

# On Apocalypse, Monsters and Mourning

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TERESA HEFFERNAN

Apocalyptic narratives—whether religious or secular—have always involved not just an unveiling or uncovering (the literal meaning of apocalypse) but an end. In *A Sense of An Ending*, first published in 1967 and republished in 2000, Frank Kermode argues that one of the most impressive expressions of the end is found in the Book of Revelation. Yet he was distressed by what he saw as an increasing lack of attention to the end as the place of resolution in fiction, which instead mistook transition for crisis and refused the connection between past and future. By indulging in the catastrophic and by abandoning a sense of an ending, we find ourselves, he suggests, succumbing to the “intolerable idea that we live within an order of events between which there is no relation, pattern, mutability, or intelligible progression” (“Waiting” 250). The end in fictional narratives, he argues, is a mini expression of a faith in a higher order or ultimate pattern that though itself will remain perhaps forever obscure, nevertheless, lends a sense of purpose to our existence in the world.

I have suggested elsewhere that there are many reasons why an investment in apocalyptic narratives falters in the twentieth-century. The assumption of a collective “we” of History, the absence of any cultural context for this wariness about endings in twentieth-century fiction, and the unquestioned acceptance of progress—all point to the limits of Kermode’s argument. On a more basic level, however, the term modernism/modernity already begs the question of what comes after, evident in the proliferating pronouncements on the post—the post-modern, post-structural, post-human, post-colonial, post-apocalyptic, post-race, post-feminism, post-globalization; and in the anxious questions about what comes after the post—hence the problematic references to the

1. See my *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*.
2. See Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." *Standard Edition*. 14: 243–58. In Freud's essay, the loss can be of a loved one or an abstract ideal such as a country, liberty etc. In "proper" mourning, the libidinal or motivational energies eventually turn away from the lost object and redirect themselves at a new one.
3. Chapter four of *Post-Apocalyptic Cultures* offers an extended reading of Morrison's novel.
4. I focus on these two works as they have received extensive critical and popular acclaim and have garnered numerous awards: Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) was adapted into a film in 2009; and the AMC TV series *The Walking Dead* premiered in 2010 and is based on the comic book series of the same name that began in 2003. Their wide appeal suggests these contemporary works have tapped into a certain zeitgeist.

"post post." The dilemma of what comes "after" is not only a problem of language, of finding the right term; it pervades contemporary culture and its conflicted relationship to the future. In this paper I want to consider this conflicted relationship in the context of Kermode's argument<sup>1</sup> that suggests that narratives need to overcome trauma by connecting a past to a future in view of the catastrophic tone of some twenty-first century narratives that stand in contrast to those of the previous century.

After the First World War and after the Holocaust, many twentieth-century narratives were preoccupied with irrecoverable loss. For instance, Toni Morrison writes her postmodern novel *Beloved* (1987) and offers a different take on classical slave journals. Her novel implicitly challenges Kermode and his investment in apocalyptic narratives. "The many more" that Toni Morrison dedicates her novel to—the many Africans that died in the Middle Passage, those without names, "the disremembered and unaccounted for," casts a different light on apocalyptic promises of a new world and new beginnings that structured the European imaginary. The intentional destruction of the records of Africans transported on slave ships—the lack of names in the ship journals, the uncertainty about the number of Africans that died in the Middle Passage, the breaking up of communities that spoke the same languages that blocked oral transmission of histories and genealogies—interrupts the process of mourning. Africans in America could not properly name their loss, making it impossible for them to redirect their libidinal energies at a new object or world.<sup>2</sup> The destruction of archives, the absence of any textual remainder, the nameless dead, renders loss untranslatable,

making it impossible for Sethe, the runaway who slits the throat of her baby girl in order to save her from the worse death of slavery, to tell her story. The past cannot be gotten over in the name of a better future, and these futures that have not been suggest the limits of History. Like the figure of *Beloved* herself, the story of the Middle Passage cannot be “passed on” in the sense of adequately documented for future generations, but neither can it be “passed on” in the sense of left behind. Trauma cannot give way to transition. Loss cannot be named and translated into the symbolic, the Freudian requirement for proper mourning, but continues to live alongside the present.<sup>3</sup>

I offer this example of Morrison by way of contrast as I want to argue in this paper, which will focus on the TV series *The Walking Dead* and the novel *The Road*, that something very different is interfering with imagining a future in twenty-first century popular narratives about catastrophe.<sup>4</sup> From zombies and viruses, to environmental and financial collapse—these narratives seem stalled in an endless loop where disaster never gives way to a new dawn. They seem to be arrested at the crisis stage of the apocalypse; however, unlike *Beloved* and other twentieth-century narratives that are preoccupied with confronting and reflecting on unnameable loss, the lack of records and the destruction of archives are not what disrupt the mourning process. In an episode of *The Walking Dead*, the hit AMC TV show that is set in the aftermath of a zombie plague, a pregnant white woman, contemplating aborting her fetus, says: “Memories are what keep me going now. Memories of what used to be, and I got a deep well to draw on. I still remember joy... this baby won’t have any good memories at all, only fear and pain” (“Secrets”). In this narrative the problem is not the absence of documents but a surfeit of them. What is lost it seems can be named but not renounced, and thus the middle-class white woman is unable to free up her libidinal energy; she lives in a state of perpetual melancholy, of perpetual crisis. The beleaguered survivors in this show are always on the move, always in fear, always fighting, always struggling. Driven by a mantra of hope but with no hope of a better future, the characters carry on even as their prospects grow more and more grim. Why is it that so many contemporary narratives are preoccupied with destruction? What is it that cannot be surrendered or reflected on and therefore never properly mourned? Always arrested in a state of trauma and anxiety—what is it that holds these characters in this loop, what traps their libidinal energies?

“Holding onto the hope of humanity” is the tag-line for *The Walking Dead*.

5. Ironically or perhaps cynically—in the midst of recent debates about gun violence and the availability of arms in America, one of the actors, Norman Reedus, has filmed an anti-gun video. Yet the show itself seems to harken back to the anti-suffrage debates in America, which assumed male citizens were continuous with guns. One such pamphlet, entitled *The Blank—Cartridge Ballot* by Rossiter Johnson (1840–1931), insisted: “Wherever we place the ballot, manhood must necessarily be the power behind it to give it effect; and manhood suffrage is therefore the logical suffrage” (12).

6. This argument intentionally echoes Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility.” In it Benjamin argues that while film destroys the aura of authenticity and originality, it opens up art to the possibility of political readings. Yet as he is watching the rise of Fascism and Nazism and its glorification in films like Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, he also recognizes its potential to aestheticize the political. In other words, seduced by techniques that simulate and arouse our senses, an alienated humankind could “experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.” The fascist idealization of war, that longs for art that dissolves the world, indulges in “the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology.”

Yet it is precisely the version of “humanity” that is being held onto, I will argue, that gets at the heart of the arrested mourning process that infects this contemporary narrative. In the series, now in its third season, the cities are overrun with zombies and the tribes of remaining humans are pushed out to rural areas. While the cities are in a state of ruin, the pristine environment suggests that somehow, despite the violent demise of humans, there has been no impact on the rest of life on the planet—as if the planet and humans and nature and culture existed independently each from the other. Moreover, in the natural surroundings, humanity is presented as something self-evident and essential. The survivors are led by a benevolent white man with a gun, Rick, who wants to do good and take care of others; he leads his group with motivational speeches about why they must keep going, why they must push on, even as he is quietly and stoically despairing. He is accompanied by a long-suffering wife, who never questions her subordinate position and remains committed to standing behind her man and their young son. For the most part, straight men shoot guns that seem to be prosthetic extensions of their bodies as if the knowledge of how to use weapons was encoded into their DNA,<sup>5</sup> while a fewer number of straight white women do the laundry and cooking—also seemingly encoded—and sometimes “learn” how to shoot from the men; there are a few token minority men—one Asian, one black; there is the constant threat of the other—both human and zombie. The men spend their days and nights fighting off the zombie hoards and protecting their women and supplies from other humans; they drive around in vehicles and search for gas, and rummage around shop shelves, foraging in the ruins of the

old world. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, there is no unveiling, there is no new beginning, and there is no renewal. As one of the characters, Hershel, says at the end of season two: “Christ promised the resurrection of the dead... I just thought he had something different in mind” (“Beside the Dying Fire”).

The characters are too busy consuming or trying to avoid being consumed to imagine other worlds. The racial and gender hierarchies, the heteronormativity, the overriding logic of competition, and the human-centeredness—these are all presented as the “natural” order of a world that has reverted to its roots even as it more accurately replicates a conservative and neo-liberal model. So perhaps it is because of the surfeit of memories that crowds out alternatives, because the characters suffer from the burden of the lingering—but exhausted—dream of the perfect American life of affluence, social mobility, righteousness (that has always repressed its flip side: slavery, genocide, a carceral society, global imperialism) that surviving amongst the ruins remains, for this select few, the best option. Yet this holding onto the past leaves its characters negotiating between nostalgia and fear with no hope of joy or happiness. Just as the characters exist in a perpetual survivor mode, so too we the viewers ingest the spectacle of our own demise as addictive entertainment—the aestheticizing of blood, the wounded mutilated bodies, the guns, the perpetual state of a war that has no end (the fascist ideal).<sup>6</sup> The pleasure of catastrophic viewing—the continual assault to the senses—like any addiction, in itself, engenders both surrender and paralysis, blocking dreams of better futures.

In many ways this show resonates with contemporary anxieties about the world. Fights over diminishing resources, the displacement of people, aging populations, the corporatization of science and the fear of what it might unleash, the collapse of the economy and the ever-growing numbers of abandoned cars, shops, houses—are all familiar realities of the brutality of late capitalism in America. Mirroring the growing divide between the elite and the masses, the zombies mostly inhabit the gutted inner cities and freeways; useless and ineffective on their own—the easiest monsters ever to trick and kill—they are only really dangerous in large swarms. While the brain-dead chase and try and consume the survivors, which is their only form of power; the survivors—the small group of humans—fight them off unaware that they are all zombies-in-waiting as the walker virus, it is revealed in the second season, has infected the entire human population. There are no winners in this system—it is only a matter of time before

7. See for instance Joel Katkin's review of Chan Koonchung's dystopian novel *The Fat Years* in *Forbes*: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2011/10/04/are-we-headed-for-chinas-fat-years/>.

8. See Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*.

9. From Coke's 1971 campaign: "I'd like to buy the world a home/ And furnish it with love/ Grow apple trees and honey bees/ And snow white turtle doves./ I'd like to teach the world to sing/ In perfect harmony/ I'd like to buy the world a Coke/ And keep it company/ That's the real thing."

the whole world is undone by the logic of consumption. When the leader of the survivors announces "this isn't a democracy anymore" ("Beside the Dying Fire") it comes as an apt description of current North American political models that take a page out of China's economic success, and that find that the "inefficiencies" of democratic societies interfere with the growth of the market.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, the desire to be part of "end times" has to do with wanting a moral order. Apocalyptic narratives have always offered up the hope of an absolute truth—the cleansing of the world from evil and corruption, the separation of the righteous from the damned, and of right from wrong. Yet as everyone is infected by the virus in *The Walking Dead*, the divide between zombies and humans collapses, foreclosing the option of an outside or alternative. There is no other, no resistance. It is a perfectly closed system—utopia is not just deferred, it is no longer possible. If representations of utopias—particularly failed utopias—offer some insight into dominant ideologies as Fredric Jameson argues,<sup>8</sup> this dystopian show leaves us imprisoned in an ideology that has both imploded and continues to live on as memory. This series cannot get over the past because *The Walking Dead* is the story of a world populated by those who will not die. The ever-growing numbers of zombies in itself exposes the contradictory logic of global capitalism: in its overarching desire for expansion and insatiable appetite for profit, it demands an ever increasing efficient system that not only involves an "intense phase of time-space compression," as David Harvey suggests (284), but must finally overcome humans themselves. Having rendered all life exchangeable,

consumable, and transient, the system itself is held up as intransient and impervious—as an end in itself.

Like this TV series, Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) is also set sometime after an unnamed disaster that has destroyed the old world, and it also features a man with a gun and his boy child. So too, the father instills empty hope in his son: he tells his son they are “carrying the fire” and that they are heading south to a more liveable place by the sea, knowing himself there is “no substance” to this goal (29). The more they travel down the road the bleaker their circumstances get. The better place never materializes. Unlike the pristine and lush rural environment that provides the backdrop for many of the scenes in *The Walking Dead*, however, the remnants of the old world all point to the aspects of global capitalism that have hastened the destruction of the planet. They travel with a “tattered oilcompany roadmap” (42) and a shopping cart, scavenging shop shelves and momentarily enjoying the scraps of the old consumer world, the very world that has given way to the catastrophe. In an abandoned supermarket the man finds a can of coca cola in a vending machine and gives it to the boy to drink—sugared fizzy water with no nutritional value that has travelled the globe, marketed as promising world “harmony.”<sup>9</sup> The father wants the son to have it all and the boy responds: “It’s because I wont ever get to drink another one, isn’t it?” “Ever’s a long time,” the father replies (26). But a few pages later, a sentence reads: “But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all” (28). This passage, in which the father solemnly introduces his son to a can of coke, cannot help but mock the questionable nostalgia for the old world—what exactly is being mourned: pop and the promises of advertising; the simulacrum standing in as the “real thing”? It also undercuts the idea that the world that produced coca cola and all that it connotes is the end of history or “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” (Fukuyama 4). Countering the view of Western neo-liberalism as the final form, this novel suggests both the costs of consumer culture and its transience: “ever” as no time.

The boy and his father live in fear of blood cults and cannibal marauders, figures that have haunted capitalism since its inception. In Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, while transporting his cargo of slaves from Africa to Brazil to increase his wealth and expand his already profitable plantation, Crusoe is shipwrecked on an island. When he encounters the infamous footprint on the beach, after decades of solitude and hoarding, his first fear is that cannibals might be after his things. So too, the boy and his father live wary of others, carefully guarding their

supplies. However, the boy in *The Road* slowly loses faith in his father's insistence that they are the "good guys" as, intent on surviving and protecting his son, the father kills a man and leaves others to starve and suffer. Unlike *The Walking Dead* that operates on the flimsy divide of the zombies versus the humans and that keeps its audience invested in the "hope" for humanity, there are only degrees of a divide in this novel and hope seems utterly pointless. The mother of the boy announces: "We're the walking dead in a horror film" (55). Dispelling any illusion of a definitive divide between the good guys and the bad guys, she kills herself; several times in the course of the journey with his father, the boy expresses his wish to join his dead mother.

Nevertheless, some critics have read the novel as redemptive. Ashley Kunsu, for instance, argues that the novel offers an "unexpectedly optimistic world view," "the conditions for a New Earth, a New Eden" (58–59). Kunsu concludes: "In *The Road*, McCarthy has granted us this new Prometheus, a twenty-first-century good guy, Adam reinvented: the child is carrying the fire of hope and righteousness from the old story toward the new one. The father gives his son language, and after the father's death, the son goes on to seek that still elusive New Jerusalem that waits somewhere beyond the pages of the novel" (69). Like the tag-line for *The Walking Dead*, these critics view the novel as "holding onto to the hope for humanity." Yet, it is hard to imagine where this New Jerusalem might exist given that the novel is explicit about the complete and utter destruction of the planet—the dead oceans, the disappearance of animals, the falling trees. Early on in the novel, in one of the many passages that foreground the "dimming of the world," the man reflects: "Once in the early years he'd awakened in a barren wood and lay listening to flocks of migratory birds overhead in the bitter dark. Their half muted crankings miles above where they circled the earth as senselessly as insects trooping the ring of a bowl. He wished them godspeed till they were gone. He never heard them again" (53). This large-scale devastation of the planet seems to be the blind spot in critical takes on the novel that focus solely on the love of the father for his son as the source of redemption. Like the characters in the novel, these critics seem to live on the hope extracted from the most paltry of places: Lindsey Banco suggests that the contraction marks "that remain evoke some of the most important things in McCarthy's world, human agency and assertion—which, if lost, would result in the postapocalyptic landscape he imagines" (278). But human agency and assertion, a child "carrying the fire of hope and righteousness," (Kunsu 69) are absolutely meaningless

in the absence of a habitable planet. Rather, the focus on preserving “the human project” as if it existed as an independent entity that could ignore the death of all other life suggests a destructive arrogance.

As Nietzsche put it well in his fable, humans are relatively recent on the planet: “In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been poured, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the ‘history of the world’; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die” (142). He goes on to suggest, echoing Darwin and evolutionary biology, about how insubstantial, transitory, and arbitrary human consciousness appears to the rest of nature: “there were eternities,” he writes, “during which it did not exist, and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened” (142). We are not in control of the planet, though we may wreak havoc on it, but dependent as we are on it we also cannot survive its destruction. Part of not being able to get past the mourning phase is about not being able to give up on the idea of the supremacy of humans as conscious agents, of imagining a world before and after “us.”

After the death of the father, in the penultimate paragraph, the boy meets a woman who tries to talk to the boy about God. The boy tries to talk to God but cannot and the woman tells him “that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time” (286). But, this is not where the novel ends—the final paragraph is about brook trout: “On their backs were vermicular patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery” (287). The story does not begin or end with man. Does this ambiguous final passage suggest the destruction of the world—that it cannot “be made right again”; or does it suggest that “the maps and mazes” on the backs of the trout, that signal “the world in its becoming,” unlike the disintegrating oil company map that the boy and his father are following, cannot be “put back” in the sense shut down or stopped? In other words that man cannot impose a singular “right” or teleological direction on the humming “mystery” of a maze-like world.

There are also critics who are far more pessimistic about the ending of the novel than Kunsza. Alex Hunt, for instance, argues that the opening setting, the dream in the cave, suggests the inverse of Plato’s allegory of the cave. Where light and sun suggest an “illuminating wisdom” in the latter,

10. For a more nuanced and optimistic reading of the cave, see also: Carole Juge's "The Road to the Sun They Cannot See: Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Oblivion, and Guidance in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*." *Cormac McCarthy Journal* 7:1 (2009) 16–30.

the cave in *The Road* is about darkness and the slow fading out of human civilization: "The point of 'no return' in the cave, the finite lights from the candle, and the frame created by opening and closing with a glaucous, anti-Platonic objective correlative, bespeak an end to civilization, not its rebirth" (Hunt 157).<sup>10</sup>

But I suggest this reading also overlooks the possibility that what might have contributed to the demise of the world is the Platonic ideal in the first place. The boy increasingly interrogates his father and his stories about "courage and justice," "good guys," the "fire," and the "light"—as there is a gap between the ideals and the actions of the father. The child says to him toward the end of their journey together: "in the stories we are always helping people and we don't help people" (268). The boy's ethical acts—asking his father to not kill the dog, to give food to the old man, to help the man who has robbed them—stem from accepting his mortality and from taking seriously the demand of stories to always try, impossibly, to imagine the other. The father dismisses the request from the boy to help the man that robbed them; instead the father pursues and punishes the man, forces him to strip and leaves him for dead—shivering, naked, and starving. To the boy's pleas to help the man, the father replies: "He's going to die anyway" (259) as justification. But this of course is no justification, for we will all die, and it is the father who dies several pages later; it is the desire for survival and preservation at any cost that causes the father to act violently towards others. Whereas the father casts the boy as the source of eternal goodness, a god, the boy from the outset accepts death as a condition of living. When he sees another little boy and wants to find him and share half his food, the father tells him there is

no other child and that his son is risking their lives: “Do you want to die? Is that what you want?” The boy replies: “I dont care... I dont care” (85). The father tells him he must not say that. In each situation they encounter, the father, intent on caring for the boy, justifies “not helping” with the rationale that their own safety is at risk. The father does instill in his son the value of care, but the father’s version of care that focuses exclusively on the boy also feeds the ideology of consumerism and self-preservation that the boy, born after the catastrophe, challenges.

The boy in each case is willing to give up mere survival in order to help people or the few remaining animals, interrupting the competitive spirit and individualist aspirations that fuel capitalism. The father tells him: “You’re not the one who has to worry about everything.” But the boy responds: “Yes I am, he said. I am the one” (259). The boy is the responsible one—the one that must slowly encourage a rearrangement of desire that can only occur with the acceptance of mortality. The not caring about dying is what opens up an ethical space, displacing the old-world view of an exhausted and joyless humanity preoccupied with surviving. The boy asks his dying father: “Who will find the little boy?”; and the father responds: “Goodness will find the little boy. It always has. It will again” (281). But in a world where babies are roasted on spits for food for “survival,” his father’s words ring hollow. It is here that *The Walking Dead* and *The Road* differ as unlike the closed world of the TV series that holds onto the hope of some unquestioned version of “humanity,” the boy interrogates the idea of an “essential,” “universal,” “eternal” humanity that should be preserved at any cost. It is only in the absence of an ideal that the ethical is possible and remains open to futures that cannot be claimed in advance.

The promise of the biblical Apocalypse is that the word, the book, must be destroyed in order for the eternal order to emerge; other worlds, alternative worlds, must shut down. As long as the texts are written so too are worlds. Kunsu—in her hopeful reading that the language of the novel has reverted back to the “basics,” and is “pared down, essential,” initiating “a search for the pre-lapsarian eloquence lost in the post lapsarian babble,” to a pre-fallen world with “the God-given capacity to name the world correctly”(60)—seems to overlook the fact that this desire in itself, the closing of the gap between the word and its referent, requires the destruction of the world. This is a point the novel itself makes clear in several passages. Standing in the “charred remains of a library,” the man thumbs through a destroyed book: “Some rage at the lies arranged in their

thousands row on row... He'd not have thought the value of the smallest thing predicated on a world to come. It surprised him. That the space which these things occupied was itself an expectation. He let the book fall and took a last look around and made his way out into the cold gray light" (187). The books promise worlds to come and their end, hastened by some who "rage" against them, signals the end of the world. Another passage in the novel similarly draws a parallel between the end of the world and the shutting down of languages: "The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. The things to eat... The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever" (89). The "sacred idiom" cannot be absolute, as idioms themselves exceed the meanings of individual words and are particular to cultures, making them difficult to translate; the heterogeneity of languages in their singular untranslatability, like ecology, preserves the diversity that life depends on. Narratives sustain the world and anticipate a future, "a world to come." The pared-down condensed prose in the novel suggests the shutting down of worlds, and like *The Walking Dead* alternatives are crowded out.

A year before Kermode published his work on the importance of the end, Jacques Derrida suggested an alternative. Derrida's "ends of Man," responding to Kant's "man as an end in itself" or man as an absolute, suggests multiple origins and endings of man, so that man is not limited to a singular abstract category making it impossible to speak of a "we." In Derrida's work, the beginning and end of humanity are displaced by the "post," a post that is already there at the very origins of apocalyptic narratives and that opens them to all possible directions none of which can claim the right to the end. The inability to claim this right that results from this mixture of codes, texts, and languages produces the very condition for love in the world: "In the beginning, in principle, was the post," he writes "and I will never get over it. But in the end I know it, I become aware of it as of our death sentence: it was composed, according to all possible codes and genres and languages, as a declaration of love. In the beginning the post, John will say, or Shaun or Tristan, and it begins with a destination without address, the direction cannot be situated in the end" (*The Postcard* 29). The abandoning of an ultimate ending, in Derrida's work, is an ethical move that is both "our death sentence" and allows for a world that remains open to other directions, that is available to other headings. This new understanding allows for a thinking that, as he writes, "is no longer turned

toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all of his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game” (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 264).

What would a post-capitalist world that took seriously the de-centering of man on the planet look like? Derrida discusses the future in terms of ruptures and tears and catastrophic shifts and asks what the passing beyond “man” and the “origin and the end of the game” will bring forth, concluding his article with the question about “the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity” (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 293). In the dream, it is the boy, himself, that leads the man into the cave at the opening of *The Road*: “where lay a black and ancient lake.” On the far side of the cave is a creature “that swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned and lurched away and loped soundlessly into the dark” (3). The creature is not hostile or violent nor is the creature an ideal. To “man” this creature can only seem terrifying. The monstrous creature is where a story always begins.

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## ABSTRACT

If apocalypse literally means unveiling or revelation, why is it that so many twenty-first century popular narratives are caught in an endless loop where disaster never gives way to a new dawn? Why is it that they remain stalled at catastrophe and are unable to imagine a future? What is it that cannot be mourned and what is it that traps the libidinal energies of these narratives in past that cannot give way to a new world? In a reading of the American TV series *The Walking Dead* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, this paper suggests that "holding onto the hope of humanity" may itself be the problem.

## BIOGRAPHY

Teresa Heffernan is Professor of English at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is author of *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (University of Toronto Press, 2008). She is co-editor (with Daniel O'Quinn) of a critical edition of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012); and she is currently working on a new book entitled *Modernity, Orientalism, and Islam: Travel Writing and the Figure of the (Un)Veiled Woman*. She is co-editor (with Jill Didur) of a special issue of *Cultural Studies* entitled "Revisiting the Subaltern in the New Empire" and of a special issue of *Cultural Critique* (with Jill Didur and Bart Simon) on "Posthumanism." Her work has appeared in journals such as *Studies in the Novel*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *Arab Journal for the Humanities*, *Subject Matters*, *Canadian Literature*, and *Twentieth Century Literature*. She is also coeditor (with Reina Lewis) of "Cultures in Dialogue," a multi volume project that brings back into circulation travel works by Ottoman, British, and American writers.

