# ‘All These Things He Saw and Did Not See’: Witnessing the End of the World in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*

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## Abstract

Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* can be read as part of the burgeoning field of climate fiction. This article examines the way that environmental anxiety manifests in this text not only through the vision of a future earth that has been devastated, but, as I will argue, at a more symbolic and allegorical level through the metaphoric place of vision, sight, and blindness. Interrogating the metaphor of vision is central to considering this text as climate fiction because it positions the human as the chosen witness to the end of the world. This article examines the anthropocentrism at the heart of McCarthy’s text, and reflects on the place of the human in broader debates about anthropogenic climate change.

Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Road* (2006) has been hailed by Andrew O’Hagan as the ‘first great masterpiece of the globally warmed generation’.[1] In the tradition of dystopian fiction having a strong didactic function, *The Road* can be read as a warning about impending environmental catastrophe. Within popular media and academic debates, this novel is emerging as a significant text for considerations of cultural production in a time of environmental crisis. In the *Guardian*, the writer and environmentalist George Monbiot went so far as to describe *The Road* as the ‘most important environmental book ever written’.[2] Within literary criticism, *The Road* has been positioned as part of the emerging sub-genre of dystopian literature called climate fiction.[3] It has also been read as a text that enables critics to consider growing consciousness of the Anthropocene in contemporary literature and literary criticism.[4] In

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*The Road*, environmental anxiety manifests itself not only through the vision of a future earth that has been devastated, but, as I will argue, at a more symbolic and allegorical level through the metaphoric place of vision, sight, and blindness in the text. The climate-change debate has hinged on our preparedness to see global warming as the inevitable outcome of current human action and inaction. The notion of vision is central to climate-change discourse, both because it requires us to envisage a future world and also because climate change scepticism can be described as a form of wilful blindness. What has remained central to both McCarthy's novel and the discourse of climate change more broadly is the figure of the human. Nowhere is this more evident than in the naming of our current geological age the Anthropocene and in references to anthropogenic climate change.[5] This anthropocentrism pervades McCarthy's text, in which humans are the only form of life that remains: the last witnesses to the end of the world. This article will examine the post-apocalyptic vision that *The Road* presents, the place of sight and blindness in the text, and the way in which this contributes to the positioning of the unnamed man and boy as witnesses to the devastation of climate change.

McCarthy attributes the germination of *The Road* to a vision he had of a possible future. In his first television interview, an exclusive with Oprah Winfrey, she asked where the 'apocalyptic dream' of *The Road* originated. He responded:

> My son John, about four years ago, he and I went to El Paso … and we checked into the old hotel there and one night (John was asleep) … and I just stood and looked out of the window at this town … I just had an image of what this town might look like in fifty or a hundred years. I just had this image of these fires up on the hills and everything being laid waste and I thought a lot about my little boy.[6]

The progeny of this vision depicts a father and son moving through a post-apocalyptic landscape. The representation of this world is heavily reliant on the eschatological imagery of the book of Revelation.[7] The intertextual references to this great apocalyptic text include the increasing darkness, the blackening sun, the charred earth, lightning, earthquakes, a dead ocean, and poisoned bodies of water. There has been much critical speculation as to the source of this devastation, with answers ranging from divine intervention, a meteor colliding with the Earth, nuclear winter, and climate change.[8] What is important about this event, which operates to divide the time of

'before' and 'after', is that it remains ambiguous and unnamed. In many ways, it matters little what the precise event is; what is significant is that the world that is described to us is a world without either an ecosystem or natural resources. The representation of the environment can be read literally as a depiction of climate change, the results of which are brought into our immediate future by a cataclysmic event, or, more convincingly, as an allegorical projection of the anxieties present in the cultural zeitgeist, filtered through climate-change discourse. In particular, *The Road* can be seen to reflect anxieties about extreme weather events, deforestation, species' extinction, and food shortages. Interestingly, what the climate change reading has in common with the Revelation is that both, in their different ways, envisage the apocalypse as a consequence of human behaviour.

The first description that we get of this terrain comes when the man looks down the road: 'Barren, silent, godless' (2). The precise course of their journey has been subject to much scrutiny, but I am inclined to agree with Laura Godfrey, who, based on the dead plants that the man and the boy encounter, suggests that they are moving through the Appalachian Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico.[9] They believe that in the South they will find warmth and perhaps other 'good guys'. The setting that they move through is described as 'wasted country' (4), 'cauterized terrain' (13), 'desolate country' (16), and 'caustic waste' (200). While being rendered as a wasteland, the Earth is depicted specifically as sterile and devoid of life. This is most evident in the absence of living flora and fauna. Aside from some morels (40), and a dog whose existence is never confirmed (86), the man and the boy come across no living entities except for other humans. The landscape that they move through was once full of plants, but all that remains are their detritus: 'raw dead limbs' (40), 'a waste of weeds' (192), 'dry seedpods' (231), 'dead seaoats' (236). We are explicitly told that there is 'nothing living anywhere' (29). The earth itself is depicted as lifeless through the use of descriptive metaphors associated with death such as 'the late world' (10), 'paling day' (10), 'intestate' (138), and 'shrouded' earth (193). This is often connected to the absence of the sun, which can no longer be seen behind the gloom of the grey sky. The sun is portrayed as 'banished' (32) and 'indifferent' (234). This dead land is populated with empty and crumbling cities that are littered with rubbish and human remains.

The past world, our own accustomed world, exists in the text through dreams of 'aching' blue skies and fecund greenness, which the man refers to as 'siren worlds' (17). Whereas the man comes from this world of before, the boy is a child of the new world. We can assume that, since the mother is 'cradling her belly' (54) on the night that the clocks stop, the boy's birth takes place reasonably soon after the catastrophic event. The man acknowledges that the boy must see him as an alien: 'A being from a planet that no longer existed' (163).[10] *The Road* propels us into our future, rendered to express our worst fears about climate change. However, within the diegesis of the text, the action takes place within the pocket of time that the man and the boy have in common: their present. This is the liminal space of the road that carries them endlessly onward. When they reach the ocean, which they believed was to be the end of their journey, it is only a minor textual occurrence (230), and they must come to terms with the fact that sea only delivers more monotonous grey. The coast provides only temporary respite from their journey and their arrival at any final destination is endlessly deferred. The man and the boy have no future; while the man dies at the end of the novel, the boy is left in a world of ever diminishing resources.

The novel's repeated motif, of the man and the boy looking up and down the road, an image centrally concerned with vision, reveals their anxiety about their future and their guilt about their past. Early in the text they even have a mirror attached to their cart, which enables them to look back to where they have come from (4). Significantly, it is the boy who often looks behind them in an anxiety-laden gesture that demonstrates both his role as the moral compass in the text and his gradual loss of innocence. This is revealed in the instances in which they encounter others on the road. When they meet a man who has been struck by lightning, the boy keeps looking back until he realizes that they can do nothing to help him (51–52). Later, when the boy thinks that he sees another child and they hear a dog barking, he repeatedly looks back (89). He also repeatedly looks behind them when they leave the man who has stolen their clothes naked and vulnerable on the road (276). Abandoning to the road the only named character in the book, Ely – himself not 'one for looking back' (171) – we are told that the 'boy never looked back at all' (185). We can assume that all of these characters will inevitably die in the wake of the man and the boy. When the man realizes that he is close to death he falls behind his child. He narrates to us that the boy would 'look

back and [the man] would raise his weeping eyes and see him standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle' (293).

It is not surprising that looking occupies a central place in *The Road*. The man and the boy must be vigilant in order to survive; they must hunt for food, stay out of sight, and watch for the 'bad guys'. It is because of this context of constant surveillance that the man tells the boy to be their 'lookout' (159). Considerable narrative space is devoted to the description of watching. One of the few possessions that the man and the boy carry with them is a set of binoculars through which they 'glass' their surroundings. The first time that the man looks through the binoculars they provide a textual strategy to describe the surrounding countryside, which is revealed to be a colourless and ashen landscape of dead trees and bits of road (2–3). Although binoculars are a tool for augmenting vision, the subsequent times that the man looks through them they do not perform this function. In the first two instances we are told that he sees 'nothing' (7, 82), and the third time he is specifically looking for signs of smoke but does not see any (200). The man and the boy are repeatedly described as observing their world; we see them 'watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land' (3), 'watching the nameless dark' (8) and 'watching the light draw down over the world' (131). The man watches the boy so much that late in the novel the boy implores him to 'stop watching me, Papa' (270).[11] Enhancing the theme of the parental gaze, the man questions whether his own ancestors watch him (209), and dreams of them casting 'fey sideways looks upon him' (199). The boy vigilantly watches the man. His surveillance positions him as exceptionally mature and empathetic. He not only monitors the man as he weakens towards death, but he also actively observes the man's ethical behaviour. Early in the book the boy's inclination to fairness and his desire to share their meagre resources is revealed when he censures the man for giving him cocoa and taking only water for himself: 'I have to watch you all the time' (35). Arielle Zibrak reads the boy's concern at this unfair division of resources as his refusal to participate in a kind of symbolic cannibalism. If the boy were to eat more than his share, this would deprive the man of essential nourishment and cause his body to waste and diminish.[12] This is related to the ethical code that the man and the boy live by, according to which the biggest taboo – the thing that separates them from the 'bad guys' – is cannibalism.

In a book in which the physical description of characters is limited, it is notable that eyes are commented on throughout. The first person that they come across on the road has one eye burnt closed as the result of a lightning strike (51). The 'bad guy' who directly threatens them with a knife has eyes 'collared in cups of grime and deeply sunk. Like an animal inside his skull looking out the eyeholes' (65). After eliminating this threat, the father will be left with the memory of his 'cold and shifting eyes' (79). The disembodied head under the cake bell on the pharmacist's counter has '[d]ried eyes turned sadly inward' (196). Ely has '[g]rayblue eyes half buried in the thin and sooty creases of his skin' (174) and 'cant see good' (177). This character has commonly been read as an allusion to the Prophet Elijah from the Old Testament book of Kings, who is a harbinger of the end of the world.[13] This is certainly a sustainable reading since the character is not only present at what is clearly represented as the end of days, but he also tells the man that he saw it coming (179). However, I think that in focusing on his diminished vision he could equally be read as a reference to Eli from the book of Samuel, a priest with poor vision who eventually goes blind. Eli is entrusted with the child that Hannah asks God for, Samuel, who is visited by God and told that he will punish Eli's children for their wickedness. This allusion becomes particularly meaningful when the book is read as a warning about anthropogenic climate change, which is framed in contemporary discourse as a result of human behaviour.

The act of looking is necessary for basic survival in *The Road*, but it is also a perilous activity. The man is very protective of the boy when he becomes a subject of the gaze of others. When the man and the boy are threatened by a 'bad guy' who has come into the woods to relieve himself after the truck he is travelling with breaks down, the man pulls out a gun and commands him, 'Dont look back there. Look at me' (65). The 'bad guy' looks at the gun, at the road and at the boy. The following exchange reveals that their power struggle is staged in relation to the gaze:

> [Man] Do I look like an imbecile to you?
> [Bad guy] I dont know what you look like.
> Why are you looking at him?
> I can look where I want to.
> No you cant. If you look at him again I'll shoot you. (67)

The 'bad guy' is able to draw his knife when he distracts the man's eyes by dropping his belt. Looking will again lead them into danger when they come across a grand old house, and the man invokes one of the repeated refrains of the book: 'We have to take a look' (111). The tension between what is seen and what is unseen comes to the fore at the old Southern dwelling.[14] This has already been flagged as a theme about twenty pages earlier when they encounter the only potentially friendly other people on the road (until the conclusion of the text). When the boy claims to see another boy (88–89) the father does not see him, framing the encounter in such a way that its reality is questionable. The textual placement of this event comes after they hear an unseen dog barking (86), and since there is no other non-human animal life in the text, its existence is unlikely. When they enter the house, their capacity to perceive correctly what they see is tested. While the boy's fear demonstrates that he has read the situation as dangerous, the father's persistence leads them into imminent danger. This section of the novel builds tension through foreshadowing. As they survey the house, the father's narration is framed with hindsight and shows rising concern. While he does not remark on the cord running out of the window and beyond the porch, he does reveal that the windows were 'oddly intact' (111), and tells us that the pile of clothes, a visual reminder of the holocaust, would give him something to think about later (113). When he describes the cast-iron pot as the type that has been used for rendering pigs, he makes the terrible admission: 'All these things he saw and did not see' (115). The disconnection between sight and perception is depicted at times as a wilful act. The father is concerned with the terrible world that the boy is being exposed to. When they come across the bodies of refugees melted into the road, the man and the boy have the following conversation:

> Take my hand, he said. I dont think you should see this.
> What you put in your head is there forever?
> Yes.
> It's okay, Papa.
> It's okay?
> They're already there.
> I don't want you to look.
> They'll still be there. (203)

This can be read as a metatextual moment. I would argue that *The Road* shows us nothing that we have not already imagined. Dystopian literature is a repository of our already existing fears, projected into a future world. Climate fiction is exemplary in this case because it shows us the terrible future of the planet that we already suspect may come to pass.

The thematic concern with the relationship between vision and perception is extended through the representation of compromised vision. The text opens with the man waking up in the woods to a monochromatic world of black nights and increasingly grey days, 'like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world' (1). This metaphoric reference to an ocular disorder that can lead to blindness is followed by the description of the dream that he has awoken from. In this vision-like dream, the child leads him into a cave where, in a lake in a large stone cavern, they find a monstrous creature 'which stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders' (2). The image of the eggs not only reinforces the glaucoma imagery through the suggestion of a white and blank surface, but also juxtaposes the description of them as 'dead' with the symbolism of life that eggs evoke. Eggs are temporal artefacts; contained within these eggs is the horrifying potential of a swarm of miniature, multi-eyed creatures. Considered in this way, the spider eggs simultaneously suggest blindness and a plurality of vision. This tension continues throughout the opening pages so that, although McCarthy utilizes strong imagery to conjure the notion of compromised sight, he simultaneously evokes the capacity to see. Not only is the cave dream a dystopian vision within a text that could itself be described in this way, but their incursion into the cave is aided by a light source that illuminates the darkness of the subterranean space so that they can see the dripping water which metres out the geological time of the earth. The beast itself is strangely translucent, enabling them to see into its interior spaces to its bowls, heart, and brain.

At several points in *The Road* the world itself is described anthropomorphically through the metaphor of compromised vision. The blackness of the night is 'sightless' (14), and the ash that they move through 'closed behind them silently as eyes' (193). This contributes to the larger emphasis on blindness in the text. We are told that the boy's mother 'cant even see' (60). However, since she is also described as 'watching' the man over a candle flame during an argument (58), the extent to which her vision is compromised is

ambiguous, as is whether this is due to failing eyesight or because of the blackness of the night. The mother has the clearest vision of what the future is likely to hold for the man and the boy. She tells us: 'Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. The will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it' (58). Her clear logic in the face of his blind optimism continues the familiar trope of blind characters being afforded clarity of vision. However, although safety and survival are improbable, the man's dogged hope eventually pays off, and the future that the mother imagines for them is not realized within the text. The anxiety about blindness that pervades the whole text is evident most dramatically when the man exclaims, '[h]e is coming to steal my eyes. To seal my mouth with dirt' (280).

The complex web of references to vision, sight, and blindness contribute to my reading of the man and boy as witnesses. 'In the aftermath of the collapse of the world', Shelly L. Rambo writes, 'there is no end in sight, no destination, and no promise of life ahead. But in the face of these impossibilities, the impulse to impose redemption is replaced, instead, by an imperative to witness to what remains'.[15] This is a text in which the characters (and the reader) bear witness to the world after the apocalypse. There are moments in the text at which the man feels that he has clarity of vision concerning the state of things. For example:

> He walked out in the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like groundfoxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it. (138)

Paradoxically, his vision in this moment of clarity is infused with images of compromised sight, both through the absence of light and blindness. The man's celestial perspective maps the metaphor of blindness onto the sun itself, suggesting that a sundog, usually a term that names an atmospheric halo effect around the sun, is sightless. This could evoke a kind of blank orbiting, echoing the notion of the earth orbiting a sun that provides neither sufficient light nor warmth. The earth is rendered as dead through the descriptor 'intestate', which designates a person who has not made a will, and emphasizes the futility of its 'relentlessness circling'. The blindness of the sundogs

also suggests darkness, contributing to the sense of an unappeasable darkness in the passage. The man's expanded perspective permits him an exterior vision of himself and the boy in a cosmological context. This notion of an expanded perspective on the world is again evoked when the man witnesses the end of the world as a kind of reverse genesis. He tells us: 'Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. Oceans, mountains. The ponderous counterspectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence' (293). What brings both of these examples together is that the human is not only imagined as the chosen witness to the end of days, but this man is also afforded a god-like perspective on this devastation.

Undeniably, it is the human that is at the heart of this text. In a cosmic reordering we are told that the sun circles the earth (32), placing it and its inhabitants at the centre of all things. The very title of the book, and the thing that they believe will lead them to a better place, the road, is a human construction and a mark of civilization, which has outlasted the apocalypse. Aside from a small cluster of mushrooms and the unseen dog, we get no evidence of anything living in this world save for human beings. Unlike other recent eco-dystopias, such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), in which in the aftermath of the apocalyptic event humans do not fare very well but many plants and animals thrive, *The Road* offers an anthropocentric vision of the end of the world in which humans are the final witnesses, and also in which the end of the human is also the end of the world. This is made explicit when the boy is sick by the beach and the man prepared to kill himself so that the boy does not have to enter death alone. 'You have to stay near', the man says to himself, 'You have to be quick. So you can be with him. *Last day of the earth*' (267, emphasis added). Here the end of the lives of the two central characters is transposed onto the earth itself.

I am inclined, therefore, to disagree with Kearney, 'that the story best serves as a challenge to the boundaries of human perception by enabling us for a brief moment to glimpse a "world without us"'.[16] No only is the narrative largely focalized through the man, and is therefore inescapably anthropocentric, but this world, although not hospitable to the human, is certainty not devoid of it. The boy's survival, however unlikely, guarantees that the human perspective will be maintained until the end of the text. This presence of humans is sustained even into the vision of arcadia that the book concludes with:

> Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and hummed with mystery. (306–7)

This vision of unspoiled nature suggests a timescale that extends beyond the human to deep or geological time. Trout appear several other times in the narrative, but only as a memory of something that once was (30, 42). While the trout are described as 'older than man', they are not present at the end of the world which is realised in human time. In this concluding vision the human is projected into pristine nature in the address to a 'you', presumably the reader, who can not only 'see' the trout but can also hold them in their hands.[17] Here, nature is literally in the hands of humanity.

When the human holds the privileged place of witness to the end of the world in the cultural imaginary, we need to be cognizant of the particularity of this version of the human. What is evident in *The Road* is the persistence of the ideology of liberal humanism. The anthropocentrism of *The Road* privileges the perspective of a certain type of human who is male, apparently white, evokes Christian mythology, and was once middle class.[18] This is an American voice in a text in which the United States has become the entire world. The man, whose very existence fulfils American exceptionalism, embodies the characteristics associated with American individualism: self-reliance, resourcefulness, and independence. These are qualities that the man cultivates in the boy, who becomes hardened through learning that they cannot help others at the expense of their own survival. The masculine individualism that is privileged in the text is further emphasized through the deeply problematic position afforded to women. The main example of this is the doubling of the boy's mother and the woman who talks to him of God at the end of the text, who together embody the archetype of women as Madonna or whore. When his mother justifies her suicide, to the man she describes herself as a 'faithless slut' (58) with a 'whorish heart' (59). After her death, the man dreams of her in sexualized visions in which she is framed as a temptress, drawing him toward death (17). In a book that is focused on the relationship between parent and child, her absence positions

her as a failed mother.[19] Alternatively, the woman at the end of the book is positioned as a good mother not only for staying alive but also, the text explicitly tells us, for not eating her children (304). When she meets the boy she provides immediate maternal care through enfolding him in her arms. She also talks to him about God, positioning her within the familiar trope of woman as bastion of moral order within the domestic sphere. The archetypal status of these characters is reinforced by the absence of names throughout the text. This extrapolates their individual experiences to universal significance and, in the case of the man, positions him as the American Everyman.

Accepting anthropogenic climate change means acknowledging that human existence is registering on a global scale and at a geological level. It involves the very important and necessary work of mitigating human impact. This requires us to visualize that climate change is something that humans have caused, and that the solution to this ecological problem lies with human action. In relation to the debate about global warming, Dipesh Chakrabarty has suggested that at the level of discourse we are seeing a breakdown between natural and human history. He writes:

> Scholars writing on the current climate-change crisis are indeed saying something significantly different from what environmental historians have said so far. In unwittingly destroying the artificial but time-honoured distinction between natural and human histories, climate scientists posit that the human being has become something much larger than the simple biological agent that he or she always has been. Humans now wield a geological force.[20]

This enlargement of the human is evident not only in scientific discussions about climate change but also in the literature that responds to it. However, coming to terms with climate change also necessitates an understanding of the world in which the human is not at the centre of all things. The discursive privileging of the human might also restrict the scope of our vision of the world and our impact on it. Not only do we need to pay greater attention to the contours of the human within this discourse, but also, in order for literature and literary criticism to really start the work of addressing climate change we must think critically about the relative place afforded to the human and the non-human in contemporary texts.

## Notes

1. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2010); hereafter, page numbers are provided in parentheses in the main body of the article and notes. The quotation from O'Hagan has been important to the marketing of the novel and appears on the back cover of the 2010 Picador edition.

2. George Monbiot, 'Civilization Ends with a Shutdown of Human Concern: Are We There Already?' *Guardian*, 30 October 2007, retrieved 5 August 2013 from: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/cot/30/comment.books.

3. Adeline Johns-Putra, 'Ecocriticism, Genre, and Climate Change: Reading the Utopian Vision of Kim Stanley Robinson's Science in the Capital Trilogy', *English Studies* 91, 7 (2010), 748; Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra, 'Climate Change in Literature and Literary Criticism', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 2, 2 (2011), 188.

4. See Louise Squire, 'Death and the Anthropocene: Cormac McCarthy's World of Unliving', *Oxford Literary Review* 34, 2 (2012), 211–28.

5. The etymology of Anthropocene is *Anthropos*, meaning 'human being', and *Kainos*, meaning 'new': a new geological time in which human impact is felt as a force of nature and at the level of planetary change.

6. 'Oprah's Exclusive Interview with Cormac McCarthy Video', retrieved 5 August 2013 from: http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Oprahs-Exclusive-Interview-with-Cormac-McCarthy-Video.

7. Revelation is also a text that mobilizes ideas about vision. This is evident in the repeated command 'behold', the vision that induces death ('And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead', Rev 1: 17) and the many-eyed beasts.

8. See, respectively, Carl James Grindley, 'The Setting of McCarthy's *The Road', The Explicator* 67, 1 (2010), 11–13; Dana Phillips, '"He Ought Not Have Done It": McCarthy and Apocalypse', *Cormac McCarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, The Road*, ed. Sara L. Spurgeon (London: Continuum, 2011), 172–88; Tim Blackmore, 'Life of War, Death of the Rest: The Shining Path of Cormac McCarthy's Thermonuclear America', *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 29 (2009), 18–36; and Monbiot, 'Civilization Ends with a Shutdown of Human Concern'.

9. Laura Gruber Godfrey, '"The World He'd Lost": Geography and "Green" Memory in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52, 2 (2011), 170.

10. Interestingly, the morels, one of the only other relics from the old world, are describes as 'alien-looking things' (41).

11. The boy also asks the man to stop watching him when he is licking the lid of a can (204).

12. Arielle Zibrak, 'Intolerance, A Survival Guide: Heteronormative Culture Formation in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Arizona Quarterly* 68, 3 (2012), 119.

13. See Grindley, 'The Setting', 12; and Erik J. Wielenberg, 'God, Morality and Meaning in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', *Cormac McCarthy Journal* 8, 1 (2010), 2.

14. We can assume that this house is a large Southern house because when they are on the front porch we are told that '[c]hattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays' (112). This reference to human bondage resonates in disturbing ways with the discovery of the people locked in the house's cellar.

15. Shelly L. Rambo, 'Beyond Redemption? Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* After the End of the World', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 41, 2 (2008), 115.

16. Kevin Kearney, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and the Frontier of the Human', *Literature Interpretation Theory* 23, 2 (2012), 175.

17. This disembodied vision at the end is in sharp contrast to the vision of the monster in the cave with which the book opens. Not only are internal and external, and height and depth, in contrast, but so is stillness and motion: the cave contains a dark and ancient pool whereas the stream in the mountains is moving with an 'amber current' (306). The depiction of the trout and the monster could not be more polarised. Not only are the fish familiar and the monster strange, but the trout are '[p]olished and muscular and torsional' (307) while the monster is 'pale and naked and translucent' with 'alabaster bones' (2). While the monster is blind to its surroundings and navigates its world through smell, the trout have maps of the future inscribed in the pattern on their backs.

18. I read the man as white because of the absence of references to race in the text. This whiteness is reinforced by the casting of Viggo Mortensen as the man in the novel's 2009 film adaptation. The man's class is revealed both through his memories of his old life, such as attending the theatre with his wife (18), and through his decidedly educated tone.

19. The other mother who fails conspicuously in the text is the woman whose baby is found headless and roasting over a fire (212).

20. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 206.