations and animal cruelty.

These texts represent not just environmental and social consciousness, but demands for ethical accountability and responsibility that mirror the fears and attitudes present in human, nonhuman, and environmental relations, and the operations that are threatening these and jeopardizing their future together. Literary posthuman imaginings appropriately envision the theoretical undertakings of posthumanism and ecocriticism, creatively demonstrating alternate visions of reality that may ensue given the continuing trajectory of human exceptionalist behaviours and political practices. Moreover, they communicate the anxieties present as a result of this trajectory, while mapping the intersections present in contemporary ideologies, which demonstrate a movement toward the destabilization of the human.

In many of these texts there is a direct decentering of the human which anticipates redemption of the human species with the cessation of anthropocentric operations, while many other texts lament the behaviours of humanity and expect a bleak future either still dominated by human centrality on the brink of the planet's destruction or as already completely destroyed with only a toxic, uninhabitable, and empty planet remaining. These texts examine, either critically or implicitly, the constructions of humanity and nonhumanity, and seek to locate the cartographies of similarity between them. In analyzing expressions of anthropocentrism and in exploring representations of nonhuman otherness in popular and contemporary literatures, this project questions the relevance of the human—in light of anthropogenic impacts on the environment including climate change, ecological disasters resulting from industry and development, and ill-treatment of nonhuman others, such as animals and the natural world—as well as challenges human exceptionalism through an investigation of the constructions of, and intersections between, humans and nonhuman others in literature. Using posthumanism as a critical framework exposes the operations of humanity, the ways that humanity is understood and conceived of in the twenty-first century, and how this understanding is undergoing change. Literary texts that articulate this change likewise expand conceptualizations and ethical implications of the human and, consequently, treatments of nonhuman others both theoretically and empirically. These contemporary texts, are situated in a complex dialogue between traditional conceptions of the human based on traditions of human exceptionalism and the discourses of ecological renewal wherein nonhuman otherness is deployed as way to subvert and destabilize the rhetoric of the human. Finally, as a literary framework, posthumanism seeks to chart a cartography of plurality that accepts

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nonhumanity as a core quality that characterizes all life on Earth, fundamentally inverting human exceptionalism by claiming a nonhuman centrality, as each existence is linked through interconnected matrices of dependencies not separated by binaries of difference and dialectics.

Chapter One charts the origins of posthumanism and its predecessor, humanism, beginning in the Renaissance and gaining ground predominantly during the Enlightenment when ideas surrounding reason as a trait belonging solely to humanity were germinated. While many of the ideas developed during the Renaissance and Enlightenment are chiefly responsible for human exceptionalism as it is practiced and theorized today, nascent ideas regarding humanity's alleged dominion of the Earth according to biblical mythologies will be briefly observed in this chapter to examine how exceptionalist sensibilities were marshaled during the transition of humans from ascetic religious followers to nonsecular subjects of an emerging scientifically and technologically literate age. This history will also examine the trajectory from humanism to antihumanism, as well as subsequent movements aligned to criticisms of humanism, but following more closely to postmodern theories of the time, such as poststructuralism and deconstruction, leading eventually to posthumanism, ecocriticism, and the closely related animal studies, which this project theoretically relies on.

Chapter Two will commence the literary analysis section of the project with Margaret Atwood's post-apocalyptic novel *Oryx and Crake,* which examines the commodification of humans and nonhumans within the CorpSeCorps corporation, and the related genetic hybridization that occurs to benefit humanity, situated in the text as a kind of transhumanism, a theoretical mode somewhat similar to posthumanism, but

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problematic in its elevated humanist agenda. Atwood's novel likewise demonstrates a quite literal decentering of humanity, who are succeeded by the genetic hybrid humans created by Crake called the Crakers. These posthumans represent a fundamental bridge between humanity and nonhumanity, and occupy the very slash situated between the binary of human/nonhuman. Moreover, while this text questions the mediation of science with nature in Crake's intervention with human evolution and the corporations' experiments with genetic miscegenation and hybridization, *Oryx and Crake* more subtly navigates a criticism of human-centred discourses in general, whether scientific or metaphysical in nature, which convey an exceptionalist agenda whereby inter- and intra-dependent species are adversely implicated and consequently exploited. To be clear, this text does not do away with discourse altogether; on the contrary, *Oryx and Crake* elucidates the dangers of discourses that privilege singularity and which promote exceptionalism as a justified and ethical position. In line with posthumanism and ecocriticism, Atwood's novel concedes the vital interconnectedness of the biosphere and critiques the decadent plenitude with which humanity occupies the Earth.

Continuing with the literary analysis in Chapter Three is an investigation of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, also illustrating a post-apocalyptic future of Earth which has been destroyed by an unspecified cataclysm, implied as a human- catastrophe far-reaching enough to destroy most nonhumans and humans on Earth, including civilization and the environment as a whole. The novel focuses on a father and son who are struggling to survive in this barren environment, whilst routinely attempting to escape cannibalistic gangs who resort to the imprisonment and hoarding of other humans as a food resource. The text demonstrates, through the absence of a biosphere and human

culture, the unique biological interdependencies that the Earth and all its inhabitants rely on for healthy and long-term sustainability, while also commenting on the long-lasting industrial and commercial bounty produced by humanity. *The Road* illustrates the complete desolation resulting from extreme human exceptionalism which brings down the entire operations of the Earth—biological, cultural, and economical—to the point that the human/nonhuman binary begins to consume itself, quite literally in this text. The dire predicaments that the man and his son find themselves in are a direct result of the expansive colonization of human desires which have fundamentally brutalized and transformed the Earth into a desolate wasteland in which humans continue their exceptionalist praxis to the point of human consumption and total ecological exile.

The final chapter shifts generic and formal gears by moving to graphic fiction by Alan Moore and Jeff Lemire, *The Saga of Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man*, respectively. Though these two texts belong correspondingly to the ecocritical and animal studies frameworks, their generic conventions will demonstrate the similarity in the treatment of the issues contained therein, which focus on the interdependencies at the root of posthumanism, ecocriticism, and animal studies. Because Swamp Thing and Animal Man are characters who are resigned to the horror genre of graphic fiction, their capacities to disturb the boundaries of human and posthuman are much more poignant and deconstructive. The graphic elements of these texts highlight more vividly the transgressions of human exceptionalism, and participate in a vernacular much more immediate and visible to demonstrate the brutishness of anthropocentric values. Both Swamp Thing's transformation from a human, who had formerly belonged to the humanist ethos, to a vegetal mass that becomes posthumanistically connected to the

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"Green"—the ecological chain of being that connects all life—and Animal Man's powers to channel the energies and behaviours of animals surrounding him, embody the evolving posthuman perspective, thus demonstrating the alternative configurations of the human previously divorced from nature and nonhumanity.

All texts offer more than a dialogue on the possibilities of humanity—either in an advanced capitalistic or an ecocritical sense—but also, as Mads Thomsen Rosendahl describes,

> the opportunity to examine more subtle links between 'old human' identity and visions of change, and to see how a number of related questions concerning the relationships between individual and collective, normality and improvement, and memory and future, find different expression in ways that perhaps only literature can articulate. (96)

These intersections that Rosendahl mentions are offered in all the books included within my thesis, and they correspond to Rosendahl's four points regarding the capacity of literature to communicate a posthuman ethos, as they:

> 1) scrutinize the potential for re-enchantment and risk of alienation, 2) connect individuality and collectivity in a coherent artistic rendition, 3) connect ethical questions and aesthetic expression, and 4) include cultural or collective memory in a presentation of the complexities of human existence. (232)

As such, both Rosendahl and Wolfe's explications of literary and cultural production are instrumental in my own analyses of the selected texts for the length of this thesis.

Chapter One:

A History of Posthumanism

Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

In order to fully comprehend the posthuman ethic, a thorough, albeit brief, genealogy of the term must be examined. In the vein of postmodernism and poststructuralism, it may be noted that a departure occurs within the very semantics of *post*humanism as well. The *post-* functions as the point of departure from the ideology preceding it: humanism. Now most often used to denote secularism, humanism saw its first employment as a term during the European Renaissance in the sixteenth century. It was used to identify scholars contributing to *studia humanitatis*—the "humanities" as we know it today—which included the study of grammar, rhetoric, Roman and Greek culture and poetry, and moral (not to be confused with natural) philosophy (Abrams 161). *Studia humanitatis* emphasized the moral and practical value of classical philosophical literature, primarily ancient Greek and Roman texts, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, with a heightened concentration on rationality as the guiding principle in structuring and maintaining human values and morality (Ibid.). Resulting from this emphasis on classical literature came a more focused study on the human as not only rational but as virtuous (Maynard 2394).

Renaissance humanists were deeply pious Christians, merging ideals and values from pagan antiquity into Christian creeds (Abrams 161). Despite this piousness,

however, humanists, while still believing in the Christian mythologies of the afterlife, departed from the ideals of religious asceticism, leaning more favourably towards terrestrial achievements occurring *during* rather than *after* one's life (Abrams 161). Consequently, an emphasis on the possibilities of what may be accomplished during a human life grew as representations of earthly achievements, rather than religious, also gained in popularity. As many of the classical Greek and Roman texts tended to focus heavily on glorified feats of men in particular, emerging literatures of the time mirrored such glorification, ushering in novel sensibilities of the potential of the human, as well as of literature's potential to celebrate the achievements of man.

The supremacy and glory of humanity was considered best exemplified through literature and the arts, and Renaissance writers drew on the literary modes from antiquity to represent, most harmoniously to Renaissance thought, humanity in all its virtue and glory (Maynard 2395):

> The artists and intellectuals of the period not only drew on antiquity for certain practices and forms but also found there a recognition of the place of the arts among outstanding modes of human action. In this way, the concepts of fame and glory became particularly associated with the art of poetry, because the Renaissance drew from antiquity the idea of the poet as celebrator of high deeds, the "dispenser of glory." (2395)

Renaissance humanism's insistence on the representations of 'human as glorious' in literary and artistic production mirrored a shift in the contemporary discourse regarding the potential of humanity: "life as positive fulfillment" (Maynard 2395). Seen as hedonistic, such a view was defended by humanity's alleged virtuosity; simply being offered terrestrial fulfillment demonstrated humanity's privileged position within a strict hierarchy of 'creation.' In this way, seeking fulfillment was synonymous with seeking

approval from the creator (Ibid.) and was not considered remotely hedonistic. Unsurprisingly, Renaissance humanism firmly advocated the supremacy of humanity within a Ptolemaic structure of the universe, placing humans, specifically male humans, at the center of all moral and existential matters. However, concurrent with such revolutionary reconceptualization of the human was a questioning of the meaningfulness of humanity, as well as the cosmic, divine designs put forth by Christianity, leading eventually to a lessening in faith of the heavenly order, as well as a questioning of the ultimate value in human accomplishment (Ibid.). As such, Renaissance humanism was often plagued by the paradoxical and simultaneous extolment and cynicism regarding the human condition.

Emerging from this shift within the Renaissance, humanism was transformed from the study of classical literatures to an ideological movement toward the end of the seventeenth century with the Age of Enlightenment. *Studia humanitatis* laid the foundation for the ethics of the Enlightenment, which had cemented not only humanities as the study of morality and values, but also human nature (Abrams 161), implicating both human ontology and phenomenology, and thereby focusing on specifically human experience as that which necessarily shapes and orders reality.

Humanism, as it came to be understood by the eighteenth century, expanded on the Renaissance notion that the rational and moral human individual assumed the primacy of the natural world, and began to regard humanity as the center of the universe, thus establishing human values as the *only* values existing within both the natural and constructed worlds (Abrams 161). That humans alone possess the faculty of reason naturally granted a central positioning of humans within the ordering of nature and the

construction of subsequent worldviews. As such, humanism during the Enlightenment

concentrated on the so-called "maturity" of the acquisition of knowledge through

experience and observation, as expressed by Emmanuel Kant in his famous passage from

his 1784 essay, "What Is Enlightenment?":

> [The Enlightenment is the] emergence of man from his self-imposed infancy.
> Infancy is the inability to use one's reason without the guidance of another. It is
> self-imposed, when it depends on a deficiency, not of reason, but of the resolve and
> courage to use it without external guidance. Thus the watchword of the
> Enlightenment is *Sapere Aude!* Have the courage to use one's own reason! (as
> quoted in Law 18)

For the Enlightenment thinker, it was not enough to simply accept the knowledge

allegedly affirmed by former structures of thought, namely the religious authorities;

accepting non-secular values as universal truths without judgment or critical questioning

demonstrated passivity and a lack of reason, indicating the immaturity Kant outlines in

the above passage. Such immaturity suppressed agency as well, inhibiting the human

subject to cultivate one's own dominion and critical attitude regarding the world at large

(Wolfe 71-78). This emphasis on reason meant a subsequent critique of religious 'truths,'

eventually leading towards a secularization of meaning in an increasingly scientific and

technological world, thereby revolutionizing ideas surrounding human nature and the

meaning of human in the universe. While complete secularity was still quite rare during

the Enlightenment, the increasing lack of reliance on religiosity became a more frequent

characteristic of the rational, thinking subject of the Enlightenment who refused to

embrace beliefs in superstition, dogma, and revelation (Baldick "The Enlightenment,"

2008).

Fundamentally, notions of human agency were separated from theological and supernatural understanding of humanity. The human as an autonomous being took precedence over the human as a "miserable sinner awaiting redemption from a pit of fleshy corruption" (Baldick, "Humanism"), and this concept of the "freely self-determining individual" (Ibid.) affirmed the supremacy of human progress while placing humanity at the center of all life and global interests. As far as Enlightenment humanism is concerned, the very notion of having interests can only belong to rational and thinking beings and not to any nonhuman animal as such. Indeed, the eighteenth century branch of humanism opposed the view that humans can be considered animals at all because humans are rational and self-determining, while animals, in the humanistic sense, categorically are not (Callus, Herbrechter 3965). This view, in addition to the centering of humankind in the midst of all life qualifies humanism as fundamentally anthropocentric and hierarchical, though at the time this would have been seen as a given, and not necessarily as pejorative; any contempt of such aspirations would have been considered regressive and archaic. Accordingly, human progress became emblematic of the Enlightenment, and was used as justification for excessive developments towards industrialization, scientific discovery, and arts that reflected a concentration on such advancements.

While the humanism of the Enlightenment continued past the nineteenth century in a fairly straight trajectory, with the exception of counter-movements such as Romanticism during the eighteenth century (Merriam-Webster 6001), specific events, namely World Wars I and II, began to derail many of the chief ideas espoused during the aptly termed Age of Reason. Due to the scientific discoveries that enabled the atrocities

of the two world wars, and an allegedly heightened rationality accompanying it, confidence in humanism began to wane drastically, leading eventually to a collapse of Enlightenment-era humanism.

However, several main tenets of Enlightenment humanism remained in the post-war era: human exceptionalism and the dominance of related metanarratives, including the discursive formation of the human condition, human nature, and the mythologies surrounding the centrality of humanity in global and environmental relations. As structuralist theory led to post-structural and deconstruction theories, anti-humanist sentiments became increasingly vocal by the 1970's primarily in France with main proponents Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Louis Althusser. Foucault, in particular, was exceptionally critical of humanism, specifically the humanism of the Enlightenment, the era he believed to have cemented humanism's core beliefs. Beatrice Han-Pile quotes Foucault's position on this in her essay, "The 'Death of Man': Foucault and Humanism":

> The Humanist movement … dates from the end of the 19th century … [W]hen one looks a little closely at the cultures of the 16th, 17th, and 18th century, one realises that man literally has no place in them. Culture is then preoccupied with God, the world and the resemblance of things. (Han-Pile 121)

Foucault's boldness is evident in his claim that man was "literally" not present during the centuries preceding the Enlightenment; however, it is not entirely unfathomable to assume that any conception of man in his "corporeal, labouring and speaking existence" (Foucault as quoted in Han-Pile 121) was absent from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century, as the concept of human prior to humanism was bound to religious mythology and theological metanarratives. In other words, man—as an autonomous, rational, and

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temporal subject—only came into existence when man and his place within the world became questioned.

For Foucault, "Renaissance 'humanism' and Classical 'rationalism' were indeed able to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world, but they were not able to conceive of man" (Foucault as quoted in Han-Pile 123). Only once the concept of man became divorced from theological underpinnings could the concept of man be understood in his historical finitude and anthropological context (Han-Pile 123). Understanding humanity, in Foucault's estimation, could only be achieved through sufficient representations of the subject in question; for Foucault, "to be known was to be represented adequately" (Han-Pile 123). In other words, previous representations of human were so wrapped up in their historical and religious contexts that any understanding of human nature was relative to the understanding of the historical period that represented humanity, and, therefore, any claims to the universality of human nature were considered dubious constructions of historicism.

Such anti-humanist ideas were cemented by the introduction of deconstruction and, subsequently, humanism's centrality underwent severe questioning, though perhaps only ideologically, as many of the practical applications of humanism continued through advanced capitalism and economic development, which maintained a human-centered approach heavily dependent on exploitations of race, class, wealth, the environment, and nonhuman others. Despite this, an enquiry of human subjectivity transitioned to an enquiry of the human as a whole in the wake of the destruction wrought by excessive human exceptionalism leading to a series of global environmental disasters, either seen as

immediately anthropogenic, or occurring as a long-term result of human-ecology interactions.

Consequently, posthumanism emerged as a theoretical framework to guide such a questioning of the human. As a term, posthumanism entered into cultural discourse during the 1990s; its early roots, according to Cary Wolfe, may be found at the Macy cybernetic conferences from 1946 and 1953 where systems theory was first conceived, and where the theoretical questioning of human's place "in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition" first took place (Wolfe 59).

Wolfe, arguably the leader in posthuman discourse, spends considerable time delineating the history, theoretical framework, and the discursive concerns of posthumanism is his seminal work, *What is Posthumanism?* (2010). In this text, Wolfe engages with multiple theories surrounding posthumanism, often mistakenly considered synonymous with the albeit related theory of transhumanism, which he argues has less to do with posthumanism than it has to do with humanism; transhumanism is, Wolfe asserts, "an *intensification* of humanism" (94), rather than a movement beyond the Enlightenment's ideal of human exceptionalism. Posthumanism, unlike transhumanism, deals largely with the dichotomy of human/nonhuman as mentioned in the Introduction. The framing of this dichotomy is problematic, however, because it already figures human as the privileged side of the binary, thereby affirming, in many ways, the contested duality that humanism promotes. Yet, it is such a dichotomy, whether simplistically oriented, that situates the nonhuman against, or in tension with, the human, and which remains a foundational concern of posthumanism.

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From the posthumanist perspective, humanist discourse functions as a way to interpret and construct nature simultaneously. Seen in this way, nature cannot be regarded as a space that exists organically and separately from humankind, but as a space that is necessarily self-referential and self-generative, a view fundamentally favourable to a humanistic, anthropocentric agenda where the 'natural order' is bifurcated into two separate configurations: the governing body of humankind and the exploited body of the natural world. This bifurcation, from the humanist perspective, allows the binary of human/nature to remain relatively stable in that an inextricable link exists and is required by either side of the binary; for the humanist, the supremacy of humanity is affirmed by nature's subservient existence which allegedly permits its own exploitation. Conversely, the posthuman approach does not see the relationship between human and nature as belonging to a stringent dialectic of binaries and bifurcation, but rather regards this relationship as a deep "interconnectedness of human beings and nature" (Johnson 219) that must, and does, resist the taxonomic hierarchies advocated by Enlightenment humanism.

As Rosi Braidotti neatly states in her introduction to *The Posthuman,* "the posthuman condition introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet" (2). While still maintaining a humanist approach to the question of humans' positioning on Earth, Braidotti affirms that the common referent for all species—the vital interconnection of life—is in jeopardy by the very behaviours and practices of humans since the Industrial Revolution. While the Enlightenment may have secured a sense of stability regarding the mainstay of humanity, anthropogenic effects on

the planet have quite literally deconstructed this stability, as manifested in global warming and resulting environmental disasters, not to mention more immediate calamities such as oil extraction, oil spills, hydraulic fracturing (fracking), deforestation, overfishing, poaching, and other resource developments resulting in the extinction of and habitat loss for nonhuman species.

Questioning the differences between human and nonhuman other explores the "challenges of difference and otherness more generally" (Wolfe 3), or perhaps more specifically. By investigating the phenomenological differences between human and nonhuman, the recognition of otherness exposes a more varied network of differences which, ineluctably, highlights the speciesist approach to the investigation of otherness in the first place. In much the same way that Renaissance humanism celebrated the virtuosity and glory of humanity in literature and the arts, and that Enlightenment literature celebrated human as rational and experiential, posthumanism as a literary theory seeks to reform such historically situated and obsolete discourses into one that questions human exceptionalism and, in so doing, attempts to decenter a trend of supremacism that enables speciesism and ecological degradation. In the posthuman estimation, the boon of the human is over. Thus, posthumanism sees its own theoretical model as one that subverts its predecessor and deconstructs humanism's centralization in social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental avenues.

Chapter Two:

Posthuman Cognitive Estrangement in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

The living are wrong to believe in the too-sharp distinctions they themselves have
created.

Rainer Maria Rilke, "The First Elegy," *Duino Elegies*

At first glance, Margaret Atwood's recent forays into the realm of speculative fiction
with her *MaddAddam* trilogy may seem superficial or amusing at best. However, the
constructions of humanity and nonhumanity—as well as their subsequent
deconstructions—are cautiously examined in Atwood's imaginings of a near-future and
its demise in her novel *Oryx and Crake*, the first installment of the trilogy. This novel,
which shifts between a dystopian, post-apocalyptic future in which most of humanity has
been destroyed and a time not unlike present-day North America but set some decades
into a future, sees a world dominated by advanced capitalism merged with biogenetics.
During this time, the middle class has been completely dissolved, making the ruling class
a small population of privileged elites who live in discrete compounds which house the
corporations, such as CorpSeCorps, OrganInc, HelthWyzer, at which the inhabitants are
also employed. These compounds are distinguished by a lifestyle elevated from that of
the lower-class citizens who reside in ghetto-esque perimeters of the cities. In a harkening
to Ancient Rome, these neighbourhoods are known as pleeblands, which bring to mind
the Roman organization of the general populace with *plebs* or *plebeians* as the common,
working class, and the *patricians* as the elite ruling class who governed laws and dictated
the structuring of relations within the cities. Likewise, in *Oryx and Crake*, those living

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and working within the compounds dictate the consumerist behaviours, relations, and desires of those living in the pleeblands. As such, the privileged elite in the text occupy a central positioning regarding the social relations structured by biocapitalism and the continuing degradation of the environment. This bifurcation of the social order echoes the human exceptionalist discourse of human/nonhuman that eventually becomes dismantled through Crake's bioterrorist plot.

The commodification of both humans and nonhumans is apparent in the bioengineering and hybridization of nonhuman animals for the purpose of commodity exchange with the cute, pet-like creatures Rakunks, a hybrid of skunks and racoons; for security, with Wolvogs (dogs and wolves); or for use in the production of more commodities and organ-transplants targeted for humans with Pigoons, pigs raised in laboratories which are inserted with human genetic material, described in the text as "transgenic knockout pig host[s]" (Atwood 22).[7] This commodification is also seen in the wealth of products available for consumption such as AnooYoo, targeting those in search of eternal youth; Happicuppa, a coffee corporation whose production tactics resembles the Monsanto of today;[8] and BlyssPluss, a prophylactic designed to eradicate death as a biological factor of human life: "the logic behind it was simple: eliminate the external causes of death and you were halfway there" (Atwood 293). By external causes, Crake,

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[7] Such a practice is already a part of reality today. For more information, see: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25550419.
   [8] "Happicuppa coffee was designed so that all of its beans would ripen simultaneously, and coffee could be grown on huge plantations and harvested with machines. This threw the small growers out of business and reduced both them and their labourers to starvation-level poverty" (Atwood 179). For more information, see: http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/feb/12/monsanto-sues-farmers-seed-patents

the scientific mastermind behind BlyssPluss and the subsequent catastrophe of humanity,

defines these as:

> War, which is to say, misplaced sexual energy, which we consider to be a larger factor than the economic, racial, and religious causes often cited. Contagious diseases, especially sexually transmitted ones. Overpopulation, leading Earth as we've seen in spades Earth to environmental degradation and poor nutrition. (293)

Crake, in outlining the factors which cannot exempt humanity from death, also highlights

the core issues of the reality in which he lives, namely war, corporate greed,

overpopulation, and environmental deterioration. However, it is clear, from this passage,

that Crake sees unchecked sexual activity as the fundamental root of global problems. It

is this displeasure toward sexuality that leads Crake to deliberately design his posthuman

hybrids without the desire for carnal fulfillment. In using a variety of nonhuman animals

as well as humans in his bioengineered progenitors called the Crakers, Crake challenges

human-centered, speciesist discourses that lead to the external factors which he sees as

causing endless and needless suffering throughout the world. In creating the BlyssPluss

prophylactic, which he uses in his bioterrorist plot to destroy all of humanity, and the

Crakers, Crake fundamentally critiques the decadent plenitude of humanity. Moreover,

with the creation of the Crakers, Crake likewise concedes a vital interconnectedness of

the biosphere, which it requires to sustain itself. However, the text does not align its own

criticism of human exceptionalism with Crake's; *Oryx and Crake* is careful to question

the mediation of science with nature as misguided anthropocentric hubris which, when

combined with corporate capitalism, adversely functions to implicate and exploit

nonhuman others, potentially leading to its own inadvertent decentering of humanity and

the destruction of all life.

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Atwood uses speculative fiction to offer a vision of a potential future and to critique current social and scientific practices. The commodification of both humans and nonhumans within *Oryx and Crake* couches a critique of value-based relations that are dependent on consumption and exchange, allowing for a further criticism of advanced capitalism and the resulting commodification of all forms of life. Furthermore, Atwood's text illustrates the posthuman position interconnectedness of species, best demonstrated by the Crakers' physical occupation of the slash that resides between human and nonhuman, as a way to expound the dangers of discourses that privilege singularity and which promote exceptionalism as a justified and ethical position. *Oryx and Crake* is both cautionary—regarding the continuity of human exceptionalism despite the dire and obvious consequences apparent in the world—as well as optimistic. By literally destabilizing the rhetoric of the human in destroying humanity, Crake endeavours towards an ecological and social renewal of the world by bequeathing the docile posthuman hybrids as stewards of the decimated planet. In ridding Earth of humanity, Crake affords the planet a possibility at rejuvenation, however nefarious this attempt is. The Crakers emphasize the essential nonhumanity at the root of all life, including humans, and are, in fact, embodiments of both humanity and nonhumanity alike, ultimately functioning as physical figurations of the cartographies of plurality which represents posthumanism. Rosi Braidotti defines posthuman figurations as "expression[s] of alternative representations of the subject as a dynamic non-unitary subjectivity; it is the dramatization of processes of *becoming* … which defy the established modes of theoretical representation" (Braidotti 164, emphasis added). While Crake is responsible for the literal decentering of humanity in *Oryx and Crake*, the Crakers potentiate the

conceptual decentering of the human as they necessarily resist the exceptionalist

singularity that is central to anthropocentrism, and are instead recognized by their origins

as being multiple and interconnected. Likewise, Jimmy/Snowman, the sole witness to

Crake's destruction, generates his own posthuman awareness that consciously expands

into the post-catastrophic world and within his own reflections of misguided

anthropocentrism. In being situated in the complex dialogue between anthropocentric

understandings of humanity and posthuman discourses, *Oryx and Crake* literalizes the

posthuman ethos through the speculative strategy of cognitive estrangement providing

both alternative visions of a potential future endangered by unchecked exceptionalist

hubris, and a creative disruption of present attitudes regarding human exceptionalism

while affirming a transition to philosophies of interconnectedness and what Braidotti

terms "multiple belongings" (Braidotti 49).

Cognitive estrangement is best understood through the works of Darko Suvin,

who began theorizing on science fiction in the 1970's, following his emigration from

Yugoslavia to Canada, where he discovered the similarities between popular science

fiction and the critical theories of Russian formalism. In his critical essay, "On the

Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," Suvin argues that science fiction is, what he terms,

"the literature of cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 372), a genre whose qualities are "the

presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is

an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (375). By

estrangement, Suvin recalls the ideas of Viktor Shklovsky, a proponent of the Russian

formalist movement of the early twentieth century, and Bertolt Brecht, the famous

German poet and playwright, whose concepts *ostranenie* and *Verfremdungseffekt*

respectively, outline a poetics to augment the familiar, as an artistic device, within a mode of unfamiliarity or strangeness. In Shklovsky's essay, "Art as Technique," he contends that *ostranenie,* or estrangement, in a work of art operates to slow perception so that the "object is perceived not in its extension in space, but … in its continuity" (Shklovsky 783), in other words, to increase and prolong the pleasurable experience of art. For Shklovsky, and for Suvin as well, "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult ... *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important*" (778). Likewise drawing from Shklovsky, Brecht defines *Verfremdungseffekt* as follows: "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Brecht, as quoted in Suvin 374). While Suvin agrees that art makes unfamiliar the familiar, he disagrees with Shklovsky's axiom that the object lacks importance; Suvin sees art as bearing significant social importance and responsibility. Shklovsky sees estrangement as solely an artistic device, while Suvin regards it more politically. By imparting the sensation of things, as Shklovsky puts in, Suvin feels that the continuity of the object resides in both its artistic rendition as well as its relevance to actuality, much like Brecht who saw estrangement as both cognitive and creative: "one cannot simply exclaim that such an attitude pertains to science and not to art. Why should not art, in its own way, try to serve the social task of mastering Life?" (Brecht, as quoted in Suvin 374). In seeking to represent life, Brecht understood that any representation, regardless of its artistic rendering, remains bound in political discourse as art serves to perceive social norms at a critical distance.

Suvin's concept of "cognitiveness," when paired with estrangement, means a reflection of reality as a mimetic or realistic device, as well as a reflection *on* reality as well: "It implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment" (377). By making strange the environment, the fiction of cognitive estrangement encourages a critical perception of reality, in which doubt and questioning come into play. As such, science fiction has transitioned into "the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and—most importantly—a mapping of possible alternatives" (378). Such cartographic possibilities of science fiction likewise belong to the genre of speculative fiction that, perhaps more effectively than current science fiction, employs defamiliarization to, in Brecht's words, serve the social task of mastering life.

Atwood describes her *MaddAdam* series as belonging to the genre of fiction that explores "another kind of 'other world'—our own planet in a future" (Atwood 5). This is evident by one of the epigraphs she includes at the beginning of *Oryx and Crake* from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*: "I could perhaps like others have astonished you with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform you, and not to amuse you" (Atwood epigraph). That both authors are being tongue-in-cheek is evident; however, the truth—not to be confused with the reality—of such a statement becomes apparent, as the satirical exposes folly. Atwood clarifies her reasoning behind situating the *MaddAddam* world as *a* future rather than *the* future; "the future is unknown," she writes, "from the moment *now*, an infinite number of roads lead away to 'the future,'

each heading in different directions" (5). Atwood does not claim oracular divinations in her vision of a potential future as illustrated in *Oryx and Crake*; rather, she simply illustrates one possibility of many given the direction current biotechnologies are heading. Atwood's practice is fundamentally posthuman. Braidotti writes that the posthuman ethic not only requires new configurations of humanity, but likewise requires "affirmative politics" to achieve this end: "Affirmative politics combines critique with creativity in the pursuit of alternative visions and projects" (Braidotti 54). Consequently, Atwood's speculative practice echoes Braidotti's encouragement that posthumanism must "undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times. To meet this task, new conceptual creativity is needed" (54). This conceptual creativity informs the spirit of *Oryx and Crake*, as new cartographies of multiplicity are charted, both in terms of future-as-imagined, and the multiple belongings of species.

Additionally, speculative fiction denotes narratives that, while portraying fantastical or technologically advanced alternative realities, offer new critical frameworks with which to engage in present realities (Booker 3). In response to political, social, or environmental changes, speculative fiction is able to launch sophisticated critiques against the world by defamiliarizing it—in other words, by using cognitive estrangement—to imagine a world different in many ways, but which remains familiar in some approximations to the present. However, this estrangement is not totalizing; while readers of this genre apprehend the alternative world in which they are creatively engaged, they simultaneously acknowledge their own world and the differences between the two. Suvin sees this affirmative act as fundamentally political in nature as readers are forced to examine and question the differences and assumptions of their own world

(Booker 5). With the defamiliarization of speculative fiction, reality is mediated by critical engagement that inevitably challenges existing conditions and normative attitudes regarding these. Such a genre is ultimately utopian for Suvin; it presents the radical potential for alternatives in a world dominated by capitalististic disenfranchisement and political disillusionment (5). While all literary texts contain some degree of cognitive estrangement, as narratives may be rooted in past or present realities with fictional embellishments, only science and speculative fictions make cognitive estrangement a dominant characteristic and objective of the mode (8).

Katherine V. Snyder refers to the cognitive estrangement of speculative fiction as a kind of double consciousness, which is emphasized especially in dystopian narratives. While Suvin sees science fiction as fundamentally utopian, dystopian speculative fiction offers what "already exists and makes an imaginative leap into the future, following current sociocultural, political, or scientific developments to their potentially devastating conclusions" (Snyder 470), as it accomplished quite precisely in *Oryx and Crake*. However, while dystopian texts may appear woefully pessimistic throughout, they too remain hopeful at the core; the literary treatment of an alternative and devastated future exposes the possibilities of what may occur as well as cautionary messages on how to avoid such calamitous outcomes. In linking present realities to portrayed futures, speculative fiction engages in a critical dialogue of the discourses that dominate scientific, technological, and political activities; double consciousness of the two worlds suggests how present activities may lead to the dystopia of an alternative future, thereby evoking the critique contained within the text. Double consciousness, Snyder suggests, sustains the cautionary message contained within the narrative:

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> We must see the imagined future in our actual present and also recognize the difference between now and the future-as-imagined. Thus, the reader of such fiction must sustain a kind of double consciousness with respect to the fictionality of the world portrayed and to its potential as our world's future. (470)

If the status quo continues with respect to present technological, socio-economical, environmental, and/or climatological circumstances, dystopian speculative fiction communicate that the future may come to resemble the ravaged world imagined within the text.

For Margaret Atwood, speculative fiction simply refers to "*things that really could happen* but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books" (Atwood 6, emphasis added). The affirmation of alternative and plausible potentials demonstrates the speculative nature of *Oryx and Crake,* as the events occurring within the text may also see a future reality on Earth. While she states that her fictional depiction of a post-apocalyptic world is speculative rather than scientific, Atwood also maintains a certain optimism for the future in general: "I'm looking at possible futures, not inevitable ones" (Atwood, "Perfect Storms"). Consequently, while Atwood's speculative fiction may be regarded as cautionary rather than prophetic in its description of a doomed future, the prophecy remains ineluctably bound within the moral imperative of *Oryx and Crake*, which seeks to interrupt the exceptionalist discourse that threatens the possibility for a sustainable and ethical future. Ursula K. LeGuin describes Atwood's speculative practice, in her review of *The Year of the Flood*, the sequel to *Oryx and Crake,* as "extrapolat[ing] imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire" (LeGuin, "*The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood"). Le Guin's comment

strikes true with the Swift epigraph; in using the "simple manner" of speculative fiction, Atwood plainly provides a text that is rife with the ethical imperatives of posthumanism.

This moral beseechment is linked to a related neologism of hers: *ustopia.* In her collection of essays on science fiction, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination,* Atwood uses *ustopia*—by melding *utopia* and *dystopia*—to describe "the perfect imagined community and its opposite" as each, she writes, "contains a latent version of the other" (Atwood 67). She defines dystopia quite simply: "they are Great Bad Places rather than Great Good Places and are characterized by suffering, tyranny, and oppression of all kinds" (85). But Atwood acknowledges that the differences between utopias and dystopias are not quite so clear cut. Rather, there is a mutual contamination of the two, leading to what Atwood terms *ustopia*: "within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia" (85). Although unaddressed in her essay, the pronoun *us* located within *ustopia* is unavoidably apparent, as it demonstrates a recognition of the vital interconnectedness of the planet, in which all life is both implicit and complicit. By labelling the created environments as us*topian*—an ambiguously Great Good/Bad Place—Atwood alludes to the ethical accountability required for the perpetuation of sustainable futures. In relegating her post-apocalyptic narratives to speculative and ustopian genres, Atwood ensures that her texts functions as tools for mobilization against passivity and inaction in a time that demands political and ecological engagement. Atwood participates in the social and cultural debates regarding genetic engineering by using the speculative mode to criticize current biotechnological practices and to provide, J. Brooks Bouson writes, "a scathing indictment of our current 'gene rush'" (Bouson 140). Included in this indictment is also a subtle criticism of present industrial practices

that ignore the dangers of climate change, despite the many countries' and organizations'

evidence to support its reality. Atwood demonstrates one possible result of climate

change on the planet, which, of the human population, affects primarily the impoverished

and those living in coastal regions:

> the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast
> tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the mid-continental plains regions
> went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes, and meat became
> harder to come by. (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 24).

This is not far from the current reality, and such moments of cognitive estrangement

punctuate the text. As the permafrost in reality continues to melt at a rapidly increasing

pace, and droughts, floods, and other natural disasters continue with more frequency, it is

impossible to ignore the double consciousness at work in the text, which demonstrates

that not even a fictional future is safe from the current dangers of climate change and the

resulting global ecological crises that will ensue. The text also highlights possible social

ramifications of climate change, which will increasingly fragment social relations,

including cultural and familial bonds. Resulting from rampant environmental devastation

is an inevitable widening of the global social gap, leading to an increase in poverty. This

is articulated by Oryx, the love interest of both Crake and Jimmy/Snowman, a woman

they believe to have discovered as adolescents when she was a child on HottTotts, a child

pornography website. Oryx provides experiential testament of climate change, which she

casually mentions as the reason she is sold into sex trafficking. Oryx was born into abject

poverty in an undisclosed village in Southeast Asia, which Oryx herself could not

remember: "A village in Indonesia, or else Myanmar? Not those, said Oryx, though she

couldn't be sure … Vietnam? Jimmy guessed. Cambodia? Oryx looked down at her

hands … It didn't matter" (115). As a result of the global environmental problems, geographic and ancestral locations cease to bear significant relevance to personal subjectivity as these locations are already destroyed and lacking in relevance to culture; in other words, the tie to the land is broken through climate change, and historical roots cease to bear significance.

Following the death of her father, the little financial stability afforded Oryx's family disappeared, and in Oryx's village it was not uncommon for children to be sold to so-called business executives, who claimed to be offering the children long-term employment opportunities and essential skills development: "In the village it was not called 'selling,' this transaction. The talk about it implied apprenticeship. The children were being trained to earn their living in the wide world: this was the gloss put on it. Besides, if they stayed where they were, what was there for them to do?" (116). This business offered the children, mostly female children, the opportunity for a life more plentiful than what little was granted by the village, and was not deemed criminal or illegal by any means, primarily due to desperation. In a brief narrative regarding her past, Oryx illustrates the economic destabilization resulting from the change in weather, and the tenuousness of the social structure as a corollary of such factors:

> This man wasn't regarded as a criminal of any sort, but as an honourable businessman who didn't cheat, or not much, and who paid in cash. Therefore he was treated with respect and shown hospitality, because no one in the village wanted to get on his bad side. What if he ceased to visit? … He was the villager's bank, their insurance policy … And he had been needed more and more often, because the weather has become so strange and could no longer be predicted – too much rain or not enough, too much wind, too much heat – and the crops were suffering. (117-118)

The critical decrease in crop yields leading to the destruction of any agricultural

capabilities mirrors already occurring agricultural crises in many areas of the developing

world.[9] The projection of possible outcomes is encapsulated by the inclusion of such

details, which envision how the geographically and culturally marginalized may endure

and the lengths some may go to ensure a safe future for themselves or their children.

Economic destabilization and a fragile social structure disturb normative relations, seen

by Oryx's past and her initiation into self-commodification in the global sex trade,

leading to the dissolution of social relations into ones dependent on commodity

exchange.

The critique of commodified relationships, whether personal, scientific, or

corporate, is also initiated by Jimmy's mother prior to her disappearance and subsequent

execution. In a discussion with Jimmy's father who is celebrating the successful

implantation and growth of human neo-cortex tissue in a pigoon, Jimmy's mother

responds to him: "You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's …

sacrilegious" (57). Skeptical of the ethical implications of the mediation of nature and

science, Jimmy's mother cannot adapt to the complacency of a lifestyle dominated by

consumerism and bio-corporate expansionism; unable to reconcile her radical views, she

escapes the compounds and abandons both Jimmy and his father, taking Jimmy's pet

rakunk, Killer, with her. In a note written to Jimmy, he has little patience attempting to

interpret her incompatible views, using gibberish to assess, what he considers, the

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[9] For more information, see:
http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/mar/31/climate-change-poor-suffer-most-un-report

meaninglessness of the note, only taking into account her departure and the loss of his

pet:

> Dear Jimmy, it said. Blah blah blah, suffered with conscience long enough, blah
> blah blah, no longer participate in a lifestyle that is not only meaningless in itself
> but blah blah blah. She knew that when Jimmy was old enough to consider the
> implications of blah blah, he would agree with her and understand … P.S., she'd
> said. I have taken Killer with me to liberate her; as I know she will be happier
> living a wild, free life in the forest. (61)

The *blah blahs* function to restrict the information regarding the classified operations of

the compounds, though it is already evident by the dialogue between Jimmy's parents

that the biogenetic activity is nefarious and unethical, as they limit the rights of the

animals. Though the discussion of animal rights is fairly minimal throughout the text,

Jimmy's mother introduces the critique of the scientific mediation of nature for the

benefit of humanity, and demonstrates the problematic of the commodification of

nonhuman animals. She does this by voicing her concern over the practices of animal use

and by releasing the hybrid animal to provide it with the semblance of a natural

nonhuman life in the wild. Additionally, the tension between Jimmy's parents opens the

discussion regarding the general apathy of humanity pre-catastrophe, during which most

people are concerned with immediate consumer gratification without thoughts for long-

term sustainability, despite the ironic desire for immortality evidenced by the popularity

of BlyssPluss. However, this attitude is politically-sanctioned and, indeed, any sentiment

to the contrary is considered treasonous and incompatible with the predominant

ideologies, expressed by Jimmy's regular interrogations by CorpSeCorps to determine his

mother's whereabouts, and later, her eventual execution.

Crake discovers that her execution is attributed to anti-government activity, such as violent demonstrations and protests, and "membership in a banned organization, hampering the dissemination of commercial productions, [and] treasonable crimes against society" (286); however, she is already a target of political scrutiny immediately following her escape from the compounds. Because traditional governments had collapsed in favour of the extensive privatization of corporations, which, in successfully gaining control of all capitalist ventures have likewise taken control of politics and social activity, Jimmy's mother's protests were fundamentally anti-capitalistic as well as anti-governmental. In the televised execution, Jimmy's mother addresses him: "*Goodbye. Remember Killer. I love you. Don't let me down*" (258), further confusing him and disturbing his own perception of reality, in which he sees "everything in his life [as] temporary and ungrounded. Language itself had lost its solidity; it had become thin, contingent, slippery" (260). Her message to Jimmy discloses a double meaning; on one hand, Jimmy's mother reminds him of her abandonment and her theft of his pet, yet on the other, she imparts a lesson unto him to re-interpret the social reality in which he participates, a reality which dangerously oversteps the boundary between science and nature, and takes for granted that it does so.

Crake sees the utility in Jimmy's weakened grasp on reality and his confused relationship with his mother as a result of her dying and cautionary words, and he elects Jimmy/Snowman to be the final purveyor of the destruction of humanity resulting from the systemic and imposed self-destruction that Jimmy's mother, like Crake, warns against. Despite Jimmy's erratic relationship with his mother, she offers a destabilized

view of humanity in general, which prepares Jimmy/Snowman for his survival post-

catastrophe, while imparting knowledge unto the posthuman survivors, the Crakers.

Humanity is not so highly regarded in the pre-catastrophe world. Jimmy's former

roommates, artists, acknowledge the trends of human exceptionalism as enacting

dangerous exploitation on and within the world:

> Human society, they claimed, was a sort of monster, its main by-products being corpses and rubble. It never learned, it made the same cretinous mistakes over and over, trading short-term gain for long-term pain. It was like a giant slug eating its way relentlessly through all the other bioforms on the planet, grinding up life on earth and shitting out the backside in the form of pieces of manufactured and soon-to-be-obsolete plastic junk. (243).

The response to the growing issue of human exceptionalism is marked by an inclusion of

the discussion of nonhuman species, and the impact of human lifestyles on the

environment as a whole. That they are artists, a group that Crake dismisses, signals a

creative reconceptualization of humanity that is already occurring around the time Crake

is devising a plan to destroy humanity. If the human population were given a chance to

employ in a practical way a more sophisticated theoretical framework, such as

posthumanism itself, in relation to other creative alternatives, the pandemic may not have

been required at all. However, Crake holds no faith in the potential of art, seeing it as

having only a biological purpose directly related to the need for sexual gratification:

> The male frog, in mating season … makes as much noise as it can. The females are attracted to the male frog with the biggest, deepest voice because it suggests a more powerful frog, one with superior genes. Small frogs – it's been documented – discover that is they position themselves in empty drainpipes, the pipe acts as a voice amplifier, and the small frog appears much larger than it is … So that's what art is, for the artist … An empty drainpipe. An amplifier. A stab at getting laid. (168).

Like Jimmy's mother, Crake finds extreme dissatisfaction in humanity, which he sees as akin to nonhuman, though with the same potential for the misuse of power:

> Monkey brains, had been Crake's opinion [of humanity]. Monkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fondle, measure, improve, trash, discard – all hooked up to monkey brains, an advanced model of monkey brains, but monkey brains all the same. Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity, despite the large amount of it he himself possessed. (99)

By his own analysis, Jimmy feels that Crake distances himself from his own definition of humanity, yet Crake includes himself within his regard for humanity; in much the same way that primates experiment and manipulate objects, Crake recognizes his own desires to experiment similarly with humanity as a whole, making him not much different from nonhuman animals either. However, he uses his human ingenuity to devise a plot against humanity in order to prevent the impending environmental and economic cataclysms on the horizon.

Inspired by the computer game Jimmy and Crake played as adolescents, *Extinctathon*, Crake inverts the scientifically imperialist practices of the reigning corporate government which controls and exploits nature (Bouson 141). Crake opts instead to exploit humanity through the artful commodification of BlyssPluss, marketed as rendering human mortality obsolete, which he uses as the chief ingredient in ridding the planet of humans. His mass bioterrorist scheme demonstrates his intense displeasure toward humanity, additionally evidenced by his creation of the human-like hybrids, the Crakers, who inhabit the desiccated planet following the elimination of humanity. The Crakers are afforded nonhuman survival instincts and, while possessing the ability to communicate via human language, they are allegedly not instilled with the capacity for abstract or critical thinking; however, they do begin to question their own identities and

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place within their environment, leading to a development of subjectivity that is depicted as an adaptive behaviour resulting from their interactions with Jimmy/Snowman and their apparently destroyed environment. Ultimately, however, while the Crakers begin as the ideal figurations of posthuman subjects, they, too, succumb to a questioning of their selves in the midst of a destroyed and empty landscape filled with bioengineered nonhuman hybrid animals and a dying Jimmy/Snowman whose cryptic tales betray knowledge of a world beyond what the Crakers currently see and understand.

Despite their resemblance to humans, the Crakers are composed of genetic information of other nonhuman species, and occupy a loose relation to humanity in general. Jimmy/Snowman describes them physically as they surround him during one exchange:

> The people move close, men and women both, gathering around, their green eyes luminescent in the semi-darkness, just like the rabbit: same jellyfish gene. Sitting all together like this, they smell like a crateful of citrus fruit – an added feature on the part of Crake, who'd thought those chemicals would ward off mosquitoes. (102)

The Crakers are genetically imbued with characteristics belonging to a variety of nonhuman animals, providing them with the advantages for survival in their harsh environment. They are carefully bred to include deliberate adaptations resulting from thousands of years of evolution to arrive at a humanoid creature similar to humanity in its outward appearance but more particularly attuned to the nonhuman instinctual behaviours and ceremonies.

As for their cultural attitudes, the capacities for discrimination, racism, and the tendency towards generating hierarchies have been bred out of them in order to minimize the destructive practices that continue to plague humankind. With respect to their diets,

they subsist on a random array of wild vegetation, including, as well, their nutrient-rich

feces, an adaptive trait Crake instilled to prevent the exploitation of nature or any

eventual systematic attempt at agriculture that would likewise exploit nature.

Fundamentally, the Crakers are created as already completely adapted, both biologically,

as well as socially, to their environment:

> There were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create
> houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing. They would have no need
> to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money. Best
> of all, they recycled their own excrement. (102)

Implicit in his displeasure toward "harmful symbolisms" is Crake's resentment of

symbolic or abstract language, which Crake sees as potentiating metaphysical

ruminations divorced from material reality and, ultimately, the ability to survive.

Included within this elimination of language is a likewise removal of anthropological

culture; in removing the desire to participate in ceremonies and rituals from their

genetical material, Crake omits a very crucial element that some may argue is the only

redeemable quality of humanity. While the Crakers maintain a culture, it is fundamentally

nonhuman, which is to say it remains materially bound to its environment and the need to

survive. Any cultural knowledge transmitted between and among the Crakers deals with

the concrete and physical reality, not with abstractions or symbolic representations.

Crake's reasoning for this is largely due to what he considers the related issues of human

sexual behaviour, which he sees as responsible for innumerable violations that grow out

of abstractions and harmful symbolisms, such as power and hierarchy (Atwood 165).

Having dispensed with sexual activity as nothing more than carnal pleasure in his

posthumans, the Crakers mate only when biologically necessary rather than for

gratification: "Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man" (305). His inventions—BlyssPluss as well as the Crakers—are designed to "put a stop to haphazard reproduction" (304), which places an enormous burden on the Earth's resources and the general health of the global human and nonhuman population. By simplifying their sexual practices to mate only for reproductive purposes and by eliminating the neural complexes that generate hierarchies, Crake attempts to create a sustainable future for the Crakers, though the Crakers are ignorant of any threat posed either to them or their environment. According to Crake: "In fact, there would never be anything for these people to inherit, there would be no family trees, no marriages, and no divorces" (305). Essentially, no humanist culture that verifies identity or subjectivity, as it has been deemed redundant by Crake, would exist among the Crakers.

Prior to the Crakers' intercourse, the female release a pheromone that indicates to the males that she is ready for copulation, to which the males respond accordingly. For the Crakers, "there's no more unrequited love … no more thwarted lust; no more shadow between the desire and the act" (165); there is only the biological response between the release of pheromones and the act to follow. Because sex among the Crakers is only a biological necessity, and because the need for abstract symbolisms, such as power are intentionally removed from their hardwiring, the associated problems of unchecked sexual activity are also eliminated: "No more *No means yes* … No more prostitution, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape" (165). Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement is again here at work in this passage, as Atwood is openly referring to the existing sexual assaults that rampantly continue throughout the world and presents an alternative vision

of a world where such sexual abuses do not exist. Moreover, the critique is not against

human sexual behaviour in general but the discourse of power that often accompanies it

and which enables such abuses.

Fundamentally, Crake's inspiration for the Crakers is the antithesis of humanity;

the traits he deems as responsible for, as Ralph Pordzick puts it, "the misery of humanity"

(153) are bred out, namely that of sexual desire:

> There'll be the standard quintuplet, four men and the woman in heat. Her condition
> will be obvious to all from the bright-blue colour of her buttocks and abdomen
> Earth a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons, with a contribution
> from the expandable chromosphores of the octopus. (164)

Crake's decision that intercourse among the Crakers will be biologically scheduled offers

a tidy solution to the issue of overpopulation and to avoid the emotional and

psychological repercussions of human sexual activity, demonstrated by

Jimmy/Snowman's emotionally fragile, yet sexually industrious relationships. The sexual

act among the Crakers is akin to a variety of nonhuman mating rituals, complete with

courtship performances during which the female chooses the most eligible mates with

whom to copulate:

> Courtship begins at the first whiff, the first faint blush of azure, with the males
> presenting flowers to the females Earth just as male penguins present round stones,
> said Crake, or as the male silverfish presents a sperm packet. At the same time they
> indulge in musical outbursts, like songbirds. Their penises turn bright blue to match
> the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number,
> erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the
> singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From
> amongst the floral tributes the female choose four flowers, and the sexual ardour of
> the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left.
> Then, when the blue of her abdomen has reach its deepest shade, the female and her
> quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her
> blue colouring fades. And that is that. (165)

The hybridization of courtship rituals of penguins, silverfish, songbirds, and crabs suggests that Crake sees the sexual activities of nonhuman animals as less barbaric than the sexual activities of humans, which are mediated by psychological impulses rather than for biological progenation. As such, the frustrations that accompany human sexual behaviour are eliminated, leaving the species always perfectly adjusted and satisfied. This is juxtaposed by Jimmy's sex life, which is plagued by sexual frustration, excessive desires, and lack of fulfillment, and which Crake ridicules, believing Jimmy's libido to be responsible for his general malaise. While Crake sees the Crakers as the pinnacle of human evolution, he likewise dismisses qualities vital to humanity, such as pleasure and fulfillment; all the redeemable qualities of humankind, except for their physical attributes, are diminished in the Crakers to avoid calamitous outcomes for their race, yet this results in a kind of minimization of the posthuman ethic, which does not seek to diminish human qualities, but the exceptionalist attitudes which endanger nonhumanity and nature. As such, while Crake's act to create his posthuman hybrids is an attempt to move beyond human exceptionalism, it fundamentally fails, not so much in its intentional genetic interconnection with nonhuman species, but in the almost complete diminishment of humanity in the Crakers.

Ralph Pordzick, in his essay, "The Posthuman Future of Man: Anthropocentrism and the Other of Technology in Anglo-American Science Fiction," writes that while the Crakers appear human and are "perfectly adapted to their environment," they remain "emotionally and mentally retarded" (153), which Crake sees as an advantage in the survival of their hybrid species; a fundamental lack of sentimentality and frustrations allows the Crakers to be entirely suited and satisfied with their basic existences;

ontological or existential queries do not factor into their quotidian operations. This is

largely due to their limitations of language as designed by Crake, who programs the

Crakers language as functioning only for the reflection of an immediate and empirical

reality. Upon first seeing the Crakers, Jimmy asks Crake if they speak:

> "Of course they can speak," said Crake. "When they have something they want to say."
> "Do they make jokes?"
> "Not as such," said Crake. "For jokes you need a certain edge, a little malice. It took a lot of trial and error and we're still testing, but I think we've managed to do away with jokes." (306)

The multiple uses of language are allegedly done away with in the Crakers. Crake's

trivial view of human language as only "a vehicle to transport notions already shaped in

the mind" (Pordzick 153) fails to see that language is used to mediate and generate

realities; by limiting language's potential to assess and represent reality, reality itself

becomes limited. However, the linguistic introduction of new ideas with their discussions

with Jimmy/Snowman allows for an expansion of the Crakers' realities, one that includes

the harmful symbolisms Crake warns against, such as their deification of both Crake and

Oryx, and the abstract representations of Jimmy/Snowman himself. As Jimmy/Snowman

returns to the village from his journey to the pleeblands, he sees the Crakers partaking in

an activity he has never witnessed before:

> As he approaches the village, he hears an unusual sound – an odd crooning, high voices and deep ones, men's and women's both – harmonious, two-noted. It isn't singing, it's more like chanting … What's the thing – the statue, or scarecrow, or whatever it is? It has a head, and a ragged cloth body. It has a face of sorts – one pebble eye, one black one, a jar lid it looks like … Now they've seen him …
> "Snowman! Snowman! … You are back with us! … We made a picture of you, to help us send out our voices to you." (360-361)

Though Crake believes he has bred out the use of symbolic language, he forgets that

language itself is always already symbolic and representative of abstract notions vaguely

related to reality. The Crakers' ability to recall material existences, such as

Jimmy/Snowman's, in an abstract and symbolic manner through their creation of an

effigy that resembles him conveys their understanding of Jimmy/Snowman's absence

from them, and thus they begin to understand the linguistic and semantic differences

between a material presence reality and its lack once that materiality has been removed

from their vision:

> In their bodies, in their enhanced, reprogrammed biology, [the Crakers] may be post-, trans-, or even superhuman; but they are still subject to the laws of language and meaning production as charted and realized in their minds. They are symbolic beings escaping the bioscientific legacy of their maker through their discovery of the structure of pattern-making and of "absence" (or lack) as a first cause to introduce a difference "that matters." (Pordzick 156)

Without realizing that the Crakers derive also from a system of symbolic thinking, Crake

fails to consider that their ability to use language is also dependent on the environment

they live in and changeability that occurs within it; for each change—for each

difference—necessitates new ways to express and mediate this change within language.

The main issue for Crake is not just the development of more abstract language,

but the symbolic structures to which such thinking leads:

> *Watch out for art,* Crake used to say. *As soon as they start doing art we're in trouble.* Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake's view. Next they'd be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings and then slavery and war. (361)

Here, Crake seems to be suggesting that the symbolic thinking of art causes the kinds of

destruction listed. As Bouson writes, Crake "tries to eliminate art believing that symbolic

thinking would lead to the downfall of his hominids" (150), yet non-symbolic thinking,

science, is the mechanism used to destroy the world. However, making such a claim rejects his own employment of symbolic thinking as fundamentally creative; for Crake, the symbolic thinking involved in art and science are two different kinds entirely. But Crake's use of symbolism is instrumental in his creation of the global pandemic, responsible for wiping out the majority of the human population save for Jimmy/Snowman, and the remaining humans who Snowman stumbles upon at the end of the text; such a vision, fundamentally scientific in nature, requires a thoughtful and creative imagining in order to carry out the preliminary plans to see its fruition. Yet Crake regards art and language's symbolism as being far greater in its dangerous potentials due the tendency to place art and science in mutual opposition of each other. Crake's failure to acknowledge the similar dangerous binary that allowed for the systemic exploitation of nature as also at work in the binary of art/science prevents him from anticipating the potential of the posthuman ethic that necessitates a creative reimagining of the human condition to include a recognition of the essential connection among all species. Despite his allegations against art, Crake fundamentally employs it to create his posthuman-hybrids, thereby aligning himself with the posthuman ethic: "Conceptual creativity is simply unimaginable without some visionary fuel" (Braidotti 192). The Crakers are only created through the symbolism of the posthuman; by seeing the empirical and material reality of climate change and capitalistic greed, Crake imagines an alternative reality, thereby also employing cognitive estrangement to conjure solutions for a world ravaged by human exceptionalism. In completely doing away with human exceptionalism, Crake fails to acknowledge the power of language to maintain a continuity to human values. Moreover, he forgets the changeable power of nature; while

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he may have removed the capacity for art-making, he has not removed the capacity for the Crakers' eventual adaptations, which includes the ability to become abstract and symbolic, thereby paving the way for the adoption of new structures of thought.

Any kind of language, regardless its symbolic or concrete value, always provides additional information about an environment, a condition, the possibility for danger, and so on. Pordzick describes language as "a relay system that incorporates input, output, feedback, and even noise. It is part and parcel of humanity's biological materiality, deployed to augment its perspectives and investigate and define its environmental limits" (Pordzick 155). Crake's decision to create his posthuman hybrids in the shape of humans who contain human linguistic abilities already assumes that the use of language will evolve to include cultural transmission (which simply means the ability to disseminate information trans-generationally within a species) even though he believes he has dispensed with such a capacity. Their use of language connects them back to humanity, retaining the human quality of consciousness and self-reflection, but also maintains a vision of relationality and mutual interdependence.

Though Crake creates his posthuman-hybrids as the final inhabitants of the Earth, Crake also unknowingly transforms Jimmy/Snowman's anthropocentric subjectivity to one that is aware of the interconnection among species. Through the destruction of humanity, Snowman expands his awareness and embodies the posthuman ethic, unlike the Crakers who remain unconscious of their fundamental relationship to all species, as he recognizes how finely connected life is and his own responsibility in preserving these matrices. Resembling the final phrase Jimmy's mother uttered before her execution, Crake makes a statement to emphasize Jimmy's eventual responsibility, one that requires

a recognition of how easily the balance tips when ethical accountability is

disregarded. Braidotti describes the process of becoming posthuman as

> a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self. (Braidotti 193)

In renaming himself Snowman, Jimmy/Snowman participates in the redefinition Braidotti

outlines; the consequence of the catastrophe forces him to reconceptualize his own

subjective attachment to the world he belonged to. The territorial space of the post-

catastrophic world has destroyed urbanity to make way for a space of ecological

cohabitation with "eco-others" (193), instead of the hubristic exceptionalism that

dominated the world pre-catastrophe. In this new world, the posthuman ethic is "an act of

unfolding the self onto the world, while enfolding the world within" (193). Because the

Crakers are still in their subjective infancy, their ability to recognize their own selfhood

and multiplicity in relation to their environment falls short of the posthuman imperative;

but Jimmy/Snowman's traumatic loss of his previous life, in combination with his role as

a neo-Adamic figure for the Crakers, allows him to extend a posthuman subjectivity onto

the Crakers, while simultaneously reflecting on his own interconnection to the events that

culminated to lead him to his present condition.

Crake's lack of symbolic foresight prevents him from examining how cultural

transmission occurs, even among nonhuman species. Crake's decision to breed out the

capacity to assemble culture within their social organization fails in the Crakers; by

failing to recognize that the nonhuman animals he used in the creation of the Crakers also

have unique cultural capacities, and that by carefully embedding these traits within his

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creations, he inadvertently instilled the ability to foster culture. Indeed, any species that have strong social bonds, complex communication abilities, as well as self- and group awareness also have the ability to form culture and transmit knowledge trans-generationally. By refusing to acknowledge that these characteristics belong to a myriad of other nonhuman species, Crake denies a central nonhuman quality belonging to humans as well: that culture does not belong wholly to humanity. Simultaneously, however, in Crake's peculiar dismissal of the Crakers' abilities to become culturally aware, Crake succeeds in creating a species accurately described as the posthuman, that creature which accedes an interconnectedness to all forms of life, bridging the gap between human and nonhuman, and occupying the slash that separates the in the anthropocentric binary of human/nonhuman.

Cary Wolfe states that "the human is achieved by escaping or repressing its animal origins" (Wolfe Loc 91), and indeed the creation and mass-marketing of BlyssPluss and the eventual end of humanity affirms the dominant human exceptionalist position; in opting for virtual immortality, humanity chooses to represses its animal origins and the biological necessity for death. On the other hand, the Crakers are naturally immortal. Though they die at the age of the thirty without warning, they lack the overall fear of death: "'Immortality,' said Crake, 'is a concept. If you take 'mortality' as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of, then 'immortality,' is the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal. Edit out the fear, and you'll be [immortal]" (303). The posthuman Crakers, alternatively, are not achieved by escaping or repressing their human origins, as their human and nonhuman qualities occurring in mutual operation and cooperation within their bodies. In removing their fear of death, the Crakers embrace

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their animality unconcerned with exceptionalist existentialism of humanity. The Crakers literalize the posthuman imperative for new configurations of the human, while the destruction of humanity literalizes the rhetoric of human exceptionalism through the biogenetic pandemic Crake creates.

Daphne Grace acknowledges that Atwood, in *Oryx and Crake,* offers a posthuman vision for contemporary human/nonhuman rhetoric, "a challenging new map of humanity [which] contributes to the crucial debate on what it means to be human in a post-human world" (Grace 42). Resulting from Atwood's cartographic imagining, the reader, Grace posits, "is left to question whether [the Crakers are] an improvement on the original [human]" (Grace 43) or if they open new critiques regarding humanity and posthumanity alike. Naturally, such a questioning necessitates a comparison of human and posthuman, which in *Oryx and Crake* can only be adequately achieved through the comparison of either Jimmy/Snowman or Crake and the Crakers. Because Jimmy/Snowman is the only fully developed human character throughout the text, he functions as the representative of current humanity with his carnal and consumptive obsessions, as well as his desire for instant gratification in all areas of his life. The Crakers, alternately, figure as the posthumans in the text, as they are produced in a neo-Genesis biogenetic laboratory to inherit an anthropogenically destroyed Earth following the elimination of humanity across the globe. Moreover, they embody the characteristics that are diametrically different from Jimmy/Snowman himself. As such, both Jimmy/Snowman and the Crakers function to create this comparison that Grace outlines and present alternative visions of human and posthuman potentials.

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Atwood, on the promotional website for *Oryx and Crake,* maintains that her novel should not be relegated into the genre of science fiction, as it "contains no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians … it invents nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent" (Atwood, "Perfect Storms"). She states, additionally, that every novel asks a "What if?" question, which for for *Oryx and Crake* is: "What if we continue down the road we're already on?" (Atwood, "Perfect Storms"). While working on *Oryx* in 2001, Atwood wrote several chapters on a boat in the Arctic, where she witnessed the impacts of climate change on the glaciers (Atwood, "Perfect Storms"), which inspired the climatological concerns evident throughout the text. Shortly thereafter, the destruction of the World Trade towers in New York City on September 11, 2001 occurred. Finding herself profoundly disquieted by these events while also writing about an imagined calamity, she temporarily abandoned the writing of her novel: "I thought maybe I should turn to gardening books – something more cheerful. But then I started writing again, because what use would gardening books be in a world without gardens, and without books?" (Atwood, "Perfect Storms"). Using the receding glaciers and the events of September 11 as a kind of catastrophic inspiration, Atwood channelled her anxieties about the world at present into a speculative work that intersects the fear of politically sanctioned turmoil, environmental catastrophes, and social unrest: "As novelist Alistair MacLeod has said, writers write about what worries them, and the world of *Oryx and Crake* is what worries me right now. It's not a question of our inventions – all human inventions are merely tools – but of what might be done with them" (Atwood, "Perfect Storms"). Accordingly, *Oryx and Crake* functions to offer possibilities of what may occur

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in a possible future and how to transition into ecological renewal and ethical

responsibility.

Chapter Three:

Post-Apocalyptic Commodities and Ecological Exile in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

> When the last living thing
> Has died on account of us,
> How poetical it would be
> If Earth could say,
> In a voice floating up
> Perhaps
> From the floor
> Of the Grand Canyon,
> "It is done.
> People did not like it here."

Kurt Vonnegut, "Requiem," *A Man Without a Country*

As a thematic element, the apocalypse is easily interwoven into an ecological rhetoric, largely because it can so neatly explain away the disintegration of a world or a civilization. Apocalyptic narratives are able to focus more closely on the events that led up to, and the consequences of, the apocalypse. This is the case with Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road,* which follows two unnamed characters, a father and his young son, as they traverse across a desolate landscape following an unspecified global cataclysm resulting in the destruction of all life—including plant and animal life—save for a small population of cannibals and roaming solitary individuals seeking refuge. While the text closely follows the father and the son as they struggle to survive in their barren environment, the text likewise demonstrates, with the absence of life and biodiversity, the unique biological interdependencies that the Earth and its inhabitants rely on for survival and sustainability. Without the complex interactions of life, the remaining inhabitants are estranged from their environment, losing all connection to the

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land and resources employed for humanity's alleged well-being, thus leading them into an exile that is at once cultural and ecological. As such, the final interactions with the traces of the pre-apocalyptic age are fraught with nostalgia as well as bitterness as these items—many from the automobile industry—figure as a retrospective beacon for the age to come and the abuses of humanity on the environment before the apocalypse. Illustrating the complete desolation resulting from the anthropocentric practices which are implicated to bringing down the entire operations of the Earth—biological, environmental, cultural, linguistic, and economical included—*The Road* complicates the relationship between culture and nature by demonstrating that while culture requires nature for its own survival, culture is rarely above nature to reign supreme over it. When the latter is the case, however, there is a parallel deterioration of both nature and culture; the binary consumes itself, as demonstrated quite literally by the cannibalism depicted in the text. This deterioration also presents itself through the use of language in a post-apocalyptic environment, the wavering stability of language in the wake of the disaster, and the loss of faith in language's ability to represent the reality of the apocalypse. However, the ecological exile of the text affects not only humanity, but also the environment, especially in light of the destructive practices enacted on the Earth, as figured through the frequent references to artefacts from the automobile industry, as well as other capitalist ventures. In much the same way that posthumanism, as described by Cary Wolfe, occurs before and after humanism, the ecological exile transpiring within the *The Road* occurs before and after the apocalypse, in which human inhabitants became increasingly separated from nature until they are completely and irreparably estranged from it, as Susan Kollin, in her essay "'Barren, silent, godless': Ecodisaster and the Post-

Abundant Landscape in *The Road*," rightly points out: "In *The Road*, environmental collapse is not some future event looming over America, but a disaster that has already taken place" (Kollin 164). This is meant on two levels: 1) that within the context of the narrative, the environmental collapse has already occurred within the characters' lifetimes, and 2) that environmental collapse occurred even before the cataclysm that wiped out nearly all life on the planet. The latter is demonstrated clearly though the detrita that has accumulated post-apocalypse, most of which are the ruined emblems of a capitalistic age. The collapse of the world is represented through the dismantling of the nature/culture binary, yet a dismantling that is less deconstructive than it is simply destructive. For this binary to be completely destroyed, either side of the binary, including the slash between must also be completely done away with, as the text so alarmingly demonstrates through the obliteration of life and all social and cultural institutions. The task, Kollin states, for "both readers and the characters then, is to imagine what comes next, what may be salvaged and what must be left behind in order to rebuild a society and reconceptualize human relations to nature and to each other" (164). The task of reconceptualizing humanity's relationship to nature is likewise the chief task of posthumanism. Indeed, *The Road* literalizes the posthuman condition in a much different way than texts seeking a revitalization of humanity's connection to nature. The posthuman of *The Road* takes on, literally, the term 'posthuman': *after*-human, and is, therefore, alien and estranged from prior conceptions of what it means to be human. Because the text examines a world near the end of humanity's existence, each surviving human has transformed, both epistemologically and ontologically, into a posthuman

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subject, who must question the relationship between humanity and nature when there is no nature left to relate to.

There are two general categories of apocalyptic literature. The first category is predominantly Judeo-Christian following biblical narratives of moral revelation, while the other, more secular, category, which represent what Andrew Keller Estes terms "the more recent techno-nuclear, pandemic and ecological threats" (Estes 191) of the world. The word itself derives from the Greek term *Apo-calyptein*, which means "to unveil" (Garrard Loc 1800); however, this unveiling did not initially refer to a complete destruction of the world, but an exposition of future events from some divine or metaphysical source (Estes 191). As Estes explains, it took some 2,000 years before the word's singular definition evolved into the myriad of meanings it has today, such as the state of the human condition, the decline of ecological health, the invasion of viruses into healthy human populations, the threat of nuclear disaster, and so on (192). It is the latter of these meanings—the threat of nuclear disaster—Estes goes on to explain, that truly altered connotations of the term in the wake of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 (Estes 194). However, Estes writes that it took a more objective examination of the world to appreciate more comprehensibly the simultaneous vastness and minuteness of the Earth itself, which was accomplished through William Anders' famous photograph, "Earthrise," the first image of its kind, which Anders took during the Apollo 8 mission in 1968 (Estes 194). Estes writes:

> [This] first image of the Earth from outer space … was instrumental in re-conceiving environmental crisis. Individual problems were conglomerated into a perceived threat against the planet. Furthermore, being able to visualize the planet engendered new ways of thinking—the planet became something unique, even

precious, a thing whose image could be easily grasped and that cried out for defense. (194)

While apocalyptic literature has existed for some several hundred years, only recently have contemporary apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literatures begun to explore the ramifications of ecological maltreatment. Estes argues that ecocriticism grew out of a more objective examination of the Earth, resulting from the expansion of scientific knowledge regarding the planet in its galactic and universal context.

Though these literatures do not necessarily convey an objective worldview, apocalyptic literature presents such objective worldviews in a creative and speculative context in order to stir readers out of complacency with respect to the status quo. Apocalyptic literature, as a genre, does indeed still rely on the original meaning of the term—to unveil—but uses this unveiling to communicate what Damian Thompson refers to as "the end of history" with "glimpses of a world destroyed" (as quoted in Garrard 1800). Thompson explains:

> Apocalypticism has been described as a genre born out of crisis, designed to stiffen the resolve of an embattled community by dangling in front of them the vision of a sudden and permanent release from its captivity. It is underground literature, the consolation of the persecuted. (1800)

Literature that is born out of crisis, as Thompson maintains, is necessarily rooted in the sociological and historical; and its narratives are relevant to the point that the allegory of the apocalypse, whether thinly veiled or straightforwardly blunt, may be recognizable by its audiences so as to convey either a message of possible redemption or a prophecy of damnation. Whatever the message, the apocalyptic narrative seeks to disturb complacency towards serious issues that plague the world.

Greg Garrard, in his text *Ecocriticism*, points out that according to Thompson's definition, the apocalyptic narrative must include the following:

> [1)] the social psychology of apocalypticism that has historically inclined such 'embattled' movements to paranoia and violence; [2)] the extreme moral dualism that divides the world sharply into friend and enemy; [and, 3)] the emphasis upon the 'unveiling' of trans-historical truth and the corresponding role of believers as the ones to whom, and for whom, the veil of history is rent. (1800)

Though these qualities are, for the most part, represented in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the text takes the focus almost entirely off the apocalypse itself, instead launching into an acute investigation of the apocalypse's aftermath, particularly on the brittleness of ideology: "The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring" (McCarthy 11). As implied in this passage, with the obliteration of the materiality of the former world, the ideologies of the previous era also are disengaged from the material reality which bound these structures of thought in place. The uncoupling of materiality from ideology occurs as that materiality has been made redundant. More than simply a physical dismantling of the world, the apocalypse is all-encompassing, subverting *everything*, including ideology and meaning, into ghostly forms of a former world.

In *The Road*, precisely what destroys the environment is never mentioned; only the fragility of what Garrard terms the 'trans-historical truth' is exposed by *The Road*'s apocalyptic event. Notwithstanding, Garrard is correct in outlining the characteristics of an apocalyptic literary work, which *The Road* employs. Garrard's first point mentioned above—"the social psychology of apocalypticism that has historically inclined such 'embattled' movements to paranoia and violence" (1800)—is indeed explored throughout

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McCarthy's text, especially in the case of the cannibals who attempt to maintain a semblance of their ideological roots through their hierarchy of who to eat and who not to eat. As Thompson argues, such violent and grotesque scenes are vividly explained, and in *The Road*'s case, are implicitly juxtaposed to the world prior to the apocalypse, especially illustrated in the scenes which, though not representing the actual moments of human consumption, show half-alive, and half-eaten, humans in the midst of being consumed, and in the most brutal scene, a burnt corpse of a decapitated human infant, whose innards are nowhere to be found (198). These scenes of depravity resonate precisely because of their tacit and immediate juxtaposition to contemporary values, which refrain against the consumption of humans. Though the apocalypse is not identified in the text, the inclination towards cannibalism is demonstrated through the text's exploration of hierarchical and anthropocentric values occurring prior to the apocalypse, exhibited namely through the text's inventory of items relating to the automobile industry, which signifies the capitalistic endeavours that led to the apocalypse and the absence of capitalism's plenitude following the apocalypse. The automobile industry, moreover, implies a fraught relationship with the natural world, as this industry requires the land— and its exploitation—for its own successful and widespread imbrication within the landscape. Consequently, this intrusion of human values onto and within the land signifies the anthropocentrism that is at the root of such an interaction. The exceptionalist narrative that justifies humanity's exploitation of nature is central to the automobile industry's practices because it reinforces the hierarchical values necessary to enable the alteration of the landscape and the continued environmental degradation needed to support the industry.

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The suggestion is not, however, that the automobile industry leads to cannibalism, but that any anthropocentric framework that promotes hierarchies among humans and other life, such as the automobile industry, leads to a justification of the exploitation that consequently occurs. This notion is usually something akin to 'the greater good,' a concept that attempts to prove that an action that benefits a larger population while proving disadvantageous for a smaller group is justified, regardless of the extent to which the disadvantaged group is exploited. Ineluctably bound to this concept is the affirmation of hedonism, in which the quality of the 'good' is constantly being redefined especially in the milieu of capitalism; as commodities change, are improved, or are simply marketed as needs when they are, in fact, simply wants, the concept of 'good' changes as the definition of the 'quality of life' also does. Moreover, the notion of what is 'good' according to any humanist or anthropocentric rhetoric is undoubtedly 'not good' for those who do not belong within the category to whom the 'good' applies. In short, the anthropocentric values of assigning what is the greater good is a system which is necessarily founded on hierarchical and anthropocentric thinking. With the environmental degradation post-apocalypse, there is an attempt to sustain this way of thinking despite the dwindling resources with which to preserve the 'greater good' rhetoric. It is primarily this way of thinking that leads to the cannibalistic practices that determine who to consume, and on a more basic level, whether to consume another human at all. This is apparent in the cannibals' continued use of vehicles as a means for transporting humans that will eventually be consumed regardless of the lack of gasoline and available parts necessary for a successful operation of the vehicle. While the use of automobiles does not

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determine cannibalistic practices, the use of automobiles represents the cannibals'

reliance on exceptionalist ideologies that justify exploitation and destruction. Continuing

to use the vehicles, specifically those running on diesel fuel, typically used in commercial

vehicles, demonstrates the cannibals' reliance on the old world standards of the pre-

apocalypse, such as commodification and the exploitation of life:

> They could hear the diesel engine out on the road, running on God knows what.
> When he raised up to look he could just see the top of the truck moving along the
> road. Men standing the stakebed, some of them holding rifles. The truck passed on
> and the black diesel smoke coiled through the woods. The motor sounded ropy.
> Missing and puttering. And then it quit. (McCarthy 61-2).

With the road being used with its original purpose in mind—to transport—the road once

again signifies commodification, yet this intended purpose leads to exploitation of

another unsustainable resource, which in this case is humanity. While the demotion of

certain humans to food-source level indicates a denigration of the human, it also

reinforces the exceptionalism at the root of nonhuman animal consumption, which is

rationalised as morally and culturally permissible before the apocalypse. Afterward,

however, with no nonhuman animals left to eat, the exceptionalist framework that these

individuals rely on to provide them with order and sustenance, incites them to continue

their exceptionalist practices, yet in a way that continues to create hierarchies among the

remaining life on the planet, in this case, among the humans. While this does prove

advantageous for some of the individuals, specifically those who are not being consumed,

their cannibalistic practices will inevitably fail once the resource has been completely

depleted, again repeating the exploitative practices implied to have caused the

apocalypse.

Garrard's second point on apocalyptic literature—"the extreme moral dualism that divides the world sharply into friend and enemy" (1800)—is another quality of apocalyptic literature which is represented in McCarthy's novel. As a matter of survival—and cultural transmission of sorts—the father's appeal to the son that they are "the good guys" (McCarthy 77) as opposed to the bad guys, specifically the cannibals of the text, fosters a dualistic precedence that, although conveying a dialectical way of thinking often considered harmful or essentializing prior to the apocalypse, is necessary for their survival following it. Avoiding the bad guys, whoever they appear to be, is necessary to avoid becoming implicated in cannibalistic or exploitative practices. The return to dualistic categories enables the father and son to endure in the post-apocalyptic wasteland of America. Dualistic thinking becomes a practice in complete utility; as such, utility is a key thematic and structural element throughout the text. Allowing for any flexibility between and among binaries exposes vulnerabilities that cannot be afforded in such a hostile environment, shown by the boy's tendency towards pity and empathy, and his consistent questioning of whether they still remain the 'good guys'. Such vulnerability is demonstrated when the boy, while waiting for his father, spots another child:

> A face was looking at him. A boy, about his age, wrapped in an outsized wool coat with the sleeves turned back. He stood up. He ran across the road and up the drive. No one there. He looked toward the house and then he ran in to the bottom of the yard through the dead weeds to a still black creek. Come back, he called. I wont [sic] hurt you. He was standing there crying when his father came sprinted across the road and seized him by the arm.
> What are you doing? he hissed. What are you doing?
> …
> The boy would not stop crying and he would not stop looking back. Come on, the man said. We've got to go.
> I want to see him, Papa.

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There's no one to see. Do you want to die? Is that what you want? (McCarthy 84-5)

For the father, there is a clear distinction between good and bad; the bad people are anyone who puts their survival at risk. The father and son are the "good guys" because they are surviving without putting anyone else's survival at risk. In the father's view, anyone that they would have to help would be considered bad solely because they would make their situation so much more precarious. The boy, however, who relies on his father for survival, cannot discern the distinction between these labels, and sympathizes with all people he encounters because they are all in the same situation. Seeing the other child, the boy sympathizes, recognizes his own suffering in the other child, and wishes to help. He sees his father's apparent coldness as an attribute of the "bad guys." For the boy, this binary does not have a survivalist function; it is less practical and more qualitative. Rather than viewing people from either a survivalist or cannibalistic perspective, the boy views people based on their own subjectivities, despite the fact that the world no longer has any practical or aesthetic use for such preoccupations. The son's empathy for the other people, including his potential murderer, compromises his ability to survive. However, this of affirmation the 'good' qualities of humanity such as empathy, hope, and resilience, allows him to recognized suffering in one's other, a quality clearly absent in the post-apocalyptic world, and possibly a by-product of the exploitation that may have led to the apocalypse. The son's recognition of plurality for each individual, while at the same time acceding the similarity of their current situation, has less to do with utility and more to do with an affirmation of diversity in a world when such diversity is dwindling. In essence, the boy simply wishes to see the world and those who belong within it, despite the futility of their existences. The boy regards the world with curiosity because

his world is a stripped-down version of his father's earlier life where people were plentiful, and commodities were not disused leftovers from a bygone age, but were seamless components of daily life. Seeing another child is at once a means of self-reflection, and a way to compare differences, to see life in another way. The boy's plurality, then, is the refusal to categorize others based on the duality of good vs. bad that his father espouses for their survival. However, this acceptance of plurality is anachronistic according to the new world standards where survival, not compassion or curiosity, is paramount.

Garrard's last point that the unveiling exposes trans-historical truths is indeed demonstrated in McCarthy's novel; however, the truth that is revealed to the man is not the inheritance of any specific truths and values from the previous era or other ages before, but the fragility of *all* alleged truths:

> In those first years the roads were peopled with refugees shrouded up in their clothing. Wearing masks and goggles, sitting in their rags by the side of the road like ruined aviators. Their barrows heaped with shoddy. Towing wagons or carts. Their eyes bright in their skulls. Creedless shells of men tottering down the causeways like migrants in a feverland. The frailty of everything revealed at last. (McCarthy 28)

For the father, the apocalypse exposed the brittle structures which so many people had put their faith into: religion, industry, economy, politics, and any other system which places human at the center of all transactions and ways of thinking. The only faith that remains, for the father, is his faith in practicality and utility as a method of survival. Any process additional to survival is utterly extraneous and fruitless. The father and son focus almost exclusively on survival processes, such as building fires and repairing old wheels

and shopping carts. Their conversations tend toward minimalism, both in their manner of speaking as well as the lack of narratological description of their speech:

> Can I ask you something? he said.
> Yes. Of course.
> Are we going to die?
> Sometime. Not now.
> And we're still going south.
> Yes.
> So we'll be warm.
> Yes.
> Okay.
> Okay what?
> Nothing. Just okay.
> Go to sleep.
> Okay.
> I'm going to blow out the lamp. Is that okay?
> Yes. That's okay. (McCarthy 10)

The stripped bare speech points to their utilitarian use of language. While the boy does ask his father questions about mortality, their conversation never strays too far from their present circumstances into abstraction; their speech revolves around the events of their days, their plans to move southward for the winter, and objects necessary for their survival, such as lamps, blankets, and shoes. The absence of narratological description of their conversation—such as information regarding their tone or inflection, as well as any verbal descriptions of speech such as *said*, *responded*, *asked*, and so on, conventional in most other novels with dialogue—conveys the deterioration of language following the environmental disaster. Language itself is stressed, rather than the conventions for dialogue which would distract from what is actually being said by each person. The stripped, pared-down language focuses on utility and conveying only exactly what is needed and not more. Providing additional detail on how the dialogue is spoken would simply weigh down the speech with superfluous description. Moreover, by removing the

dramatic description of the dialogue, the text points to the deterioration of language and

its inability to represent anything other than the immediate circumstances present to each

character. Even when the characters discuss the past or recall a memory, the reality of the

present always makes a swift return within the speech; this is shown in the lengthiest

dialogue in the text between the father and the old man, Ely, who they met on the road:

> How long have you been on the road?
> I was always on the road. You cant [sic] stay in one place.
> How do you live?
> I just keep going. I knew this was coming … I'm just on the road the same as you.
> No different.
> Is your name really Ely?
> No.
> You dont [sic] want to say your name.
> I dont [sic] want to say it.
> Why?
> I couldnt [sic] trust you with it. To do something with it. I dont [sic] want anyone
> talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there … I could be
> anybody. I think in times like these the less said the better. If something had
> happened and we were survivors and we met on the road then we'd have something
> to talk about. But we're not. So we dont [sic]. (McCarthy 168-172).

Ely's blatant remark on the state of language in their present circumstances reflects the

inability of language to represent post-apocalyptic experiences. Furthermore,

economizing language to omit statements of hope affords a greater chance of survival

and, as Ely mentions, eliminates extraneousness banter irrelevant in 'times like these.'

The less said is, indeed, the better, for any more than what is necessary potentiates a

gross misrepresentation of their experiences. As such, the economical and minimal use of

language in *The Road* points to the need not only to use language as practically as

possible, but also to avoid using language in any way that would fall short of responding

in an accurate way to the apocalypse and the loss that has been incurred. The minimal use

of language, then, is as much a defense mechanism as is scrounging for commodities for survival.

The text's formal qualities mirror the practicality necessary for the survival of the father and son. In a time when anything other than survival is omitted from their daily routine, the text also does away with other extraneous details that weigh down the description of their struggles to parallel the minimalism of their survival. The sparseness in detail and explanation reflects how little the father and son actually have. In a Hemingway-esque style of omission and minimalism, *The Road* focuses only on details that directly refer to the processes required for the father and son's survival. McCarthy's allusion to Hemingway is clear, moreover, at the end of the text with his description of the trout:

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

This appears as a direct reference to Hemingway's short story "Big Two-Hearted River," a narrative which concentrates, almost painstakingly, on the process of fishing, meanwhile dismissing the surrounding context in which the protagonist finds himself. This focus on process is adapted within *The Road*, where the father demonstrates to his son what he does when building a fire or mending a tire, in order to transmit the knowledge of survival. As Hemingway's protagonist largely ignores his context, so too does McCarthy's pair who, already in full comprehension of their environment, need not continually elucidate its details. However, this passage, while alluding to Hemingway, is

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descriptive in a way Hemingway is not, especially throughout "Big Two-Hearted River,"

the passage is unlike much of the rest of *The Road*. McCarthy is clearly toying with his

allusion to Hemingway. With descriptive and seductive prose, full of texture and

textuality, McCarthy returns the environment from utility and minimalism to the pure

vitality of an unexploited and harmonious landscape. Despite the father's concentration

on survival, this survival is indelibly linked to the environment. Human survival is

dependent on the environment's survival; without the environment, humanity is unlikely

to survive, though the inverse would likely allow the environment to flourish, as

intimated in the novel's final lines. In particular, the reference to the "maps of the world

in its becoming" operates on two main levels. These maps correspond to the earlier maps

used to traverse the barren wasteland, but here they are not anthropocentric as the road

map, which the father uses to navigate their way to the coast; they are what Estes terms

biocentric. Biocentrism "implies an egalitarian view of nature in which all members of

the ecosphere have intrinsic rights," as opposed to anthropocentrism, which "sees natures

as only a tool in man's service" (Estes 41). The biocentric maps that Estes refers to are

those which "stress the intrinsic rights of nature, the imbrication of humans within a web

of biota and a flexible and dynamic approach to dealing with the environment" (216). In

other words, the biocentric map of 'the world in its becoming' points to a utopian view of

nature where, without the exceptionalist interests forced onto nature by humanity, nature

remains diverse and balanced. The maps imprinted onto the fish are strikingly contrasted

with the road map used by the father and son to maneuver their way across the landscape:

"The tattered oilcompany [sic] roadmap had once been taped together but now it was just

sorted into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners for their assembly. He sorted

through the limp pages and spread out those that answered to their location" (McCarthy 42). Estes refers to the roadmap as resolutely anthropocentric because it was originated by the oil company responsible for the construction of the roads and, consequently, the alteration of the landscape for such roads. Rather than the map illustrating the landscape, the map only "answers to their location" if they are on or near a road; any natural landmark is omitted from the map. As the oil company roadmap "denotes a view of the environment as raw materials for human exploitation" (25), these maps point to an interruption and corruption of nature for human use, whereas the biocentric maps of the fish conveys the opposite. Because roadmaps were produced to boost tourism and gasoline consumption (25) rather than to invite humanity into nature to, as Estes describes, approach nature and its biodiversity with dynamicism, such maps emphasize an anthropocentric ordering of nature, thereby justifying the exploitation of it for human consumption and wealth. By ending the text with an image of a map that is not created like the roadmap, but developed through a long history of adaptation and evolution, the text prompts a questioning of human's place alongside nature, and, returning to Rosi Braidotti's mandate, reveals "a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet" (Braidotti 2).

On another level, "the maps of the world in its becoming" returns to the etymological roots of apocalypse as a prophetic unveiling of the future to come, in which all life will become commodified and consumable to the point at which it "could not be put back. Not be made right again" (McCarthy 287) The totality of our ecological exile is made explicit in the final line of the text: "In the deep glens where they lived all things

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were older than man and they hummed of mystery" (287). Returning to the pre-historical moment prior to humanity, McCarthy represents a moment in time in which all life was naturally and harmoniously biocentric when humanity did not yet exist—and would not for some several billion years—to impose its constructed self-importance onto nature. Moreover, this final line is indicative of the brevity of human civilizations, many of which projected their own importance as dominant and singular. The father himself makes note of this as he affirms that each civilization is ephemeral and relatively short-lived: "He'd come to see a message in each such late history, a message and a warning, and so this tableau of the slain and devoured did prove to be" (91). For "in each such late history," there is a recognition of the multiplicity of histories in which each civilization outgrows and exceeds its limitations for existence. For the father, it is not so much the apocalypse that signals the end of an era, but the collapse of civilization, or perhaps more accurately, the collapse of civility following the apocalypse that anticipates civilization's conclusion. In this case, then, the effects of the apocalypse are more significant than the apocalypse itself, for it is in the aftermath that civilization is truly annihilated and not during the apocalypse. This is shown in the ruthless cannibalism of Earth's remaining humans. Though the apocalypse is responsible for the destruction of the resources necessary for survival and the widespread decimation of the human population, it is not the apocalypse itself which leads the remaining humans toward cannibalism, but rather the lingering traces of a culture that remains firmly entrenched within an anthropocentric ideology. Cannibalism, as represented in the novel, is grounded within hierarchical structures and ways of thinking inherited from humanism's exceptionalist ethos. It functions as a mode of resource extraction; and in this case, humanity becomes a food

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resource, offering a small group of humans reprieve from the endless scouring of food. Fundamentally, cannibalism demonstrates an anthropocentric exploitation of a resource that cannot be "put back. Not be made right again" (287), just to relieve, temporarily, the suffering of a small group of individuals. In this way, the humanist ethos is apparent in the cannibalistic practices of these remaining individuals, as consuming other humans works to serve a greater good, even though the population whom this good serves is small and also dwindling. In the same way that resource development was so exploited before the apocalypse to the point of complete devastation, using humans as a food source cannot be sustained but will be exploited until no resource remains.

The text is careful to outline these practices, as well as the late history of humanity with respect to resource development and economic practices as emblematic of a decaying civilization. It is clear by the *The Road*'s subtle navigation of these issues that the underlying message speaks to the destruction of civilization even prior to the apocalypse. The wanton excess of consumer goods and traces of a dying economy are so prevalent in the text, indicating that the end of human civilization was already nigh before the apocalypse. Though the apocalypse may indeed have been human-induced—a global event triggered by climate change leading to widespread disaster—the text points to the extreme estrangement of the Earth from its inhabitants, in which humans and nonhumans became increasingly divorced from the land, forcing them into ecological exile.

The social and ecological conditions represented in the novel are relevant to current issues, which Garrard notes is characteristic of apocalyptic narratives:

apocalypticism is inevitably bound up with imagination, because it has yet to come into being … it is always 'proleptic'. And if, sociologically, it is a 'genre born out of crisis,' it is also necessarily a rhetoric that must whip up such crises to proportions appropriate to the end of time. (1812)

Apocalyptic narratives respond to crises relevant to the times, which have political and social roots, and, for Garrard, ecological roots as well. Garrard, like Estes, also mentions that this imagination contains an element of cautionary didacticism: "Only if we imagine that the planet *has* a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it" (as quoted in Estes 196). In this way, *The Road* functions as a cautionary tale, but one that avoids a prophetic announcement of what form the apocalypse will take, and instead poses the question: what will be left when nature is destroyed, and how will this affect humanity? The question does not point so much to what will happen when humanity is destroyed, but how humans have enacted such violence on the planet to endanger themselves.

The question is answered by the bleakness illustrated throughout the text, punctuated by the regular litterings of the seemingly innocuous items of a bygone age: a variety of species of dead plants, old shopping carts, disused automobiles, tattered road maps, empty cans, deserted houses and so on—all of which are mostly devoid of their original purpose, yet still remain as representations of an era of excess. Because the narrative does not blatantly remark on these objects from a previous time, it is clear by the scarcity of objects that the items included and the features of the landscape are not innocuous but are emblematic of capitalism.

The novel critiques capitalism and anthropocentric ideology through the representation of the roads and commodities relied on by the father and the boy. The text engages in a dialogue that questions the capitalist practices of production, as well as how

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the landscape's configuration became altered in order to bolster the economy and change

buying habits. The title of the novel alludes to this reconfiguration of nature, which

evokes the American road narrative tradition and the cultural and economic history of

roads in America. By embarking on the road, the father and his son traverse the history

and fall of the economy that installed the roads and automobiles as a permanent fixture of

the American landscape. Even following the destruction of humanity, the roads and the

ruins of the vehicles remain as a testament to the fall of the civilization, and the

disintegration of the hope and faith that had been placed in the automobile industry by the

American people:

> They passed through the city at noon of the day following. He kept the pistol close
> to hand on the folded tarp on top of the shopping cart. He kept the boy close to his
> side. The city was mostly burned. No sign of life. Cars in the street caked with ash,
> everything covered with ash and dust. Fossil tracks in the dried sludge. A corpse in
> the doorway dried to leather. (McCarthy 12)

The scattered ruins of industry is prevalent throughout the text and it serves as a grim

warning to the impermanence of not so much the materiality of the industry, but the

ideologies which appear to uphold that material reality. This is evidenced by the absence

of capitalism following the apocalypse, as the people and resources to preserve and

maintain capitalism no longer exist. But it is mostly evidenced by the prevalence of

disused vehicles, gas stations, roads, and trains throughout the text, serving to reinforce

both the stark absence of humanity and the consumerist worldview that dominated

humanity prior to the cataclysm. Disused residue of capitalist America can be found

throughout the landscape; the father and son employ these shards as tools for their

survival. The shopping cart is used to carry their dwindling resources, such as tarps,

plastic bags and bottles, and other "essential things" (McCarthy 5), most of which

survived the apocalypse because they are fashioned from unsustainable and ecologically

unfriendly materials derived from crude oil. What was once used to enable a culture of

excess, such as a shopping cart—emblematic of excessive consumerism and commodity

availability—now carries meagre supplies for survival, which ironically were limitless

and unremarkable prior to the cataclysm. Estes affirms: "That *The Road* depicts the world

as garbage automatically makes readers suspect some kind of a techo/nuclear or

environmental catastrophe, yet the man and the boy repeatedly identify themselves as

good by embracing consumer society and technology" (Estes 198). For the father and

son, these commodities are more valuable than the china teacups (McCarthy 21), brass

sextants (227), currency (23), and television sets (22) that remain untouched and

unnecessary according to the "new world standards" (161). Only what was produced in

excess before the apocalypse is most valuable following it. Even Coca Cola, ubiquitous

throughout the world, is regarded as a treasure:

> By the door were two softdrink machines that had been tilted over into the floor and
> opened with a prybar. Coins everywhere in the ash. He sat down and ran his hand
> around in the works of the gutted machines and in the second one it closed over a
> cold metal cylinder. He withdrew his hand slowly and sat looking at a Coca Cola.
> What is it, Papa?
> It's a treat. For you. (22-23)

Because so little remains, even a commodity as common as a soda is considered precious

because it contains calories, and therefore, can be used for survival. By the "new world

standards," aesthetics are dismissed for practicality; whatever is impractical is

unnecessary or, in other words, worthless. Worth, in *The Road*, is determined by utility. If

excessive production was unnecessary before the cataclysm, these remaining items from

that era are now deemed of vital importance primarily because they remain ubiquitous

enough, even in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, to provide sustenance. On the other hand,

prior to the apocalypse, often rare or expensive items determined worth and quality

likewise determined status and class among people. This inversion of worth results from

the dissolution of class and status that resulted from the apocalypse. Even among the

cannibals who attempt to reinstate hierarchies among their ranks, they still assign worth

to commodities—including people—by their potential to provide utility and sustenance.

In the post-apocalyptic America, items of practicality and utility are the most valuable

while also serving as "signs," Susan Kollin writes, "of what existed before and are thus

reminders of the failure of that world" (163). Such ghostly reminders are littered

throughout the books, torturously conveying "the richness of a vanished world"

(McCarthy 139) that has now failed to provide even the slightest capacity to sustain life:

> They passed through towns that warned people away with messages scrawled on
> billboards. The billboards had been whited out with thin coats of paint in order to
> write on them and through the paint could be seen a pale palimpsest of
> advertisements for goods which no longer existed. (127-8).

Here, the billboards, while referring back to a world that offered everything, now is

reclaimed for practical purposes. It is whited out so that messages may be made legible to

other individuals attempting to survive. However, the two images—the advertisement and

the warning—co-exist, mutually contaminating the message of the other to convey a

message that is at once doomed and dooming. As Kollin confirms: "In this new landscape

billboards no longer beckon consumers with enticing promises about their product.

Instead, they repel and rebuke the viewer, offering only fading signs of a lost world"

(162). While the failed world of capitalism may be responsible for the cataclysm itself,

the remains of this world allow the final few humans to survive, a comment both on the

ability for civilization to bestow its traces upon a new world as past civilizations have done before, but also on contemporary practices of production and land management, which alter the landscape and geology so as to render areas of the planet permanently barren and sterile.

Like the shopping cart used by the father and son, which is no longer used to stroll through air-conditioned aisles full of food and other goods, the automobiles, emblematic of a decadent and flourishing American economy, punctuate ditches and parking lots, making an irony of the road that the father and son are travelling on. Because *The Road* is a disturbing play on the American road novel, it does not communicate a redemptive message typical of road novel; as Kollin testifies, "Even though they are in search of a better place, the father and son do not arrive at a new Eden, as the contemporary American road novel often promises" (162), but are led ever further from the possibility of redemption or long-term survival. The road, ultimately, will lead nowhere. Because the automobile has been bereft of its purpose, that is, to transport individuals through the country, the automobile ceases to be meaningful. The only objects of meaning according to the new world standards are the objects that will abet survival, not prevent it.

While the text may seem to launch into a dialectic of culture versus nature, certain plants which appear to belong to the nature category are in fact yet another marker of culture and commodification. The kudzu plant, which appears amidst the depravity of nature highlights the destruction of culture:

> The land was gullied and eroded and barren. The bones of dead creatures sprawled in the washes. Middens of anonymous trash … All of it shadowless and without feature. The road descended through a jungle of dead kudzu. A marsh where the

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dead reeds lay over the water. Beyond the edge of the fields the sullen haze hung over the Earth and sky alike. (177)

Here, the text, rather than itemizing the various leftover consumer goods and products that have endured the apocalypse, illustrates a poignant vignette of a dead world, complete with the decimated ecosystem of the marsh, the dried and dead plants, and the remains of unidentified animals. The only species directly named is the kudzu plant, appearing innocently alongside the rest of the dead plant and animal life. The naming of this species—the specification—in line with the naming of other species of plants, such as pears, potatoes, corn in canned goods, suggests the plant's cultural significance, rather than its natural place within the landscape. Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*) is an invasive plant species originating from Northeast Asia, which was brought to America from either Japan or Korea during the late nineteenth century (Kollin 159). This species became a popular variety to use in domestic areas as a shade producer, and eventually became employed primarily as a means of limiting the rates of erosion and became so prolific that it began to pose agricultural and ecological problems throughout the American South, where kudzu was the most popular (159). Peter Goin, an American photographer who documents altered landscapes, notes that the kudzu, apart from being classified as a weed in the American South, is distinguished by its hardiness: "kudzu is extremely difficult to eliminate; it grows rapidly in nearly any kind of soil, and its roots sink deeply into the Earth" (as quoted in Kollin 159). For these reasons, the presence of this plant in *The Road* is complicated by the kudzu's history in America, a history that conflates both nature and culture. While it is a native species in some areas of Northeast Asia, its presence in America is unnatural and overbearing.

In a non-native landscape, the other plant and animal species are unable to control the kudzu, and it proliferates unabated. The manual and intentional relocation of the kudzu to America expresses a cultural imperialism of nature on the landscape, as the lack of knowledge regarding the plantation of native species in a non-native ecosystem bolstered by cultural desires to have more shade and to prevent erosion are both indications of environmental illiteracy and mismanagement. Furthermore, the kudzu represents the ecological failures of a capitalistic era, as the kudzu is at once the commodity and the excess of commodity. The kudzu's hardiness parallels humanity during late capitalism. After the apocalypse of *The Road,* the humans who are left behind are similar to the kudzu in that they are able to survive, albeit meagrely, despite the dead landscape they live within. Like the kudzu, humanity is difficult to eliminate, and though few remain after the apocalypse, it should be noted that they did not all die as a result of the event. Moreover, kudzu's ability to rapidly grow in almost any kind of soil, as Goin points out, mirrors the global growth of the human population especially following globalization and the expanse of capitalism. The kudzu also reinforces the ecological exile of the text; despite kudzu's ability to prosper in nearly any kind of environment, it could not survive the cataclysm which destroyed the remaining life on the planet. If the parallel to humanity is considered further, the implication remains that human survival will prove to be eventually futile, and that humans, along with the rest of the lifeforms, will also become extinct, and the Earth, as a former host of incredible diversity, will likewise become totally estranged from its vital potential.

Description of one's environment often betrays the tensions within that environment and the potential estrangement occurring therein. *The Road* explores

humanity's relationship to the environment, but also examines the environment as a

whole as a setting which includes humanity instead of setting humans apart from nature,

as anthropocentric standards do. Estes seeks a re-reading of environments within any

literature, especially within McCarthy's oeuvre:

> The bulk of McCarthy's fiction is comprised of descriptions of environments. An
> alternative reading strategy to that of the humanist critics would be to take this at
> face value and to make the environments themselves the central object of
> investigation to which human characters only occasionally contribute. (Estes 19)

While the text navigates a traversal across the country with a concentration on the father

and son, the text critically investigates the environment, not in terms of reflecting the

emotional or psychological preoccupations of the characters by means of pathetic fallacy,

but as an independent force, in which the characters may in actuality reflect the

preoccupations of the environment (Estes 19):

> Out on the roads the pilgrims sank down and fell over and died and the bleak and
> shrouded Earth went trundling past the sun and returned again as trackless and as
> unremarked as the path of any nameless sisterworld in the ancient dark beyond.
> (McCarthy 181)

Because the Earth has died—and any possibility of sustenance along with it—the

inhabitants cannot continue to exist on the planet. Because of this the characters in the

novel reflect the impotence by which the Earth is now characterized. Without the ability

to sustain life, the Earth can no longer reflect the emotions of characters who no longer

exist.

As Estes paraphrases from Lawrence Buell, "*place* connotes meaningful human

attachment, social interactions and a known topography while *space* indicates rather a

geographical abstract—located specifically but without affect" (Estes 18). In *The Road,*

the only meaningful human relationship is the one between the father and the son. Before

the apocalypse, descriptions of the father's relationships—with his wife, uncle, his parents, and sisters—are all deeply connected to *place*. The man's relationship to his wife is connected to their matrimonial home ("Memory of her crossing the lawn toward the house in the early morning in a thin rose gown that clung to her breasts" (McCarthy 131)), while his relationship to his parents shows his childhood, including details of family gatherings and habits such as his mother's cleanliness ("This is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy … They walked through the diningroom [sic] where the firebrick in the hearth was as yellow as the day it was laid because his mother could not bear to see it blackened" (McCarthy 26)). However, the description of the father's childhood relationship with his uncle is connected to the landscape but remains mediated by culture as the two do not exist passively within nature, but move through it with ease simply to go fishing, returning again to Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River":

> The shore was lined with birchtrees [sic] that stood bone pale against the dark of the evergreens beyond. The edge of the lake a riprap of twisted stumps, gray and weathered, the windfall trees of a hurricane years past. The trees themselves had long been sawed for firewood and carried away. His uncle turned the boat and shipped the oars and they drifted over the sandy shallows until the transom drifted in the sand. (McCarthy 13)

Their ability to navigate natural environments indicates a comfortable knowledge regarding these topographies, but this navigation is dependent on culture and technology. In order for them to cross the lake, they must employ a boat made from materials presumably taken from nature. As mentioned in the passage, many trees have been reduced to stumps for their cultural potential. This relationship between nature and culture signifies that nature itself is never simply a space when humans are present, but is always ever a place. As Estes explains, space is absent of social meaning or, rather,

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indifferent to social meaning. Because nature is used for culture, nature cannot be considered a space, as space is a location that, while existing specifically, is unequivocally devoid of cultural affectations imposed on it.

However, the place of nature becomes transformed into a space following the apocalypse. Before the cataclysm, the natural world had experienced the imposition of humanity through industrial development, resource extraction, and a general exploitation of nature for human purposes. Yet, following the cataclysm, the text "shows the reversion of place to space as all human traces become effaced from the land in a post-apocalyptic United States" (Estes 18). As the world dies following the apocalypse, humanity is robbed of the ability to enact any cultural imposition onto the environment by the virtue that humanity has been almost entirely decimated. Nature becomes entirely a *space* rather than a *place*. The environment loses all potential for providing and sustaining life, and is reduced to space. Conversely, because humanity has likewise suffered from the apocalypse, its own location within the environment has been reduced from *place* to *space*. As every recognizable institution and system has become totally dismantled, the *place* in which humans were situated, though perhaps remaining geographically the same, becomes foreign as all traces of humanity and culture are erased. In this way, humanity is estranged from its own location, resulting in an exile that is at once ecological as it is spatial.

Exile, which is spatial, national, and cultural is related to transnationalism, which Berndt Ostendorf describes as "presuppos[ing] anti-essentialism, favour[ing] plurality, mobility, hybridity and … margins or spaces in-between" (as quoted in Estes 21). The father and son, while ecologically exiled from their environment, are also culturally

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divorced from their home. The alteration of their environment has erased nationality and culture from the landscape, leaving them in a different land altogether. Subjectivities of exile and displacement are characterized by the thematic elements of transnationalism such as anti-essentialism, plurality, mobility, hybridity, and marginality, but exile does not favour these; instead, these qualities remain fraught with tension and confusion as the experience of displacement, not of voluntary movement implied by transnationalism results in a traumatic treatment of these elements, and, therefore, in exile and alienation. Unlike transnationalism, which allows mobility to another nation or culture, the experience of exile divorces the subject from the environment, leaving the subject disoriented in the new location. Alienation occurs as a result of what Edward Said describes as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (173). The claim to place is dismantled through exile and because of this, alienation regarding one's subjectivity becomes dismantled and questioned.

While this is true of the father and the son, as they have lost their homes and any connection to their past through the destruction of the surrounding environment as well as the rest of humanity, the nonhuman world also experiences exile through the rift forced between a species and its native place. Said goes on to explain exile's close relation to nationalism, which he writes is "an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile" (176). According to many humanist ways of thinking, only humanity is able to have a community of language, culture, and customs; however, it has been shown that nonhuman animals also reflect these qualities (Shettleworth 277),

and so it may be concluded that a loss of a nonhuman species' home may constitute exile, resulting in alienation. Rosi Braidotti asserts that expansions of "dominant normative visions of the self" are required to "evolve toward a posthuman frame of reference" (167). Breaking the anthropocentric definition of exile to include nonhumans allows for a re-identification of the kinds of loss that are experienced throughout the environment among all species who are bereft of their native places. This is necessary, according to Braidotti, because such ideological rejuvenation "shifts the relationships to the nonhuman others and requires dis-identification from century-old habits of anthropocentric thought and human arrogance" (168). This dis-identification, much like alienation or defamiliarization, requires a reconsideration of one's place among a complex matrix of relationships. This revision often implicates the "loss of cherished habits and thoughts and representation, a move which can also produce fear, sense of insecurity and nostalgia" (168).

This loss and insecurity is experienced among all of Earth's inhabitants throughout *The Road* because of the literal depletion of security. Though the apocalypse forces this conceptual revision of humanity's relationship to nature, there is no redemptive quality for such a revision as all the nonhuman animals have been erased with the apocalypse; the shift towards the posthuman frame of reference comes too late. Yet, this sense of alienation is remarked on throughout *The Road*, as the father reflects on their ecological exile. The term 'alien' appears at significant junctures—with a total of five appearances—and responds to the acute sense of exile felt by the father. The first appearance of the term occurs when the father find small morels in the ash for them to eat: "They pulled the morels from the ground, small alien-looking things" (McCarthy 40).

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Despite the seeming banality of the line, the term points to the alienation of the soil to provide even the smallest sustenance. The morels are yet another reminder of a previous age—not one that is riddled with commodities, but an age that was still able to provide nourishment from the Earth. The morels are "alien-looking" simply because nature is itself alien in this post-apocalyptic world.

Estes, in his investigation of McCarthy's employment of the term, sees 'alien' as simply a way to describe the post-apocalyptic environment as unfamiliar and destroyed, yet the use of 'alien' functions on a more semantic level and returns to Said's explanation of exile. The term 'alien' describes a subject who has been estranged or is not yet naturalized to their environment (Oxford English Reference Dictionary 34), and such estrangement is typified as a symptom of exile. The etymological roots of the term from the Latin *alius* meaning 'other' derives from the Old French term *alienus*, meaning "belonging to another" (34). The morel is alien-looking because it does indeed belong to another world, and undergoes its own ecological estrangement.

The etymological meaning is reflected again in the father's estimation of his son's appearance following their encounter with the cannibals: "The boy's candlecolored [sic] skin was all but translucent. With his great staring eyes he'd the look of an alien" (McCarthy 129). The pallor of the boy's skin and the bulging of his eyes suggest his nearness to death; it would seem that while he may in fact have the look of an extraterrestrial, the father sees that the boy is slowly approaching death and may no longer belong within the post-apocalyptic world. However, the father recognizes his own alienation to the world and from his son: "He turned and looked at the boy. Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a

planet that no longer existed … He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world

he'd lost without constructing the loss as well" (153-4). In this description, McCarthy

sums up the experience of exile, which, as Said testifies, "is strangely compelling to think

about but terrible to experience" (Said 173). Furthermore, for Said, "The pathos of exile

is in the loss of the solidity and the satisfaction of the earth: homecoming is out of the

question" (179). For the father to regale his son with narratives of a world no more, the

father must traumatically relive his past and his experience of the apocalypse that

estranged him from his past life, which has lost all its solidity of reality. Said, again,

reports that the exile, "once banished, lives an anomalous and miserable life" (181), and

the father's representation of his previous life recreates his banishment while

emphasizing his placement in the current world as alien and unnatural.

The father's alien subjectivity is augmented by the environment's estrangement as

well. As the father awakes one morning, he sees the: "Bleak dawn in the east. The alien

sun commencing its cold transit" (McCarthy 178). The sun itself belongs to another

world, a world no longer in existence; the sun is alien primarily because it is no longer

life-providing and sustaining as it was for ages before. It is not the sun itself which has

ceased to provide life; the sun cannot sustain life which no longer exists. In this way, the

sun is exiled within this world, providing "bleak" light that can no longer participate in

the photosynthetic processes on the planet due to the extinction of species that require

light to survive. To describe the sun as cold is not to remark entirely on the warmth it no

longer exudes, but to remark on the indifference of a world in its demise: "The ponderous

counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly

secular. The silence" (274). The repetition of 'cold' asserts the impassivity of the Earth's

"late history" (91), responding less to the lack of divinity demonstrated in the planet's final moments, and more to the temporality of the humanity's imposed exceptionalism onto a world. Now, without humanity and the rest of the species, the world is silent and, consequently, unable to respond to the material reality of the Earth in its last stages.

The final appearance of 'alien' in the text looks to the ruined environment, specifically the ocean, and how dispossessed it is of its interconnection with the natural processes of life: "Out there was the gray beach with the slow combers rolling dull and leaden and the distant sound of it. Like the desolation of some alien sea breaking on the shores of a world unheard of" (McCarthy 215). Here, the father sees the alienation transitioning from highly specific and singular (from the mushrooms, to his son, and then himself) to the alienness of both the planet and the natural operations therein. This passage, in concert with the previous passages employing the same term, demonstrates the totality with which the planet has been completely unhinged from its own ability to sustain itself. Instead, even the ocean, while still responding to the gravitational forces causing the tides, is in exile, appearing to belong more naturally on another world.

McCarthy's repetition of 'alien' throughout *The Road*, used in conjunction with the post-apocalyptic narrative, signifies not only the father's and son's estrangement from the world, including their pasts and culture, but the estrangement the Earth and the environment face as a result of anthropocentrism and the apocalypse that ensued. The world, as it is now, has become alien unto itself. As such, the term 'alien' is a testament to the absolute alienation and exile that the world of *The Road* experiences. It is not one that only is attributed to humanity, but to all species named and unnamed. In all five uses of the term, McCarthy is inclusive without being overly general with all the lives that

have suffered the cataclysmic extinction of life. Through the anthropocentric critique

situated within the litterings of commodities throughout the text and the careful use of

'alien,' *The Road* offers a subjectivity of ecological exile that is totalizing as well as

equalizing.

The problematic of posthumanism is complicated in *The Road* as the 'post' of

posthumanism literally signals that which comes after humanity. But because

posthumanism seeks to render all life equal—in the same way that Estes's term

biocentrism denotes—the term posthumanism in this text does not simply refer to that

which comes after only humanity, but what occurs when *all* life ceases to exist.

"Geographer David Harvey," Kollin discusses, "argu[es] that 'all socio-political projects

are ecological projects and vice versa,' … For Harvey, 'critical examinations of the

relation to nature are simultaneously critical examinations of society'" (Kollin 158). This

is evident especially in the framework of posthumanism, which sees how the human is

situated and imbricated within nature so that the binary of nature/culture is tenuous and

continually in conflict with itself to the point of destabilization. For *The Road*, this

critical examination of society is made clear by the narrative exploration of how the

remaining humans roam the desolated landscape they are singularly exiled from. The

total ecological collapse likewise prompts a collapse of the social order, essentially

abandoning humanity from their self-generated and self-imposed view of the world and

beyond, exposing the fragility "of things one believed to be true … The sacred idiom

shorn of its referents and so of its reality" (McCarthy 89). The fundamental estrangement

of the text, both of the world and its inhabitants, points to posthumanism's reliance on

what Braidotti calls "intense de-familiarization of our habits of thought through

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encounters that shatter the flat repetition of the protocols of institutional reason"

(Braidotti 169), which is precisely what McCarthy's text accomplishes. In the wake of a

complete ecological catastrophe follows the complete destruction of a system which

allowed humanity to regard the Earth as a planet within its own possession. Instead,

humanity becomes relegated to much the same position as previous Earth-others who also

experienced the devastating loss of their habitats and, consequently, the ability to survive.

In much the same way, the state of humanity following the apocalypse mirrors the state

of the animals prior to their eventual disappearance and demise as a result of excessive

industrial activity. In an environment "where all recognizable social institutions are in

ruin" (Kollin 157), the veil of signifiers falls, revealing a world so barren that the

remaining humans recognize their profound estrangement from and within it. With the

loss of almost all life on the planet, the cataclysm functions to democratize all life by not

privileging one species over another; all life, including humanity, has ceased to exist or is

in the last stages of survival. While humanity lingers temporarily on the borders of life,

their demise remains inevitable. Though no redemptive or hopeful message closes the

text, the cataclysm of *The Road* is a literalization of posthumanism's *post* and equalizes

all life through its vast destruction and, in so doing, shatters the illusion of

anthropocentrism's alleged sacred idiom.

Chapter Four:

Ecological Renewal and the Posthuman Ethos in Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* and Jeff

Lemire's *Animal Man*

Pity the land that needs heroes.

Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*

Like many narratives concerning a dismantled human subject, the elemental comic book

hero Swamp Thing, from Alan Moore's ecocritical *Saga of the Swamp Thing,* questions

both the traditional constructs of human identity, including humanity's relation to, and

existence within, nature. Originally created by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, *Swamp

Thing* underwent radical transformation under Alan Moore's penmanship in the 1980's.

The protagonist's ideals shifted from a concentration on self-determination and human

exceptionalism, as seen in previous issues, to an ontology that questions such

preoccupations.

Swamp Thing—an anthropomorphic vegetal creature who, through the swamp in

which he resides, has absorbed the consciousness of the person he believes to be his

former self, Alec Holland—was conceived in 1971 by Wein and Wrightson for a standard

horror issue of *House of Secrets,* a comic book magazine specializing in suspense comic

serials (Di Liddo 537). The original Swamp Thing was a scientist who, after being caught

in a scientific lab explosion, transforms into a bog creature and, unable to mediate his

monstrous transformation with his internal human psyche, retreats, alienated by his

monstrosity, to his swamp home (539). While this version of Swamp Thing saw some

acclaim, it eventually waned in popularity until its revival in the 1980's. DC Comic's

revamping of *Swamp Thing* in 1983 occurred when Wein recruited Moore as a writer, accompanied by artists Stephen Bissette and John Totleben, to continue the narrative of Swamp Thing. Maintaining the protagonist's appearance (Di Liddo 539), Moore radically overhauled the character's subjectivity. Unlike the original Swamp Thing, who remained ontologically connected to his previous self, Moore's Swamp Thing is instead a creature wholly separate from the psyche that remained in the swamp following Alec Holland's death. Brian Johnson best describes Swamp Thing as a: "bio-genetically altered sentient plant haunted by the psychic residue of the dead man's ghostly consciousness" (207). Swamp Thing's ontological shift mirrors his physical transformation within the series and works to destabilize humanist understandings of both nonhuman and human identities and to move toward ecological renewal. Moore's *Swamp Thing* conveys an ecocritical posthumanist approach to the natural world as his series opposes the exploitation of nature espoused by humanist anthropocentrism, in which nature is seen as subordinate to and existing for the exceptionalist practices of humankind. Throughout *Swamp Thing*'s revival, Moore advocates environmental renewal by developing a sympathetic elemental hero who attempts to negotiate his posthuman identity in a threatened and exploited landscape, where he too is imperiled as the position he comes to occupy is on the brink of both humanity and nature.

Similarly, Buddy Baker/Animal Man in Jeff Lemire's *Animal Man,* of DC Comic's recent The New 52 series, is another elemental hero of sorts, who is connected to the nonhuman animal world, and is able to sense and channel the qualities of various animal species through what is termed the "morphogenetic field" (*Animal Man* Volume 1: The Hunt), and later on in the series, the 'Red' (the animal life-force). This series,

revamped following a late 1980's revival by Grant Morrison which, like Moore's *Swamp Thing,* participated in a dialogue on environmental and animal rights, follows Animal Man as he defends his family against the Rot, the force of decay seeking to destroy the natural world—human, nonhuman, and ecological—for nefarious purposes, but mainly for complete world domination. Like Swamp Thing, who is connected to the plant-elemental chain of being called the Green, Animal Man is connected to the Red and may conjure a variety of physical qualities of animals, such as speed, night vision, or strength as a way to defend nature, but primarily to defend his family. Animal Man is also an eco-sympathizer, yet one who remains bound to the human world as he does not relinquish his human body to connect to the nonhuman animal world, unlike Swamp Thing, who never truly had a human body to begin with. In this way, Animal Man maintains a corporeal bridge between the human and nonhuman; Animal Man is the ultimate posthuman because he remains vitally connected to humanity and nonhumanity alike.

The New 52's re-launch of *Animal Man* introduces Swamp Thing as a participant against the destructive actions of the Rot, which is emblematic of anthropocentrism's ecologically destructive practices. Swamp Thing's guest appearance in Lemire's series positions the pair as defenders of the nonhuman world, providing a graphic representation for the need for ecological preservation as well as human/nonhuman cooperation to maintain this preservation. The two combine their connections to the Green and the Red in order to defend against the Rot. Because the dialectic of human/nonhuman—or, more specifically for Swamp Thing, human/nature—is subject to an intricate system of power relations inherent within the binary, the duality of human/nonhuman functions to privilege humanity advocating the control of both the nonhuman and nature through

political, social, and economic means. Exceptionalist representations of the human race, embedded and entrenched within cultural constructions and modes of production, are reproduced within *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* with uncanny and grotesque resemblances to reality so that the anthropocentric ethos is monstrously transformed. This is not to say, however, that humanity as a whole is made monstrous in either series; with the destructive capacities of Arcane and the Rot, seen in both *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man,* the dualism that divides humanity from nature and which privileges humanity makes monstrous the binary itself, rather than the ability to occupy either side of the human/nature binary.

While Swamp Thing initially regards his transformation as monstrous, the ability to bridge the binary, as both Swamp Thing and Animal Man do, is necessary for preserving nature and for a shifting posthuman ethos. The opposite, however, in the inability to bridge the binary, and the exploitation of the binary, is what is considered truly monstrous in both series. This is especially demonstrated through the character of Arcane, the representative of the Rot, who employs the human/nature binary as a method of domination, as does human exceptionalism. As Brian Johnson writes in his essay, "Libidinal Ecologies: Eroticism and Environmentalism in *Swamp Thing,*" "experiences of transgression interrupt and potentially dismantle the rational subject of Cartesian humanism, opening up a space in which alternative configurations of posthumanist subjectivity become possible" (225). By constructing an ecological space where the embodiments of nature and nonhuman are elevated to the same level as human, and the dualism of human/nature is made monstrous, both *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* dismantle the alleged rationality of Cartesian humanism's exceptionalist praxis.

Both series communicate a posthumanist ethos of ecological renewal, as the environment and nonhumans are elevated from traditional Cartesian dialectical values through an interruption of anthropocentrism's continuing "dysfunctional relationship with the environment" (de Laplante 159). As such, *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* attempt to redefine humanity's place alongside, and within, nature. Swamp Thing initially regards his transformation from Alec Holland, a man who participated in the humanist ethos, to a vegetal mass that becomes posthumanistically connected to the Green, as a monstrous transgression. However, Swamp Thing eventually perceives his connection to the Green as a powerful, animated force through which he harnesses the energies of nature to defend it against destruction. Animal Man, following his connection to the Red, acknowledges the interconnectedness of life and defends his family and the world against the Rot in order to maintain ecological stability. Because of this, both *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* embody the evolving posthuman perspective advocated by Cary Wolfe, thus demonstrating the "alternative configurations" of ecocritical posthumanism and the possibility for ecological renewal. Neither Swamp Thing nor Animal Man exist separately from humanity; both remain linked to both humanity and nonhumanity. This lack of dialectical differentiation demonstrates the texts' posthuman inclinations towards inclusion and interconnection, rather than an inclination towards taxonomical categorization.

Interconnection is formally and graphically illustrated throughout the series, namely through the marriage of image and text. Graphic fiction combines word and icon in a hybrid form that allows for an immediacy to the narrative and the action contained therein. By assembling narratives through images and text, graphic fiction—also known

as comic books—relies on a connection of formal features traditionally relegated to discrete disciplines of literature and visual arts. In the hybrid form of graphic fiction, there is already a demonstration of connection that is vital to the form's existence. Thus, narratives about the interconnection of life in all its variety are well suited in a form that destabilizes binaries through the merging of formal elements. Through the assemblage of images and text in a sequence to create an immediacy to the narrative, graphic fiction fosters a vivid portrayal of the figurations represented therein. Using the comic book to engage in a narrative that "allegorize[s] the intimate relation between the practical work of green politics and the utopian horizon of the new earth it works to bring about" (Johnson 230), the text visually represents the ecocritical debate regarding the state of humanism in an environment that bears physical evidence to the accumulation of human exceptionalist practices within it. Because the graphic form is a hybrid media, the ecocritical sentiments contained therein structurally demonstrate a movement towards a posthuman ethos in which form and content are married, making acutely explicit the destabilization of the human/nonhuman and human/nature binaries, and the unequivocal progression towards posthuman plurality. It is not the form of graphic fiction that necessarily, or always, represents a posthuman slant, but that graphic fiction already highlights the successful formal hybridity of word and icon, demonstrating that the hybridity of human/nature may also be a successful undertaking. The exaggeration of these binaries is made evident by the characters who reside on either side of and in the slash between the dualities, drawing a clearer delineation, formally, of the conceptual undertaking of these two series.

This conceptual undertaking is perhaps most aptly defined as ecocritical. While many critics relegate *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* to the horror genre of comic books, because of the graphic elements which employ conventional and stylistic horror features, the critical climate of both texts is clearly that of ecocriticism, as both examine ecological attitudes surrounding nonhuman life. The earth-centred approach of ecocriticism is made highly visible in *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man.* The palette, consisting primarily of various shades of green, evokes an earth-centrality; whenever green's complement appears throughout *Swamp Thing*—red—it is often suggestive of ecological contempt or wrongdoing, while green suggests a sustained connection to nature. In *Animal Man*, the use of red signifies a connection to the nonhuman animal world. This series' palette makes use of a variety of strong primary colours, namely varying shades and hues of red and green, to establish a connection to nature, including nonhuman animals and nature. The palette used to represent the Rot, which attempts to corrupt the Green and Red, employs colours that range from wan browns and purple, to foul greys and beiges, all connotative of decay and putrefaction. In the colours alone, the series communicates a connection to the Earth that is, as Garrard describes of ecocritical works, "avowedly political" (Garrard 189) because they correspond directly to the elemental arenas which are endangered by exceptionalist practices.

Swamp Thing and *Animal Man* engage in the critical practices of ecocriticism and posthumanism alike, as both series articulate, through a graphic literary mode, the intersections of human, nonhuman, and nature within an ecological framework. The examination of the treatment of nature aligns itself both with ecocritical and posthuman critical endeavours; *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* engage in what Glotfelty writes is the

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"the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (para. 5).

The dialogue of interconnection pervasive throughout both series erases the distance used to exploit nature and nonhumanity in order to elevate and promote a discussion regarding ecological and nonhuman animal rights as a whole. This question of the human is central to both posthumanism and ecocriticism, and requires a redefinition of what it means to be human in a landscape of interconnection and ecological renewal.

Cary Wolfe sees the human as already decentered through technological and theoretical advances; he claims that humanism was, paradoxically, an interruption of posthumanism. Wolfe understands posthumanism regards as events occurring both before and after Cartesian humanism:

> Before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world … [but] after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human … is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms … a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies … of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (Wolfe 101)

The need for such theoretical paradigms of the human must be rethought in relation to the cultural practices of domination and exploitation, without denying the material existence of humanity which, despite what humanism attempts to convey, is embedded within and around nature.

Related to posthumanism's reconception of human is the reconception of ecology and environment where more post-anthropocentric agency will be able to occur with

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increasing freedom (Callus, Herbrechter 3965). For theorists like Wolfe, such advances will require new forms of "ecocriticism that challenge views of human 'dominion' over the world [by] acknowledg[ing] the multitude of interactions and mutual interdependencies between humans, nonhumans, and their environment" (Callus, Herbrechter. 3965).

Wolfe also maintains that humanism's theoretical frameworks initiate the construction of the "normative subjectivity—a specific concept of the human—that grounds discrimination against nonhuman animals … in the first place" (118), thereby justifying the exploitation of nature and maintaining an elevated position within it. This cyclical referentiality between the justification of exploitation and the modeling of this exploitation after the semantic and cultural binary of human/nature advances a discursive behaviour that cements a specific way of thinking about the natural and constructed world, seeing it as fundamentally separate. For Wolfe, these ways of thinking must be confronted, which will aid in the "decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates" to change the very nature of thought "in the face of those challenges" (109). Wolfe testifies that "the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist" (109). As a corollary of this, conceptions of human and nature must undergo redefinition as a way to destabilize humanism's paradigmatic approach to constructing the human and its relationship within all other networks whether natural or constructed.

Such redefinitions of the human occurs throughout the *Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* series, alongside a destabilization of the binary used to separate humanity from nature, specifically through the title characters' ability to occupy both sides of and the

slash between the duality of human/nonhuman and human/nature. In *Saga of the Swamp Thing Book One*, Moore's protagonist has a similar experience to the original Dr. Alec Holland and is also seemingly transformed during an explosion into, and henceforth trapped within, a vegetal mass vaguely resembling his previous human form. Moore introduces Holland at the opening of *Book One*'s "Loose Ends," as synonymous with the creature known as 'the Swamp Thing,' seen in earlier runs of the comic. Swamp Thing, who continues to believe he is Alec Holland, is still attempting to mediate his traumatic ontological dislocation in a body that horrifically negates his internal and subjective identification, while remaining dualistically exiled in a foreign landscape uninhabited by humanity. He sees himself as wholly monstrous, unable to occupy either sphere of the human/nature divide comfortably, as seen in the figure below:

Figure 3.1. Swamp Thing questions his liminality as human and nonhuman (Moore 21).

Swamp Thing here is clearly devoid of the agency he requires to come to terms with his

subjectivity as he continues to regard himself as monstrous. He is "a human subject

dismantled and demolished: a human body whose integrity is violated, a human identity

whose boundaries are breached from all sides" (Hurley 205). Swamp Thing believes his

body has been altered from his previous form of Alec Holland, whom he believes he

fundamentally is, as his subjectivity remains connected to Holland's consciousness; as

such, Swamp Thing regards his quasi-humanity as monstrous and abject. However,

Swamp Thing remains monstrous only until he finally comes to terms with his existence

not as human but as a part of the Green, as an elemental figure who is deeply connected to all forms of life. Until then, Swamp Thing occupies a liminal space where he is "a spectacle of the human body defamiliarized, rendered other" (Hurley 203). Before realizing the truth about his identity, Swamp Thing battles for his humanity as a last effort to remain connected to a subjectivity he believes he owns:

Figure 3.2. Swamp Thing struggles to maintain his humanity (77).

This panel, from "Swamped" of *Book One* demonstrates Swamp Thing's physical and ontological struggle with his alleged human past, and the memories and experiences that led him to his present self. After escaping from Sunderland Corporation, where he was kept in cryogenic stasis in a presumably deceased state in order to be studied and dissected for capitalist ventures, Swamp Thing learns that he never truly was Alec Holland. When the bio-restorative formula Holland had been developing combined with the dynamite explosion, Holland died instantly. However, his body goes into the swamp along with the formula that it is saturated with … But what about the plants in the swamp? The plants that have been altered by the bio-restorative formula? The plants

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whose hungry root systems are busily ingesting the mortal remains of Alec Holland?

Those plants eat him. They eat him as if he were a planarian worm, or a cannibal wise

man, or a genius on rye! They eat him … and they become infected by a powerful

consciousness that does not realize it is no longer alive! (48) In other words, the plants of

the swamp, after becoming infused with the bio-restorative formula, consume the corpse

of Holland and, in so doing, absorb the memories and consciousness of Holland. Once

the plants accumulate, they form into an anthropomorphic vegetal mass, and assume the

subjectivity of Holland, thus believing itself to be a monstrously transformed human.

Once Swamp Thing returns to his swamp home in a post-traumatic state, he physically

roots himself during which he flits in and out of consciousness and travels to a hell-like

space where, with his vegetable, human-esque body, Swamp Thing clings onto the

skeleton of Alec Holland (seen in the panel above) as way to maintain the "slash

between" as Kelly Hurley phrases it (203) the natural and the human. The physical

struggle to preserve his humanity is categorically posthuman. Here, Swamp Thing is

shown as transformed from embodied humanity into embodied plant matter with the two

embodiments seeming to cancel out each other's respective subjectivities; Alec Holland

is not Swamp Thing, and Swamp Thing never was Alec Holland. The embodiments and

ontologies associated with each body subvert and destabilize each other. While this may

seem to be, simply, a transformation of embodiment from one form to another, thereby

maintaining an anthropocentric ethos, the confrontation of the two bodies works to negate

"fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself" (Wolfe 93).

Neither ontology is disembodied or autonomous but are rather transcended to a level of

ecological connectedness and consciousness; Holland's psyche feeds the plants, and the

plants absorb Holland's psyche, growing to create Swamp Thing who, imbued with Holland's memories, may remain connected to the human world.

Swamp Thing's posthuman displacement leaves him disoriented as he occupies only the slash between human/nature, which now comprises his subjectivity. Mediating his newly acquired ontology with his memories and history remains difficult, as expressed in the figure below:

Figure 3.3. Swamp Thing comes to terms with his posthuman subjectivity (96).

Swamp Thing begins to remember that he was never Alec Holland only after he emerges from his physically rooted delirium to seek revenge on Dr. Jason Woodrue/the 'Floronic Man,' who, realizing that he is able to absorb Swamp Thing's relationship to the Green by eating Swamp Thing's vegetable growths, desires to terminate all animal life on the

planet so that plant-life may reign over the planet. Woodrue refers to this as "the revenge of the grass" (112).

Figure 3.4. Swamp Thing grapples with the exceptionalist ethos that attempts to prevent his survival (100).

Recognizing that he has been bodily violated (as a human subject during the explosion) and ecologically exploited (as a plant during an attempted assassination and subsequent laboratory experimentation), Swamp Thing seeks revenge on Woodrue for denying him his subjectivity and for plotting a genocidal scheme to destroy "the screaming meat" (108) of the human-animal world to foster the advancement of plant-life.

Figure 3.5. Swamp Thing informs Woodrue that his alleged alignment with the Green is exploitative (122).

Woodrue's perplexity regarding Swamp Thing's defense of humanity stems from

Woodrue's failure to see the interconnectedness of all beings. This inability is a symptom

of Woodrue's humanist agenda, as he "remains caught within the binary logic of the very

anthropocentric system [he] … seeks to displace" (Johnson 252). Swamp Thing,

belonging physically to the Green, "the literary paraspace representing the nonhuman

dimension of the ecosphere to which Swamp Thing's conscious is connected and through

which it can travel" (Johnson 252) and to the human world through his absorption of

Holland's consciousness, finally establishes himself as an alternative configuration of

subjectivity and embodiment in which he is able to occupy both human and nonhuman

realms without only existing in the slash between.

Figure 3.6. Woodrue's actions are labelled anthropocentric (123).

In this way, Swamp Thing decenters Woodrue's inverted anthropocentric attitude of nature/human, and "establish[es] the deep ecological ethos of interconnectedness between human and nonhuman life" (Johnson 252). His posthuman ethos surfaces after recognizing that monstrosity is not the embedded psyche of deceased human but "the embodiment of multiple, incompatible forms" (Hurley 203) as figured with Woodrue and his attempt to conflate humanism with posthumanism while keeping with the "originary epistemological violence" of anthropocentrism which exacts suffering on nonhuman life (Johnson 260). Though Woodrue seeks to decenter the human, he attempts to do so using his self-determination and assumed autonomy to execute his plans, thus employing a humanist agenda. Swamp Thing points out Woodrue's error, stating: "You are ill… Woodrue… And you poison… The Green… with your desires…" (123), demonstrating to him that he has not transcended human embodiment but has remained caught within the dualistic system that provoked such ecological destruction in the first place. Seen below, Swamp Thing points out to Woodrue that ecological renewal cannot be generated by the further destruction of life, but that a union between human and nature must occur in order for an ecologically sustainable relationship to exist between the two:

Figure 3.7. As Swamp Thing points out Woodrue's constructed connection to the Green, Woodrue becomes disengaged from it (124).

Following this statement, Woodrue's connection to the Green disappears and he is unable to sustain himself as the allegedly elemental being he claimed to be and so withdraws into the binary of human/nature he sought to displace.

After defeating Woodrue, Swamp Thing grasps the destruction that results from the power dynamics inherent in the human/nature binary. His entreaty in the panel below is as much a question to humanity in *Swamp Thing* as it is to Moore's readership in general:

Figure 3.8. Swamp Thing and his lover Abby discuss whether humanity will cease destroying the Green (126).

The question seeks to disturb the relationship between anthropocentrism and self-determination over the environment by demonstrating the necessity for ecological renewal that may only come as a result of a posthuman re-conceptualization of human as embedded within, and not apart from, nature. Swamp Thing's question, "Will *your* people… do as much?" is a direct attempt to communicate the major questions of environmental philosophy in general, namely:

> 1) Do human beings have moral obligations to protect or preserve the natural environment? …
> 2) What are the root causes of contemporary attitudes and practice with respect to the natural environment, and how can we change them? (de Laplante 155)

By allegorizing the practical tenets of environmental philosophies and posthumanism (Johnson 229), *Swamp Thing* advocates for a reconceptualization of human relationships with the environment. However, this raises the question of whether or not humans can or really should speak on behalf of the natural environment, and whether this stewardship demonstrates a continuation of the humanist ethos in itself, albeit with a less self-deterministic stance. "Even the term 'nonhuman,'" Callus and Herbrechter assert, "poses a problem because it tends to presuppose a human norm, essence or truth from which all

nonhuman forms differ" (Callus, Herbrechter 3979). However, Donna Haraway posits

that speaking on behalf of nonhuman life is a practice in the "responsible sharing of

suffering" (as quoted in Callus, Herbrechter 3993) and a way to move beyond binary

exceptionalism. Included in the eco-philosophical umbrella which includes

posthumanism, ecocriticism/green theory, and deep ecology, is the idea that speciesism is

the "new form of inequality or prejudice to be redressed" (Callus, Herbrechter 3965-

3979), and this continues to be articulated as a mainstay of ecological philosophies.

Swamp Thing's question functions then as an entreaty to the "responsible sharing of

suffering" that Haraway likewise promotes.

After seeing how destructive the dualistic thinking can be, Swamp Thing accepts

his ontology as an elemental figure and enters what Annalisa Di Liddo calls "a state of

communion with the earth" (558) by finally asserting himself as "the Swamp Thing," and

not as a reincarnation of Alec Holland.

Figure 3.9. Swamp Thing affirms his identity as an elemental figure of the plant world
(127).

As he admits himself to being fully Swamp Thing and not Alec Holland, Swamp Thing

sees himself as a figure of monstrosity, but a figuration of the liminal space between the

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semantic border of human and nature; his posthuman ontology works to confound the spaces that foster taxonomic hierarchies in the first place. Swamp Thing's liberation from the ambiguous relationship to Alec Holland symbolizes, Johnson writes, "the death of an unethical and self-limiting mode of humanist self-understanding, just as Swamp Thing himself, freed from the corpse of this false self-image, comes to symbolize the emergence of a new (posthumanist) subject" (321). The posthumanism of Swamp Thing serves to communicate a narrative of ecological renewal and a plea to ascribe, what Arne Naess calls, "intrinsic moral value to the nonhuman natural world" (164-165) as a way to "justify environmental policies that acknowledge and respect this value" (164-165). Swamp Thing succeeds in attributing value to the natural world by demonstrating the interconnectedness of his ontology with all living things and by disturbing the premise that because humans are capable of rationality, humans are privileged to exploit the Green.

This interconnection continues to be demonstrated in Lemire's *Animal Man*, which re-introduces Buddy Baker as Animal Man, the superhero who is able to channel the abilities of other animals, whilst remaining physically human. He uses these powers initially to defend his city against petty criminal activities, but eventually employs them to defend his family and the rest of the world against the Rot. Animal Man initially believes to have received his powers from a group of extraterrestrial visitors. However, this narrative was a ruse orchestrated by the leaders of the Red—referred to as Totems throughout the series—to make him a temporary avatar of the Red so that he may pass on his powers to his next child, Maxine, who has already been chosen by the Totems to become the new true avatar of the Red.

Figure 3.10. A believable narrative and powers are implanted in Buddy Baker by the Totems of the Red (Lemire, *Vol. 2 Animal vs. Man*, "Red Birth").

Terrestrial avatars—such as Animal Man—may only exist singularly. Following their deaths, another avatar is chosen, while each deceased avatar may become immortalized as a Totem within the Red Kingdom to preside over and guide the actions of the subsequent avatar. Each avatar of the Red and the Green becomes the protector of nonhuman animal and plant life, respectively, across the planet, ensuring that a proper

balance is maintained within these realms. In the same way that there are numerous

avatars of the Red, there are avatars of the Green, a role which Swamp Thing assumes,

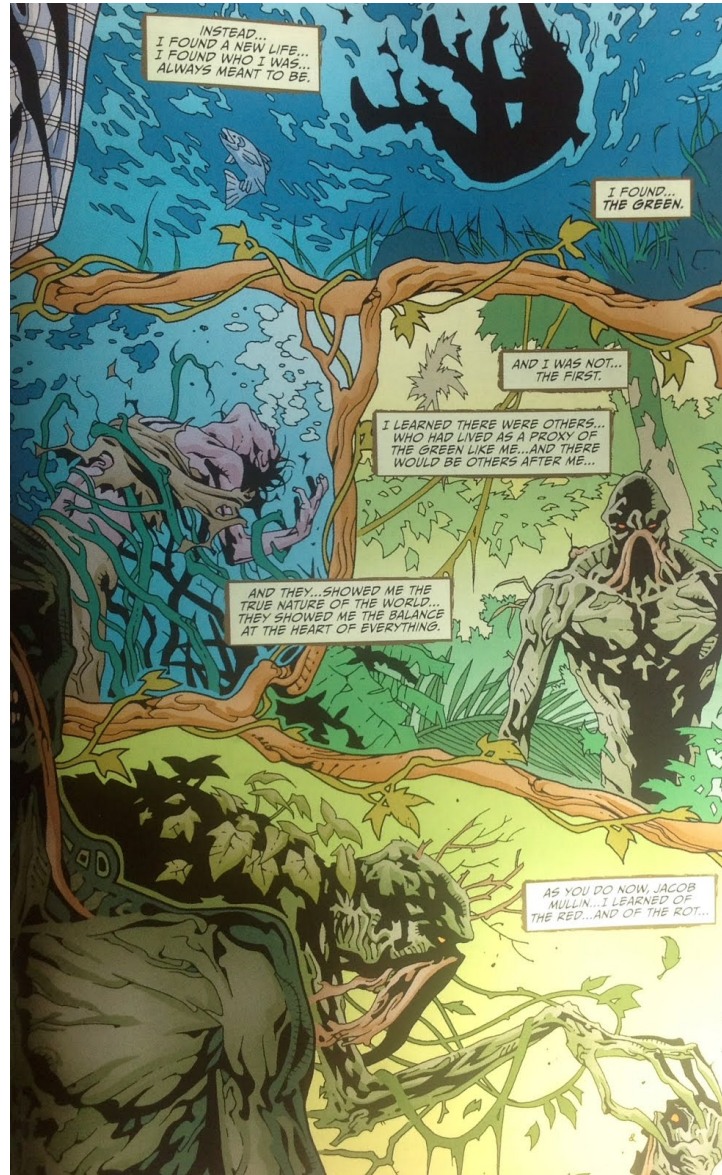knowing that there have been several Swamp Things before him:

Figure 3.1. An avatar, or guardian, of each realm exists always exists at any given time
(*Vol. 2 Animal vs. Man*, "Endless Rot").

Similarly, Animal Man assumes the temporary role of avatar of the Red in order to prepare and protect his daughter, Maxine, who claims the title as the true avatar of the Red; however, Animal Man is ignorant of the Red or of the avatars themselves prior to his daughter's posthuman awakening, only until he begins having dreams relating to both the Red and the Rot, as well as his daughter's powers.

Figure 3.12. Animal Man learns that the inheritance of his powers was a ruse devised by the Totems to reach his daughter, Maxine (*Vol. 1 The Hunt*, "Part Three: Totems").

Animal Man's assumption of his role as a superhero prepares him, in many ways, to

adopt the protective and defensive attitude customary of the superhero ethos.

Furthermore, his own connection to the Red underscores his recognition of the

interconnectedness of all life, alerting him to the dangerous duality of anthropocentrism,

a recognition necessary for his defense against the Rot.

Animal Man is introduced in an interview, showcasing Animal Man, positioning

him as a "Superhero/Actor/Activist," placing his character and the series in the animal

rights framework. Animal Man, also known as Buddy Baker, tells the interviewer:

> When I got my superpowers, becoming a hero just seemed like the right thing to do.
> And that led to all kinds of new experiences, and really opened my eyes to the
> injustices facing animals in our world. I realized I could make more of a difference
> educating people on animal rights than I could by punching out a super villain, you
> know? … If my time as Animal Man has helped open people's eyes to the fact that
> we share this planet with all other creatures, and that we are all connected … then
> I'm not complaining. (*Animal Man Volume 1: The Hunt)*

The posthumanist slant of the series is made evident through this introductory interview,

which speaks to the broader ideas of interconnection in which ecocriticism and

posthumanism as a whole are situated. Animal Man, in conceding the interconnection of

all life, situates the text within an ethical context. In complicating the binary of

human/nonhuman, *Animal Man* approaches the question of alterity with respect to

nonhuman animals, hinting that the anthropocentric concept that humans are distinct and

apart from nature and nonhumanity is one that will be dismantled throughout the course

of the series.

Speaking of Lemire's other critically acclaimed series *Sweet Tooth*, a post-apocalyptic graphic series about an array of human/nonhuman hybrids, Katherine Kelp-Stebbins writes,

> *Sweeth Tooth* not only offers forth speculative visions for the future of humans and animals, it gives graphic shape to these imagined posthuman [sic] and their world in a way that denies domestication. In a historical era where 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion' … *Sweet Tooth* re-visions the fear of human/animal cohabitation and contagion. Lemire's work appears at a contemporary moment where increasing anxiety about zoonoses on a global scale has made the borders between humans and non-humans a site of increased biopolitical securitization. (Kelp-Stebbins 339-340)

The same may be said of *Animal Man* as Animal Man himself is the literal figuration of the cohabitation and contagion of human and nonhuman within a single body. Rather than having the duality of human/nonhuman polarize his identity, Animal Man consolidates the juncture between the binary as, what Judith Jack Halberstam and Ira Livingston term, a "re-distribution… of difference and identity" (as quoted in Kelp-Stebbins 337). Animal Man is not manifested by the human/nonhuman dialectic, but by a human-*and*-nonhuman plurality, which he affirms within his own identity, but also in the identity of all Earth creatures, demonstrated by the above passage. This is echoed in Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites*, in which Wolfe argues that "the other-than-human resides at the very core of the human itself, not as the untouched, ethical antidote to reason but as part of reason itself—the 'trace' that inhabits it" (Wolfe 17). Situating humankind within the framework of nonhumanity and nature permits a flexibility in the understanding of identity as a whole, allowing for a plurality hitherto denied by Cartesian humanism in which difference was subject to a system of hierarchy and exploitation. Wolfe goes on to say,

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By thus keeping open the incalculability of the difference between reason/the human and its other/the nonhuman (animal), we may begin to approach the ethical question of nonhuman animals not as the other-than-human but as the *infrahuman* … as a part of us, *of* us—and nowhere more forcefully than when reason, "theory," reveals "us" to be very different creatures from who we thought "we" were. (Wolfe 17)

This thinking prevents anthropocentric discursivity, instead revitalizing a heterogeneous and ecological perspective that constellates across a breadth of differences and subjectivities, during which, as Halberstam and Livingstone outline, the redistribution of identity occurs. This redistribution and renegotiation of identity is visible from the outset of the text, in which Animal Man comes to realize that even his own powers are not distinct and separate, but belong to network of interconnections, which include the Red, the Green, and the Rot, and that his daughter also has the ability to connect to the Red on a deeper level:
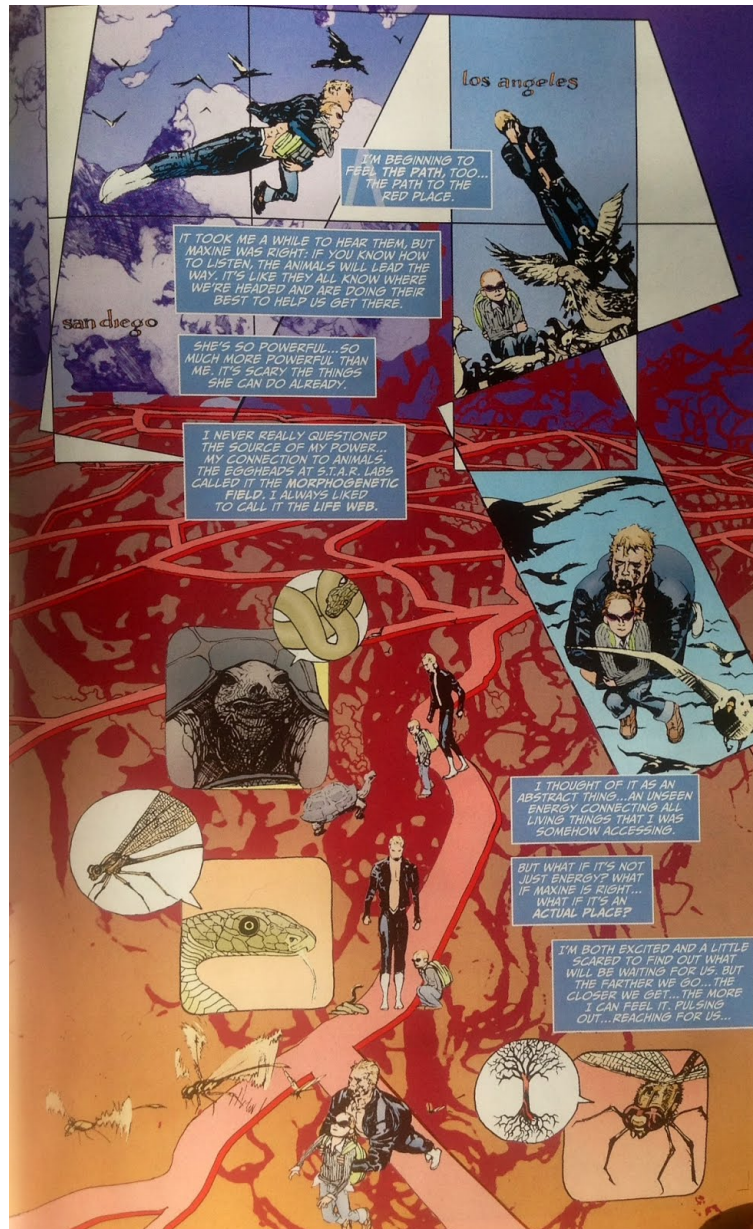
Figure 3.13. As Animal Man and Maxine travel to the Red Kingdom, Animal Man acknowledges his daughter's powers (*Vol. 1 The Hunt*, "Part Two: Maps").

The Rot, the force of decay, is not diametrically positioned as a force of evil, but rather as a necessary part of the life-force, that must be carefully balanced with all the other forces, the Red and the Green:

Figure 3.14. The three forces of life are shown to be interconnected and must remain in balance (*Vol. 2 Animal vs. Man*, "Endless Rot").

As seen in Figure 3.14, these elements cannot exist exclusively from one another, but can only operate fluidly when in concert with the other elements; disruption to this balance results in the need for correction, which may only happen when a relatively even amount of power is attributed to each. In *Animal Man,* however, the power is grossly imbalanced,

leading, as the Totems mentioned, to a war that involves all life. As Ignatius/Socks the

Cat, a Totem of the Red who has left the Red Kingdom to accompany Maxine on her

journey, explains to Maxine, the Rot is a force that regularly invades the Red and the

Green:

> The last time the Rot attempted an incursion of this magnitude was in the small
> farming community of Stone Lake, Manitoba, near the Boreal Forests, in 1894. As
> it is wont to do, the Rot began to creep in quietly. It was almost unnoticeable at
> first. At strange affliction began to take root in a few fields of wheat … But it
> spread quickly, and soon an entire season's crops were festering and ruined …
> Then, the flies came. *Too many* flies. It wasn't long before the livestock fell ill too.
> Even the most rational of men could...*something* dark had come to Stone Lake. The
> Red and the Green were sick. *The Rot was there.* (*Vol. 2: Animal vs. Man*, "Endless
> Rot")

Initially, this incursion seems sudden and unwarranted. However, *Animal Man* is careful

to point out exactly when and where the Rot begins to invade. The Rot's invasion occurs

when humanity had begun to encroach upon the Boreal Forest, destroying nonhuman

habitats for agricultural development, a development that benefits only a small population

of humans, whilst harming innumerable nonhumans, both animal- and plant-life. As

death became pushed out of balance in the forest, the Rot gained in power, leaving the

remaining elements vulnerable to its decaying authority. Consequently, the Rot feeds off

the decay wrought from humanity's destruction of the environment, and amasses vast

portions of nature, including plants and animals, which are then transformed into

figurations of decay and putrefaction, and reflects the destructive behaviours back onto

humanity. In this way, while the Rot represents anthropocentrism in many ways, the Rot

also resembles the posthumanist ethos of interconnection; if ecological destruction

persists, the vital balance of the planet will be displaced, likewise provoking an incursion

of decay.

The invasion of the Rot that dominates the series corresponds to present ecological problems; and this bridging of reality with the speculative fiction of *Animal Man* prompts yet another hybridity. This hybridity of the fictive and the real, characteristic of speculative fictions, draws connections between the two in order to communicate the broader social and ecological issues at stake, specifically regarding the "end of humanity and the dawn of the posthuman age of humanimal hybrids" (Kelp-Stebbins 339). In all areas of the text, interconnection is mirrored with formal elements of hybridity to clarify as well as demonstrate the practical and theoretical potency of posthuman hybridity, and is further articulated with the partnership between Animal Man and Swamp Thing. While a Swamp Thing makes an appearance in *Animal Man Volume 2: Animal vs. Man,* the Swamp Thing of *Saga of the Swamp Thing* does not appear until *Volume 3: Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*. It is in this volume that the participation between Animal Man and Swamp Thing is initiated. It begins when Animal Man is forced to rely on Swamp Thing so that he may lead Animal Man into Rotworld to prevent the Rot from continuing to destroy the Red and the Green, and to save his son, Cliff, from the destructive reign of Anton Arcane, the evil avatar of the Rot, who in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* attempted to destroy both Swamp Thing and Arcane's niece, Abby, who is also Swamp Thing's lover:

Figure 3.15. Swamp Thing and Animal Man meet (*Vol. 3 Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Prologue: Part One").

Agreeing to collaborate, the two descend to the Rotworld to confront Arcane and restore balance among the three elements.

Figure 3.16. The two descend into Rotworld in an attempt to defeat Arcane (*Vol. 3 Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Prologue: Part One").

Though the two descend into the otherworld of decay, this anchoring represents more than the literal fastening to the world above; it also signifies both Swamp Thing's and Animal Man's will to remain linked to the world of the Green and the Red, rather than divided into dualities that would precipitate further destruction from the Rot. However, as they descend deeper into Rotworld, they encounter Arcane, who admits that he has lured

them there and has warped time itself so that they have been imprisoned in Rotworld for

a year when it seems only like minutes:

Figure 3.17. Arcane tricks the united pair and traps them in Rotworld for a year (*Vol. 3 Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Prologue: Part One").

Once they are sent back into world above, they see a landscape completely disfigured by

the Rot, in which life has been displaced by decay and zombie-like creatures who attempt

to destroy all remaining traces of the Green and the Red. Arcane's message that the Rot

has already won against the Green and the Red along with the visual exemplification that

it has, in many ways, won again the two elements, illustrates the literalization of
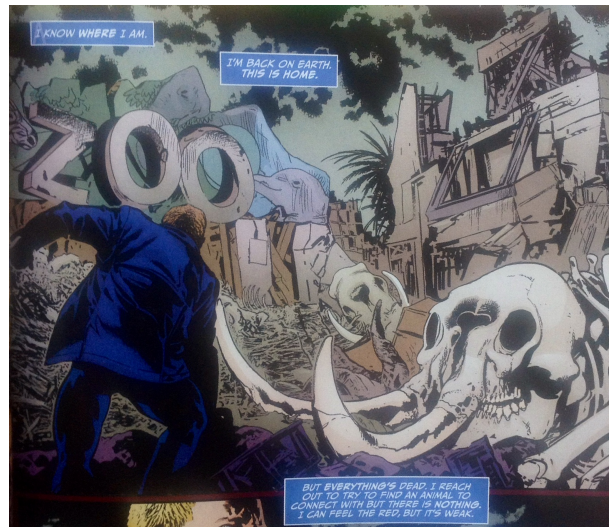
exceptionalism's exploitative practices:

Figure 3.18. Animal Man returns to the surface of Earth, finding it decimated (*Vol. 3 Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Prologue: Part One").

This devastated landscape functions as a vivid demonstration of how the planet may

appear without plants and nonhuman animal life to sustain it; the absence of vitality

marks it as a ruined landscape in which life itself has become wholly unsustainable. This

devastation, along with a drab and lackluster colour palette presents the anthropocentric

ethos as fundamentally destructive, monstrously transforming it so that the short-term

agenda of exceptionalism inevitably leads to a long-term devastation that is unable to

recover. The dualism of human/nonhuman, allegorized by Arcane's heinous plots to

destroy nature and to privilege his own agenda of worldwide domination, articulates the

monstrosity of the binary. Returning to Glotfelty, this vivid illustration of the destroyed

environment makes graphically clear that the text has "one foot in literature and the

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other," almost literally, "on land" (par. 3), as the graphic form permits a glimpse into a landscape completely ravaged by exceptionalist activities.

Once Animal Man and Swamp Thing return to the world above following their entrapment in Rotworld, the two become separated from each other, and it is not until the war commences between the remaining superheroes and Arcane's undead army that the two are reunited. Immediately following their reunion, Animal Man and Swamp Thing collaborate against Arcane in a final effort to defeat him and his plot of apocalyptic annihilation. Because Arcane wishes the Rot to be the sole element on the planet, he represents the exceptionalist practices which enact such destruction on the planet. Animal Man's and Swamp Thing's partnership against Arcane situates the Green and the Red as a hybridized effort against the destructive capacities of exceptionalism, during which a level of balance is required to overthrow Arcane, demonstrated within the graphic structuring of this conflict. Figure 3.19 presents a pictorial balance evident in the page's form, mirroring the balance required by both Swamp Thing and Animal Man to overthrow Arcane's reign of decay. The image demonstrates a participation of forces necessary by the elements to foster a sustainable future that is made obvious by the formal structuring of the page:

Figure 3.19. Swamp Thing, Animal Man, and the remaining heroes fight together to defeat Arcane (*Vol. 3 Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Rotworld: War of the Rot Part One").

As Swamp Thing rushes to release the bio-restorative formula into the Earth's atmosphere to debilitate Arcane's undead army, Animal Man remains on the ground to fight their foes with the remaining superheroes. The two heroes embody the alternate configuration of the posthuman subject whose task is to destabilize the exceptionalist ethos of anthropocentrism.

Even so, their own partnership represents another binary that may be considered problematic: life/death. As Swamp Thing and Animal Man are representative of the two life forces, the Green and the Red, respectively, they are positioned across from and against the Rot, which is figurative of death as a whole, and are privileged within the duality that is generated through their partnership. The text considers this, however, pointing out that all three elements must be balanced evenly in order for each to function

sustainably alongside each other, indicating that the Rot, while representative of death, is

a required polarity of life in all its variety. Therefore, the Rot is also in need of protection

against Arcane, whose exceptionalism will inevitably destroy the Rot as well:

Figure 3.20. Discovering that the Rot is also threatened by Arcane's actions, Swamp
Thing and Animal Man again unite to help restore balance among all three forces (*Vol. 3
Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Rotworld: War of the Rot Part Two").

Such an attitude echoes the ecological ethos which looks to cooperation as a necessary

component of alternative and posthuman configurations of subjectivity. Crucial to this

ethos is a related comprehension that anthropocentrism serves interests within the short-

term, yet ultimately compromises long-term ecological stability, as short-term

gratification typically employs exploitative practices that are unsustainable and

exhaustive. In the same way, Arcane's ploys, while temporarily gratifying for himself,

disable a future that even he may sustain. As such, the Rot's Parliament of Decay,

consisting of the Totems of the Black, beseech Animal Man and Swamp Thing to save

what the Totems refer to as the "natural order of the balance" (*Vol. 3: War of the Rot,

Part Two*); in other words, life and death itself, so that all three elements may once again

operate in tandem with one another. This beseechment destabilizes the binary of

life/death demonstrated by Swamp Thing's and Animal Man's partnership against

Arcane, and instead furthers the argument for ecological cooperation and renewal.

Realizing that balance may only be restored if the three forces coordinate their elemental

efforts, Swamp Thing and Animal Man enter the Parliament of Decay as a final effort to

thwart Arcane from completely destroying life and death.

Figure 3.21. Swamp Thing and Animal Man choose ecological renewal regardless of any possible deception that may follow (*Vol. 3 Rotworld - The Red Kingdom*, "Rotworld: War of the Rot Part Two").

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Though the two consider that the Totems may be plotting against them, reminding them of Arcane's previous trick in Rotworld, Swamp Thing and Animal Man choose to enter the Parliament of Decay to participate with the Rot against Arcane's exceptionalism, favouring complete ecological renewal despite the possibility of their own demise. In so doing, the text engages with a posthuman ethos of cooperation that articulates the need for a united defense against ecologically destructive practices and involves an inclusive treatment of the vital interconnectedness of all forces, including life—human, nonhuman, ecological—and death.

This partnership between Swamp Thing and Animal Man demonstrates the essential connection necessary among nonhuman life, and their defense against, and *with*, the Rot dramatizes a posthuman shift in the treatment of nature and the conceptualization of the human. Animal Man's relationship with Swamp Thing, then, results in a posthuman configuration that is much more visible in the graphic form as it demonstrates a unified resistance against anthropocentric activities, and functions to work against the destructive binary of human/nonhuman. The signification of the Green, the Red, and the Rot working together to defeat Arcane illustrates the functionality of an ethos of interconnection, whereby ecological balance may be renewed if the forces of the planet cooperate rather than remain divided by dualistic exceptionalisms.

The ideological reading of Moore's *Swamp Thing* and Lemire's *Animal Man* subverts the Cartesian dualism that is responsible for the ecological devastation on Earth as a result of an individualism promoted by humanism. Communicating an ethos of ecological renewal, *Swamp Thing,* "a scathing depiction of the environmental

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depredations wrought by everyone from non-recycling suburbanites to the American

military-industrial complex" (Johnson 207), critiques the primacy of humanity and

negates, in the battle between Swamp Thing and Woodrue, the Cartesian privileging of

the human over all other life. While posthumanism breaks down the distinction between

human and nature, Kevin de Laplante remains somewhat skeptical:

> We are invited to consider that the self is partly constituted by its relations to the biotic and abiotic environment, but does that imply that there is no self/environment distinction? Or does it simply imply that any conception of self automatically implies a conception of environment that is defined in relation to it? (170)

Though his query is rhetorical and remains unanswered, these are the questions *Swamp*

Thing conveys, especially in light of Swamp Thing's ambiguous relationship to Alec

Holland. Such questions seek to redefine the human, both as isolated subject and as

connected to and embedded within the world. Although *Swamp Thing* does not

necessarily communicate a practical approach to posthumanism, Swamp Thing's earlier

question to Abby, "Will *your* people do as much?" establishes a posthuman ethos that

demands empathy and begs for the dissolution of essentialist dualisms that have wrought

destruction throughout the environment.

Graphic narratives such as *Animal Man* and *Swamp Thing* exploit, as Kelp-

Stebbins writes, "the dynamic tension of the form and renders tensions within humanity

itself graphically explicit" (332); in other words, the graphic form visually demonstrates

the discourse of species at work within the series, whilst demonstrating the hybridity at

work in both the form and the content. In so doing, both series criticize dualistic thinking

which fosters anthropocentrism through the bifurcation and hierarchization of the natural

order. In complicating the anthropocentric ethos of human/nonhuman, these graphic

series engage in a vision of posthumanity in which alternate configurations of human,

nonhuman, and ecological renewal become visually and conceptually possible.

Conclusion

Using posthumanism and ecocriticism as critical frameworks, my thesis explores representations of humanity in contemporary literatures, including how the human is being articulated and re-imagined in these modes. Contemporary literature best coveys current questions of the human because it is politically, socially, and environmentally relevant to the present historical moment. Only recently has climate change entered the global political discourse as nations across the world are uniting together to prevent widespread environmental disasters as imagined in ecological post-apocalyptic literatures. It is apparent, especially with the reports issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, that the climate change the world is now experiencing is undoubtedly anthropogenic. This brings forth a series of questions regarding the human and humanity's place in the world. Consequently, the rights of the environment and nonhuman animals are brought into discussion as they signify locations of anthropocentric violence and cruelty. Re-examining the human in relation to the environment and nonhuman others opens a discussion surrounding the basic understanding of exploitation, allowing for new definitions and understandings of what it means to abuse even a fellow human. These redefinitions are necessary especially today; contemporary ecological damages cannot be repaired without an accurate understanding of how the Earth and its inhabitants have been maltreated, exploited, or destroyed. This holds true, too, for the regard of other humans as class, status, gender, and race still are used against individuals as justification for their exploitation. Biocentrism and posthumanism seek to acknowledge all life as worthy of respect and ethical treatment.

Cary Wolfe, in *Animal Rites*, argues that posthumanism is relevant precisely because it

applies to each human and nonhuman subject:

> As long as this humanist and speciesist *structure* of subjectivization remains in tact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference. (8)

Posthumanism as polity may be used to grant access to basic rights to all subjects on the

planet, while expanding the rights currently granted to individuals who still suffer from

discrimination based on gender, race, class, or sexual difference, as Wolfe mentions. In

situating nonhuman otherness in the context and cartographies of posthumanism, such an

examination demonstrates the possibilities of posthumanism's alternative and evolving

configurations of humanity and nonhumanity.

The texts included in this study all share an element of the apocalyptic because

this genre most readily illustrates the end of humanity, while the ability to survive in a

post-apocalyptic environment already signals a shift into post-humanity. Posthumanism

questions the relevance of humanity in this age of late advanced capitalism and the

related anthropocentric values which have enacted violence on the environment and

nonhuman animals. At its core, posthumanism maintains a strong ecological ethos and

argues against the centrality of humans. As such, posthumanism and ecocriticism are

concerned with the human/nonhuman binary that justifies the gross violations on the

planet. The texts included in this thesis—*Oryx and Crake*, *The Road*, *Swamp Thing*, and

Animal Man—all complicate the human/nonhuman binary and resist the humanist, or the

Enlightenment, idea of the human as autonomous, discrete, and rational, questioning

whether this notion of what it means to be human is the reason for the wide destruction wrought on the planet. In other words, posthumanism and the texts examined deconstruct the human/nonhuman binary to put forth an ethos and rhetoric of the vital interconnectedness of life on earth.

Margaret Atwood examines how humans and nonhumans alike are commodified in a period of late biocapitalism in her speculative dystopian novel *Oryx & Crake*. The novel, shifting temporally before and after the apocalypse, shows a decadent pre-apocalyptic world in which the bridge between humans and nonhumans is confused by biogenetic miscegenation and experimentation. Crake's genetic hybrids, the Crakers, who eventually inherit the post-apocalyptic wasteland of North America and, presumably, the rest of the world, complicate the concept of what it means to be human and nonhuman. The intervention of nature with science is questioned in the novel. These interventions are regarded as misguided anthropocentric hubris that, in addition to harming nonhuman others, also threatens humanity. However, the mediation of science and nature, seen in the creation of the Crakers and in the destruction of humanity, literalizes the posthuman condition within the text. Crake's destabilization of the human marks a move toward ecological and social renewal though his incentive remains undoubtedly humanist. Regardless of Crake's intentions with the Crakers, these individuals are emblematic of posthuman reconfigurations, as they are embodiments of both humanity and nonhumanity alike. As such, the Crakers represent the resistance to the exceptionalist singularity which has dominated conceptions of human identity; they are figurations of multiplicity and interconnection. Using cognitive estrangement as an element of speculative fiction, *Oryx*

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and Crake literalizes the posthuman to imagine a world that may be redeemed by evolving reconfigurations of the meaning of human.

       The Road by Cormac McCarthy also makes use of the post-apocalyptic genre to show a world completely ravaged by an unspecified cataclysm, but also the industrial activities before the apocalypse, namely the automobile industry as the title implies. The novel follows a father and son who are travelling across a desolate America to find refuge in the warmer south. Their struggles to survive in their dead environment are illustrated through the sparseness of detail and minimalist writing which describes their movements across the barren landscape. As a result of extreme human exceptionalism, implied as the catalyst for the apocalypse, the father and son are exiled from their land and culture, and are among the lone survivors in their environment. The critique of anthropocentrism complicates human culture's relationship with nature, showing that the destruction of nature rarely benefits culture in the long-term, seen in the deterioration of all social structures and cultural knowledge in the post-apocalyptic wasteland, including the stability of language to impart knowledge and meaning. The novel shows what the world will resemble with the absence of biodiversity: a world and its remaining inhabitants unable to survive and estranged from their environment. The ecological exile that pervades *The Road* is not characteristic of only the humans but of all life, including those unnamed throughout the text. Using the automobile industry to critique anthropocentrism and advanced industrial activity, *The Road* also literalizes the posthuman condition by democratizing all life through the apocalypse's sweeping and indiscriminate destruction of all life, including humanity. This novel, rather than offering a redemptive message of

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what the future may bring, offers a horrific vision of a future that may come to pass if anthropocentric industrial activities remain unchecked.

Saga of the Swamp Thing by Alan Moore, and Jeff Lemire's *Animal Man* use the graphic mode to show the posthuman transgressions of the title characters who are both guardians of their elemental realms. Swamp Thing and Animal Man become protectors of the Green and Red, respectively, which they must defend against exploitative and destructive activities of Arcane, who signifies anthropocentric destruction throughout both series. Because they are protectors of plants and nonhuman animals, the title characters are figurations of evolving posthuman identities as they occupy the slash that divides human from nonhuman and human from nature. As the two fight together to defeat the nefarious Arcane from devastating the planet's flora and fauna, Swamp Thing and Animal Man acknowledge the interconnectedness of all life and seek an ecological renewal of the planet so that it becomes once again balanced and sustainable. This interconnection is made graphically astute throughout the series as the form of the texts illustrates the problematic of anthropocentrism and the destructive ideologies associated with it. The graphic form visually displays the discourse of species and interconnectedness within both series to promote alternate configurations of humanity so that ecological renewal may become possible.

Together, these texts form a survey of ecological literatures that are informed by an awareness of the changing perspectives regarding humans and nonhumans, and each text responds to the growing contemporary ecological crises throughout the world. Assembled together, these works are representative of the growing posthuman awareness in contemporary and popular literatures, and demonstrate that the Enlightenment notion

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of what it means to be human is destabilizing. All works included in this thesis can be read together as a series that communicates, across genres, the increasing anxieties regarding the effects of human exceptionalism on the natural world. Perhaps most importantly, they emphasize the need for ecological literacy, accountability, and cooperation in a time when the Earth is becoming increasingly threatened by human industrial activities.

While the graphic fictions of *Saga of the Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* may seem divergent from *Oryx & Crake* and *The Road,* these visual expressions of the dangers of anthropocentrism are appropriately paired with Atwood and McCarthy's texts because they graphically communicate the need for environmental participation in order to preserve the natural world. Though *The Road* bleakly situates a future destroyed by human industrial activities, *Saga of the Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man* extend redemptive messages, showing that with proper and sincere action, environmental devastation may be curtailed, and even, possibly, reversed. *Oryx & Crake*, while sometimes appearing as far-fetched as the storylines in *Saga of the Swamp Thing* and *Animal Man*, is, in fact, a reminder that the future is not so distant or so dubious, and that for any sustainable future, humanity must begin to accept responsibility for the violence enacted upon the planet. In concert, these works are foundational for an accurate understanding of the ecological fears communicated in contemporary literatures across genres, and for an evolving posthuman ethic in which the concept of human is changing to reintegrate humanity into the network of nonhuman relations.

The essential irony at the core of this examination is that, while examining configurations of a changing human ethos, the question of humanity has remained central

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to this investigation. French philosopher Luc Ferry aptly notes, "all valorization, including that of nature, is the deed of [hu]man and that, consequently, all normative ethic is in some sense humanist and anthropocentric" (as cited in Wolfe *Animal Rites* 27). In many ways, this project fits appropriately within the humanities discipline, as it explores fundamental constructions of humanity within nature, and nature within humanity. Yet, while some argue that posthumanism is antithetical to humanism and the humanities, posthumanism's critical endeavours are, in fact, directly in line with the chief goals of the study of the human, which is to examine the places where humans exist and the ways in which they deal with and are affected by their environment. Posthumanism takes this critical examination one step further by inverting the consideration of nature over human, seeking instead to understand how nature is affected by humanity: "The task of the humanities," Estes writes, "is, in part, to analyze culture's effect on nature so as to marshal our shared resources to the end of achieving positive change" (40). The relationship between human culture and nature is, therefore, perfectly located within the schema of posthumanism as an integral part of the humanities. Investigations of these relationships, moreover, will hopefully mitigate the anthropocentric edge that dominates the study of the human, and begin to pave the way toward an ethic of posthuman and biocentric awakening within the humanities. The late Carl Sagan—astronomer, astrophysicist, and staunch environmentalist—has extensively commented on the need for biocentrism to prevent widespread ecological and social disasters. In his final book, *Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death at the Brink of the Millennium* (1997), written shortly before his death, Sagan urges humanity to acknowledge our interconnectedness with all life, stressing that no action is ever isolated:

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> Our planet is indivisible. In North America, we breathe oxygen generated in the Brazilian rain forest. Acid rain from polluting industries in the American Midwest destroys Canadian forests. Radioactivity from a Ukrainian nuclear accident compromises the economy and culture of Lapland. The burning of coal in China warms Argentina. Chlorofluorocarbons released from an air conditioner in Newfoundland helps cause skin cancer in New Zealand. Diseases rapidly spread to the farthest reaches of the planet and require a global medical effort to be eradicated. And, of course, nuclear war and asteroid impact imperil everyone. *Like it or not, we humans are bound up with our fellows, and with the other plants and animals all over the world. Our lives are intertwined.* (80, emphasis added)

It is for this reason which Sagan outlines that posthumanism is a vital theoretical framework in contemporary criticism, as it works toward a sustainable and ethical future for all of Earth's inhabitants. The texts investigated throughout this study extend from the realm of science, post-apocalypse, and horror, and into a contemporary reality that can no longer afford to deny the repercussions of humanity's actions on the Earth's environment. Each text, while fictional, represents very real threats that face our world today, and calls for a reconsideration of how the Earth is thought of and treated. Moreoever, these narratives caution against modes of thought which resist the "multiple ecologies of belonging" (Braidotti 193) by which the world and the environment are characterized. Because a transition into posthuman polity requires, as Braidotti expresses, "more visionary power or prophetic energy" (191), these literatures identify the multiple possibilities of a future that is in imperil due to the anthropocentric activities still in process. However, the representations of ecological and posthuman participation throughout these texts also show the ways in which such futures may be prevented. In a time when climate change threatens the global health of the planet, new configurations of ecological and posthuman participation are required to ensure earth's future, and there is no better way to navigate these alternate configurations than through literature.

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