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The Apocalypse and its Aftermath

Society, Survival and Accountability in The Road and Oryx and Crake

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Abstract:

This is a two-part thesis: a literary analysis and a didactical examination of the novels chosen. The literary analysis explores the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic worlds in *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, and *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, by examining the novels with three keywords: *society*, *survival* and *accountability*. Humanity is seemingly lost in both novels, and the main characters fight to survive in new environmental conditions. The risk of trusting other humans is a gamble in *The Road* as survival is priority number one, while the human character in *Oryx and Crake* struggles with his place as an only survivor in a world inhabited by new and dangerous species. The questions posed in this thesis are how humans survive in this new world order, if they seek to establish new communities or if they follow their own path, keeping their own morality.

The didactical part looks at how literature is important in the classroom, and how the teacher can use literature to engage students in current societal issues, and increase their tolerance towards other cultures. By using debates or including other subjects in teaching about literature, the students may learn to enjoy reading and reflect on how literature can be used as a tool for learning about past societies.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theory and Method	3
2.1 Apocalypse vs. Post-Apocalypse and the dystopian element.....	3
2.3 Survival, Society and Accountability	7
3. Society, Survival and Accountability in <i>The Road</i>	14
4. Society, Survival and Accountability in <i>Oryx and Crake</i>	22
5. A Comparison of the two Novels.....	30
6. Teaching Literature in the Classroom: <i>The Road</i> and <i>Oryx and Crake</i>	34
6.1 Teaching Literature in the Classroom	34
6.2 What to think about when teaching literature	38
6.3 The Apocalypse and the Classroom.....	42
7. Conclusion.....	45
8. Works Cited	47

1. Introduction

The apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction is a genre that has seen a growth in interest in recent years, especially among young adults. The main appeal of the books is not only the physical: action, dramatic scenes and the world ending, but also the psychological challenges facing the survivors: the terror of surviving, the desperate struggle to keep living and pushing on despite circumstances. The news-conscious only have to turn on the news and the fight for survival is easy to see in different parts of the world ravaged by war and disasters. This is why the apocalypse and the post-apocalyptic are not only relevant for the present lifetime, but the past as well. My first encounter with science fiction and fantasy was when I was a little girl. My father bought my sisters and I a computer game called *Neverwinter Nights*. The setting was in the famous *Forgotten Realms* world, where the city of *Neverwinter* experienced a plague, which I as the hero was to help cure. The fantastical world of magic, demons and lack of technology fascinated me as a little girl; it still does to this day. However, it was the characters that I became particularly interested in, their journey and growth throughout the game. It was also the first time I became aware of injustice and corruption. The themes and their execution within the game affected me for years and made me hunger for more of the same. *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* have strongly written characters and their struggles are believable, and easily relatable to.

The novels *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy and *Oryx and Crake* (2004) by Margaret Atwood both depict a post-apocalyptic world, yet the focus and the circumstances are different. *The Road* follows the path of a father and his young son as they struggle for survival, while *Oryx and Crake* revolves around a man called “Snowman” and his life before, during and after the apocalypse. *The Road* is very dark in its approach to the aftermath of what readers speculate is nuclear war. The title gives an indication of the plot of the book; the father and son journeys through the world, following a path, which they should not stray from. Around them

lurk marauders, intent on surviving at any cost. The psychological journey is as important as the physical one, and the father and son encounter challenges on their way down the road. *Oryx and Crake* switches between the past dystopian world, and the present post-apocalyptic. The story concentrates on the main characters Jimmy/Snowman, Oryx and Crake, and Crakes creation the Crakers. In a world controlled by science and corporations, Crake has been able to splice the genes of humans and different animals to create the Crakers; a humanoid race with lowered intelligence. Realizing the devastation humankind is releasing upon the earth, Crake has intentionally released a virus to kill earth's population. He gives his friend Jimmy the antidote and entrusts upon him the role of a teacher, making sure the Crakers survive after humankind is gone. The present timeline deals with how Snowman, as Jimmy calls himself now, survives as a lone human and his interaction with the Crakers and the outside world.

This thesis will explore how the novels deal with apocalyptic events, and how the characters adapt to having their world dramatically changed. The analysis of the novels will center around three keywords: *society, survival and accountability*. The first keyword, "society" looks at the way humans adapt socially to apocalyptic events. Do they seek other humans and restart life as it was before the end, or do they create new communities? In the absence of government, do they create new governing structures or is there total anarchy? The second keyword refers to how the texts deal with survival and whether the struggle for survival is easier or harder depending on the circumstances of the surrounding world. The third keyword involves ethics more than anything: is murder, rape, cannibalism and looting justifiable when there is no law there to govern them, or can the characters be held accountable for their actions?

There is also a didactic element to this thesis that will deal with how literature is important in school, and how a teacher can use literature to motivate students, making them want to read more, and give a varied education in the classroom.

2. Theory and Method

This thesis explores the circumstances of the characters in the novels *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Survival is a very broad concept to use, as every action and scene in the novels is about survival. I have however chosen to use the word in relation to character growth, to narrow down the thesis and to be able to dedicate a section for the topic society. Society and survival go hand in hand, yet at the same time they can be viewed separately, as humans can continue to exist despite the absence of an organized society. Accountability is a term that I found interesting to explore. How does the single individual affect his/her surroundings and what happens when morality seemingly is gone?

This chapter will consist of a brief introduction to what apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature means, and a presentation of the sources used in the thesis. Chapter 3 and 4 will analyze the novels, focusing on the three chosen keywords. Chapter 5 is a comparison of the two novels, and how they differ in their characterization of the apocalypse and its aftermath. Chapter 6 discusses the importance of literature and how one can include literature in other subjects than English, and then suggesting specific ways of teaching literature in a classroom.

2.1 Apocalypse vs. Post-Apocalypse and the dystopian element

At the beginning of *The End of the World: Apocalypse and its Aftermath in Western Culture* Maria Manuel Lisboa defines the current narration of apocalypse as “upheaval and destruction,”(xviii) instead of the “discovery and epiphany”(xviii) of the older works within apocalyptic fiction. Discovery and epiphany can be traced back to the Bible where the Book of Revelations or the Book of Daniel shares several traits with contemporary fiction. Religious symbols are to be found in numerous media, movies as well as books. Some of these symbols will be discussed in the analysis of the novels, especially *The Road* as religious symbols are

abundant in this particular novel. Eschatology is the theology dealing with the study of the end of the world.

David Leigh discusses the different approaches within eschatology in *Apocalyptic: Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Here he states that the apocalyptic genre emerged from traditional Jewish religious eschatology by differentiating itself from the prophetic writings.

Prophetic literature was marked by its national scope, its basis in tradition and realistic experience, its human authorship, its use of human instruments, its testing by fulfillment, and its origin in preaching and action. Apocalyptic literature in contrast, was marked by its cosmic scope, its basis in universal history, its use of visionary symbols, its anonymous authorship, its lack of human instruments and dependence on direct divine action, its greater emphasis on promise than on fulfillment, and its origin in writing.(5)

Leigh further lists characteristics of apocalyptic literature that are often used today: “imminent end-time, a cosmic catastrophe, a movement from old to a new age, a struggle between forces of good and evil, a desire for the ultimate paradise, a transitional help of a god or messiah or a final judgement and manifestation of the ultimate.”(5) Within these narratives Leigh includes the themes: “vision or dreams by seers or guides, characters in spiritual turmoil, pseudonymous authorship, mythic imagery, a composite text, a crisis situation, a sense of hope, and signs of an end-time.”(5) *The Road*, despite being post-apocalyptic, contains several of these characteristics; a struggle between good and evil after a cosmic catastrophe, where one of the main characters experiences a spiritual turmoil.

Lisboa also mentions characteristics that are common in apocalyptic literature. The arrival or return of a messianic figure is prevalent in this kind of fiction, and she points out that this feature often only occurs when most of humanity has perished. Salvation is only afforded the few after a global apocalypse, which is something that will be discussed in chapter 5 in relation to *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake*. Lisboa also mentions how before salvation, terror and destruction reign. This terror can manifest itself as the crossing of boundaries, a line

between the familiar and the unknown. This line, Lisboa proposes, is dissolved or made breachable with the abnormal becoming the normal.(xviii-xix)

The end of the world might not really be the end of the world, or as Lisboa puts it “a total wipeout”(8) but a “clearing of the decks in anticipation of something new.”(8) This relates closely with the definition of the apocalypse as an upheaval or destruction. For something new to begin, something must be destroyed or experience a fall, as Adam and Eve do when they are exiled from the Garden of Eden. In both *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* civilization takes a fall, and humanity is changed forever.

James Berger divides the apocalypse into three categories: the eschaton, the end and the unveiling or revelation. Eschaton is the “actual imagined end of the world”(5) where the end is portrayed as it is imagined in earlier written texts, whether they be religious or not, or as humanity views nuclear and ecological threats today. The end is apocalypse that can be interpreted as the eschaton, an end of a way of life or thinking. Revelation or unveiling refers to the Greek meaning of apocalypse; that the apocalyptic event must illuminate the why the apocalypse came to be. “The apocalypse, then, is The End, or resembles the end, or explains the end.”(5) Like Lisboa, he subscribes to the notion that the end is never the end. He writes further that in apocalyptic texts there is usually always *something* left after the end. The post-apocalypse is more important than the apocalypse because the aftermath is the true object of the writer.(6)

Berger mentions how apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic literature often is a response to a perceived social decline, and the fears of the media, often criticizing the existing social order. The world has descended into such decay that there is no other choice but to end it, and pave the way for a new beginning.(7) In recent times, however, the enlightenment proposed by the apocalypse tends to be overshadowed by the continued decay of society, or what is left of it. Morality takes the back seat to survival.

After the end, the new beginning must start, or at least the road towards the beginning. Often after a catastrophic event in fiction, there are enough survivors left to keep humanity viable: enough plants, animals, humans of both genders and resources to sustain the next generation. Another fear is that the old mindset is still alive within the leftover population, and that former mistakes will be repeated until the cycle starts again.(Lisboa 8)

Oryx and Crake switches between an apocalyptic and a dystopian world. The dystopian element is noticeable through the rigid rules of the society, where there is little room for individualism. Gregory Claeys defines dystopia as a “fictional portrayal of a society in which, evil or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as satire of utopian aspiration which attempts to show up their fallacies.”(Claeys 107) Writers who are known for their portrayal of dystopian worlds are George Orwell with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Aldous Huxley with *Brave New World* and H. G. Wells with *Time Machine*. He writes:

Their common theme is the quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectually by vestigial individualism or systemic flaws, and relying upon scientific and technological advances to ensure social control.

These themes are found in *Oryx and Crake* as corporations control society, in the products they create and in how they choose to protect them, in communities/compounds, where the average human is not allowed to live.

2.3 Survival, Society and Accountability

The Road and *Oryx and Crake* are set in a post-apocalyptic world where circumstances have made survival difficult. Both novels deal with a significantly depopulated earth, quite different from the past. Chris Gilbert discusses some of these struggles in his article about “The Quest of the Father and Son: Illuminating Character Identity, Motivation and Conflict in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*”. The article describes a method Gilbert chose for a classroom session wherein he made his students analyze *The Road* using the medieval genre of ‘the quest’ in dealing with the characters’ journey. By doing so, he started a process in his students’ minds of the journey the father and son make, and how they respond to the difficulties on their path. In addition to reading the novel as a -quest-, he and the students analyzed the actions of the characters by exploring what is acceptable and what is not by applying Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs. This hierarchy theory can be applied to both novels as they examine what basic needs humans have to satisfy in order to survive. The pyramid gives a basis for analyzing human behavior as Maslow wrote his theory around motivation theory. He, however, states that motivational theory must not be confused with behavior theory as behavior is determined culturally, biologically and situationally.(Maslow 371)

Instead, this motivational theory will be used to discuss the motives of certain characters’ behavior, and how the fulfillment or lack of satisfaction of needs, affects their character development throughout the novels. According to Maslow’s theory, the physiological needs such as air for breathing, water, food, sex, sleep, excretion and homeostasis are the first needs that have to be satisfied. The second tier of the pyramid concerns safety and security, of both self and family, health, property, morality and resources. The third is love/belonging with friendship, family and sexual intimacy. The fourth takes into account self-esteem, confidence, achievement, and the respect by/of others. The last tier is self-actualization, a person’s morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice and acceptance of facts.(Maslow;

Gilbert 44) According to Maslow, no need exists in isolation, they all affect each other, and usually the strongest need has to be satisfied first. However, each need does not have to be 100% fulfilled before the next tier “unlocks”. This quota of fulfillment depends on the individual as human A can be satisfied with physiological satisfaction of 60% while human B must have 85%.

Maslow’s motivational theory works best when used on the post-apocalyptic world, as there are no descriptions in *The Road* to analyze from, and the society in *Oryx and Crake*, while dystopian, lacked little in the form of food and material possessions. Therefore, it is natural to apply the theory after the world has ended. Maslow writes about how in a well-supplied and well-functioning society, “emergency conditions” are rare as food and water is not as scarce anymore.(374) These “emergency conditions” are, however, frequent to notice in war-ravaged countries, in the aftermath of natural disasters and in very poor countries. For many the “emergency conditions” are only temporary, but the fight for survival takes precedence over any other factors while it lasts.

The gratification of the basic needs is an important element in motivation theory. In his article “Civilization and Its Discontents”, Freud veers into the theme of gratification when he discusses how humans behave within communities and the lengths they will go to, to achieve happiness, or avoid pain. He argues that the pursuit of happiness can be divided into two categories: positive and negative.(8) The positive aims to remove pain and discomfort, while the negative seeks “experience of intense pleasure.”(8) Freud claims that it is easier to be unhappy, than happy, and our life’s purpose is to lessen this unhappiness. With unhappiness comes suffering and Freud defines three sources which this suffering comes from: Our own body, the outer world and human relationships.(8) Freud describes the gratification of instincts as happiness, but also claims that when they are left unfulfilled they cause great suffering. This is what Freud means when he claims that avoidance of pain is a form of happiness in itself.

Perfect happiness is impossible to attain, therefore the prevention of suffering can be viewed as surrogate happiness. He also discusses how humans affect each other within communities, and how their search for pleasure actually creates a fake state of happiness.(Freud 11) A sign of an advanced civilization is the appreciation of beauty, a concept Freud regards as a waste, as appreciation of beauty does not equal true happiness. Society would then benefit from reverting to a more primal state, to eradicate the misery society forces upon its inhabitants.(13) This notion of a civilization needing to revert to a more basic state is explored in *Oryx and Crake*, as Crake decides that in order to save the earth; humanity must be extinguished, and be replaced by the less intelligent Crakers.

Earl Ingersoll writes about survival, in relation to *Oryx and Crake*, but some of his points can be said to apply to both novels. Both *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Road*, are set in an “overwhelmingly hostile and alien world in which a viewpoint character is struggling to survive.”(Ingersoll 163) The readers are also “encouraged to get involved in some quick Sherlockholmsing to figure out when and where they have been dropped and what’s happened to this world.”(163) Deteriorating environment and the concern of day-to-day survival are important themes in both novels. Scavenging for food and supplies, as well as looking for shelter, the novels explore the possibility that the survivors are left with an intelligence level “enough to survive, but not so much that they will self-destruct.”(173) The Crakers’ low intelligence and the desperate, almost fanatical, need for food in *The Road* can be seen as signs of an intelligence that is dropped low enough to be able to survive long term, but the same sentiment can be used against them as low intelligence leaves little room for self-reflection over their own behavior. Maslow’s motivational theory suggests that humans unable to move past the basic physiological needs are unable to evolve, so desperate in their need for sustenance that higher thinking is made dormant. Survival is also a factor in the hope/hopelessness of the apocalyptic narrative. Both *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* offer

readers the “hope of failure”(173) that science and redemption will not be enough, and that humanity cannot be saved, but still leave the earth intact, thus allowing for other species to evolve.

According to one dictionary, accountability can be defined in the following way:

The obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibilities for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. It also includes the responsibility for money or other entrusted property(BusinessDictionary.com)

Accountability, in this thesis, explores how the characters are responsible for their actions, and if there are any factors that make certain behaviors or actions excusable. The articles “The Possibilities of Accountability” by John Roberts and “Accounting for the Effects of Accountability” by Jennifer S. Lerner and Philip E. Tetlock explain the uses of the term accountability both for the individual person and how accountability affect individualization within corporations.

Lerner and Tetlock write that accountability is a “modern buzzword”(Lerner and Tetlock 255) because the term has seen an increase of use in recent years. Accountability is used in health care, education, business, politics and in the justice system, the main aim having been to decide who is responsible for whom or what, and what rules people have to answer to. They also mention that it is only recently that research within psychology has examined the use of accountability in “social perception, attribution, organizational behavior, judgment accuracy, consumer preference, attitude formation and change, and negotiation.”(255)

The application of accountability varies from situation to situation, as the circumstance behind every action is different. Lerner and Tetlock examine different types of accountability, while Roberts looks into the hierarchal system of accountability within corporation. *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* displays different kinds of accountability, as in *The Road* any form of government is gone and only the individuals are left to struggle on their own. In *Oryx and Crake*

corporations are featured heavily, completely dominating the individual at times, but the individual can still make an impact, an example of this being Crake's decision to end mankind.

Four types of accountability which Lerner and Tetlock discuss are accountability to an audience with known versus unknown audience views, pre- versus post decisional accountability, outcome accountability versus process accountability, and legitimate versus illegitimate accountability. The different types of accountability tackle different situations; when knowing your audience you conform to their ideals to reach a favorable outcome, while not knowing how your audience will respond, you have to work through your argument, justifying your decision in case of opposition. In some cases, conforming might not be the most effective, for instance in *The Road* conforming mean joining the marauders, sharing their ideology that survival must outweigh moral standards.(256-57) Pre- versus post decisional accountability deals with how motivated persons is with their decision and whether they resort to defensive bolstering to justify their opinion. Defensive bolstering means that the individual focuses on his/her justification for the cause, why he/she is right and how the critics are wrong. Who resorts to self-criticism or defensive bolstering varies from person to person.(257-58) Outcome accountability focuses on the end goal regardless of the means used, while process accountability takes into account the decisions used to reach the goals. According to Lerner and Tetlock, those who were focused on the outcome gained greater commitment, but the stress of reaching the goal without giving much thought to the effectiveness of the decisions, lowered the quality. The process-oriented spent much more time considering how to reach the goal, increasing the quality of the work. In the article however, Lerner and Tetlock are referring to organizational behavior students who compared private vs. public corporations. Private corporations used outcome accountability where the employees where given free reign, and became more efficient; while public corporations were less efficient because they had to follow strict guidelines.(258) Legitimate or illegitimate accountability examines the reactions people

have to being questioned by someone they know or expect to justify themselves to, and strangers. Insulting or intrusive accountability could be viewed as illegitimate, and the people being forced to justify themselves resorted to defensive bolstering or polarization of opinions. Lerner and Tetlock also speculates that people simply cares more about the family's or a friend's opinions than that of strangers, and thus react unfavorably to being questioned.(258-59)

Roberts differentiates between individual and social accountability. Individual accountability emerges in childhood when the child discovers the difference between “me” versus “I”. In the beginning, the child sees himself as an object of others, “me”, and later develops the “I” who is capable of affecting his/her environments, and how rules and beliefs and values structure social life. Roberts also discusses how the child uses mirroring to develop or “take over” the attitudes of others and integrating them into its own.(Roberts 356-58) Both *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* introduce characters who are children. The son in *The Road* was born after conventional society collapsed, and is dependent on the nearest source of morality, which is his father. Jimmy and Crake, in *Oryx and Crake*, have their parents in addition to a functioning society to help create their moral sense. Social accountability often manifests itself as conformity. The pressure to conform affects the ability to stand out as an individual according to Roberts, as the corporate world encourages people to express opinions that match the corporate idea. The hierarchy in the corporate world is complex as it expresses the conformity the lower workers must express towards the management to achieve results and be recognized, yet at the same time these workers are afforded more individualization, as the managers must keep to the conformity of the corporation to keep his/her position. To rise in the ranks the workers must adapt to the managers expectations, however it is the manager who is held accountable for everyone's actions as he/she keeps a higher position.(Roberts) In *Oryx and Crake*, the corporations are considered powerful because they supply the demands of the

population. To control their products and workplace, the corporations place their workers in compounds where the inhabitants must adhere to strict rules, or face serious consequences. Conformity is necessary to be able to function within these compounds, so differences of opinions are not tolerated, as seen with Jimmy's mother and Crake's father.

In the didactical chapter the use of literature is discussed in relation to how to teach students in upper secondary school how novels or short stories can be used in variety of ways in the classroom. Elin Vestli's article "Fra Sokkel til Klasserom: Litteraturens Plass i Fremmedspråkundervisningen" is very helpful for those uncertain of how literature can be relevant for English and other subjects. Students learn to immerse themselves into a different world, with different cultures and values than their own. They also learn to connect literature with historical events, as literature often is a reflection of the period they were written in. Gunn Imsen's two books *Lærerens Verden* and *Elevenes Verden* are an introduction to pedagogical theory, teaching people studying to become a teacher the values and tools to become a good teacher. The importance of planning each session with a specific goal in mind, and how to teach them to the students according to their needs is an important point in these books. Alfie Kohn raises the issue of how not to teach literature, and gives examples of how to engage the student in his article "How to Create Nonreaders: Reflections on Motivation, Learning, and Sharing Power." Magne Dypedahl discusses culture, and how literature can be a way to introduce multiculturalism in the classroom in his article "Interkulturell kompetanse og kravet til språklæreren."

The next chapters will use the theoretical framework introduced in this chapter, along with articles dealing specifically with the different novels, to examine the three keywords *society, survival and accountability*. The characters growth, motivation and actions will be analyzed to understand how the author portrays the apocalypse and the survival after the world has ended.

3. Society, Survival and Accountability in *The Road*

The Road is a very monotonous novel at times, as the perspective of the characters is so limited. As readers, we only see what the characters see, and most often it is from the father's point of view. Because the novel is written in third person limited narrative, this monotonous feeling is reinforced by the references to ash. "Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered in ash and dust".(McCarthy 11) and "... but other than their own faint track through the ash he saw nothing".(71) The slow progress of the main characters and continuous references to ash gives the readers a sense of hopelessness and emptiness. Survival in such an empty world seems like an impossible feat to achieve.

Society or communities are almost non-existent in the novel. The father and the son are the closest to a 'normal' relationship in the story. By normal, I mean a more or less healthy approximation to a relationship between two or more people, in comparison to other characters we find in the book. The descriptions of the characters and the society around them are as scanty as the circumstances surrounding the story. The readers are left to ponder on the nature of the disaster that ended the old world as much as they are left to speculate on the rest of humankind. During their travels, the father and son encounter other humans, some having even banded together as a group. However, the descriptions of these groups are full of nightmarish episodes, of murder, abuse and cannibalism. "They came shuffling through the ash casting hooded heads from side to side. Some of them wearing canister masks. One in a biohazard suit. Stained and filthy. Slouching with clubs in their hands, lengths of pipe."(62-63)

They passed two hundred feet away, the ground shuddering lightly. Tramping. Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each. (96)

The quoted passage shows society's state of collapse in the novel, at least as seen through the father's eyes. The father and the son are in a constant fight for survival; not just from the elements, but from other humans as well. This is a world without order, where every man, woman and child is left to fend for him- or herself. The need for safety could be lessened when existing in numbers, especially as a group would be stronger than a single human.

The two quotes above describe the two first meetings the father and son, the two protagonists, have with groups of humans. The meetings are not associated with something 'good', but rather the 'bad', the definition the father and the son use with reference to themselves and others. The use of words suggests that the groups are not afraid of being ambushed as they are 'tramping' away on the road(62-63) and are fully equipped with weapons(96). The scenes remind me of the post-apocalyptic game "Fallout: New Vegas" (2010) where the members of a large group called Caesar's Legion would hunt for slaves and bring them back to camp. The scenario is reminiscent of what is happening in *The Road*, as the slaves are in harnesses as makeshift horses, drawing a wagon with "goods of war." (96) Just as the actions of the Caesar's Legion are suggestive of Roman times, so is this group of marauders. The wagons and slaves are reminiscent of an earlier time in history, perhaps even a more primal one as the references of cannibalism indicate.

The relationship between the father and the son on the one hand, and the rest of the world on the other is made different and somehow special by the seclusion they maintain from the groups that they encounter. They have a choice between joining one of the groups and have a higher chance of survival, or keep their distance and take their chances alone. The father is adamant that they keep their distance, "It's all right, he said. We have to run. Don't look back. Come on".(63), "What is it, Papa? People on the road. Keep your face down. Don't look".(96) The boy is more optimistic and naïve compared to his father, seeking companionship rather than solitude. ""Can we help him? Papa? No, we cant help him".(51) "I told you to stay put.

Didn't I tell you? Now we've got to go. Come on. I just wanted to see him, Papa. I just wanted to see him".(89) Despite having witnessed gruesome things, it seems that the son longs for a sense of community. "I wish that little boy was with us".(139) It is not until the end that they meet humans who can be classified as "good" people, and not marauders or cannibals. "We have a little boy and we have a little girl. How old is he? He's about your age. Maybe a little older. And you didn't eat them. No. You don't eat people. No. We don't eat people".(304) At the end of the road, the boy, and perhaps the father too, found the 'good' people that they were searching for by traveling south.

In the novel we have the elements of the Quest as Thomas Foster lists them in *How to Read Literature like a Professor*: 1. The quester, 2. A place to go, 3. A stated reason to go there, 4. Challenges and trials en route and 5. A real reason to go there.(Foster) All these elements are in the novel. The questers are the main characters, the father and the son. Their stated mission is to move south to avoid the winter.(McCarthy 2) The challenges on their way are basic needs and staying alive. The real reason to move south, according to the students of Gilbert, was not only to survive, but also to sustain hope and love between each other.(Gilbert 46)

From a survivalist point of view, it is the trials en route which are the most relevant to the keyword Survival. It is from the challenges that the character growth comes from, and not the static notion of who the quester is or where they are going. The descriptions are short and sparse, portraying a world void of life. No animal life, no plants and few humans. The endless voyage creates a feeling of hopelessness and apathy, which is hard to shake. As most humans in a post-apocalyptic world, the father and the son must scavenge to find resources such as food, clothing, tools and shelter. Despite it being years after the apocalypse, there is still canned food left to be eaten, "Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned ham, Corned beef".(McCarthy 146) As canned food does not spoil, they are a vital part of the

nutrition of the pair. Scavenging does not always yield results, and anything resembling food with nutritional value is consumed, “It looked like something fetched from a tomb, so dried and drawn. He cut into it with his knife. Deep red and salty meat inside. Rich and good. They fried it that night over their fire, thick slices of it...”(16) Vitamins are also important. The father is often on the lookout for vitamins as he wants his son to be healthy, “He needed vitamin D for the boy or he was going to get rickets”.(280)

Surviving the aftermath of the end of the world does not only require scavenging, but also ingenuity. What would happen if clothes were ruined or an exit blocked? The father is described as a very capable man as he is able to overcome several difficulties. For a pair of humans who are malnourished, the idea of them managing to carry enough supplies to keep themselves fed, warm and hydrated, seems an impossibility. Despite the challenges, the father uses a shopping cart to transport their supplies and occasionally the son. “He pushed the cart and both he and the son carried knapsacks. In the knapsacks were essential things. In case they had to abandon the cart and make a run for it”.(4) The father even positioned a “chrome motorcycle mirror”(4) to be able to observe behind them.

Looting is on the worst end of the spectrum of scavenging, and the father and son are both the victims and perpetrator of this action. “What happened, Papa? They took everything.”(271) The pair eventually catches up with the thief and the father in his righteous anger takes all of his clothes, “Take your clothes off. What? Take them off. Every goddamn stitch.”(274)

The third keyword Accountability examines the moral and the ethical issues of the novel. By this, I do not mean what moral lessons the readers can extract from the book, but the legality of the characters’ behavior. The world has ended and so have the government, the military, and any functioning remnants of the old world system. Therefore, there is no police to control or contain characters, nor steer them in the right direction. In his article, Gilbert proposes

that the characters are following Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs.(Gilbert 44) He made his students discuss the events of the novel with the pyramid in mind and try to explain the actions of the characters.

The scavenging and the search for shelter would fall into the first tier as the need for nutrition, hydration, warmth and even sex are basic needs that are important to have satisfied. Both the father and the son, and the groups of people they encounter, are in search of having their needs satisfied. Throughout the novel there are references to cannibalistic acts, "He pushed at the bones with the toe of his shoe. They looked to have been boiled".(McCarthy 73-74) In a flashback the mother voices fears of what certain groups of people will do to them to satisfy their needs. "They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont face it".(58)

If we take into account Maslow's Hierarchy, can we blame the characters for resorting to unsavory methods in order to survive? Food is scarce, so can the cannibals be blamed for using an easy source of nutrition that is available, which is human flesh? Maslow even puts sex as a basic human need, which would seem to excuse the abuse of the catamites, who are chained and dragged after the wagon.(96) Gilbert asked his students to reflect upon this situation as they analyzed the actions of the main characters and the actions of the transitory ones. They came to the conclusion that while Maslow's Hierarchy explains the actions of the transitory characters, it does not always explain the actions of the father and the son.(Gilbert 44) The son often seeks the companionship of others, as I have already mentioned. This need is in tier three and therefore should not have been desired as his need for food and shelter was unfulfilled. Maslow himself states that the hierarchy is not a key where behavior and the motivation of certain behaviors are absolute. The pyramid, then, can only be used as a guideline on which we can base the legality of characters' actions. He also writes that a child's need for shelter is defined differently than an adult's. Shelter or security for a child can be the "preference for some kind of undisrupted routine or rhythm."(Maslow 377) The son may find security in the father's

attempt to normalize their situation. Scavenging for food, looking for shelter, and avoiding other humans have become routine; thus allowing the son the opportunity for developing other needs, as described in Maslow's pyramid.

Cannibalism is taboo in most cultures yet often features in works depicting the aftermath of an apocalypse. The image of one human feasting on another can be used for shock value, and to make a statement of how low humankind has sunk. The students in Gilbert's class reached the conclusion that while Maslow's pyramid expects humans to resort to depravity and becoming self-serving beings, there are some who can reach beyond the basic needs and greet the world with kindness.(44) Cannibalism is also a sign of the desperate situation humankind is facing. The scarceness of food means humans have to look for alternative sources, namely each other. The need for food is so strong; everything centers on how to find food, what kind of food does he/she want. All other thoughts are driven away by the intense need for food, "All capacities are put into the service of hunger-satisfaction, and the organization of these capacities is almost always entirely determined by the one purpose of satisfying hunger.(Maslow 373) The marauders' actions can be seen as an attempt to satisfy hunger, and that the need is so strong that all other consequences are ignored.

The father has an enormous amount of pressure placed on his shoulders. His wife is dead, having left them to commit suicide(McCarthy 60), and it is just him and the boy alone against the environment and other humans. His struggle is not just a physical one, but also psychological. The need to persevere to protect his own son, no matter what consequences, triggers a mental struggle not to succumb to the numbness of the new world. His body is already failing, "Coughing. Coughing. He bent over, holding his knees. Taste of Blood."(254) This need to keep moving is the father's way of keeping the son pure. Jamie Crosswhite writes about the gun and its bullets as a way of indicating death. In the beginning, the mother talks about how there were only two bullets left, and how she could not stand this way of living any longer.

As the first bullet was spent, so was the mother's life. As the number of bullets is reduced so is the number of characters. The father was forced to use the second bullet, indicating that another life was forfeit. In the end we learn that it was the father himself, although the coughing and indication of sickness foreshadowed his fate.(Crosswhite) Even as he commits acts the son questions, the father takes on the responsibility because they must survive. By asking the son to look away he hopes to absorb the darkness of the world into himself, "Take my hand he said. I dont think you should see this. What you put in your head is there forever? Yes."(McCarthy 203) The father sacrifices himself, so that the son may be untouched by impure thoughts.

The son represents the next generation, the future. The father tells the son before he dies that he will "have to carry the fire"(298) The father's protection, the need to keep his son pure has religious undertones. The son is to be the new world's savior; his morals and kind being will bring about a new start where the world will begin anew and learn from its mistakes. The son was born during the apocalypse, and one might wonder how he has managed to develop this kindness toward others. Humans often reflect the environment they are born in, and McCarthy could have written the son as self-centered boy with trust issues, yet the son wants to help others, "Cant we help him Papa?"(McCarthy 51) According to John Roberts children "mirror" their surroundings and assimilate the attitudes of others before forming their own opinion of right and wrong.(Roberts 356-58) This explains the son's innocence, as the father avoids interacting with strangers. The son only has his father as a judge of character, and thus mirrors him before developing his own conscious. While the son is the messianic figure, the father is the martyr. Maslow describes the 'martyrs' as the "strong" people, humans whom have had their basic needs met in their youth to such a degree that they have developed a "strong, healthy character structure."(Maslow 387-88) The dichotomy of the father's actions is curious. He refuses to let his basic needs degrade his morals in such a way that the pair is forced into cannibalism, yet he still displays a cynicism that he refuses to teach his son.

The readers can understand the father's struggle to keep his son alive, as he is the only good thing in a dangerous world. Society has broken down and total anarchy rules where the strongest survive, and the weakest are eaten, enslaved or killed. The actions are as true to a post-apocalyptic world as the reader can imagine, where we can understand the characters' action, but will still not condone cannibalism and murder as they are taboo in our own world. The ending seems to indicate that there is hope, the son survives and meets a family with children, but the last paragraph gives an ambiguous feel to whether or not humankind is too depraved to carry on.

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 were they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.(306-07)

The last paragraph suggests a world which can not be fixed. The fish could be a metaphor for earth where the maps and mazes represent life before the apocalypse. Whatever started the end of the world left wounds too grave for the world to be the same again. One can hope that this would mean that humanity has learned from their mistakes, and not that they have become so corrupt that any chance for redemption is gone.

4. Society, Survival and Accountability in *Oryx and Crake*

Oryx and Crake is set in both a dystopian and post-apocalyptic world. The main character Jimmy/Snowman is narrating through a third person retrospective perspective. The novel begins in the post-apocalyptic timeline, where most of humanity has died of a virus. Here the readers are introduced to Snowman and three children. What is special about these children is that they are the progeny of biologically spliced humanoids called Crakers. The dystopian world before the virus, was focused on bioengineering and splicing the DNA of different species. The novel moves back and forth between the different timelines, teasing the readers with short passages of the events leading up to the release of the virus and the subsequent extinction of humankind.

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is still relevant in some sections of this analysis, however Foster's analytical use of the Quest does not work quite as well within the narrative framework of *Oryx and Crake* as it does in *The Road*. The complexities within Snowman's point of view makes the Quest difficult to follow, as his journey is not as linear as the Father and Son in *The Road*. The formula can still be used, however, up to a point, to analyze Snowman's actions after the breakdown of society.

The world in this novel is divided into pre-and post-apocalypse. Pre-apocalypse is the dystopic world where the pursuit of scientific discovery is highly valued and encouraged. The ethical rules of biological engineering have been broken; splicing animal and human DNA to create new species such as the pigoon, wolvog and rakunk is socially accepted. The scientists and their families live in communities connected to the workplace. Humans living outside these compounds live in what Snowman refers to as "the pleeblands." (Atwood 27) Life outside the corporate communities was considered unsafe, as people in the big cities walked without "finger identity cards" (27) and "could be anyone." (27) Crime was not uncommon in the

pleeblands, and the wealthier people looked down upon these people as they thought themselves above ordinary humans.

It is interesting to note that society in *Oryx and Crake*, despite numerous technological advancements within cosmetics and medicine, is not a happier world; the coveted utopia. Instead, the divide within the population creates a class system in which regular humans are symptomatic to what ails the world. Capitalism and abundance of money have forced medical advancement so far that pharmaceutical companies resort to spreading disease within their merchandise in order to create a demand for more medicine. This demand for more is never enough and so the cycle of consumerism and capitalism continues.

Considering the world corrupt, Crake, Snowman's childhood friend, creates a virus to kill off humankind. He believes that humans have reached a state where total annihilation is the only solution. Humanity tampers with nature, natural laws and the ecosystem. Due to an increasing population and pollution of various kinds, several species are becoming extinct, and living areas are being irrevocably changed by human intervention, a situation highly similar to the concerns of our own day and age. In Crake's mind humanity is to continue in the Crakers' image.

Post-apocalyptic society is still thriving, although on a different level from before. Most of humanity is dead; Snowman only knows about himself as a survivor, "Meanwhile, the end of a species was taking place before his very eyes. Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species."(344) The Crakers are now to be the dominant species, created to endure the changed conditions on earth. Crake has conditioned the genes of the Crakers to remove aggression so that they will not have territorial ambitions nor develop a hierarchical system where some members would have an elevated status, while others rated a lower position in the community. Their sexual drive " -was not a constant torment to them"(305) any more as the need to copulate has been reduced to the basic biological urge of heats, which the Crakers

experience at regular intervals. Crake claims to have made his “children” better than humans, but at an intellectual price. Crakers have a diminished IQ, meaning they are, in theory, only concerned about survival and giving life to the next generation. To avoid overpopulation, Crake has in addition “programmed”(303) the new species to drop dead at age thirty. By shortening the Crakers lifespan, he forces them to mature at a faster rate than normal humans. Combined with lowered IQ’s, the mental development would be lower for a 20-year-old Craker than for a 20-year-old human. A shorter lifespan forces the Crakers to reproduce earlier, adding more responsibility, which detracts time they may have needed for intellectual development.

Piaget created a theory of age development, where children learn in stages, most often associated with age. When the Crakers are forced to age at a faster rate than what we would think of as normal, they might miss important stages crucial to the development of intellect. Because of their short lifespan, the stages in Piaget’s model would also have to be shortened. The newborn has less time in the safe arms of its mother, and the toddler has to learn language, and other crucial skills at a faster pace than usual. The time between child and adult leaves fewer opportunities for communities to develop from tribal societies into something more sophisticated. Piaget’s theory has been criticized for not leaving any allowance for individual development (Imsen *Elevers Verden. Innføring I Pedagogisk Psykologi* 235-45)

When everyone falls dead at the age thirty, the idea of the old wise man/woman is shattered, as there will be no elders to teach the newcomers how things used to be in the past, or pass important advice from one generation to the next. The Crakers seem to have adapted well to their surroundings, their genes a perfect combination of what Crake wanted for the new world. However, biology is always evolving, and the Crakers may develop to become intelligent beings like humans. Homo sapiens did after all evolve from homo neanderthalensis.

The main focus of the novel is the characters of Snowman, Crake and Oryx, although the Crakers and the transgenics play an important part as well in the post-apocalyptic world. It is within, or just outside, the Craker community that Snowman exists. Before Crake commits suicide he entrusts the Crakers' safety and education to Snowman, and this commitment is what keeps him going,

Once in a while he considered killing himself – it seemed mandatory – but somehow he didn't have the required energy. He could imagine Crake's amused contempt and the disappointment of Oryx. But Jimmy! Why did you give up? You have a job to do! You promised, remember?(344).

As a shepherd appointed by Crake and Oryx, Snowman is provided with fish by the Craker tribe once a week. He still scavenges for food as the comfort of having a varied menu, and drinking water regularly would fall under the first tier of Maslow's pyramid. He ransacks dead people's houses looking for clothes, food, equipment and shelter. However, the scavenging is not without danger. When the virus started killing its hosts, the transgenics were released. "It must have been during the initial mayhem, thinks Snowman, that some genius let out the pigoons and wolvogs. *Oh, thanks a bundle.*"(340) The pigoons have since evolved into a state with brain capacity similar to that of a human, the result of genesplicing, "They were waiting for him, using the garbage bag as bait. They must have been able to tell there was something in it he'd want, that he'd come to get. Cunning, so cunning."(271) This role reversal demonstrates the transgenic's ability to adapt to a changed world. The human has become the hunted, while the pigoon has risen above its former station as an object and become the predator. The pigoons are hungry and willing to eat human flesh. Since pigoons are the result of genesplicing of pig and human DNA, their actions can be considered a form of cannibalism. Cannibalism is also hinted at in the beginning of the novel, "Also to set the queasy at ease, it was claimed that none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would

want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own.”(23-24) and “...and meat became harder to come by, some people had their doubts. Within OrganInc Farm itself it was noticeable how often back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies turned up on the staff café menu.”(24) The image of cannibalism can be explained by societies’ need for meat, and when the need is not satisfied, the body develops a hunger for it.(Maslow 372) When civilization exists, the taboos are harder to cross(Lisboa xviii-xiv), or harder to excuse crossing, while the absence of social norms makes survival an imperative.

Crake gave Snowman a task to perform after the eradication of humanity, “If anything happens to me, I’m depending on you to look after the Paradise Project. Any time I’m away from here I want you to take charge. I’ve made it a standing order.”(320) Snowman has now become the quester, with a mission that has been forced upon him: look after the Crakers. He does not have an obligation to follow this request, but the thought of a disappointed Oryx makes him acquiesce. Just like with the quest in *The Road*, Snowman may have accepted the quest because it was given to him, but his reasoning for staying on after the apocalypse is not necessarily the same as when he first accepted it. In *The Road* the quest was undefined, the goal a vague one of reaching safety by moving forwards until the journey was over. In *Oryx and Crake* Snowman is aware of humanity’s decimation, and his vulnerability in comparison to the other species. The goal then becomes survival.

Throughout most of the novel, the readers assume that Snowman is the only human survivor, because that is what Snowman himself tells us. However, three other survivors approached the Craker camp while Snowman was away. They were scared away when the Craker men started presenting their mating dance, the smell of the surviving human woman being similar to the pheromones emitted by the Craker women in heat. Snowman follows their tracks, unsure whether he should approach them peacefully or killing them. The introduction of other survivors begs the question of what exactly is happening in the rest of the world. The

virus was supposed to have killed all other humans; did they also have the antidote or were some immune? The novel does not give any answers at this time, but it is the first part of a trilogy. Atwood's second novel *The Year of the Flood* is set in the same timeframe as *Oryx and Crake*, but in a different part of the world where other humans have survived.

Oryx and Crake presents an undefined moral code. On the one hand, we have capitalism, which is destroying the earth with its ever-increasing demand for production and consumption, and need for living space and on the other, Crake with his questionable morals. Chung-Hao Ku likens Crake to a mad scientist in his article "Of Monsters and Man: Transgenics and Transgressions." He uses the term "mad scientist" to prove how far Crake was willing to go to cleanse earth, where "mad" equals an ethical violation. (Ku 120) Creating the Crakers and spreading the deadly virus are ethical violations that affect humanity on a grand scale, negatively. His intention to eradicate humanity would not necessarily garner sympathy from the readers; however, the presence of Oryx helps mitigate the harshness of his actions.

Oryx, a child prostitute taken in by Crake, is sympathetic to Crake's vision of a world where there is peace. Her circumstances and gentle nature encourages the readers to feel empathy towards Crake's cause, perhaps even to support his methods. Because both Crake and Oryx die during the apocalyptic event, it is difficult to use Maslow's pyramid in connection to them. However, if some readers find themselves willing to accept that Crake's method was just, then the needs of the earth must be taken into consideration. As mentioned in chapter 3, the first tier of the pyramid deals with the physiological needs, while the second tier takes into account the individual's need for safety and stability. If we look at earth as an entity that needs saving, as Crake implies by creating the more ecofriendly Crakers, then the destruction of mankind is necessary. To be able to function as a planet, giving life to organisms, earth needs to be able to provide food, water, shelter and warmth, all of which humanity is destroying with overpopulation and deforestation. Using Maslow's pyramid, Crake's actions could be judged

as justifiable, as the death of humans saves the earth and at the same time a number of other living organisms. In which case, the needs of the many trump the needs of the few. The dilemma of whether Crake should be held accountable for his actions or looked upon as a symptom of a sick society is a complicated one.

Where Snowman fits in this moral quandary can be difficult to place. He did not instigate nor encourage Crake in his plans to end humankind, nor did he put a stop to it. He portrays the average human, as he conforms to society's hierarchy. To be fair, Snowman was not aware of Crake's plan, but he knew some of the experiments Crake was making. As a product of his upbringing, Snowman does not object when Crake introduces him to the Crakers. He only shows concern for their marketable value, and if they can sell. Snowman before the apocalypse was firmly entrenched within the capitalistic world, being neither good nor bad. After the virus, he is the prey, and the only socialization he receives is through the Crakers. Chung-Hao Ku writes that with the new biologically superior Crakers, Snowman is the one reverting into a primitive state.(Ku) This reversion could be interpreted as a punishment for his inaction and culpability for humankind's demise. Humanity did not care for the world, so they are relegated down in the animal hierarchy, where they can do no harm.

Children in *Oryx and Crake* mirror their society when they conform to the roles society gives them. Snowman/Jimmy does not do as well within science as Crake, therefore he is sent to Martha Graham to study humanities; meanwhile Crake is sent Watson-Crick where he is expected to contribute to scientific discovery. The hierarchical roles play an important part in the novel, as society only functions if scientists are placed on the top. The demands of the public are so big that science is used to solve most problems. Because of the dystopian world, society can be viewed as an organization where roles and rules are important. John Robert's opinions about hierarchies and individualization are relevant to the order of society in *Oryx and Crake*. The isolation of the compounds and their workers, in addition to how scientists are elevated in

status within society, makes individualization hard. Everyone must conform to how life is managed at these compounds or they are looked upon as different, and different is not good thing. It is important to note that in the “pleeblands” life is not arranged the same as in the compounds, but the rich and those living in compounds look down upon them. In Robert’s hierarchy the scientists are at the top, the marketers in the middle and the regular humans in the bottom.(360-63) The scientists are accountable for giving the average humans their products, which are safe and tested for use, while the marketers are accountable for making sure the average humans want to buy the products developed. Crake feels these scientific developments comes at the cost of ruining earth, and takes on the responsibility to reverse or at least stop the damage that has been done. After the apocalypse, societal accountability falls apart in *Oryx and Crake*, because there is no known human civilization left. Instead, the Crakers are the new standard to avoid past mistakes.

Even though humankind is thought to be eradicated, life on earth continues because of the Crakers. Snowman assumes the role of the teacher and guardian, upholding his promise to Crake, even though he feels on the outside of society. With the end of the world, a new time where transgenics rule the planet starts. Humanity has outlived its usefulness, and whether or not Crake’s decision was moral, it might have given the earth the chance to recover from humanity’s influence.

5. A Comparison of the two Novels

The Road and *Oryx and Crake* shares similarities in their approach to the apocalypse. However there are also differences: the cause of the apocalypse, the apocalyptic narrative, the character's survival and inner conflict and the prospect of a future for the world.

Oryx and Crake is the only novel to deal with the apocalypse in detail; the events leading up to it, the apocalypse itself and the aftermath. With the information given to the readers, the motive behind the cataclysmic events seems to be a political one; the human condition and how the human species evolved to dominate the world, and in the process destroying it.

Freud proposes in "Civilization and Its Discontents" that the enjoyment of beauty, "the beauty of human forms and movements, of natural objects, of landscapes, of artistic and even scientific creations"(Freud 11), is not culturally relevant because the need for appreciating beauty is not apparent. In *Oryx and Crake* the scientific advancement and the "words people"(Ku 121) detract from what society should center around: continuity, survival of the human race. Ku discusses the division of character types Atwood hints at in the novel: the numbers people and the words people.(121) Crake and Jimmy's father would be considered numbers people, as they are scientists. They create inventions that can change the world, while words people like Jimmy, enter into marketing as they appreciate the beauty of the words rather than scientific discovery. Crake deliberately modified the intelligence level of the Crakers so that they would never want for more than what they have; namely food and community. His argument was that by having power urges, prejudice, and a permanent sex drive, the Crakers would live peacefully, letting the world heal from what James Berger calls the trauma of the apocalypse.(Berger) *The Road*, with its empty world is devoid of beauty as everything the father and son come across is dead. This deadness is reflected in the society. Just as *Oryx and Crake's* highly developed culture was what gave it civilization in the past, the lack of culture in *The Road* defines the primitive state of the living conditions and (lack of) human values. The more

primitive the society, the easier it is to cross boundaries of social conventions because there are no longer any laws. Ingersoll also visits this topic in his article, when he discusses the role of Arts in *Oryx and Crake*. Crake believes the Science to be superior, and considers Arts to be the symptom of a consumerist society. “When any civilization is dust and ashes art is all that’s left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning— human meaning, that is- defined by them.”(Atwood 167) Snowman tells this to Crake when they are discussing the roles of society. The reticence Snowman shows in including himself in the Craker community validates the opinion that Arts is a human component, “Why does he feel so dejected, so bereft? Because he doesn’t understand this kind of behavior? Because it’s beyond him? Because he can’t jump in?”(169) The lack of advanced thinking in the Crakers leaves Snowman feeling isolated. In *The Road* the father also isolates himself, because the world has been reduced to a society of instincts where the appreciation of beauty is no longer a main concern.

The apocalyptic narrative is not the same in *The Road* as it is *Oryx and Crake*, but the overall message is similar. The readers are given indications that prior to the apocalypse some sort of catastrophic disaster took place, which started a nuclear winter. The absence of plants and animals, and the dropping temperature indicates that something is preventing new life from forming. In *Oryx and Crake* it is a virus that kills off humanity, leaving the earth intact. The Crakers and the transgenics are left with an environment they can sustain themselves from; the air is clean and food is growing in the wild. There is little food to scavenge from the wild in *The Road*, canned and dried food has replaced fresh versions of the same products. Both novels deal with political issues, *Oryx and Crake’s* is more open about their motives than the ones in *The Road*. Overpopulation, genetic tampering, consumerism and capitalism are discussed often in *Oryx and Crake*, while the political motives in *The Road* are more hidden. If the readers agree with the assumption that the world suffered from a nuclear disaster, the issue of war arises. It could have been the consequence of negligence towards nuclear power plants, as it

does in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. While *Oryx and Crake* deals with the more openly political issues, *The Road* has chosen to look at the what-if-scenario.

Even if the novels' differ in their approach to the apocalypse, the consequences for the human race are the similar. In *The Road*, there is no indication that humanity can survive. The harsh living conditions mean that the weak do not survive while the strong carry on, until they too become weak. That the surviving humans resort to cannibalism, shows that the availability of food is limited and might one day run out. The author gives the readers the hope that humanity can survive by uniting the son with a family with children close to his age, but their survivability does not increase just because there is hope for procreating. The issues of food, water, and hostile humans are still present and very real. *Oryx and Crake*, on the other hand gives a much hopeful depiction of humanity's fate than *The Road*. Snowman might be the only survivor at first, but there is still life in the form of the Crakers and transgenics. They have been conditioned to survive much harsher environments than human's, and will continue on despite humanity's fate. The ending of the novel introduces other human survivors, who will be central in the next two volumes in this trilogy.

Apocalyptic literature often features religious over- or undertones. Of the two novels under scrutiny here, *The Road* is the novel in which religion is the most apparent. The father and the son must stand together to fight evil, while struggling to avoid being infected with the corruption in the barren world. The son may be seen as some kind of new messiah, the savior come from God himself to fix the world so that humanity can live on. The father takes the role of the shepherd who guides the messiah to the new world, sacrificing himself when he feels the corruption take hold of him. His inner battle represents the good and the evil in the world. He wants to do the best for the son, but what is best for the son is not always the moral decision. The father must deliver his son to his intended destination, or the world is assuredly doomed forever. That the father refers to his son as the one, who carries the fire, is further proof that the

son is the savoir of mankind. The state of the earth can also be seen as being in God's disfavor; that humans fell from Grace and have been condemned to live in hell. The son's role might then be about achieving redemption, though the novel ends before we learn of human's fate. Religion in *Oryx and Crake* is not as prominent as it is in *The Road*, but in fact the Crakers worship Crake and Oryx as gods. Crake is their creator and God, while Oryx takes on the role of Virgin Mary, the protector of the Crakers. Snowman is given the role of an apostle, whose task is to bring messages between the Crakers and their god Crake. "He takes good care of us, says Madame Curie. You must tell him we are grateful." (Atwood 161) Before the virus, society was very secular with science as an important principle. Because of this, the scientific inventions came at the cost of other species' extinction and abuse, and overuse of the earth's resources. Crake realized this and took upon himself the role of God, and releasing a "flood" in the form of a virus to cleanse earth. The remaining species then could start anew, leaving the world to heal itself. The same happens in the Bible, the genesis chapters 6-9, when God releases a flood to revert the earth to its pre-creation state. Noah is given the task of building an ark where a certain number of animals and humans are allowed to live while the rest of the world is purified and made inhabitable again. Crake takes upon himself the role of Noah, as well as God, when he releases the virus.

6. Teaching Literature in the Classroom: *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake*

This chapter will focus on how both *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* can be used to teach literature in the classroom, especially on the upper secondary school. The theme of apocalypse and survival are topics that are certainly relevant to our society today. Nuclear threats, biological warfare and the human body's resistance to antibiotics reoccur often in movies; examples of these are *Contagion*¹ and *The Book of Eli*². By discussing such topics in the classroom, the students learn to think independently, to review literature, newspapers and articles critically, and not accept information as it is presented in the media unquestioningly, without judging its bias. The Knowledge Promotion Reform (KPR) and the English Subject Curriculum (ESC) lay ground rules as to what skills and competency aims the students have to learn, and all teachers must abide by these aims.

6.1 Teaching Literature in the Classroom

English is a universal language, and according to the English Subject Curriculum(ESC), Norwegian students are required to learn English in such a way that they can make themselves understood both orally and written, therefore the English education starts early; in first grade. By the time students start upper secondary school they are expected to expand their vocabulary, especially within vocational education programs, learn to listen and understand oral texts, understand authentic English languages, reading and analyzing authentic English texts, evaluate sources, and learn about traditions and cultures within English speaking countries.(ESC 5) Because English is a universal language, the chance of encountering situations where the students must understand the language to some degree is highly probable. These situations can be traveling abroad, searching the internet, conducting business or reading literature. The latter

¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1598778/>

² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1037705/>

is the focus in this thesis, as literature is not just a form of entertainment. By reading literature, students may develop empathy and insight into different traditions, cultures, and historical events.

Teaching literature can be demanding, as there are movies and synopses on the internet that may remove the joy of reading. The importance of experiencing emotional responses to reading is the reason why literature in school is essential. By reading literature, the students are introduced to characters that they can identify with. The more believable the characters are, the easier it is for the students to immerse themselves into the story and learn what the author is trying to express. Elin Vestli remarks in her article about literature's place within the classroom that literature is a neglected part of language education, whether it be French, Spanish, English or German. As an adult, I can think back to my own experiences and concur; that literature had been largely set aside in favor of linguistics; at least in my time as a student. Vestli mentions that this could be due to the vast selection of literature, the difficulty of finding suitable texts for the students, and which methods are chosen for the lesson,(Vestli 4) which is a shame since literature can open up a new world for both children and young adults. The most important thing is knowing your audience; knowing what your students want to read, and finding novels or short stories within that genre.

I mentioned earlier that literature is important because it may develop student's empathy and understanding of other cultures. The ESC states that:

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to:

- discuss and elaborate on culture and social conditions in several English-speaking countries
- present and discuss current news items from English language sources
- discuss and elaborate on the growth of English as a universal language
- discuss and elaborate on different types of English language literary texts from different parts of the world
- discuss and elaborate on English language films and other forms of cultural expressions from different media
- discuss and elaborate on texts by and about indigenous peoples in English-speaking countries
- select an in-depth study topic within one's education programme and present this (ESC 5)

The competency aims are very open to interpretation, which makes each class and each lesson unique. The teacher can tailor every lesson according to the students' needs or what they want to learn. By using the didactic diamond created by Bjørndal and Lieberg (Imsen *Lærerens Verden Innføring I Generell Didaktikk* 406), the teacher has certain frameworks which help form the different lessons. Even if the competency aims are open to interpretation, the texts must have a connection to the aims and serve a function beyond just being interesting or entertaining. Both *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake* criticize current society and attempt to show the readers the consequences of not initiating changes before we as humans wipe ourselves from existence. It is not enough to ask the students to start reading and then write a book report. There has to be a foundation and a reasoning behind the choice of texts, before handing the assignments to the students.

Magne Dypedahl writes about tools for reflection, which I have chosen to translate as “reflection-knobs” (refleksjonsknagger). He lists eight key words in order to create a foundation for how students can use language and literature, to understand different societies and traditions: “1. Ethnocentrism. 2. Culture and cultural backgrounds. 3. Verbal differences. 4. Non-verbal differences. 5. Differences in values. 6. Stereotypes and prejudice. 7. Contextualization. 8. Losing face.”(Dypedahl 8) These eight “knobs” can be useful when teaching literature in the classroom because they exist in all societies in different variations. Ethnocentrism is important because we always judge what we know by what we ourselves have experienced. Therefore, it is easy to force our cultural norms on other cultures and judge them as inferior because they do not live up to them. Literature can expand upon these borders and teach students that every society is different, with different sets of rules and acceptable behavior. The students learn to reflect upon the differences and accept them as they are, even if they should disagree with them.

Culture is not the only reason for teaching literature. In upper secondary school, the students have to learn to read authentic English texts to such a degree that they can be considered proficient. Reading skills are basic skills, which every student is required to learn. These basic skills are in every subject curriculum in Norwegian schools, and they all vary in execution depending on the subject. The basic skills in English are oral skills, reading, writing, digital skills and numeracy.(ESC 4) Concerning literature, reading, writing and oral skills seem self-explanatory, but numeracy and digital skills can be harder to pin down. Using oral skills means adapting speech to different situations, learning expressions and variations of English, while reading requires the student to understand English texts with varying complexity and length, gaining knowledge about cultures and reading styles. Writing in English means that the student should be able to write a text, which is grammatically correct and coherent. By writing, the student expands his/her vocabulary, and is able to write different genres. ESC defines using

numeracy in the classroom as being able to use measuring units, mathematical concepts, everyday- and specialized terms, and figures and tables. Digital skills is using media, digital resources to help with language learning, communication, and writing. By using digital media, the students are exposed to authentic texts that have not been processed. They also learn to use sources and verify them as authentic or not. While it is preferred to include all basic skills into each lesson, sometimes numeracy, for example, does not fit with the type of novel the teacher has in mind. Adapting the skills to keep the lessons interesting is important, as they are imperative in deciding if the students want to continue with literature instead of linguistics.

6.2 What to think about when teaching literature

The legwork for teaching literature can be extensive, and how each class is receptive to reading large novels varies. The didactic diamond is a good foundation when planning a lesson because it makes the teacher reflect over the choices he or she makes. In Gunn Imsen's book *Lærerens Verden* the didactic diamond consists of six terms crisscrossing along the "diamond". These terms are goals, learning activities, assessment, material conditions, student/teacher conditions, and academic content. (Imsen *Lærerens Verden Innføring I Generell Didaktikk* 406)

As a teacher, there are certain terms that are more natural to start planning a lesson with than others. The goals are what the teacher aims for the students to learn, this can be a combination of the competency aims, and goals decided by the students. Ultimately, it is the competency aims that dictate what the students should learn, but it is up to the teacher, and even the students, to decide the contents and how the content should be used. When planning a lesson I start with the **aims**, what do I want the students to learn, and then find **ideas** that I think are relevant and interesting. After deciding upon the goals and several different contents, I have to judge whether the academic contents are **usable** in a classroom situation, the cost of material and whether the

students have **prerequisites** to learn the material. After this, I can focus on **how** I want to teach the lesson and whether I want some form of **assessment** afterwards.

In this instance, the focus on the lesson would be *The Road* or *Oryx and Crake*. As both novels are over 300 pages, it would be prudent to choose only one of the novels to avoid overwhelming the students with reading material. The competency aims below are well suited for a lesson dealing with literature as they include oral, written and culture into one or several lessons.

- Present and discuss current news items from English language sources
- Discuss and elaborate on different types of English language literary texts from different parts of the world
- Understand the main content and details in texts of varying length about different topics
- Write different types of texts with structure and coherence suited to the purpose and situation
- Use patterns for orthography, word inflection and varied sentence and text construction to produce texts
- Express oneself fluently and coherently in a detailed and precise manner suited to the purpose and situation
- Use patterns for pronunciation, intonation, word inflection and various types of sentences in communication (ESC 5)

The goals for the class, using these competency aims, could be learning to read a larger work of literature, understanding the themes of the book and how they can be related to our own or other societies by reading newspapers or news on the internet. The students will also learn to write a coherent text dealing with the themes of the book, and present them orally in an understandable manner. The goals are comprehensive, which is why the students' prerequisites are important. Factors like motivation, background in literature and writing can make or break the learning progress. I mentioned earlier that knowing your audience is important; in fact, it is very important. The genre chosen can have a big impact on how well the novel is received by the students. Fantasy, science fiction and dystopian literature have become increasingly popular with young people in recent years and a larger book about zombies or biological devastation

can be a better learning tool than an old poem. Including the students in choosing the literary texts increases the chance of a successful lesson.(Vestli 30-31)

Gauging the students' level within written and oral skills helps when choosing literary texts. Some classes can be more advanced than others, and there can be a divide in skill level within one class. Some novels have been rewritten to accommodate different reading levels, which can be useful when challenging experienced readers while still including students who struggle. Vestli argues that our respect for literary texts is too big. As teachers we should allow ourselves to use the texts as we see fit; this includes dividing the text between students, simplifying the language, or choosing sections or chapters instead of the whole work.(30)

Another factor is motivation. The students can be excited about the choice in texts, but if the learning activity is not interesting and diverse, this enthusiasm can wilt away. Vestli writes about the traditional analysis and the literary dialogue in relation to the classroom; however, her article is focused on foreign language where students have a weaker basis for reading texts than students reading English. Her opinion is that the traditional analysis and the literary dialogue are too pacifying for the students. Instead of choosing themes the students would like to discuss themselves; the teacher tends to take the role of the active participant, guiding the analysis and conversation instead of only helping with topics.(16-18) Students have been studying English longer than for example French, and are more capable of leading a literary dialogue, but this also depends on the prerequisites of the students and the teacher's willingness to relinquish his/her role as an active participant.

In an article about how to create nonreaders, Alfie Kohn describes seven ways a teacher may kill the student's interest in reading literature.(Kohn) Avoiding these pitfalls can create a reading environment in which students voluntarily read literature without feeling that it is a chore. The first way to create a nonreader is to quantify the reading; this means telling a student to read a certain number of pages or for a certain number of minutes, which for some students

is an insurmountable goal, or too short making the reading dull when the student cannot read further. The second is to make the students write reports, proving that they have read the text. The third is isolating the students, making them work alone. Kohn believes that separating the students and making them read alone can weaken the individual's interest in reading. Instead, situations should be created where students can compare or cooperate with each other. This is further proven by Vygotsky's theory of the proximal zone. This theory is about how much students learn while working for themselves, and how much they can learn when cooperating with other students. In the model, the inner zone represents how much a student by himself has the capability to learn, but when grouped with other students this zone grows to encompass all the knowledge the different students teach each other. The proximal zone also includes the help received by the teacher, but socializing with other students teaches the student to cooperate and accept other ideas and concepts than just his own. (Imsen *Elevenes Verden. Innføring I Pedagogisk Psykologi* 258-59) The social development of the student is one of the key elements to the core curriculum. The fourth is about avoiding the use of analysis tools, such as which genre is this text, is it third person or first person narrative, whether this is a metaphor and not a simile. The students want to learn about the characters, their journey and how the themes of the text are relevant to themselves, not if their vocabulary is good enough to write a passive report of a short story or novel. The fifth deals with how incentives and rewards can have the opposite effect. Kohn claims that rewarding students for reading actually teaches the students that reading literature is good for getting something special and not something to invest in. Encouraging intrinsic motivation is the best way to create readers because they want to read, as opposed to "I read this to get good grades". The sixth is connected with the fifth, as grades often come in connection with tests. Testing knowledge without encouraging independent thinking does not create intrinsic motivation nor does it encourage students to think critically. Number seven deals with some of Vestli's point about how teachers pacify their students. The teacher

has control of all the decisions, but it need not always be so. Motivation is important for a happy learning environment, and how are students expected to want to learn if they do not get a say in how they learn, what they learn and how they are assessed? Including students in the classroom decisions may increase motivation to read, and most important: to learn.(Kohn 16-19)

6.3 The Apocalypse and the Classroom

The Road and *Oryx and Crake* are semi-thick novels, but they are written in such a style that they are easy to read. The contents however, can be a little tricky for inexperienced readers. Death, survival, human relationship and dystopian worlds are central themes in the novels, as well as cloning, implied nuclear threats, mass extinction and religion. The students are already familiar with these themes from video games, movies and television shows and comic books, but some may not have thought about how society and society's fears have affected literature and how science fiction often is used to criticize politics. In the classroom, both novels can be used to help students learn how different societies work, how character growth works, analysis of a literary work and how literature can be transferred to the real world by comparing historical events and themes. Apocalypse or the post-apocalypse is also a genre that can be transferred to other subjects, such as home economics, natural science, biology, history and politics.

Of the two novels, *The Road* is often used in Norway to teach English literature in upper secondary school. The novel is less confusing in its narrative than *Oryx and Crake*, however, if the class wants a challenge, *Oryx and Crake* is a great novel for the students to analyze. When reading literature, the characters are important. If they are one-dimensional with little growth, the readers may feel bored with the story, as there is no progress. The same can be said for the contents of the novel, if there is slow progress to the story and no eye-catching events, the students may feel bored and stop reading. Students are used to fast-paced action from movies

and games, and using fantasy and science fiction when teaching literature brings the teachings to their own playground. Teaching literature can be challenging, and receiving help in the form of student involvement can only be a good thing.

As a theme, apocalypse could be perfect for creating an interdisciplinary project. By recruiting natural science, physical education, arts and crafts, biology-, Norwegian-, and home economics teachers, the school can organize a project where apocalypse and the aftermath is the main theme. This type of project requires a fair amount of planning, but the results can be rewarding. English and Norwegian could start the subject by introducing the literary work, for example *Oryx and Crake*, and lay the foundation the students need for understanding the mechanics of what an apocalypse entails and how to analyze such a topic. The assignment could be that the students must read *Oryx and Crake*, and using the novel as a basis for their own short story or a news report. While still in the same “universe” that they are reporting on, in physical education a group of students could be cannibals/zombies/barbarians and the rest unfortunate civilians acting out a pre-prepared scenario. Arts and crafts could be involved by making tools, furniture or shelters, which would be needed after an apocalyptic event. Biology and natural science could delve into the science of disease, cloning, and natural disasters. History and literature are closely related, and it might even help students to remember certain historical events by linking them to fiction. In this way a book could become the basis for an entire project where the students are active participants, both in planning and execution.

As Vestli argues, the traditional analysis can become trite and overused in the classroom, but the literary dialogue can be adapted and changed into different forms. Letting students debate the themes of the book could be a fun exercise. Chris Gilbert used debate to some degree in his classroom when he asked the students to use Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs to analyze *The Road*. Dividing the students into two or more groups, and assigning or letting the students’ choose subjects, giving them one or two lessons to prepare the debate before they

present in class. Using debate in the classroom helps the teacher to assess the students orally and in terms of written work, as students often write a manuscript before they do a presentation. Examples of topics can be pro- or against cloning, looting, cannibalism, living in groups or joining a community, what is acceptable behavior during an apocalypse and what is not.

Vestli has good suggestions on how to make literature in the classroom more action-oriented instead of consisting of passive reading. Students' can create a blog where they cooperate in writing about cloning, or the threat of nuclear war, the damage humans are doing to the environment, or about the dangers of gene manipulation. The students could even write a fictional interview, biography or a diary from the perspective of a literary character. Exploring why Crake decided to eradicate humankind could be an interesting assignment for students. Games too can be fun, for example board games or role-plays. Some novels have board games designed from them; however, it is not difficult to create a board game from scratch if one is willing to put some effort into it.(Vestli 20-29)

Because of the abundance of themes within *The Road* and *Oryx and Crake*, there is no shortage of possibilities for how they can be used within the classroom. The apocalyptic and dystopian theme opens avenues of teaching literature in non-conventional ways such as role-play, storyline and debates, while traditional reports or oral presentations can be judged as interesting enough to not be boring and monotonous. By encouraging students to look beyond the mechanics of analysis, and investigate themes and characters, they can learn about genres, history, and character behavior.

7. Conclusion

The apocalypse and its aftermath are relevant with regard to religion, politics and science. The human mind will always be fascinated by what could have happened, and if the world is going to end tomorrow. Historical events have given us reason to fear for the future, whether it be war, disease or natural disasters. Both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Road* deal with these issues, each in their different way. The world becomes more and more secular in the wealthier countries, and science has breakthroughs every day. It is not so farfetched that one day, we might be living in compounds where scientific advancement is viewed upon as the ultimate career, and splicing genes is the norm. It is just as possible that one day a nuclear plant explodes and causes such devastation that life as we know it is unsustainable, or that another cold war breaks out, ending in the detonation of an atom bomb.

Fight for survival and the dissolution of society are topics in both novels, and giving a frightening picture of how low humanity may fall when every day is a fight for survival. What good does it to cling to past social norms when they might stand between you and another human? If the choice is between living and not being eaten by cannibals, society cannot blame a person for striving to live in a world where everyone is out to get you. But if society is to prevail, some taboos must not be overstepped. To achieve redemption one must not cast aside ones values and succumb to lawlessness, as goodness will win only if enough people believe in it. The three keywords *society*, *survival* and *accountability* all tie in to each other as the father and the son in *The Road* and Snowman in *Oryx and Crake* all struggle with their morality in harsh conditions, left outside society by their own volition, to continue humanity in their different ways.

Because these novels are full of religious and political motives, they are excellent to use in the classroom. The students are required to learn about culture and to critically judge sources. These novels can help with introducing alternative societies, and compare them to the one we have now, and whether they believe the world could survive an outbreak of a virus or a nuclear threat. As long as the teacher assesses the students' levels, the educational variety literature introduces is big. Linking literature with other subjects, teachers can organize a storyline in which the students participate actively in the planning and execution of the project. Including the students in the planning can help them stay motivated, and it also forces them to reflect on why literature is important to learn. Using debates in the classroom can be a way of renewing the literary dialogue, which can intimidate inexperienced English learners. Literature is a versatile tool that is underused in the classroom, and despite being relevant to many topics and situations in the real world.

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