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Reclaiming the Body and the Machine

Technology in Post-Apocalyptic Narratives

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Chapter 1. Language as Technology: reclaiming the body

1.1 An efficient but double-edged tool: language and the hero/-ine in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood

Atwood's 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake* is a post-apocalyptic Last Man novel about Jimmy, who in the narrative present calls himself Abominable Snowman and who has survived a pandemic of the synthesized virus JUVE, that, as far as he knows, has killed everybody on Earth except the bio-engineered human-like Crakers and other animal-like genetically spliced creatures. A third person omniscient narrator tells the story of Snowman while he struggles for survival in a devastated area¹ where bare necessities are scarce. The narrator has access to the character's consciousness and the reader is therefore able to follow Snowman's efforts in reconstructing his pre-catastrophe life, when he belonged, along with his highly intelligent and scientifically trained friend Glenn, to the privileged albeit far from free inhabitants of the gated communities of specialized workers called Compounds. This novel has been followed in 2009 by *The Year of the Flood*, whose storyline comprises the same events but where the characters' points of view is that of the outsiders, excluded from the sealed-up world of the Compounds, and relegated but nonetheless uncannily free to live in the parts of the city called the Pleeblands.

The Year of the Flood follows three main female characters from this background that, like Snowman, have survived the viral contagion because of being shut off in isolated places. The main narrative is brought forth by a third person omniscient narrator that focuses on the story of Toby, daughter of a middle class family whose status collapses because of insurmountable debts after her mother's death, she has to become a low-paid

and sexually exploited employee for a fast-food chain before joining a religious group called God's Gardeners. The narrative also comprises the diary entries of Ren, who finds herself a member of the same group because her mother run away with one of the members, to escape her unaffectionate scientist husband living in the Compounds, and the sermons of Adam One, who coordinates the God's Gardeners before and after the apocalyptic event, which he calls the Waterless Flood and for which he had been preparing. As Jameson has pointed out in his review, this last novel "results from an enlargement of narrative perspectives to include the deep space of institutions and collectivities, and a rather different kind of historicity from that projected by the individual fable of the first version" (TWRT).

Throughout my analysis of both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, I will show how these works of speculative fiction together constitute a larger cautionary tale whose main aim is to remind society how "the mediator between the mind and the hands must be the heart"², and I will argue that they represent an experiment in reclaiming the role of narrative as the human default technology for mapping reality and affecting it. From this consideration follows that the discourse of techno-science, as for instance examined by Latour in his *Science in Action*, features the same characteristics as any other human tentative effort of representing reality: authority granted by human interactions and consolidated norms, shifting perspectives and group alliances, linguistic compromises and rhetorical tricks.

In examining *Oryx and Crake*, I will also trace the author's reflections on the role of the artist in mediating public debate between the ongoing expansion of techno-science³ and the ever-growing sense of isolation and limited spiritual and physical agency of individuals in post-modern society, which the dystopian pre-apocalypse matter of both novels describe. As for *The Year of the Flood*, my observations will point out how the text

shows the perspectives and actions of the outsiders and disenfranchised in society, or as Goldman explains, of those "barred from paradise [...] in accordance [Canadian literature]'s concern for the ex-centric and the victim" (5), ambiguously mirror those of the elite and differ from them only in two aspects: acceptance of natural boundaries, limits of necessity, and quantitatively inferior use of sources.

In Atwood's view, the method of scientific analysis and its varied technological applications is already hard-wired in the human brain, which she refers to as "among other things, a mapmaking entity", allowing us to "inscrib[e] our own tracks, markings and naming and claimings onto the landscape itself" (IOW). Atwood's works stand then as a counter-narrative to technological deterministic discourse that continues to challenge natural and human limits in claiming to pursue progress for the common good, while actually being subservient to capitalistic intents of profit maximization. Her texts try to demonstrate that there are no inherent differences between the mechanics and functions of narrative, the structure of scientific knowledge and the workings of technological systems and tools existing exteriorly to the human body - storyteller, scientist and tinker might well coexist in the same person.

Coral Ann Howells has remarked how uncommon *Oryx and Crake* is among Atwood's works, in presenting two male protagonists. Indeed, the novel takes the form of a quest romance where these two characters, Jimmy, the "words person", and Crake, the "numbers person", share the same romantic interest for Oryx, the Asian woman whom they think they watched on a porn website when they were teenagers and who fatally reappears in their life when Crake requests the service of a prostitute at his university⁴. It is symptomatic that male perspective represents the two spheres of science and art, while the female character is a symbol of first world sexual and material exploitation towards third world countries. On the one hand, then, the author reflects on how, as Howells explains,

"that creative imagination is not confined to artists but is shared by scientists, for it is one of the qualities that distinguish human beings" (CCMA 170), but on the other, she also advances a critique about the gender clichés attached to this creative effort - be it a scientific or artistic one. The traditional separation between men and women occupations might even be considered a factor in the exploitative character of the kind of techno-science portrayed in the novels. However the case, the author makes the point that since creation is an action and not a contemplative status, it should always be coupled with morality because it can turn into a system of domination, both inside and outside the reality in which it has originated.

Thus, the author suggests readers should re-think the categories that ascribe agency to the work of techno-science (and by translation to white, male society in Western capitalistic countries), while disregarding the same property when considering arts (or other disenfranchised members of society). The applied versus contemplative knowledge debate is thus sidestepped by putting forward a notion of willed limited agency even when the possibility of larger applied systems can be imagined and carried out.⁵ Since, like technology, narrative - understood as the technical realization of human language faculty - can also be misused, the challenge then is for the artist to sublimate its material and to conceive, as Linda Hutcheon has pointed out commenting on earlier works by Atwood, "art as both product and process, as both artifact and part of life" (*Canadian* 157).

In order to set out in her narrative enterprise that blends features of satiric, dystopian and post-apocalyptic tales, the author makes use of a broad range of traditions in Western literature. The author herself has described *Oryx and Crake* as a Menippean satire,⁶ and indeed one of the epigraphs quotes *Gulliver's Travels'* narrator's plead to the reader of taking his words as "plain matter of fact". However, the novel strikes contemporary readers as much more realistic than Swift's critical piece and other works of

dystopian Sci-Fi to which it has been associated.⁷ This should be easily understood if we consider Atwood's engagement and activism not only in literary and academic circles, but also in human rights and environmental organizations.⁸

Most importantly as regards to literary tradition, in *Oryx and Crake*, we find another configuration of the "mad scientist" figure, like, among others, Goethe's *Faust*, H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Frankenstein*. Crake is a Faustian hero destined to destruction but he is all too aware of this, since he has been conscientiously planning to bring destruction to the entire human race for all his life. Thinking back at his friend's unshakable belief in the innate and dangerously irrational emotionality of human beings, Jimmy/Snowman muses: "Sitting in judgment on the world, [...] but why had that been his right?" (398). As a matter of fact, Crake implements the results of his research and is finally successful in bringing about a utopian change, which happens to be a misguided vision of the world without human beings. Nonetheless, unlike Dr. Moreau's experiments that caused animals to be brought into consciousness, Crake's aim is that of enhancing the human body (adding adaptation genes from animals), while emptying the human brain of any feature that he considers not directly linked with survival and therefore culturally elaborated on. Since in Crake's diagnosis "symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall" (419-420), he wishes to extirpate those same frames of the mind that render us human and that have allowed him to plan his scheme in the first place. With these, come the ideas of God, dreams, love ("As a species we're pathetic in that way: imperfectly monogamous" 195), but also that of property which results in aggressiveness and war ("*Our arboreal ancestors*, Crake used to say. *Used to shit on their enemies from above while perched on trees. All planes and rockets and bombs are simply elaborations on that primate instinct.*" 417). Interestingly, because the technology he is using is that of genetic splicing, his project is that to design at once the perfect machine

and the perfect human beings, although somewhat dull (Jimmy muses: "Despite their irritating qualities - among which he counts the naive optimism, their optimism, their open friendliness, their calmness, and their limited vocabularies - he feels protective towards them", 180). Crake's machines perfectly fit in the environment, produce no waste and are autonomous from human control. Their mix of animal genes makes them, and the other animal-like splices, perfect for the post-catastrophe environment, while Jimmy not only struggles for gathering food but has to keep in the shade and to build makeshift shelters. Many times in the novel Jimmy envies the Crakers for what we can call "inbuilt technologies", like that of being mosquito-repellant. And yet Crake, notwithstanding his conviction that human beings are just like other animals ("Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity, despite the large amount he himself possessed", 114), utilizes the form of the human body. Atwood here points out to a shift from previously dreamed-of utopias where machines functioned outside the human body, and yet influenced human beings in inspiring them to imitate their "restless and perfect motions" (...check). Nature in these previous cases was discarded as either a refuge or a source of raw material, but human beings, or at least a group of them, kept their hierarchical position at the top as first beneficiaries of these machines. In this novel, the image to be imitated is nature yet again, but that of a nature that is being read by the distorted lens of a utilitarianism ("I don't believe in Nature either. Or not with a capital N", 206), which is pushed to the limits because it does not even benefit the inventor/scientist himself. Crake's reasoning levels off everything that he cannot read as data, which includes his own good, too. Crake copies the features he finds most elegant, that is, less wasteful, from it, but refuses to acknowledge the "imperfections" in the natural world, of which human ones (that Crake so despises) are a part. Besides, although his creatures are initially meant to be sold and need to be human-like in form, Jimmy immediately notices that their eyes were chosen by "Crake's aesthetic"

sense. The machine might have become invisible and disguised because of the sophisticated technology it is a product of, but the artificiality of the whole effort, even if Crake dismisses Jimmy's questions about "fake" and "real", banes even Crake's project.

As it has been discussed by Barzilai, Atwood also ironically employs narrative features of the quest romance, since the main character's "inner movement in space and time parallels the outer, aim-directed journey as Snowman recalls the events that have brought him, and humanity at large, to this pass" (88), and of survivors stories, which make Snowman "both messenger and Job: he replays the story of his escape even as he remembers and mourns his losses" (89). Like other fictions that present post-apocalyptic scenarios since *The Last Man* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,⁹ these features were particularly popular among non-realist Victorian writers, and Atwood herself stated her work should be understood and framed in this tradition (IOW).

As we have seen, utopian writing can employ apocalyptic scenarios,¹⁰ but in this case, it is the *post*-apocalyptic point of view that offers a new, even though unsystematic and unplanned, utopian vision or, most significantly, the possibility of it. In fact, Howells reads the final scene of the novel, where Jimmy spots follows the footprints in the sand and finally finds other survivors sitting around a fire, as the representation of this choice that Snowman faces. The fate of the character will actually be revealed at the end of *The Year of the Flood*, where we recognize the group of survivors as Amanda, one of the heroines, and her two captors. As DiMarco has pointed out this scene "reminds readers that Snowman necessarily struggles with repeating a cycle of violation and imperialism" (...). Moreover, although he plays a part in rescuing Amanda, Snowman dies because of a blood infection that not even Crake's antibiotics can cure, marking the definite defeat of his much-trusted scientific knowledge. Moreover, it is significant that Snowman finally arrives at the realization that he can initiate a human connection that does not encompass

trading. Indeed, even his relationship with Oryx is tainted by his wanting to hear her life story, which is only a translation of his feeling of possession towards her and therefore of his jealousy. Only the act itself of storytelling then, is characterized by his redemptive and community-building features: "But no, he has nothing to trade them, nor they with him. Nothing except themselves. They could listen to him, they could hear his tale, he could hear theirs" (432).

In the same analysis of genres interplay in the novel, Barzilai reads the novel as a *Bildungsroman*, which is true also for the following novel, in that it returns to Atwood's theme of "female *Bildung*". However, as the critic notes, the protagonist's formation is complicated by the shattered connections in a world where "[v]irtual reality is no less incisive (...) than his interaction with actual parental figures" (88). Indeed, the characters move in an environment where actual human interactions with their parents are consistently associated to protocols or scripted lines. For instance, Jimmy's parents "cross off the list of the good parenting guide" (p..) their responsible acts towards him. Still, any spontaneous effort for connection by Jimmy, especially when he uses irony and double-talk, is not registered or is registered with irritation by his mother, who yet represents his only model of morality because she eventually abandons the Compounds. ("You used to have ideals," she remarks to her husband, who instead does not question his company's unethical and profit-driven research practices and goals). Barzilai, following this line of thought, also reads the novel as a revenge tragedy - a version of *Hamlet* where "Snowman, like Horatio, is condemned to carry on a while longer and to explain, albeit only to himself, how this scene of desolation came about" (89). Following this association, he however does not consider Crake's character as fully matched with Hamlet because his lack of soliloquies makes him a "cipher" (89). In my later analysis of the character's use of language (which indeed does not always result in speech acts, but even takes the form of

phrases displayed on fridge magnets), I show how the text actually offers enough clues of Crake's revengeful purpose to equate his linguistic acts to those of Hamlet's more or less coherent ones.

The critic Frederic Jameson has described *Oryx and Crake* as a narrative that intertwines "two dystopias and a utopia" and the author herself described her vision as a "ustopia"¹¹, since, she explains, as soon as a narrative of one kind of the other includes more than one group's perspective, "the clash of priorities is inevitable" (In Other Worlds). The post-apocalyptic narrative has to be justified by an "after the end" point of view, which in this case is that of Snowman (who even in his change of name marks a pre- to post-crisis passage). Indeed, following the tension between the main three characters' visions via Snowman's flashbacks, we come to the realization that the dystopia Snowman is forced to live as a survivor and "keeper appointed" of the Crakers, was the utopia dreamed for by his friend Glenn. As Frederic Jameson has remarked (and as it will be true, I would argue, also for McCarthy's novel), the "post-catastrophe situation in reality constitutes the preparation for the emergence of Utopia itself". Indeed, however shattered, dangerous and apparently lacking of grips for human meaning and therefore action, the post-apocalyptic world reasserts the importance of new beginnings. It is a wilderness, not a wasteland.

Besides, Glenn/Crake is ironically the only character that struggles to formulate what Segal calls a utopian vision that is "effective as social criticism", in that it is "concrete enough to be applicable to the real world" and "detached enough to be truly critical" (157). Unlike the dystopian world of *The Handmaid's Tale*, where social control was justified by a rhetoric much inspired by religious fundamentalism, the background society that surfaces in these novels seems to reflect the post-modern condition where profit substitutes any form of political thought. The corporations controlling movements of

goods and people do not interfere with anything that doesn't directly interrupt this flow. As Somacarrera has observed, in this novel "[p]ower is invisible but more tangible than ever [...] it is multiple and comes from many locations" (55). The CorpseCorps, a mercenary police force employed by the corporations, is only one of the many agents from which danger arises, as it is even more clearly portrayed in *The Year of the Flood*, where the female protagonist has to fend off several exploitative roles that society wants her to dress for.

Moreover, in contrast with the other main characters in *Oryx and Crake*, it is only Crake who offers an "alternative to existing society's own ideology" (Segal 158), in a society where even in the humanities and arts college Jimmy attends "the curricular emphasis had switched to other arenas. Contemporary arenas, they were called" (220), implying that art is useless without a profit-making application ("Like everything at Martha Graham it had utilitarian aims" 220). The examples of "technological utopias" Segal surveys in his book where complex technological infrastructures and systems sought to liberate human beings from hindrances which supposedly make them unhappy, since "[w]idespread inefficiency and waste are seen as socially deleterious, but losing some money or time or energy in themselves is not. The real "profit" of efficiency, therefore, lies in improving society as far as possible" (16). Crake's utopian vision, while working on some of the same assumptions of this tradition, marks a profound shift in that it does not imagine a human society at all. Since he has rationalized the view that "we're hormone robots anyway, only faulty ones" (*OC*, 196), he is ready to dismiss the "unfixable" and "wasteful" features of humans, as if they were machine hardware and, as Di Marco points out, to accept the brutality of failed experiments as required step towards progress and "not as unethical activity." (DiMarco). Indeed, the BlyssPluss Pill, the product inside which

Crake hides the lethal virus, is "designed to take a set of givens, namely the nature of human nature, and steer these givens in a more beneficial direction" (346).

In the world of the novel, which is as Cooke describes it "geopolitically [...] divided into the producers and the consumers" (67), Crake cannot but follow his own logical reasoning based on facts constructed by scientific data and theories, because this gives him the sense of control and therefore agency, that he thinks everybody else is lacking. Even the people closer to him fail to prove him wrong when they act in the exact way he has predicted, so that even "Jimmy and Oryx interpret their invitation to labor in Paradise as promotions - a move from slave status to citizen, in a sense, which is paradoxical since they really survive as slaves to Crake's concerns and "free" enterprise" (DiMarco). Crake embodies the contradiction of being on one hand the most empathic character, while on the other, of not being able to establish connections through a language shared by a larger community. His position as being both a scientist and an engineer and thus possessing both the know-why and the know-how to analyze and act on reality, shuts him off from any meaningful communication by enclosing him in a loop of reciprocally enforcing logical statements based on accepted theoretical frameworks and a process of practical experimentation that, although marked by failures, still gives increasingly successful results. Progress then is tangible, and thus reinforces previous observations and methods of analysis¹². Ultimately, Crake is caged by the use of a language whose basis he never questions, demonstrating precisely the proceedings of a flawed scientific reasoning ("This was his way: when there was a question he didn't want to address, he acted as if it hadn't been asked" 228).

Crake behaves like a machine in that he does not show the flexibility required for mapping what does not belong already to his framework of knowledge. As Cooke explains, he "exclud[es] or expell[s] everything that is threatening to this homeostasis"

(69) and he has to do so consistently in order to proceed towards his goal of creating machines that are indeed homeostatic by design and do not need the awareness that plays a part in human survival efforts. But, ironically, the homeostatic machines that he creates, seem, at least towards the end of the story, to be more perceptive and questioning of reality than both Crake and Jimmy in many occasions.

Moreover, as Cooke notices, Crake's pseudo-scientific speech, although presenting accurate data, renders science "a vehicle of rhetoric and fashion, and as a vehicle of scientific development" (70), more than a discourse about knowledge. The fact that Crake possesses knowledge in scientific fields as varied as genetics and physics, and also masters technical know-how of computer programming (which is, significantly, a cluster of languages), leads him to a predominantly a-theistic view of nature, so much so that Jimmy, when pondering on the ethical implications of eating a Pigoon (a pig that also has human genes), tries to support the pro-arguments with what Crake once told him: "There's nothing sacred about cells and tissue, it's just..." (65). On the other hand, Crake, as a scientist, fully recognizes the importance of learning a lesson from nature ("Can a single ant be said to be alive, in any meaningful sense of the word, or does it have relevance in terms of its anthill? An old conundrum of Crake's", 429),¹³ but his sensibility in this sense is suffocated by his never being in contact with it.

Still, even in admitting the importance of natural phenomena, he fails to yield to the fact that human society, however sophisticatedly or complexly "cultural", is part of nature too. His project of creating biological machines (but still machine and therefore, human artifacts) that would fit perfectly with nature point out to the contradictions of his own thinking. He even seems to follow the creative process of the artist proposed by Transcendentalism in that he believes in being inspired by nature ("As Crake used to say, Think of an adaptation, any adaptation, and some animal somewhere will have thought of

it first" 194). At the same time, he obviously refuses the spiritual side of human nature as non-rational ("Crake thought he's done away with all that, eliminated what he called the G-spot in the brain. *God is a cluster of neurons*, he'd maintained" 186). Crake's linguistic acts are for him both a tool of knowledge and a tool for bringing about the change he envisions. However, his unquestioned usage of scientific knowledge, at times make his lines no less "holistic" than that of the artists he despises, except for the fact that he pits his arguments on other scientific theories instead of on what nature really projects for itself. As Latour notices on the confusion between theories and the implementation of their findings: "[a]s soon as a divide is made between theories and what they are theories of, the tip of technoscience is immediately shrouded in fog" (242). Ultimately, Crake's failure is that his empathy is only projected into his ideas, and this brings him to frame the moral progress he wants to impose by the same utilitarian terms that cause the dystopian reality to come about in the first place.

In order to understand how Atwood conceives of language as a tool¹⁴ that her characters master with a different degree of awareness and skill, I propose to look into the use that each main character does of it throughout the novels. On one hand, we have the eminently "technical" Crake, who gets to know Jimmy after he arrives at his high school because his father has been "snatched" by HelthWyzer. For lack of any other political organization in this dystopian society, this cluster of companies govern the area, and, as the ultimate "total institution"¹⁵, are in control of their workers while providing them all necessities and even luxuries of life. Jimmy immediately realizes that the "Crake side of him must have been there from the beginning" (81) and indeed Crake will be the name all other people will call him, except Oryx.

Crake chooses his name, from a rare Australian bird¹⁶, because he is aware of his unique intelligence but at the same time he might be consciously giving clues of his

character: Australia, as a former British colony and still part of the Commonwealth - like Canada, represents his own imperialistic gaze and his de-humanizing view of humanity and, for that matter, nature as material to have at his disposal; at the same time, although the country is fully Anglicized, it remains remote, feature that mirrors Crake's paradoxical existence as a fully functioning clog of the capitalistic enterprise but at the same time, as the only character among the "privileged" who sees the system critically and indeed eventually "hacks" it from the inside. Although some have seen these clues as an authorial intervention, I would argue that the fact that he chooses his nickname, much like Jimmy gets to choose his after the pandemic, shows that he is most aware among all characters (except those, indeed, of the pair novel, *The Year of the Flood*) of the world that surrounds him¹⁷ and that his plan of getting rid of humanity to leave space for "perfect" creatures is based on, however misled, "good intentions". In this respect, Crake represents another example of the American hero who finds inspiration and a retreat in nature but also harbors a will of overtaking and surpassing it (and with it, other human beings too). Unlike Jimmy, whose recurrent scene in a dream brings him back to a moment of empathic relationship with nature when he was a boy¹⁸, there are no corresponsive episodes where Crake is depicted in communion with nature. Nonetheless, his attraction for Oryx, who represents an exotic and therefore more "natural" world, points out in this direction, together with revealing Crake's imperialistic point of view that divides a world of rigorous control versus one of chaos and, like the Jimmy describes the Pleebands "boundless" and "subject to change" (231).

Another feature Crake's character share with the American hero is his relationship with language. Throughout the novel, he is depicted as a silent character that gives people "the sense of energies being held back, held in reserve for something more important than present company" (83). In his exchanges with Jimmy, he always finds efficient ways to

translate his scientific jargon in statements that can be understood by his friend, and what is more, appreciates Jimmy's translations of his nerd-speak ("You're a genius" ...). Indeed, whenever Crake and Jimmy are debating an issue, Crake preponderantly has the last word. Jimmy's prowess as a "word person" is constantly undermined by the Crake's rhetoric but this happens exactly because the former speaks in isolation, depending on his own solitary study on old paper dictionary and encyclopedias, while most of the latter's argumentations are based - or seem to be, especially to non-scientifically-trained ears - on data gathered by scientific research. "I've seen the latest confidential Corps demographic report" (347). Seemingly in contrast to Crake's characterization as the lone genius scientist, his speech is always coated by a shield of authority, which is necessarily the result of strong cultural connections¹⁹. Like the scientific literature analyzed by Bruno Latour, it reflects a kind of organization that is "more social than so-called normal social ties" (62). If then "[t]he status of a statement depends on later statements" (Latour 27), this is a useful lens to analyze the interactions between a solitary artist figure ("Erudite. I used to be erudite", recalls Jimmy) and the star of the HealthWyzer company, who receives unlimited funds to pursue his research. Whether or not Jimmy believes in any of this statements, they work as a scientific text full of what Latour calls "black boxes", being read to a large non-trained audience: if he takes it for a real statement, he cannot build on it, because he lacks a research structure to base his follow up on and if he wanted to contradict him, he couldn't, for the same reason. Only once Jimmy points out to Crake that what he is saying "[s]ounds like Applied Rhetoric 101" (OC 356), one of the humanities-turned-utilitarian classes he attended in college. Ultimately, although Jimmy and Crake come from the same social background, the privileged sons of scientists' families living in the Compounds, they are fighting two different wars and although their weapon is the same, language, their strategies and tactics are completely different. At the end of their story, the situation is still

like in the first days of their friendship as teenagers, when they play chess with "two computers, so they could sit with their back to each other, one at each (...). "The real set is in your head" (88), Crake says to Jimmy. Crake here significantly unveils his materialistic view of the world ("It was one of Crake's rules that no name could be chosen for which a physical equivalent - even stuffed, even skeletal - could not be demonstrated", 8): if thought is matter, then all the seemingly unreasonable human feelings are matter that, where impossible to control, has to be "edited out" (p...). When Jimmy points out that the Crakers are not really immortal like Crake has just described them, he sets out in the logical argument: mortality is fear of death > children are unaware > children have no fear > children are immortal. But if human beings turn into machines, that still leaves the matter open to whom it should be allowed to set up the rules for the hardware/software closed system anyway.

At times, even Jimmy is disturbed by Crake's dismissal of human feelings, especially when they are his own. In describing his mother's death, Crake uses words that could be used by a scientist observing a weird natural phenomenon: "It was impressive [...] Froth was coming out" (207). Yet Jimmy is the only character with Oryx, to be able to read Crake's humanity behind his linguistic performance, remarking: "But probably it was just an act. It was Crake preserving his dignity, because the alternative would have been losing it" (208). In another scene, Jimmy even has a glimpse of his friend's subconscious because he hears him yelling in his dreams. Indeed, once Crake's 'dream' has come true, Snowman describes his situation this way: "So Crake never remembered his dreams. It's Snowman that remembers them instead. Worse than remembers; he's immersed in them, he's wading through them, he's stuck in them. (...) No wonder Crake screamed so much" (256).

In this respect, Crake can be associated to the character of Ahab in *Moby Dick*. Both are embodiments of industrial capitalistic society and yet both are also struggling to come to term with it.²⁰ Both have a goal bigger than the plainly stated one, and that they do not share even with their closest allies and friends. A goal that is practical and linked to profit (killing the whale for selling the by-products, making the perfect bioengineered babies to sell²¹), but also acquires a moral overtone throughout their quests. Also, both characters know from the beginning that they are driving themselves and others towards their planned destruction and have to demonstrate a certain skill in luring the rest of the crew. Like the gold coin nailed to the mast by Ahab, the chance to pursue their research offered by Crake to the scientists he teams up with, is difficult to resist. But whereas Ahab's crew was made up of a whole set of second-class citizens from different backgrounds, Crake's team members are all highly trained scientists (some of them lured back or blackmailed into joining in a project they were formerly trying to oppose as members of the eco-terrorist group MaddAddam).

Although it is true what Cooke states, that "[t]hrough Crake's reductionist technoscience, and through the cut-and-paste naming strategies for the outcomes of biotechnological splicing, the function and power of language is explicitly linked to the practices of technoscience and bio-informatics" (78), this is only true when we consider his speeches full of scientific and technical jargon which of course are more common in his later interactions with Jimmy. But, keeping in mind his teenagers years, which Jimmy is so careful in tracking back in his memories, a clear strain of almost mystical ideas is present and underlies Crake's acts and speeches. When trying new computer-games, Crake voices his preference for one because "it was more cosmic, said Crake: the field of battle was larger, both in time and space" (89). It is significant that Crake points out the "cosmic" and non-quantifiable elements of life in the rules of a video-game. This sensibility for the

sublime at an infinite space-time created in virtual reality is not translated to actual reality - although there is a hint of it in description of the Pleeblands. So large is Crake's appreciation for the vastness that mathematics allows to contemplate and for the perfectly predictable systems that it can create ("Internal consistency is best", 110), that he even helps Jimmy in his homework ("*You have to get the beauty of it. It's like chess.*" 204). Crake, then, like Ahab, is continuously attracted to the sublime, but he also thinks he has the actual scientific knowledge to grasp it, as opposed to Ahab's more reckless heroic physical courage. Another online game that Crake likes is "Extinctathon", which will actually be revealed as the platform that bioterrorists employ to plan their attacks on technological infrastructures. In the game, the players have to name recently extinct animals, thus reversing the role of language as a celebration of God's agency into a hailing of human beings' one. Naming God's creations is transformed into the ultimate challenge of giving a name to Man's destruction ("*Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones*", 92). The ultimate challenge of science is represented by his attack on the very prerogative that makes it possible.

However, we find clues in the text of Crake's empathy (if a somewhat detached one) towards the suffering of human beings. Indeed, although he uses a strictly scientific framework to describe human feelings ("How much misery," (...) "how much needless despair has been caused by a series of biological mismatches, a misalignment of the hormones and pheromones", 195), he reveals at times more empathy than Jimmy, who seems to cherish human suffering because it gives "inspiration" for artistic endeavors ("Think of all the poetry", 196). Also, Jimmy and others persistently notice how both recognition and material goods leave Crake indifferent, which is why his creatures are programmed to disregard private property ("It no longer matters who the father of the

inevitable child may be, since there is no property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war", 195).

Crake's character then shares feature with such as Doctor Frankenstein and other mad scientist figure. As Stein points out, Crake is the "trickster scientist" figure that embodies contradictions "a split between reason or abstract thinking and emotion" (43). But he is especially to be equated, and significantly so, to Ahab. Crake's language is on the whole much worse than just a scientific jargon incomprehensible to most, but a language disembodied by any physical experience - be it the observation of phenomena (mediated by laboratory machinery) or empathic contact with others. It reminds us of Latour's observation that "[i]t is because [scientists] know about neither [society or Nature] that they are so busy trying out new associations, creating an inside world in which to work, displacing interests, negotiating fact, reshuffling groups and recruiting new allies" (142).

Thus, Crake's mistake lies in believing that the language of science is not part of human language, or that it is inherently more efficient and precise. Also, that it is one of the tools that both allow us to describe and to act in reality, and it is limited by our sensory perceptions, even when enhanced by machine, because machines still translate data to be managed by human beings. As DiMarco has pointed out in her analysis of the thematic of barriers throughout the novel, and how actual spatial barriers (for instance in the layout of the city) correspond to internalized linguistic and psychological barriers, the problem of departmentalization of knowledge and technology (language included) is the main one Atwood addresses.

As for Jimmy's relation with language, it is not less problematic than Crake's one. Jimmy is consistently represented as a character that cherishes language and words and has a greater-than-average skill with communication, especially when confronted with many of the characters that people his family's environment. Although his main characterization

is that of a "word person", much to the disbelief of his father, who keeps "giving him tools" to "make him more practical" (...), Jimmy actually shows a fair amount of skill as a tinker with electronic and mechanical devices. For instance, he hacks the kitchen cuckoo clock so that the two birds have one the sound of the other, or even sets up a mike so that he can listen to his parents fighting while he stays in his room. But once he discovers the potentiality that he can harness and direct towards his goal, he starts developing an addition for his own inventiveness with language. So much so that, thinking back to his exploitative behavior, he recognizes "[h]e shouldn't have used [language] up so much earlier in his life, he shouldn't have treated it as a tool" (132).

Some critics have described Jimmy/Snowman as a Robinson Crusoe type of character, and indeed, the last chapter of the novel, "Footprint", is a clear reference to this tale of colonization and survival. Nonetheless, this relation needs to be problematized following these characters' two main line of actions: one technical, the other linguistic/cultural. Although Snowman is a survivor from a wreck, he is not as uncritical towards the society that has caused the catastrophe, but his moral flaw lies in the fact that he did not go against it while he had the chance. The catastrophe forces him to reconsider his previous life, when he was enmeshed in a cycle of continuous consumption (of women, alcohol and even, in a way, words), and to be recast in what Rao calls a "liminal condition between longing and belonging, "suspended time" and where his "relation to language soon becomes one of estrangement" (110).

Moreover, instead of Robinson Crusoe's efficient time tracking, diary keeping and resource gathering, Snowman fails short of all these tasks. Firstly, his watch has broken, and although "[o]ut of habit he looks at his watch", it has become more of a "talisman" (3) than a tracking device. It becomes, in fact, the prop that he makes the Crakers believe he uses to listen to Crake, whom they believe to be a God, inasmuch Snowman, assuming the

role of the storyteller, tells them they are all "Children of Crake". The "absence of official time" (3), on one hand, points to a return to duration instead of a mechanical linear and quantifiable idea of time. On the other, Snowman in his pre-catastrophe life had spent much time in submitting outwardly to choices not his own: since he comes from a family of Compound scientist, it is assumed he will go to college, but his father has to use his connections to get him even into an art college of questionable reputation. The only actions where he demonstrates to be in command of his time are those that show his childish derision of the society he belongs to. For instance, when he chooses to employ his free-time from easy college classes in collecting lists of archaic words: "The system had filed him among the rejects, and what he was studying was considered - at the decision-making levels, the levels of real power - an archaic waste of time. Well then, he would pursue the superfluous as an end in itself. He would be its champion, its defender and preserver" (229). Still, his good if ineffectual intentions during college are crushed when he can only find a job as a copy for an ad agency and he is too easily lured into submitting his love of words to plain deceiving. Hengen has noticed how, when Jimmy starts using his skills in his job and to put his "large vocabulary in the service of dubious persuasion", he finally, after the period of adolescence, where his flamboyant and theatrical use of language and mimicry make of him a trickster figure, he officially enters into the "culture of consumption" (135).

Instead, the situation that frames him as the last survivor, and therefore the last subject who can bring forth the human perspective on the world, also ironically forces him to live in the "real time" (...) that Crake was so fond of pointing to when, as Snowman recalls, he asked him if a bioengineered creature was real or fake. It is only as a survivor that he is forced to reconsider his use of time. As a consequence, he spends it more conscientiously than in the past, because he realizes that time is not a property ("[h]is *time*,

what a bankrupt idea, as if he's been given a box of time belonging to him alone, stuffed to the brim with hours and minutes that he can spend like money", 44), but a physical property of his body.

Whereas Snowman used to consider words a fine hobby but a "waste of time" nonetheless, which made him no better than the part of society whose argument he was mocking, he now has the opportunity to reconsider language. It is true, like critics have remarked, that as the only human being, it is almost impossible for him to re-appropriate language ("language itself had lost its solidity", 305), and he struggles against a "dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlist drifting into space" (43). However, this "end of language" does not represent in my view "the end of the human", as Cooke puts it (66). But it certainly does stand for the end of a consumptive use of language, exemplified in his job as an adman²², and an end to a language cherished only because it is considered quaint and a relic of the past that cannot impact on the present.

I would argue that we could read this novel, other than by comparison with all the literary traditions Barzilai and others discuss²³, also with another Shakespeare's tragedy, *The Tempest*. In the very first scene, Snowman imagines that the Crakers probably think of him as "a creature of dimness, of the dusk" (6), reminding us more of Caliban than of Crusoe, so much so that "they make him feel deformed" (48), just like Caliban is described by Prospero. So while, on the one hand, this makes the bioengineered beings he is forced to help out of the Paradise complex and to the seashore, the colonizers of this new post-apocalyptic world, on the other, it makes Snowman as the representative of Western capitalistic society, suddenly cast in the role of the people that have been oppressed until now. As Ku has remarked, "the non-bioengineered Snowman, even if more "human" in the traditional (organic) sense, now becomes the "other"" (112), and more specifically, the "other" that has been consistently held in submission because thought to lack, among other

things, the same knowledge that is significantly symbolized in Shakespeare's play by Prospero's powers. So while Crake embodies the "scientist-imperialist" (Bousoon 141), Jimmy represents the other half of the same Western society. His redeeming appreciation for art ("art is all that's left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures", 197), which he defines as the only human endeavor holding meaning, can only be partly so. Indeed, his idealization of art and of the past makes more crucial his detachment from human feelings. For instance, when watching porn websites with Crake as teenagers, he cannot come to understand that the characters on screen are real: "[n]one of those little girls had ever seemed real to Jimmy - they'd always struck him as digital clones" (103). His lack of empathy for anything human that is not expressed in his "language" (he's a "word person") mirrors Crake's one. Ultimately, Jimmy is caged by language not less than his friend.

What makes of him a more hopeful choice for the continuation of the human is ironically his reluctance in following the scripted narrative of the survivor Crusoe, also indicated by his unwillingness to "give his life some structure" by "keep[ing] a diary" or "mak[ing] lists" (45). This associates his figure with a pre-writing culture, which actually causes Snowman to think of himself as the "ancestor" (123) of the Crakers ("he's what they might have been", 123). Moreover he rehearses Caliban role in addressing Crake at his most upset Crake looking at the sky, as if he had really turned into the God his bio-engineered Crakers believe him to be and cursing him, reminding us of how Caliban regrets Prospero's teaching him his language if he then can only use it to curse. Being the last person on earth causes Snowman to consider the human-like machines created by Crake as if they were a future new generation and he a past and savage one, which very much recreates the discourses of colonization.

Nonetheless, Snowman's sensibility for language as a way of representing reality, is shown by how he starts to understand, now he is the post-catastrophe world, how "precise" (...) the words that he has spent much of his time are, and he employs his cherished vocabulary to describe the beauty he still sees in the landscape. And if this is useful for his own survival, in order to make sense of this new existence, Snowman is also the appointed storyteller for the Crakers. These creatures indeed look up to him eagerly because they feel the need to hear the story of their origin. Snowman then has to create a "religious mythology" (Bosco 163), and even reenacts Moses role in the Bible when he leads the Crakers out of the Paradise dome and brings them to the safest place he can think, on the seashore, thus breaking free of the boundary that has enclosed him for most of his life.

Howells has noted that the previous versions of the novel retained the traditional convention of the manuscript written by the survivor of the apocalyptic event, but more than just representing a choice of "more stringent realism" (CCMA, 171), I would argue that this departure from the convention points to the necessity of maintaining a critical stance towards tools and of re-thinking how the adaption of a technology should not either become dominant inside the society itself and become a tool of subjugation. Ultimately, Jimmy/Snowman's oral counter-narrative mirrors the author's stance on technological advancement. Abandoning the written text in favor of a tale actualized only in memory, that thus encompasses all sensorial data, and especially, the oral dimension of the here and now, might just be the answer. The post-colonial critique finds its pair in the reassessment of our technological capacity and goals. If Jimmy is a new Caliban then his chosen path might well be that of abandoning the accursed language taught him by Prospero (the scientist/imperialist but also more humane than the greedy usurpers of his throne) and return to oral narratives.

1.2 An inefficient tool: performance behind representation in The Road

While the satirical and dystopian representation of the world's pre-catastrophe social structure in Atwood's novels logically and chronologically leads the reader to understand and frame the apocalyptic event and its aftermath, in McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, the destructive event that caused the whole world to be covered by ashes, and that left few peopling the country, is not described nor explained. The protagonist, unnamed and called throughout the novel only "the man", is a survivor of the unspecified catastrophe that wrought destruction to a world that is now a wasteland. The man has been left alone with his child after his wife's suicide, decided by her desperation of facing this new violent world. So, the man is struggling to protect his son's life from the acts of cannibalism perpetrated by the other survivors. He is introduced in the novel as waking up amidst dark woods and assuring himself of the presence of his child by reaching out with his hand. Immediately, by describing a very simple act of familial intimacy, the author sets out in drawing attention to the gap between knowledge and discourse and the limits of the symbolic order in coming to terms with a wilderness, which is not just the matter of the natural world, but also, as I will explore later, the symbol of human beings and their souls. Also, his confrontations with his son on the use violence in order to survive stress the chasm between the man's priorities²⁴ and the boy's post-humanist (because, post-catastrophic) sensibility.

In this section I will trace the textual evidence that support my previous statements, showing how the characters' uncertainty in reading reality is coupled with a disruption of language, and especially of its narrative function. This disruption, that is manifest in the actual form of the text - with its paratactic structure and episodic progress -, nonetheless

goes together with a re-appropriation of language itself as a tool for knowing and representing the world as truth, a reality that comprises the landscape and the moral code in regards to others and to nature. Indeed, if the man is sometimes tempted to overstate or distort reality even for the sake of keeping high the morale of both, the role of the child becomes essential. Since his only experiences are those of the post-apocalyptic world they have to survive in, he functions as the watchman of truth and goodness, because his point of view is a post-revelation one. Other than the few guidelines by his father His approach to language and morality derives from its experience of reality as a thing-in-itself and not as a cultural construct. The boy mirrors the character of the kid in *Blood Meridian*, and yet is the one McCarthy's hero to have a positive father figure who can shield him from the violence inherent to the landscape and still existing in some of the other survivors.

McCarthy is constructing a narrative that in a way goes against narrative itself and tries to bring to life a work that is inherently, as Woodson has remarked, "performative" (96). Accordingly, the author is opposing the common use of language as consisting of a systematic narrative that tends towards idealization of the past or pre-vision of the future. Both these functionalities can be misleading and insidious in that they organize time in a linear and therefore progressive order, where the *telos* is projected into the future. The loss of meaning, represented by the end of a language deeply-rooted in society's unquestioned scripts, represents a coming into awareness of the continuously present problem of morality towards both nature and other people. Thus, the progression is performed in space and in interactions (comprising deeds and dialogues) of the two protagonists with all the other characters, rather than represented by a narrative built around psychological insights.²⁵

This narrative choice mirrors the limits of knowledge imposed on the characters by their helplessness and by their being surrounded by an ashen wilderness. The scarcity of

means they are trying to cope with seals the impossibility of imposing a system on either nature or human society - or a larger society than the one represented by the motherless nuclear family. Furthermore, although this condition causes the persistent sense of danger that the characters feel throughout their journey, it also carries with it the liberating and empowering possibilities opened by embodied moral action; therefore, the narrative's performative character can only be open to testing at every step and not fixed by any totalizing idea of 'good' to which the man still has to hang on, linking it to the idea of God, but also of violence.²⁶ Whereas, here, I will focus on the moral and religious implications of these features, there also are political ramifications that will be more relevant to my later discussion of the novel as a *Bildungsroman* of the American citizen, the son, via his journey in the post-apocalyptic wilderness.

The need for re-assessing the structure of narrative is at once revealed by the dismissal of the dimension of time. The omniscient narrator informs us that the man "hadn't kept a calendar for years" (2), and indeed the ash-ridden landscape makes it difficult to assess time by any traditional means, be it simple eye-sight or technologically-enhanced observation ("Impossible to tell what time of the day he was looking at" 164). Time as an inherently human and cultural dimension is dismissed because of its aptness for creating non-contingent meaning. Therefore, the word more than all others associated with transcendence, "ever", loses its usefulness because it stands at once for a "long time" and "no time at all" (28). The author significantly frames this thought, "[t]hat ever is no time at all" (28), between the description of an earthquake, that stands for the geological time of the earth,²⁷ the father reading old newspapers with "quaint concerns" (28) in them, that reminds us of the superseded pre-catastrophe society, and the man's foreseeing the moment in which he might need to kill his son to spare him from starvation or cannibalization ("Can you do it? When the time comes? Can you?" 28).

What is more, we are reminded of this idea in the very last paragraph of the novel, where the narrative voice takes over in depicting the past natural world - a function that throughout the novel rests on the father's memories. The mindset that informs the passage is that of the father, and its language also reflects his paths for understanding reality.²⁸ In particular, the passage is crucial because, thematically, it highlights the fact that human experience is embedded in a system of things "older than men" (307), and, formally, as Wilhelm has pointed out, it projects the whole text "beyond the narrative's temporal dimension" (141), thus decoupling the sense of moral progress from a linear vision of time. Ultimately, the novel, as Cooper has noted, points out to the "transience" of human life, and yet does not portray what the critic describes as the "relative unimportance of the human race". Instead, I would argue, while certainly making the point that all things existing bear the same importance by flattening the human experience to the level of the existence of the rest of the natural world (notwithstanding the cruelty and indifference which divides the natural from the human world), the novel reframes it into a vision of what Guillemin has indicated as McCarthy's "ecopastoralism".²⁹

This rejection of a linear vision of time is even more remarkable if we consider that both the man and the son and the other few survivors are more than once described as "pilgrims" and "mendicant friars" (1, 133). As Vanderheide has noted while considering the influences of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* on this novel, McCarthy refuses the idea of "absolute transcendence" and the formal "thematization of transcendence characteristic of the Protestant progress" by having his protagonists' advancement - which is indeed episodic - remaining "trapped within the immanent wasteland" (108).³⁰ Thus, the dimension of time is challenged by denying the existence of an 'after', as it is present in the Christian tradition of the afterlife, and by only submitting to the duration of natural cycles (for instance, they set out South to escape another winter, and they camp when it gets dark,

although they cannot assess the exact position of the sun). By maintaining associations to Christian religious tradition³¹ throughout the text and at the same time by overturning the 'Celestial City' theme - even the unhopeful father sees in their reaching the ocean shore as a chance for new beginning - the novel achieves its aim of affirming ethical issues into a secular perspective, specifically into the American myth of the frontier, which is, above all others, the story of a new beginning. As Walsh has remarked, "*The Road* reclaims a sense of mythic space for Southern and American literature, especially with regard to this inscription of the myth of the frontier" (48).

This novel in fact adds to the issues arisen in *Blood Meridian*, the other frontier story - and an historical and even too real one, since it is based on a true account. In its epilogue, a man is making holes in the rock by means of a machine, symbolizing the taming of the wilderness by an ever-progressing civilization³² - the same civilization which has allowed and whose laws did not interfere with the unnecessary violence of Grafton's band. In answering to the problem of how such society is built on amoral acts, then, *The Road*, in Cooper's words, "focus[es] on shipping away all signs of humanity in order to examine the tiniest seed of what it means to be good", so that "morality may appear as nothing more significant than a visceral desire for community or connection" (2673 kindle). McCarthy at the same time reminds us that humanity and nature share at least part of their 'stuff', but also continues to point out, even in *The Road's* more positive outlook, that human beings can exceed in violence (perpetrated by means of technology - the bomb that annihilates the world or the man's gun with two bullets), whereas nature does not have the ability to choose.

Moreover, in the father's recollection, the explosion that seems to have caused the earth's destruction literally stops time, or society's time symbolized by the watch. As Steven Frye has noticed, the fact that the clock stops at 1:17, the only precise indications

of 'human' time in the novel, points to John the Divine's Revelation verse³³ about the Second Coming of Christ³⁴. This association makes of the man a prophet, but one whose mission to carry the Word revealed consists not in proclaiming it but in actually saving its signifier, embodied in his child: "If he is not the word of God God never spoke" (3).³⁵ In fact, the child is consistently described as associated with images of sanctity, goodness and light: he is "God's own fire-drake" (31) and a "Golden chalice, good to house a god" (78), and "glowing in that waste like a tabernacle" (293). What is more, calling him the 'word of God', reminds us of a passage in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* that accurately describes the behavior of the boy throughout the novel:

As the Word passeth a judgement upon our heart, so it passeth a judgement upon our ways; and when our thoughts and hearts and ways agree with the judgement which the Word giveth of both, then are both good, because agreeing thereto. (117-118)

On the one hand, then, the boy is certainly the link to a higher dimension, and yet this association is problematic in the context of this particular text insofar as "[t]he use of antecedent (originally religious or mythological) iconography is mystifying insofar as it remains metaphysically meaningful [...] even as the narratives erase its transcendental meaning" (Guillemin 145). On the other hand, the man carries within him the meanings of human discourse, with all its in-built flaws. In order to save the boy, the man has to set not only on a physical journey towards the South to find a better climate to survive in, but also on a quest to recover meanings in relation to their signifiers, which he still recollects even over the things themselves. For instance, the man is said to remember only the name of things, like colors, but not the actual things because "[t]he last instance of things takes the class with it" (28).

Thus, the loss of the direct experience of the thing, like the blue sky, and more than this, the impossibility of knowing if the sky still retains its old color behind the curtain of ashes, forces the man to go back to a vocabulary that is relevant for the "raw core of parsible entities" (93) amounts to a loss for the man but not for the son, who is in fact described as a "creation perfectly evolved to meet its own end" (60-1).³⁶ So, whereas the father is still connected, however hazily, to the past pre-apocalyptic world, the child is literally the symbol and the 'first citizen' of the post-apocalyptic world. The "conflicted morality of the post-apocalyptic hero" that Cooper indicates as the source of tension in the novel is a result of the man's struggle between the symbolic order³⁷ that used to sustain systems and to map³⁸ even places where one never has been, and the new moral questions arisen from unknowable post-apocalyptic world. Indeed, as Cooper remarks, the man makes of his son a "moral compass" by whose instructions he can navigate the new world, and yet he is also forced to use his know-how and his insight into history and human nature to protect him.

If we consider his connection to the past and thus to the previously valid symbolic order, the man certainly represents a heroic but doomed character. In fact, he sees the past as both a place of rest (for instance, when he dreams of his wife or he remembers the past beauty of animals and scenery), and a tempting illusion ("In dreams his pale bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy. [...] He mistrusted all that" 17). The man, in a similar way to the heroes of the Border Trilogy, is a figure comparable to that of the pastoral hero described by Marx as "endowed with the qualities [...] that result from his having lived as both a part of, and apart from, society".³⁹ His role as a father makes him part of society, yet, his wish to model his living on the day he went fishing with his uncle and "[n]either of them has spoken a word (12), is telling of his distance from the rest of society.⁴⁰ That silence has (at least, in his pre-catastrophic life) such a powerful significance, makes his

new situation even more problematic: he is now the one that has to promote not only moral acts (e.g. not eating other human beings), but also, he has to think how to recreate speech as a means of connecting to his son, in order to try to "enkindle in the heart of his child what was ashes in his own" (163).

This is why he attempts to "transform storytelling into a ritual of redemption" (Cooper 2671 kindle), especially when it is clear, as his son often point out to him, that there is a gap between his efforts in representation and his deeds. Despite this, his unwillingness to accept even the possibility of forming a community dooms him to failure as it is exemplified by the fact that he suffers from lung illness throughout the story and will eventually die. He is the first to acknowledge the son's supremacy when he tells him "[y]ou are the best guy. You always were" (298). And yet in one of the last dialogues he wants to be reassured by his son that he would do "everything the way we did it" (297), claiming that at least the practical knowledge he has passed on to his son will become useful to him. Here again, deeds and performance acquire a higher degree of importance, but, as opposed to the rest of the story, the father finally accepts this order, as underlined by the fact that he has to stop talking because of his coughing and reassures his son "You dont have to talk" (299). It is only once his father dies, that the boy eventually develops the need for a sort of spoken connection, finally elevating dialogue to the same consequence of actions, as he promises in front of his father's body to keep talking to him ("I'll talk to you every day" 306). By accepting language as a means of connection even when his father will not be physically present, the boy becomes also symbolically ready to be part of a new community. His inherent goodness and the know-how passed on to him by his father make of him the ideal American citizen.

Throughout the novel, on one hand, the rituals constructed upon stories do not succeed in inspiring sympathy in the son, and the man realizes his son must think of him as

a "being from another planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect" (163). Significantly, the narrative voice never reports the "[o]ld stories of courage and justice" (42) that the man tells the boy, but this description is enough to make the reader think about the lore of Western tradition (the same, incidentally, the novel is informed by). The man himself, moreover, while defending these tales when his son points out to the divide between the deeds told and their actions in real life ("Those stories are not true. [...] in the stories we're always helping people and we dont help them" 287), is also portrayed as distrustful of these old stories and the books where he must have learned them. In a scene where the man stands among the ruins of a library and its books bloated by water, he observes with "rage" the "lies arranged in their thousands row on row", and after browsing without reading through the pages, he "let[s] the book fall" (199). This passage has already been described as a "metafictional statement on the narrative itself" (Vanderheide 119), and indeed it mirrors both the author's underlying assumption that narrative can only be allegorical⁴¹ and the protagonist's eager but ultimately hopeless clinging to stories which can only treat, in their subject matter, what the man calls space of "expectation" (199). And just as the man stops depicting a brighter future in the South because he realizes that "those things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad" (55), in the same way, the closer the reader gets to the end, the fewer attempts he makes in retelling stories. This trajectory is also emphasized by the fact that in one scene, he asks the boy to tell him a story, but the boy refuses because they are "not happy" and "more like real life" ones (287). Once again, immanence is prioritized, and when eventually the man reminds his son that they are at least still alive, the boy repeats the expression that comes to symbolize their moral and pragmatic approach to survival, "okay" (288).

On the other hand, successful rituals in this new world are only those who are built around speech made up by simple statements of fact, or around actual physical presence.

At the beginning of the novel, for instance, when the father goes back to his son after checking the safety of the road, his "I'm right here" finds a simple answer in the child's "I know" (4). Later, when the father prepares as comfortable a place close to the fire as possible after having washed a man's blood from his hair, he describes the act to himself as "some ancient anointing"; so great is, in fact, their need for rituals, that he thinks "[w]here you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breath upon them" (77-8). Thus, the continuous need to check one another's presence, and the line "Each the other's world entire" (4), more than an act and a description of affection, are textual clues that remind us of the characters' inability to understand the world, once the characters cannot infuse sense into it by using established signifiers.

Moreover, we understand how both characters consider language a weak if viable means of connection by their very own linguistic acts. Even the man, who is still entangled in a traditional idea of language and story-telling, mainly uses only two of the functions, the referential and conative one. The first kind of statements is related to their immediate condition and is usually employed by the father when they encounter somebody or something along the road. Often, the man's estimations are right and reliable when inanimate objects are concerned (as when they approach isolated houses), but it is when "[s]omeone's coming" (108) that he fails to guess what exactly are the referents of his talk and admissions of ignorance are repeated. The second kind of statement is that upon which the man relies when he addresses the boy during or immediately after having faced dangerous situations. Indeed, since the man represents the individualistic perspective of the Western hero, he frequently has to bid the boy, who instead represents the possibility of community, to desist from seeking connections to other human beings. Notwithstanding the fact that the boy is described by attributes as those used in the Bible to depict Christ, as Tybursky has remarked,⁴² the man as hero is also a Christ-like figure, while his son,

especially towards the end, acquires the features of the Holy Ghost and provides the link with the new community, after having innocently verified their beliefs ("You dont eat people. [...] And I can go with you?" 304).

Also, the father rarely relies on language expressive function, and yet these occurrences are significant in that they trace his relation to the idea of God. At the very beginning of the novel, for instance, the man walks away from where the boy is sleeping, and curses God while kneeling on the ground. While the character's other mentions of God all provide for the possibility of its inexistence (the word "if" is always present), in these scene the man's indictment of God is direct, and indeed almost seem to require its presence as if it were a human being ("Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul?" 10). As Vanderheide has remarked, his attitude towards God correspond to that of Job, who in the Biblical story has been stripped of all his property, and curses the day he was born before being restated to wealth. Although the man is not destined to being reintegrated in human society, his other expressive speech act ("Oh my God, he whispered. Oh my God" 146) materializes when the man, indeed almost miraculously, finds the bunker that will provide much needed shelter and food to his son and him.

What is more, speech reveals his inadequacy especially when the two characters meet other people on the road. For instance, their encounter with an old and almost blind man who at first calls himself Ely emphasizes the reversal of the traditional Christian stress put on the importance of the word for the prophet. As Cooper and others have noted,⁴³ this episode subverts a traditional *topos*, the encounter of the hero with blind prophet who, even if ambiguously, tells of his experience with the super-human, be it God or another mystical and transcendent force, so that the other characters can draw a lesson from his tale. In this case, however, the exchange between the man and Ely represents a

negation of narrative, so much so that the traditional appeal, "Tell us where the world went" (176), does not have elicit any answer from the old man. Moreover, the prophetic sight is undermined by his condemnation of the false ideal of domination over time, since he points out that the mistake of people in the past was that of they "were always getting ready for tomorrow. I didnt believe in that. Tomorrow wasnt getting ready for them. It didnt even know they were there" (179). Significantly, then, this is an anti-prophetic figure that can only assess the past's mistakes, does not want his words to be spread out ("I dont want anybody talking about me." 182) as his namesake in the Bible does, and repeatedly changes his statements ("I just made that up" 182). He, like the others in the road, lives a "day providential to itself" (56). In this scene, what seems to be denied is again positive religion, more than narrative itself, and its idea of a linear time that ends with either damnation or beatitude. Indeed, the old man line "There is no God and we are his prophets" (181) states again the importance of a word that is critically repossessed through language, even though its referent remains problematic.

As Cooper has noted, the lay stories that the man recounts to his son, and which are supposedly so archetypal that need not be related, "become the sacraments and rites of a new religious order". If it is true, as the man muses, that the "sacred idiom [is] shorn of its referents and so of its realities" (93), this only means that those who survives in the post-apocalyptic world have the possibility to renew the relationship between things and words. This activity acquires even more significance, when we consider that even in the pastoral and prelapsarian memories and dreams of the man, the correspondence between words and things is all but univocal. In one of the most important passages where the narrator has access to the man's memory, it is related how, when he was about the boy's age, he witnessed a group of men burning some serpents for no stated reason. The men are assembled "for a common warmth" (201) and this sort of rite helps them only inasmuch

they have "no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be" (201). This episode underlines the pitfall of symbolic language and the way it shapes how human beings understand reality. The effect on the reader is made even stronger by the silence that hovers on the scene described ("no screams of pain" come from the serpents, and the men "disbanded in silence" 201). The "common warmth" that the men experience comes from their feeling of communality based on a symbolic order they do not fully understand and cannot therefore ply to their own true necessities.

In this respect, the man seems to understand the dangers of imposing on nature a human perspective, as it is symbolized by the fact that he desists from lingering on to the images that come to him as dreams ("He said the right dreams for a man in peril were dreams of peril and all else was the call of languor and death" 17), and depict a pastoral idyll which he rightly connects with a death wish ("And the dreams so rich in color. How else would death call you?" 20).

Instead of projecting a pastoral ideal fixed in a utopian time/space⁴⁴, the novel continues the reflection on a mystical union with nature, or at least of a different kind of cohabitation, not by pushing to the margins the human perspective, but by leveling the discourse around it to the same level of the discourse around nature. If it is true that, for instance, the image of cannibalism "enacts a reversal in the ancient human progression to symbol, to metaphor, that we find in the story of Abraham" (Ellis), in that human lives are considered by the same token of animals, it is also true that in this novel, the innate goodness of the boy, together with the man's morality, represent a strong counterweight to the idea of violence, which is not present in other works by McCarthy. The loss of the system that sustains the symbolic order and yet the endurance of language, as Edwards has remarked, "both create and destroy the world [...] simultaneously" (59).

This is even mirrored in the form of the novel, which, as Woodson has, "avoid[s] the extra long sentences of some of McCarthy's former novels, the sentences that, in their complexities and use of metaphor, create a reality of their own", and instead make use of a "substantive language" that however shattered has the power to "evoke that which can be known beyond language". The form and the content both work together to summon a non-verbal context of deep moral significance, so much so that, as the narrator states in the novel "[p]erhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made" (293).

The battle between the man's internal thoughts and his actions is underlined by his failure to define goodness except by using the metaphor of fire. In many occurrences, the man and the son encounter people on the road who represent a danger either because helping them as the son suggests would mean fewer chances of survival (the lightning-struck man, the old man), or because they are bound on looting, enslavement and cannibalism (the roadrat, the caravan of marchers, the thief). After these encounters, the son falls into periods of time when he is unwilling to speak, until he is reassured that however cruel might the actions of the man have seemed, they are the "good guys" because they are "carrying the fire". The symbol of fire is a problematic one in that, as it has been noted, it can both represent the fire of civilization and the fire of truth and morality. The father is indeed connected with the fire, as he is protecting his son, but it is the boy who has the power to balance his father's actions ("You're not the one who has to worry about everything. [...] Yes I am, he said. I am the one." 277)

Edwards has observed how the textual occurrence of the apocalyptic event should remind us of a "variant of the machine-in-the-garden trope" described by Leo Marx, where the blast despoils the landscape of its meaning. Many critics have associated the description of the "shear of light and series of low concussions" (73) and the wasted ash-

covered nature and dead bodies the characters encounter, to a nuclear explosion, but the text remains significantly unclear about it. However, Edwards' observation is still useful because it is clear how this disruption causes the man to cast in the back of his mind the memories of a ideal pastoral setting, which can only exist in the past and therefore in memories that do not find expression in dialogue, but we can only access thanks to the omniscient narrator. However nostalgic the man can be for the fishing trip with his uncle, when "[n]either of them had spoken a word. This was the perfect day of his childhood. This the day to shape the days upon" (12), the catastrophe forces him to focus on the present, although in his dreams he still recalls of "softly colored worlds of human love, the songs of birds, the sun" (292).

In order to understand how much more "utopian", and positively so, this post-apocalyptic novel as opposed the "apocalyptic" character⁴⁵ of other McCarthy's works, it is useful to compare the interconnections between landscape and time in *Blood Meridian*, another novel where a young character goes through a process of *Bildung* (or better an anti-*Bildung*) and the role of the landscape is particularly significant. Kollin has argued that *Blood Meridian* is an anti-Western⁴⁶ that "features an anti-Edenic landscape whose ownership is violently contested and overturned by the group of mercenaries" (562).

In the novel, the indication of the inexorable passing of time in the descriptions of the sky, which comprise the movements of stars and of the sun, is a trope consistently repeated. While heavenly bodies are seen as violent and inexorably tracking time, human acts of violence are aestheticized in a "sublime" (Kollin 563) and therefore extra-temporal dimension. But while the narrative is keen on these descriptions, the characters, too occupied in their violent and lucrative pursuing, live in a sort of temporal vacuum, in that their amoral deeds are completely disconnected from the rest of human society. Daugherty notices that the gun of the judge "Et in Arcadia Ego" stands for "murderous humankind"

(in POCC 165). The substitution of an artifact, the gun, with the traditionally neutral "Ego" of Death as a natural occurrence clearly shows the shifting paradigm of a Nature transformed by human technological agency that is not the benefic one of the farmer, but the destructive one of the mercenary. Which is way the middle landscape representing the pastoral idea is turned into an "anti pastoral" (Grammer 31). The mercenaries' vision of time is linear and mechanized, in that they pursue a succession of aims following over and over the same protocol. Interestingly, the Judge, who plays the role of the educator/tempter to the kid, is also characterized by both rhetorical prowess and a scientific know-how that allows him to lead his followers to survival when they are surrounded by Indians, a for instance, when he fabricates gun powder from chemical elements he finds in the "natural" setting. In *The Road* on the other hand, the man questions himself more than once about time and search uselessly for indications of it in the natural world (sun) and in objects. Paradoxically, when the man could do away with the formerly socially recognized view of time and indeed when the situation is one of utmost danger and therefore rules of morality could be discarded (and indeed they are by other survivors), the protagonist tries to read clues of passing natural time in the ashen gray sky.

As opposed to *Blood Meridian*, a novel inspired by historical facts presents a bleak view of the American frontier hero, who has been described as a "reversal of Huck Finn" (Kollin 566), the a-historicity of the setting of *The Road* then points out to an ambiguous if not impossible relationship between American history, or the life of its representative hero, and the moral dimension. When a "real" setting sets in, amorality seems to run amok or in the best of cases, moral question remain unarticulated; when the setting becomes symbol of the spiritual dimension (as in the tradition of *Pilgrim's Progress*), then moral conundrums can at least be pragmatically addressed, if not solved. Blending "science with deep personal and theological concerns" (Frye ch. 5), McCarthy equates our status to that

of "the great pendulum in its rotunda scribing through the long day movements of the universe of what you must say it knows nothing and yet know it must" (103). Reckoning is necessary to human beings: our status as animals weakened by a "biological inadequacy" (Galimberti 84 my translation) gives us no precise instincts to dictate our action (even when bare survival is at stake). As a narrator, McCarthy's interest in science is actualized in his effort, especially in *The Road*, to unveil in what manner different ways to construct reality influence our actions. The allegorical structure of the novel and the use of mythical symbolism (light) reminds us of Leo Marx's observation on Hawthorne and Melville's works that since language is always a step behind innovation (PP 117), authors have to infuse old symbols with new meanings. This is what McCarthy does, showing how, as human beings, language is our preferential 'tool' and narrative is a flexible system, but also that decoupling language from actions might lead to betraying our own prerogative of materiality. Ultimately, in *The Road*, since the chance of the actual and literal pastoral (and therefore of escape from society) has been erased, the man has to find a way to rediscover a societal dimension to both acts and words, while also shaping a new relation between these two spheres of human existence.

Chapter 2. Machine as Nature: reclaiming the machine

2.1 Artificial and natural: blurring the boundaries in Atwood's latest novels

If it is certainly true that in her last two novels Margaret Atwood gives us an uncanny dystopian image of a world made waste by the exaggerations of technoscience, it is also true that the author detaches her works from the line of tales in the tradition (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, above all) about scientists who stray from society to pursue 'unnatural' quests, posing a threat to laws imposed by God or nature. Indeed, although some scholars have read in the God's Gardeners collective in *The Year of the Flood* a call for environmentalist becoming a religion,^(footnote) I find that Atwood's stance is still a political one. In an interview quoted by Somacarrera, Atwood explains "[p]olitics, for me, is everything that involves who gets to do what to whom" (73), in other words it implies the drawing of boundaries and limits. The limits that the Amish-like community represented abides by, are only explained through metaphors of the natural world (the leaders of the group are former scientists and they update many metaphors with today scientific jargon) and a language very much imprinted by religious discourse (Christian one, in particular); theirs, however, is a strong political organization, which heavily relies on the use of systematized processes of production and consumption and a hierarchical, if egalitarian, social order. In his review of *The Year of the Flood*, Frederic Jameson asks, in regards to the God's Gardeners eco-religion, "Is this religion not itself ideology?". I would argue that in this novel, Atwood highlights the fact that the discourse of religion seems to be still the one that can be used to counter-argue the apolitical hegemony of the capitalistic system and the technological system it both creates and is supported by.⁴⁷ The God's

Gardeners vision of time maintains the linear Christian perspective that envisions, however critical the present situation (and the dystopian world described in *Oryx and Crake* represents such a critical point), a new Garden. But what is more deeply suggested is that human beings are not "pure Word" (68) and are thus free to disengage from any of the dominant discourses in society, be it the scientific, economical or religious one. In front of the alliance between the jargon of technoscience and capitalism, Atwood's characters use a discourse that is linked to a religion worldview, but the heroine, Toby, is skeptical throughout the novel, and recognizes the 'ideology' behind any of these. Using the sermons of this community as a foil to Crake's scientifically informed theorizing and Jimmy's cunning but individualistic use of language, the author shows the efficiency and demerits of both, and underlines the fundamental role of memory. Nature and the machine (and the 'system') exist in a continuum, but what makes both human beings and 'things' (words no less than technological objects) uncanny and 'unnatural' is a mismatch between its effects and its awareness of being in the world and acting in it.

In this novel also, the reflection on human beings relation to time offers an important basis for the difference between human/machine/nature. One of the teachings of Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, that Toby remembers is that of 'observing the seasons' and to refrain from "enter[ing] the Timeless before it is time" (217). Indeed, in the God's Gardeners community, members are 'allowed' to slip into what they call the "fallow state" (106)⁴⁸. These few statements point out to a gap between the unity of human beings with nature, and their capacity of envisioning an infinite amount of time. This concept is well understood by Crake when he explains in what way he wants to create immortal machines: "[i]f you take 'mortality' as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then 'immortality' is the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal. Edit out fear, and you'll be..." (356). Language, thus, surfaces as the main tool that human

beings have of understanding their mortality, and thus making use of present time. On the one hand, in the dystopian society of the pre-apocalyptic society, this unawareness of time emerges in the fact that the narrative voices who are reconstructing their lives in the actual narrative we are reading, are often at a loss in pin pointing elapsed time between different periods of their lives: Jimmy cannot think how much time he spent working in advertising, Toby can only remember the most traumatic episode that brought her from one 'station' to the other but rarely has a precise idea of the amount of time spent in each phase. These characters represent the "atomi isolati" (Galimberti 405) that separately struggle in their roles in either production or consumption, and together give the opportunity for the technocratic system to re-iterate itself.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the problem of human relationship to time for the Gardeners, lies in their connection with nature. Bouson writes that throughout *The Year of the Flood*, "nature is envisioned, contrastingly, as a "Wordsworthian" good mother and a "Darwinian" bad mother" (18); this is the case because of their choice of 'regression', that brings them back to being mindful of nature's seasons, thus picking its fruits, but also to living in a less sheltered manner. The romantic view of nature, however, is completely forgotten, in that the stress is always put on the best way for the community to survive. Indeed, when Toby is surviving after the catastrophe using the food she kept in her "Ararat", the personal reserve that each member has stored away, she remembers with appreciative tone sayings of the Gardeners such as "An Ararat without a wall isn't an Ararat at all" and "A wall that cannot be defended is no sooner built that ended" (24). The view of nature cannot be completely Wordsworthian because we are facing a Canadian author and one that has always embedded in her works the problem of 'survival'.⁵⁰ The Gardeners are "strict about not killing Life, but on the other hand they said Death was a natural process" (76). The importance of limits between the self or community and the landscape is thus made clear, but is also based on the

importance of the human element. For the gardeners, the effort of surviving following a set of rules (their organization is often compared by Toby to that of a monastery⁵¹) itself is the goal of living, and such is the alteration in outlook from the rest of society, that Toby more than once wonders what is the meaning of all this effort, especially in view of their religious framework that seemingly supports a linear vision of time and consequently an apocalyptic one ("why be so picky about lifestyle details if you believed everyone would soon be wiped off the face of the planet?" 60).

In addition to these approaches to nature and time, we have Crake's vision of a timeless, homeostatic and perfect world. He dreams of creatures who live in a habitat where "[i]t's all admirably good-natured: no pushing and shoving, more like the gods cavorting with willing nymphs on some golden-age Grecian frieze" (199). While his funding from the corporations is granted because there is a market for genetically enhanced babies, his secret goal is to do away with humanity itself. The Crakers are "perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing" (359) and they are "programmed to drop dead at age thirty - suddenly, without getting sick. No old age, none of those anxieties" (356). Some scholars have rightly pointed out to Crake's traumatic and loveless childhood as an explanation of his motives. Indeed, his is a state of denial, that misguidedly finds in the unlimited possibility of control and power of (sub)creation, a way to channel his all too human feelings. What is more interesting, though, is that, although he considers himself wholly rational, he cannot see that his scientific view is a reflex of reality, however efficient a representation of it. In his life trajectory he reenacts the loss of innocence and the search for renewal and final redemption from the supposedly sinful 'animal' side of human beings ("In other words - and up to a point, of course - the less we eat, the more we fuck" 139), that is common to a certain kind of scientific worldview and to Christian

religion. He gives up (or does not develop) the guiding principle of rationality, which is reason and therefore confuses the means of knowledge with knowledge itself.⁵² Moreover, the same mistake is made by Snowman, when he is alone in the post-catastrophe world with the Crakers. As Ku remarks, "Snowman becomes so preoccupied with his inferiority that he eventually gets bogged down in nihilism" (116).⁵³ His is the recurrent conceptual mistake of equating human beings to machines. Although, it is an understandable one, since the Crakers are so uncanny similar to the human form, he would not feel inferior if he recognized in them only a machine, built by the very advanced technology of genetic engineering.

On one hand, it is true that Atwood makes the point that these machines could develop language in a way similar to humans: to understand Snowman's oddness, they "accumulated a stock of lore" (9), that they also pass to their children. As Cooke remarks "[t]he human is a function of memory supports and the trace, of language and technical infrastructure; with the disappearance of these supports, the status of the human is threatened" (81) and Snowman experiences such a trauma in surviving the epidemic, that the narrator so describes his status: "There are a lot of blank spaces in his stub of a brain, where memory used to be" (5). Yet, I would argue the opposite of Cooke when he states that "the end of the human is figured as a crisis of language and thus of memory" (9). It is precisely the in-human manner of life of the pre-catastrophic society that allows Snowman (in *Oryx and Crake*) and Toby (in *The Year of the Flood*), to build anew their memories and thus their identities. Also, we have to keep in mind that a certain kind of memory and creative processes are inbuilt in computer programs based on algorithms. What really distinguishes these machines from human beings is that they lack the capacity for using metaphors ("He should avoid arcane metaphors" 112). This supports the analogy between the Crakers and machines: although, programming languages are in a sense metaphoric

too,⁵⁴ machines are not aware of the processes that allows them to 'translate' code to whatever act they perform. Even Snowman's observation that the Crakers want to hear stories ("A story is what they want" 117), might well be read as a metaphorical (human) reading of their interactions with the exterior.⁵⁵ Snowman himself, in fact, in other circumstances sees the Crakers as being "like blank pages, he could write whatever he wanted on them" (407). Snowman's stance highlight one of the problems of human rationality, which is that what it can grasp, can more easily be represented than what the human emotional sphere, especially in a culture that tends to cultivate analytical thinking. Referencing Bergson's observations about this question on the interplay between the 'organic' and the 'inorganic', Galimberti summarizes

[l]a tecnica, costruendo una natura artificiale dove l'inorganico ha il primato sull'organico, ha sviluppato le potenzialità intellettuali dell'uomo che sono molto più a loro agio con l'inorganico' che con l'organico', per non parlare del 'vitale'. [...] Il mondo inorganico, infatti, è più accessibile alla natura analitica della conoscenza razionale e alla corrispondente prassi sperimentale di quanto non siano la sfera vitalistica o la sfera psichica che, sfuggendo alla metodica analitica proprio dell'intelletto, debordano nell'irrazionale (667)

Furthermore, there is only one characteristic of the Crakers that makes them more "humane", and this is their inbuilt non-aggressiveness, so much so that when they have to kill a fish to offer to Jimmy, they do it in group ("That way the unpleasantness is shared among them and no single person is guilty of shedding the fish's blood" 116). Significantly, it is this repulsion towards violence that Snowman finds enervating and 'unnatural'. As Ku has noticed "[h]e wants to be congenial, a pacifist, an instructive storyteller, but such wishes are qualified—if not totally quenched—by his aggressive instincts, his desire for dominance, his belief in hierarchy, his aspiration for control, his distrust of strangers, as well as his concern about the weapons both parties possess" (127). Yet, Crake has programmed them so that "no *thou shalt not*s would be any good to them,

or even comprehensible, because it's all built in" (426). As Hutcheon has remarked, "Crake and his MaddAddam colleagues are not only the biggest beneficiaries of this biotech machinery but also its harshest opponents. In other words, their relation to capitalism is simultaneously one of 'critique' and 'complicity'" (quoted in Ku 120). Despite the element of nobility in Crake's plan, he is, like Ku points out "claiming *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye" (123), as a revenge for the way he has been treated. Crake, in this respect, acts without the support of memory and reason and thus his actions are much more violent than anyone else's in the novel, especially because he acts from personal motives on an impersonal scale. In opposition to the narrative of *Oryx and Crake*, in *The Year of the Flood*, there are many examples of direct violence, such as Blanco's sexual exploitation of Toby and the other girls who work in his shop, and the PinBallers, jailed criminals to whom is offered liberty if they can survive after fighting in an arena. As Jameson has described, Atwood deploys an "enlargement of narrative perspectives to include the deep space of institutions and collectivities, and a rather different kind of historicity from that projected by the individual fable of the first version". This allows her to stage the consequences of an issue like violence in all its forms.

Violence is, indeed, one of the main issues throughout Atwood's work. For the author, this theme is deeply linked with politics, since it concerns the individual's or group's actions on their exterior according to the priorities they have culturally absorbed. Seen as the exercise of power⁵⁶ over the body of another person, the concept can and must be enlarged, especially in view of the corporate society described in these latest novels. What is interesting as an addition to this reflection, is that while in earlier works Atwood criticizes a kind of power that "silence[s] the voice [...]" so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power" (Somacarrera 53), in this dystopian future, society's wreckage is so complete that power does not even need to speak, and even to act to assure

its authority. The 'new' violence we witness in these narratives is that of technoscience and its modification of reality for no purpose other than profit or for the sake of doing something that works.⁵⁷

Again, we are shown the difference between the different kinds of outlook toward both nature and humankind: where Crake wants to 'edit out' violence altogether, believing that he does not share these features with other humans, Adam One reminds the Gardeners "[w]e must be mindful of our own animal-nature tendencies and biases at all times" (158). Science and technology are to be a means of restricting violence, not a way to delete features that constitute part of the way we understand the world. The stress put on the means does nothing but upset the 'natural' in human actions and "disrupt the hierarchy implicit in the anthropocentric homo faber" (Ku 129).

All the main characters in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* share a deep awareness of the importance of language as a tool. Significantly, though, the God's Gardeners maintain a 'appropriate technology' stance in this instance, too. Not only then, they are taught to "[b]eware of words. Be careful what you write. Leave no trails. [...] Depend on memory" (7), but one of the most important rules of the community is "Say about others as you would have them say about you. In other words, nothing." (134), and also, "avoid any broadcasting of their personal problems: foisting your mental junk on the others was frowned on" (150). This idea of words who become embodied to the point of being considered as objects, points out to the importance of the linguistic act, which is considered by the same token of actions.⁵⁸ Since in the dystopian society the Gardeners are trying to defend themselves from, words are consumed and this consumption becomes an end in itself, then, it is in line with their view that they re-appropriate this technology, language, while at the same time using it sparingly and, as Adam One, who is a former

scientist,⁵⁹ reminds them, since it is a tool, it does not consist in the matter itself that it helps shape.

Indeed, among the Gardeners, even the same religious talk that binds the community is undermined by the same leaders of the community that are so keen on rules and rituals. They, as former scientist, see the religious discourse as a way of being understood, but are far from relying totally on it, so much so that Adam One can say "[w]e should not expect too much from faith [...] Any religion is a shadow of God. But the shadows of God are not God" (224-5). If we consider Crake's utter reliability on the discourse of science, we see how the Gardeners indeed approach every act with prudence.

Naming is an important step of the links of actions that binds human perceptions and understanding and actions. As Adam One puts it in his retelling of the Creation story: "And for Adam himself, the Names of the Animals were the first words he spoke - the first moment of Human language. [...] To Name is - we hope - to greet; to draw another towards one's self" (15). That naming is seen as such a sign of positive attitude is also shown in the fact that Jimmy, the most literate person of the novel, watches with interest an animal forming human words: "Alex the parrot was his favorite, from Classics in Animal Behaviour Studies. He liked the part where Alex invented a new word" (61). Yet, even names can become a means of violent repression. Toby, for instance, the strong female character in the book, while struggling to survive in the Pleebands, changes her name in each location so that she cannot be identified, thus assuring her more agency than she would have otherwise had. It is, instead, Ren, the weakest female character, that writes her name incessantly on her diary, as if she wanted to take hold of her identity.

Overall, the Gardeners are in some ways far, I would suggest, by the perfect political system that we might envision, and one of the reasons is what I have described as their impossibility of using a language that does not rely on discourses which are linked to

a history of violence and domination (both the scientific and religious one); yet, Atwood imagines a community that in every sense, does what it can with what they find. The same way they re-cycle ("evil materials being put to good use" 67) objects, they try to renew language without disrupting it, but trying to recuperate the 'true metaphors' of each discourse that can be understood in the present. As Atwood herself has remarked "[w]e seem to be hard-wired to have a belief system of some kind... Very few people don't have some belief system that includes something other than themselves" (quoted in Bouson 17). Since in the dystopian universe she represents, politics fails to imprint legality in the actions of both science and religion, this community works with the discourse that are still at least partially valid, and states the importance of the human element.

As one of the Gardeners remarks "[i]t's comforting to remember that *Homo sapiens sapiens* was once so ingenious with language, and not only with language. Ingenious in every direction at once" (114). In her essay *In Other Worlds*, the author asserts that progress is inevitable but not a one-way path, so that human ingenuity can follow human meaning instead of the machine's. The dream of the perfect independent machine, the perfect artificial creation, fails because human beings want to feel "like God". In this regard, the post-apocalyptic setting allows Atwood to point out to the necessity of re-assessing not only some of the inconstancies of the traditional natural vs. artificial dichotomy, but also of the need to reevaluate the boundaries between human knowledge and actions.

2.2 Re-mapping the "technological sublime" in *The Road*

As we have seen, *The Road* can be read as the man's progress towards an understanding of the pitfalls of applying the workings of symbolic-grounded knowledge to both the natural order and moral judgments. The whole of reality, in the novel, resists human understanding. The ashen landscape mirrors the wilderness the first pioneers were faced with, and the other survivors on the road are potentially not less dangerous than the elusive 'savages' who were so feared by the pioneers themselves. Indeed, the post-catastrophe setting recreates a similar condition to that of the Western frontier,⁶⁰ where lawlessness is a consequence of the utter destruction of pre-existing political organizations and legality (not of the characters' indifference towards them, like in *Blood Meridian*). The characters move in a barren landscape that functions alternatively as a refuge and a dangerous surrounding - prerogatives both held by the wilderness the civilized and (so considered) 'half-savage' heroes, described, for instance, by J. F. Cooper. Yet, for McCarthy, the advantage of the post-apocalyptic trope is that it surpasses the wilderness-as-a-symbol, which has often been applied to a civilized society in later fiction, but not to the middle-landscape pastoral (utopian) ideal of a balanced Nature/Society situation. Since the idea of utopian pastoralism is not considered feasible in McCarthy's works, although it is present in most of them, he can utilize the post-apocalyptic wilderness image to fit his "ecopastoralism", because, in Guillemin words, it not only "respects the ecological equality of all creatures and favors undomesticated nature over agricultural land, but, [...] it equates the external wilderness of nature with the social wilderness of the city and the internal wilderness of the human mind" (13). The fact that he detaches his fiction from realistic settings, allows the author to work with a clear allegoric framework.

Yet this framework does nothing but reinforce the realistic and material element,⁶¹ so that we follow both characters while they work on negotiating their relation to an environment shaped by dynamic between nature/machine/post-machine wilderness, as well as to other survivors who fight for the scarce resources available. It is worth considering the novel in line of the traditional theme of the (white and male) character's formation by experience of its environment, which is incidentally comprised by the layer of the 'natural' garden turned into wilderness, and that of the remains of technological artifacts that have modified and still linger in it. Especially, the novel can be interpreted as a call for a reassessment of American citizenship in relation to human society and nature. Significantly, though, the barren and infertile land, the lack of animal life, and the proof of worldwide destruction,⁶² reverse the traditional idea of abundance that has been traditionally implied in American discourse about nature and the need to harness natural resources with new and ever more powerful technologies. Thus, if we consider the boy's *Bildung*, what is true of the representation of landscape in the novel, that is, its being both a *paysage moralisé* and a realistic setting of human-wrought destruction on nature, is also true for the characters' development: this comprises both a moral and a practical learning.

On one hand, the man is by necessity responsible for the acts of violence that enable both to survive and therefore embodies the contradictions of the Western hero; his code, as Wielenberg has summarized, must be based on a strict division between 'good guys' versus 'bad guys', and on prioritizing the securing of resources even when it means breaking a promise to the boy (e.g when the man promises not to kill a dog they meet on the road, 85-86), and yet, his moral righteousness is never dubious throughout the story, although his actions have to be checked by the boy. Indeed, although I suggested he might remind us of Cooper's heroes, he cannot retake possession of his pre-catastrophe political freedom,⁶³ and therefore lives in a sort of 'state of nature' that precludes the belonging to

any community larger than his son and him, another feature that dooms his hope for survivor. On the other hand, the boy embodies the possibility of building a new community; while he is not expected to use violence, at least until he symbolically receives the gun after his father's death, his character, although completely good, has to undergo a practical formation experience based on secular values and practical know-how.⁶⁴ The boy's journey is that from innocence, lack of agency and complete goodness to independence, power and virtue. The man's

This theme, together with the wilderness setting, make of *The Road* a Western and a frontier story that explores the long-standing question of the genre: can a community be built in an inhospitable place and how can this community balance its need for security and its interactions with exterior entities. In other words, the boy's acquisition of agency in the last scenes of the novel, when he joins the new community, is a prefiguration of a new American republic. Indeed, the dialogue with the man with the parka about the boy's gun, his goods, and the boy's questioning the moral code of the man's community, remind us of the links between technology and republicanism traced by Kasson, and, in particular, of the debate around "whether technology would help integrate the country into a cohesive nationality or prove a divisive agent" (3).⁶⁵ Significantly, the end of the novel highlights not so much the importance of the means to sustain a community (although the negotiation with the man in the parka sounds practical enough) but the "breath of God" (306), or what we can imagine being the ultimate meaning behind human language, and the "maps and mazes" of an ever-changing nature that is "older than man"(307). The know-how and the rules for the use of violence that the father carries the relationship is counterbalanced by a "reversal of the socialization process where [...] the son teaches his father [...] how to treat others" (Luttrull 24).

Here, I will discuss how the catalogue of technological objects the protagonists encounter relate to different behaviors of the pre-catastrophe society and how these approaches to nature, via the intermediation of his father, are dealt with by the boy. These artifacts alternatively symbolize the excesses of industrial exploitation of nature that climaxes in the apocalyptic event, and the necessary technological implements that human societies need in order to sustain themselves. Also, I will add to Lutrull's reading of *The Road* as a re-writing of the Promethean myth, by showing that the *hubris* element of Prometheus' story (and of its later re-writings⁶⁶) is an element lacking in this narrative, because of the man's impossibility in 'seeing' and therefore also of foreseeing⁶⁷, of his use of obsolescent (if formerly efficient) maps and finally of his son's 'moral' fire. In a fictional world where the spiritual sphere is invoked but transcendence is linked to human nature itself, the punishment of Prometheus by the gods is translated into the man's illness (he is 'tainted' by the very fact of belonging to the society that wrought destruction to the world - even though he is not individually responsible - contrary to Prometheus' personal rebellion against the gods), so that the boy's sense of right measure and moral standards impinges on the man's effort to transmit the fire of technology to him. Yet, a few hints in the text, for instance the boy being fascinated by the dam and the train besides natural features like the waterfall, can be read as a new suggestion of ideas around technology that were crucial in their definition as a republic.

McCarthy's novel has been described by Palmer as "mourning Nature itself" (65),⁶⁸ so much so that the characters' action of "keeping the fire and putting it out, are activities appropriate to bioethical relations as well as internal and interpersonal ones" (66). It is evident how the preoccupation of the novel about the limits of systematized knowledge and human symbolic understanding can be linked to the excesses of a socio-economic

system based on, and planned for, a seemingly infinite basin of resources ("people were always getting ready for tomorrow" but "tomorrow wasn't getting ready for them", 179).

If observation is the base for categorizing natural phenomena and acting on them, we understand why the thematic of vision and sight is recurrent throughout the novel, even though for the most part, both actually and metaphorically, the man's vision is clouded. However dangerous or benign the landscape can present itself, and however wary can the protagonist be in relation to language, the characters, and especially the man, still face a lot of difficulties in trying to assess reality. For instance, whenever the man and the boy meet other survivors, their dialogues are full of questions such as "I dont know. Who is anybody?" (50), "I dont know what you look like" (67), and "What are you? They'd no way to answer the question" (172). Moreover, the landscape from the very start is shrouded in a "blackness to hurt your ears with listening" (14) and the days are grey "[l]ike the onset of some glaucoma dimming away the world" (1). Moreover, technologically enhanced vision at the beginning of the story only brings home fuzzy information ("Everything paling away into the murk", 2), while an old-fashioned sextant found in a boat only arises in the man a feeling of beauty ("the first thing he'd seen in a long time that stirred him" 243), after having witnessed the "senseless" (237) vista of seabirds dead on the shore.

Reinforcing this theme, the narrative evokes, both at the beginning and close to the end of it, the images of a cave, where the characters are "[l]ike pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast" (1). As Juge has pointed out, the metaphor of the cave together with that of the light remind us of Plato's *Republic*, and this is helpful especially when considering the problem of knowledge as a basis for future actions. Throughout the novel, as I have summarized, the 'sensible world' is accessible while the 'intelligible world' remains unformed,⁶⁹ so much so that the last

cave image sanctions its unattainability, when it is described as a "cold corridor", where the "point of no return [...] was measured from the first solely by the light they carried with them" (300). However helpless, the light that the boy metaphorically carries is also one that allows him to see and distinguish the right and the wrong, even in the post-apocalyptic wilderness. While in the initial cave dream of the father there is an "ancient lake" and a translucent creature that has "eyes dead white and sightless" and tries "to take the scent of what it could not see" (2), the boy is continuously connected to the act of seeing ("The boy sat watching everything" 16). The metaphor of sight stands for a deeper knowledge that even the man will not attain to the end ("He wanted to be able to see" 297). The man's performance is, therefore, hindered by his helplessness and lack of trust in a setting that, after the machine's destruction, is unknowable. Yet, it is not so much their imposed physical and therefore intellectual blindness, but his moral one that delays his advance.

This brings us to another theme, linked to another pre-apocalyptic system of knowledge, those of maps. In Weiss' words, maps, in the novel, are

an image to code violence rather than function to reveal information one originally desires the map to define. Violence has made borders and boundaries irrelevant in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road*. [...] *The Road*, like McCarthy's other novels, reinforces and subverts historically defined and deeply rooted notions of the map as an artifact of containment and boundary. (71)

Like other artifacts that try to synthesize a reality in order to bring it into the sphere of action of human beings,⁷⁰ these objects perform in the narrative the important task of creating the uncanny feeling that arises from the gap between the man's knowledge of the world and its present condition filtered through the boy's eyes. Together with the mirror, whose reflection frightens the characters ("They came upon themselves in a mirror and he almost raised his pistol" 139), and the man's stories, that, as the boy points out, are not

related to reality ("In the stories we are always helping people and we do not" 287), maps are a means of representing the outside world in order to exercise control over it. If mirrors are needed to control one's own image and stories are required so that a community can shape in intelligible form its own past and identity, maps allow human beings to work around and eventually shape the environment to their own ends - be them more or less practical and practicable.⁷¹ This is why, again in Weiss' words, maps exemplify "the overall problem of re-containing and re-contextualizing natural environments which evidences the larger experience of nuclear destruction" (72-73). Like the genetic mapping of Atwood's *Crake*, this kind of record is at the core of knowledge, and yet knowledge is the base of actions that, if left unchecked, threaten to become more and more violent. In one of the dialogues the characters engage in while trying to localize their position on a map, the boy's innocent questions draw attention to the pointlessness of a sophisticated technological system, like roadways, when the political system that they both help build and are built by collapses:

"But there's not any more states?"

No. [...]

But the roads are still there.

Yes. For a while. [...]

But there wont be any cars or trucks on them.

No.

Okay" (44)

Framed between the pastoral memory of a river where flash of trout is feeding, and a bridge spanning a river above a rapids, this scene is especially helpful in conveying the idea that "the past markings on the material map code a knowledge about why the world was destroyed" (Weiss 73), because of how the political sphere is unknowingly put under inspection by the boy who is musing on the usefulness of these -to him - strange works.

Interestingly, some episodes later in the novel, we are told that "[t]he boy took his truck from the pack and shaped roads in the ash with a stick" (62), suggesting that it is the lack of the social element that made these systems possible that astonishes him, and that he does not find the technologies per se foreign. Indeed, in another dialogue, the boy asks his father if they could use a spaceship to go to Mars, but once his father admits that, even if they could get there, there would be nothing, the boy easily relinquishes this idea and asks another question: "If you were a crow could you fly up high enough to see the sun?" (168). For the boy, a spaceship and a crow are virtually on the same level, since he has no experience of neither; his wanting to see the sun, though, is meaningful if we follow Lutrull's reading on the cross-reference to Plato's philosophical work, where the sun is the symbol for higher knowledge and wisdom.

Many have noticed how the father "must act always with utilitarian efficiency" and that many long passages throughout the novel are "Hemingwayesque passages of fixing things, using tools" (Ellis 30). Indeed, the man is responsible for deciding what to carry with them in the cart, what objects they can rummage for and which ones are useless, and he is the one that fixes the shopping cart and makes other tools, like the lamp, work. Besides, there are occasion in which he leaves certain practical responsibilities to his son, for instance when he wants him to check that the lamp is not consuming fuel, or he wants him to hold the gun while he looks for food. Yet, the boy always fails in these tasks because, as their dialogue after their encounter with the thief near the ocean makes clear, he is aware of being responsible for another kind of action that implies compassion, even for those other survivors on the road who do not follow his father's code ("You are not the one who has to worry about everything. The boy said something but he couldnt understand him. What? he said. [...] Yes, I am, he said. I am the one." 277).

If we can consider the man a Promethean character and the boy as the fire that he carries to the world, it is also true that this fire of civilization is closer to being an idealization of humanness itself than not of the technical skills of civilization.⁷² McCarthy's refusal of imposing a hierarchy among men and nature, mirrors the man's ultimate reliability on chance for keeping alive. Even when the characters actually experience something that could resemble a pastoral interlude, like in the scene where the father finds some mushrooms and cooks them for the boy, this pastoral respite is soon dismissed. The morels themselves are described as "alien-looking things" (41), and the relief provided by their good camp⁷³ only increases the chance of falling victim to others who would find the same spot suitable ("We cant stay, he said. [...] And the waterfall is an attraction" 42). However skilled the hero, then, the narrative always describes as a miraculous reward the food and shelters the man finds along the road. The stress on the man's 'code' and the son's divinity are juxtaposed to their helplessness, which marks them as part of the animal world (although animals are significantly absent) entirely dependent on a sometimes surprisingly benign environment.

Yet, technological artifacts and the systems of production and consumption they are linked to, continue throughout the novel to be present exactly because they are the other side of the coin. On one hand, the father only sees in these objects the cause of the destruction of nature and therefore denies any idea of progress, whether in time or in the accumulation of tools. In fact, although he is the person who holds the technological know-how essential to survival, he more than once fails in being as efficient as he could be, except in life or death situations. For instance, he abandons the car mirror for the cart or he does not immediately think of getting the oil from the gas pump. On the other hand, for the son, the contemplation of the works of the previous society mirrors the uncertain approach that a politically inexperienced state (as the post-revolutionary US) naturally

oscillates between when considering the use of a technology. His is a more unprejudiced but also responsible thinking than not that of his father. For instance, the boy is afraid of houses, but he tries to suggest to his father they could find fish in the lake created by the dam.

In order to analyze what role these technologies play in the novel, and how nature and technology interact in the characters' perceptions, I employ David Nye's notion of "technological sublime". The word 'sublime' originates in antiquity when it "is identifiable by the repetition and the universality of its effect" (4). In medieval times, when the word referred to an alchemical process, it was linked to a strictly coded realm of knowledge (based on Christian thought and Aristotelian philosophy) and thus "suggested pure realms of thought and attempts to obtain hidden knowledge" (4). Once the idea that the world was not only a corrupt image of heaven was overcome, nature was seen as a source of inspiration and of moral education.⁷⁴ In one of the main works on the subject, the *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Burke associates the sublime with terror, but also with a summoning of the observer's rational abilities in order to grapple with the attributes that at first could seem out of grasp (such as "obscurity, power, darkness, vacuity, silence, vastness, infinity, difficulty and magnificence" ATS 6). Later, Kant aligns the sublime with the attribute of quantity; the experience of sublimity, in Kant's view, would first check and then lead to an outburst of emotions, and would eventually result in uniting "aesthetics with moral experience" (7). Both philosophers distinguish this occurrence from that of the beautiful, that arises affection from a feeling of familiarity. The sublime is instead characterized by what Burke calls "astonishment" - a sort of suspension that Kant specifies as being a reaction of the perceiving subject called for by the gap from an initial appraising of something out of tune

with our everyday appreciation, and the following moment of the mind's grasping of the phenomenon.⁷⁵

Nye takes into account this socially constructed dynamics of the experience with the sublime, and traces their influence in the discourse around American technological achievements from the Republican period's conquest of space and time, till the post-war atomic age. By all means, the sublime was at first an apt aesthetic category to try to capture the immensity and danger of the New World landscape.⁷⁶ Yet, as the new republic more and more achieved union and possibilities for development in the use resources and the movement of goods, technological projects such as canals, bridges, dams and railroads began to be seen as magnificent man-made additions to nature. As Nye points out, since in American republicanism "politics was expected to inspire vigorous debate and continual self-examination rather than automatic patriotism", then "another realm of unquestioned allegiance was needed to unite the citizenry" (35). The technological sublime made possible the feeling of unity among the largest possible amount of population that was indispensable in a young and ever-expanding republican nation that was made up by a diverse population.⁷⁷

I focus on this early stage of the idea of the sublime connected with American republicanism and its engaging in technological advances, because, as historians have noted, once the systems became more and more encumbering on both the landscape and human beings,⁷⁸ the idea of 'progress' took hold of the American imagination to the point where (even for utopian socialist thinkers, like Bellamy) "the ultimate extension of technological organization lay in the mechanization of men themselves" (Kasson 197). Despite Bellamy's and others' trust in systematization,⁷⁹ the development of technology became more and more linked to military uses during the war of the XXth century. Once politics had to take hold of scientific research and technological innovation, it became

more and more difficult to expect the government to 'check' (footnote), so much so that post-war technological innovations have caused "the tradition of republicanism", as Nye summarizes, to confront "the paradox of the machine that does not serve as an engine of moral enlightenment but rather reduces citizens to awed spectators before enormous systems or to terrified dreamers of a nuclear apocalypse" (ATS 254).

Imagining a post-apocalyptic landscape gives leeway to McCarthy to bring on the scene two allegorical figures that embody American stances of the early republican stage. While the man has to do everything for their survival and thus represents the mythical character of the pioneer, the boy symbolically traces anew the debate of the newly proclaimed nation and prioritizes a political perspective to a strictly materialistic one. The feeling of the sublime, or as Nye describes it, the "shared emotion beyond words" (ATS *XIV*) that they experience both in regard to the dark and dangerous landscape and to the layer of humanity's remains embedded in it, which are signs of menacing uncontrollable powers (like that of a nuclear explosion) helps them build a relationship able to face the journey to the seacoast.

McCarthy creates a tension in the novel that is not only based on the characters' struggle for survival, which is not at all straight forward like in *Blood Meridian* (kill or be killed), but also depends on the two protagonists' embodiments of two different cultural and political approaches to technology and, later, larger technological systems in American culture, as traced by Nye. The man gives expression to the ideal of the capable independent individual who picks up certain practices from the knowledge of his time, but is not a part of the largest system of progress. His pastoral dreams already make of him a 'victim' of the changes of his time,⁸⁰ besides the fact that he has to protect his son after the catastrophe. He admires beautiful things (both natural and technological - e.g., trout, the sextant), but he still represents a society that has succumbed to the idea that a technology

is worth pursuing for its own sake. When the characters look down on a valley and a lake, the man describes what was the use of the dam, but answers curtly to his son when he wonders whether there could fish in the lake ("There's nothing in the lake" 19). This image of a technological achievement turned deadly is significantly followed by the man's memory of a falcon hunting around that place. Together with his awareness that the dam "will probably be there for hundreds of years. Thousands, even" (19), it emerges in the text the inverted reaction of the man in front of this work once considered a sublime view, but that now represents for him only the seed of human action modifying nature - until eventually destruction. Moreover, to underlie how the boy is curious of technological objects but is still more prone to establish a connection with the natural landscape, in a later scene, the boy remains speechless when he sees a waterfall ("Wow, the boy said. He couldnt take his eyes off it" 38).

Another example of an encounter with a technological object that subverts the accounts of the early republic era is that of the train. The man leads his son, who is afraid there could be somebody in it, and invites him to "just sit and watch" (190) the locomotive. It is again the boy to ask his father to go and continue on the road, after, as the narrator reveals, having both come to the conclusion and deep awareness that "no train would ever run again" (192). In this occasion too, even though being the representatives of "different worlds" (192), the characters share the same deep understanding: in front of a sign of death and irretrievable way of lives, their goal is to survive on the road. The main symbol of the economical and social progress of the United States, the train, is turned into a symbol of death and stillness, but above all, of uselessness. Although, for the man, the train might well be part of an idyllic landscape,⁸¹ the son cannot but relate to it as another object that he rejects as not immediately useful to their undertaking. These two different approaches are confirmed also in another scene, when the man finds on the ground some Indian

arrowhead and coins with Spanish writings. Such objects remind us of one of the most important themes of McCarthy's work: the role of violence in any society, no matter what kind of social organization is based on; yet, while the man is captivated by the beauty and endurance of an arrowhead, that is "perfect as the day it was made" (217), the boy has already wandered on and is looking "about at the gray country and the grey sky" (218), thus, once again, pointing to the need of limits in human actions, and especially of the need of guiding them for a moral purpose, reminding us of the Emersonian stance on technological progress: "a thing is good only so far as it serves."⁸²

The theme of the absence of restraints also surfaces in the novel as a stance against another form of violence, aggressive consumerism. As Woodson has pointed out, the shopping cart "symbolizes the materialism and consumerism of contemporary society" that tends to satisfy "not just immediate needs, but desires and potential needs" (88). This projection of desires into the future is counterbalanced by the boy's awareness of the one-time opportunity to enjoy a luxury, such as the Coke can; when his father insists on wanting him to drink it all, the son asks "It's because I wont ever get to drink another one, isnt it?" (23). Such is the boy's reluctance towards any surplus that when the father finds by chance a bunker filled with food provisions, he has to assure his son that the people whose goods they are going to share "were the good guys" (148). So although the son can seemingly only understand the present moment, he actually feels a moral obligation even to people who are not there (whether because they are already dead, or they are other 'good guys' on the road, as the ones he will only meet at the end), so much so that he performs a sort of thanksgiving prayer ("Do you think we should thank the people?" 154).

As Nye has noticed, while discussing the social rituals that the inaugurations for technological achievements called for, these moments were fundamental in that the individual did not feel alone vis-a-vis an awe-inspiring but imposing artifact,⁸³ but could

feel part of a community that made possible the construction of the artifact itself. In an episode which can well mirror the celebrations of the 4th of July, when the father shoots the flare pistol he found on the boat, the boy infuses in this event ("It could be like a celebration" , says the man 258) a virtuous political meaning. He does not stand as an amazed spectator, although he lets his father handle the flare pistol ("You shoot it, Papa. You know how to do it" 258), but suggests that the light signal can be seen by the "good guys" or "[m]aybe somebody like [God]" (262).

Ultimately, the character of the boy embodies the approach to technology of earlier Americans. Technologies must be pursued when immediately useful but the focus must be on the moral command of machine by human beings. The boy contemplates the sublime achievements of technology (like the dam, and even the spaceship) but he finds uncanny and is afraid by things that move mechanically and seemingly without immediate cause, as for instance, when he has a nightmare about a toy penguin that moves even though "nobody had wound it up" and the "the winder wasnt turning" (37).

On the whole, with *The Road*, McCarthy sheds the metaphorical language of some of his former novels⁸⁴ and invites the reader to observe the elemental entities of both nature and humanity. The passages where we contemplate the destroyed objects of the pre-catastrophe world work as a critical retake of the narratives of sublime feelings aroused by the dominance on nature that Nye indicates like a shaping force in the construction of an American republican identity. As Nye remarks in *American Technological Sublime*, when humanity can deploy a technology to annihilate the world, "the exaltation of the classic sublime seems impossible" (255). McCarthy works with the allegoric post-apocalyptic setting, to shine a new light on the meaning of using a technology and its political ramifications. As Lincoln has noticed, it is the language of the novel itself that refuses to comply with the standards of ecstatic utterances of a spectator in front of the achievements

of either nature or technology, and instead "labors epically to redeem a fallen world" (Lincoln 164). Yet, only the world of civilization is fallen, with its maps and boundaries imposed on nature, while what is remaining is "like the pitch of some last venture at the edge of the world. Something all but unaccountable" (49). What remains are the other long-held American values of political freedom and independence.

McCarthy's works have been exploring the essence of humanity together with that of the natural world, and how they interact with each other. It is exactly in the dynamics of these interactions that we can distinguish not only their fundamental separateness, but also their common feature: violence. The man's know-how and his use of the gun - or better, the practicability of its use - does not fundamentally differ from whatever technology has destroyed most natural and human life on earth. The same difference in scale of technology we find in the historical setting of *Blood Meridian*, where the rifle is the finished artifact that results inevitably from the know-how that is theatrically exhibited by the judge in producing gunpowder from elements he finds in the desert. Humanity and nature's violence are akin no matter what tools humanity employs. Yet what gives humanity's actions a shroud of transcendence is their moral dimension. Whereas nature's limits are inbuilt in its laws and capacities, human beings are creatures "that can do anything. Make a machine. And a machine to make the machine. And evil that can run itself a thousand years, no need to tend it" (BM 20). Humanity does indeed 'progress' and continually needs to reassess its limits. When they act with the same unaware innocence they believe to see in natural phenomena, they fail to see what distinguishes human beings from the natural world, and their actions become like the judge's "game" (BM 137). With *The Road*, McCarthy gives us the embodiment of those limits, the boy, with his spontaneous leaning towards the 'good', will continue to do what his father has advised him ("Do everything the way we did it" 297), and bringing into the new community both

his know-how and the right measure of its use. His 'okays' are the marks of a morally coded approach to taking decisions based on present conditions and keeping in sight the common good.

¹ Snowman sports a Red Sox hat in order to protect himself from the sun, a clue which gives reason to set the story in Boston, Massachusetts.

² Lang, Fritz. *Metropolis*. 1927.

³ Latour, SIA, p.....

⁴ In the high profile university Crake attends, the students' sexual needs are catered by the school. When Jimmy is invited for the Thanksgiving, he ironically remarks: "I see, you were the student and she was the service" (p...).

⁵ "More and more if we will be able to imagine something, we'll be able to do it" (IOW)

⁶ Atwood, "HMOC in context", 517

⁷ See "HMOC in context".

⁸ See Staines, "MA in her Canadian context" in CCMA.

⁹ *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century* by Ignatius Donnelly is the closest influence on the novels I'm analyzing in its concern over the environment and depiction of a hero championing the pastoral ideal against a tyrannical capitalistic organization (...).

¹⁰ Mamoli Zorzi identifies a "filone catastrofico" (141) in the utopian writing of the end of the XIX century, that reinforces the positive utopias of the period, like that by Bellamy. She remarks, for instance, how in *Utopia or the History of an Extinct Planet* by A. D. Cridge (1884), heroic men fight against the destruction wrought by Nature, reinforcing thus the idea of the goodness of human society, which could be further enhanced by implementing technological systems. The post-apocalyptic writing I'm analyzing goes exactly against this idea of "progress by a more perfect system".

¹¹ Atwood, IOW: "[I]n my view, each contains a latent version of the other".

¹² See Gould quoted in Adams, *Assault*, 4: technological progress is considered by Gould "perfectly real" even when denying the idea of biological progress.

¹³ Atwood here references the study of E. O. Wilson on ant society.

¹⁴ Here, following Latour (*SIA*), I use the word "tool" as differentiated from "machine", to mean "a single element held directly in the hand of a man or a woman" (129).

¹⁵ See Kasson.

¹⁶ As Bouson has pointed out in relation to the nickname he chooses for Jimmy: "he calls Jimmy "Thickney", after a defunct Australian bird that once frequented cemeteries" (144)

¹⁷ We also gather other clues about this, like when in TYF he is sent as a messenger, probably by his moral upright father to the God's Gardeners to carry the diagnosis of Pilar's terminal illness.

¹⁸ Jimmy recalls an episode of his infancy, when a disease had spread among animals, and he had watched the pyre of animals being killed to stop the spreading of it. In *The Road*, the man has a similar dream, which reminds him of having watched as a boy a group of farmers burn a bundle of serpents.

¹⁹ Stein points out the difference between Crake's work and Doctor Frankenstein's. Where one is surrounded by a community of top-class scientist, the other pursues his research at the cost of being banned by the scientific community for the accusation of amorality (146).

²⁰ See Adams..

²¹ That the project Crake works on by request of the company is that of designing enhanced babies is the latest attack to eugenics after Huxley's *Brave New World* and others. As Di Marco puts it: "When today's *homo faber* produces technologies that originate in material resources -- as Atwood has Crake and others do via genome splicing, for example -- he is "successful" only to the degree that those technologies can be marketed and sold to a populace on the premise that they can fulfill

emotional desires. Whether such products are really "good" and "needed" to live a decent life are certainly questionable." (...)

²³ Hengen 135 quotes Dunning "the relationship between C S O reunmistakeably suggests the Christian trinity whose authority science has effectively displaced. Crake assumes the role of Father..., Snowman that of sacrificed Son and immanent Logos..., and Oryx that of Spirit" (95)

²⁴ Throughout the novel the man wants to save his child but is also haunted by a sense of hopelessness, because he is still linked to an idea of classic pastoralism (as his 'dangerous' dreams suggest). Guillemin, in analyzing the Border Trilogy, points out how the pastoral theme is from the very start denied by the narrator's "melancholy gaze". Referring to a scene in *All the Pretty Horses* where John Grady walks through a grove of apple trees and bites a bitter fruit - a scene parallel but opposite to the man finding a windfall of edible apples in *The Road* -, the scholar comments that "the garden is shown here in its moment of erasure as a utopian vision no longer even desirable" (137). The post-apocalyptic trope gives McCarthy the suitable non-realistic setting that allows to finally cast away utopian aspirations whether projected in the past or in the future and to focus on the performance of 'right' in the present, which is the boy's priority.

²⁵ Cooper quotes Woodward in noting how the restrictions of the omniscient narrator, who rarely describes the man's thoughts and perceptions, roots out the "anesthetic of psychology" (...kindle).

²⁶ "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you" (80).

²⁷ A recurrent feature in McCarthy's works is the contraposition between different humanity's conception of time and nature's atemporality. For instance, in this novel, in his first dream, the man is led in a cave by his son and can hear "[t]olling in the silence the minutes of the earth and the hours and the days of it and the years without cease" (1).

²⁸ The pastoral ideal suggested by the image of "brook trout", the keyword "maps", and the returning thought "Of a thing which could not be put back" and "[n]ot be made right again" (307) all point out to the man's point of view. However, as Wilhelm suggests, this passage could be ascribed to the son telling stories he heard from his father to the people in his new community, thus reinstating the idea of narrative as fundamental for human society.

²⁹ I refer to what Guillemin has called "melancholy equanimity", a leveling gaze that gives "egalitarian existential status on all terrestrial phenomena" (13). Later, I will also use his observations about *Blood Meridian's* "negative biocentrism" and the Border Trilogy's "eco-pastoralism", in order to sketch out how in *The Road*, landscape shares features of the Western wilderness and the pastoral setting, and how both these features play a role in shaping the characters' journey through a new landscape once it has been transformed by human agency and the ultimate apocalyptic event.

³⁰ See also Cooper ("A character's moral choices should not be interpreted as indicating his or her internal growth or maturation"kindle).

³¹ In addition to the overall allegorical structure and the recurring images of light and fire, Wilhelm points out to the trope of the fish that reminds even more immediately to Christian iconography (141).

³² Concerning the relation between the epilogue and the rest of the novel, Guillemin states that, while the body of the story "emphasizes human complicity with the desert's lethal indifference", the epilogue evokes "the apocalyptic nature of human progress" (99).

³³ Revelation 1:17 King James Version (KJV): ¹⁷ "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:" (<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1%3A17-19&version=KJV>)

³⁴ See also Wilhelm.

³⁵ Wielenberg has noted how the "if" in this sentence marks the conflicted religious belief of the man, that is coupled by his lack of confidence in many other matters, except his practical know-how. While Christian symbols are used throughout the novel, these are put into question together with other non-religious beliefs, taken-for-granted knowledge and commonsensical assumptions. For instance, many have noted how the son is afraid of houses, while the man is still drawn to them, as by habit, even when they constitute a danger, for instance, when they happen to find human beings kept as in storage by cannibals.

³⁶ The word "end" here might be read by both its meaning of final situation and aim, suggesting that if we share with other creatures the feature of mortality, even when denying the concept of eternal life, human beings are characterized by the ability to chose to act like 'bad' or 'good guys', which constitutes an 'aim' of itself.

³⁷ Juge points out how the father "has not successfully detached himself from the altering power of images and is therefore diminished in his philosophical endeavor" (22).

³⁸ I will explore the importance of maps in the context of my other section dedicated to *The Road*. Also see Weiss.

³⁹ Marx, "Pastoralism in America", quoted in Guillemin 129.

⁴⁰ Guillemin notes that "pastoral harmony between man and nature [...] is discursively unattainable because the symbolic order of discourse is, per se, logocentric" (138).

⁴¹ See Guillemin, 107-9.

⁴² Tybursky: "The man refers to the boy as "the word of God" (4), which is the way Christ is described in the New Testament (John 1.1-3; Heb. 4.12-13; II Pet. 3.5; I John 1.1-3; 5.7), and how the Messiah is described in the Old Testament (Ps. 138.2). Towards the end of the novel, the man sees the boy "in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle" (230). In the Jewish faith, the tabernacle traditionally houses the Torah, the word of God (Exod. 25-28)" (125).

⁴³ See also Woodson.

⁴⁴ In commenting on the passage from *All the Pretty Horses* where John Grady rides through a grove of apple trees whose fruits are green and bitter, Guillemin remarks: "Unlike comparable *ubi sunt* motifs in pastoral literature, the garden is shown here in its moment of erasure as a utopian vision no longer even desirable" (137). Instead, in *The Road*, the hero chances on a similar place and yet the apples he gathers are a bounty that provides some relief from hunger. Nevertheless, the fixity of the utopian vision is again dismissed, in favor of continuing the journey on the road. As in the case of the bunker filled with canned goods, the goods are sometimes irrationally left behind and unused by the man.

⁴⁵ John M. Grammer, in considering the pastoral theme and its interconnections with history in *The Orchard Keeper*, has remarked how "[a]wareness of impermanence is the only available permanence" ("A Thing Against which Time will not Prevail: Pastoral and History in Cormac McCarthy's South" in POCC, 33).

⁴⁶ See Kollin for the genre spectrum along which classic Westerns, revisionist Westerns and anti-Westerns operate.

⁴⁷ Ku remarks about the dystopian society described especially in *Oryx and Crake*, that "as Atwood herself has pointed out, the "mad scientist" image is a projection of human "fear of the unknown" ("Life after Man" 40); by attributing all cataclysms to Crake alone, people forget that it is the collusion between science and capitalism that may lead to the doom of the human race. (120).

⁴⁸ The fact that the God's Gardeners are a community 'of our time' is ironically showed by the fact that they fight against the redefining of words and meaning: "a real Gardener would never say *depressed*. The gardeners believed that people who acted like Verena were in the Fallow state. [...] They only appeared to be doing nothing" (106).

⁴⁹ In respect to the individual action and society's activity, Galimberti writes: "L'azione, che aveva generato l'uomo nel suo rapporto con il mondo, diventa esecuzione di un'attività che non scaturisce più dall'uomo, ma dalla razionalità dell'apparato, rispetto a cui l'azione dell'uomo è solo un parziale riflesso delle leggi che lo presiedono. Ciò significa che l'uomo non è più in rapporto con il mondo, ma esclusivamente con le leggi che governano il sistema parziale in cui il singolo si trova ad operare." (404).

⁵⁰ Hengen remarks that "[t]he Canadian North and wilderness in general serve as witness that we have not yet fully understood much less subdued the natural world of which we are part" (63). Atwood indicates this theme as a major one in her literary criticism, especially in *Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. That Canadian landscape has been constructed as being not too 'motherly' offers authors such as Atwood a way to pull away from an easy dichotomy Nature: good vs. Society: bad. This helps maybe explain what Goldman remarks about early exploration writings in Canada and their use of apocalyptic tropes that, however, are "never entirely successful" thus "creating an ironic tension" (3), and also, as opposed to American narratives, draw more on "apocalyptic visions of hell than of paradise" (4).

⁵¹ Indeed, Toby is awed by their organization: "They appeared to move and think as one [...] She must have supposed they exchange information chemically, like trees" (253).

⁵² As Galimberti reminds us, however primitive or advanced technology is, "la potenza tecnica è condizione per conseguire la scienza" (317). This brings to relying on scientific truth more up to

the point where it gets mixed up with the moral truth. Indeed, it is because human beings are 'technological animals', that we lean towards considering that "l'unica verità è quella che si produce" (317), while moral acts are not substantiated as easily.

⁵³ In this respect, Ku notices that "the mimicry of the pigeons and the Crakers, to borrow Homi Bhabha's terms in "Of Mimicry and Man," is at once 'mockery' and 'menace'" (127). This observation, that establishes a connection with the West, and especially British, colonialist enterprise, fits into my reading of Snowman/Jimmy as a new Caliban. This reversal in the relation between Western imperialism/machine/nature points out to the indifference of both the machine and nature that has been gathered also in the worldview of Cormac McCarthy. Ironically, while Western colonizers saw other peoples as not fully human and so 'backward' (and thus inert) that they were equated with natural elements, when only the machine or nature are our referent we tend to look for an irrational and emotional connection.

⁵⁴ See Hayles, "Traumas of Code".

⁵⁵ Already Nash pointed out this in regard to human perceptions of nature vs mechanical machines: "When we attempt to say that an animal is 'useful', 'ugly', or 'cruel' we are failing to see it as part of the land. We do not make the same error of calling a carburetor 'greedy'. We see it as part of a function motor" (196). Genetic engineering, Atwood seems to imply, is another steps towards creating more confusion between the categories. Yet, however artificial, human beings share the matter of both nature and machines, but not their outlook on the world, which comprises an ethical side. Until the end, indeed, the Crakers are unaware of the ethical implications of what they do.

⁵⁶ See Somacarrera's discussion on the impact of Foucault thinking on Atwood's earlier novels.

⁵⁷ Galimberti states: "La tecnica infatti non tende ad uno scopo, non promuove un senso, non apre scenari di salvezza, non redime, non svela la verità: la tecnica *funziona*" (33).

⁵⁸ This stance reminds us of the problem of the revolution in culture that brought us to inhabit a society that Galimberti thus summarizes "Ormai le parole contano più delle cose, e l'uomo è definitivamente uscito dall'incantesimo che abitava quando pensava che le cose fossero così potenti e minacciose che solo la parola di Dio le poteva sbriciolare" (659).

⁵⁹ In an ironic reversal of conversion confession, he exclaims "I thought measurement was the measure of all things! Yes - I was a scientist" (52). Some of the exaggerations in the Gardeners' way of emphatic expression hint at and mock the tradition of the Puritans, a favorite target of Atwood's irony.

⁶⁰ Weiss has defined *The Road* as a "post-nuclear" Western because "it relies on man's relation to space, maps, and boundaries (including survival against climatic elements and general privation), law is a function of the individual (and its reliance on guns), and the novel plots a quest where the characters are defined by "good and bad" guys" (71).

⁶¹ We can reference here Hawthorne's 'The Celestial Railroad', a story that ironically exploits Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* allegorical imagery to point out the all too real (in)conveniences of the technological feat of train travel in the second part of the XIXth century.

⁶² Wielenberg notes that although it is impossible for the man to be sure of the extent of the catastrophe, his finding a boat from a Spanish-speaking country might point out to the fact that the entire world has been affected.

⁶³ We are reminded of Montesquieu's reflection on how safety is a core element of any kind of government organization: "The political liberty of the subject is a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another." (Chapter 17|Document 9 Montesquieu, Spirit of Laws, bk. 6, CH. 2; BK. 11, CHS. 1--7, 20, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch17s9.html>)

⁶⁴ Wielenberg remarks how the religious overtone is conveyed by the imagery used (the Word of God, the light), but, overall, the novel imparts "conception of morality and meaning that is secular in nature" (1). This is only natural if we consider McCarthy's detached tone, and his use of allegory, as Guillemin reminds us in talking about the author's "egalitarian discourse" where "all things, natural and manmade" have "a shared materiality" (53).

⁶⁵ See Kasson, 3-5.

⁶⁶ In summing up the versions of the Promethean myth in later literature, especially in Romantic one, Luttrull points out that the Titan's "*hubris*, traditionally a flaw, is now a strength" (19).

⁶⁷ As Galimberti reminds us..... (252-253).

⁶⁸ See Ashford. Also Mobiot (cited by Luttrull 20).

⁶⁹ In Juge's words: "In *The Road*, the Sun does not allow that final step of lighting things with the glow of truth, since it remains hidden, but the father and son's wishes to see the sun again clearly reflect their desire to reach that final step, a safe exit from the cave" (21).

⁷⁰ "He'd pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived [...] Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory. Themselves among others, everything in its place. Justified in the world" (194).

⁷¹ In ASC, Nye explores the way maps became essential for the technological expansion in the USA. He points out the fact that, for instance, while in Great Britain railroads followed natural paths, in the US, space was rationalized using a grid system.

⁷² Ellis remarks "fire is also the primary implement of the destruction of civilization in *The Road*. Perhaps to carry the fire is to carry the seeds of civilization. If civilization is to return to the world, it will be through the efforts of "good guys" like the man and the child. At the very least, the two struggle to maintain civilization between themselves." (3-4). See also Lincoln (168) and Wielenberg. Yet, this civilization is so elemental that it does not seem to depart much from mere survival. In this light, both the man and the son dismiss, throughout their journey, many tools whose implementation would imply a more forceful command on nature, but also an improved comfort.

⁷³ Lincoln has noted how the boy's words ("This is a good place Papa, he said" 41), "recalls Nick Adams making a good camp in 'The Big Two-Hearted River'" (167).

⁷⁴ Nye also points out that Protestant thought embraced this view with no particular resistance, so much so that it can be said to have affected much of the American version of the natural sublime (5-6).

⁷⁵ See Nye ATS 7-9.

⁷⁶ See Nye's overview of travellers' reaction to the Grand Canyon, the Niagara Falls and other natural formations (ATS 16-32).

⁷⁷ Commenting on newspapers and journals accounts of the opening of the Erie Canal, Nye remarks: "The citizen who contemplated such public improvements became aware of the power of democracy [...]. Traveling to America's natural wonders and public works became the act of a good citizen" (ATS 36).

⁷⁸ See Hughes' observations on 'technological momentum' (AG 443-447), and Pursell.

⁷⁹ As Kasson remarks, "while the key instrument of Bellamy, Donnelly, and Howells for attaining utopia was government control of technology, the heart of their concern was moral" (232).

⁸⁰ One of the characteristics of the technological sublime in the period Nye analyzes, is that, although its manifestation unites the spectators, it nevertheless "manifests a split between those who understand and control the machines and those who don't" (Nye, ATS 60). As technological artifacts began to rely on more complicated system, this gap widens. Nevertheless, as Leo Marx remarks in PP, citing the 'expert eye' of Huck when he controls the raft on the river in Twain's novel, literature has given voice to both the view of the awed spectator and the technics' rational gaze.

⁸¹ Guillemain points out that in *Suttre* the sight of a train caught in the flames, although it certainly is a sign of the machine in the garden trope, actually is converted into an experience of "paradoxical harmony between man, machine and nature" (16).

⁸² Emerson, *Nature*, quoted in Kasson 117.

⁸³ Nye also remarks that this spirit of community was not an egalitarian one. Indeed, from the 1820s inventors were seen as republican heroes (ATS 40-41) that could shape matter at will for the wellbeing of the nation. In this regard, he continues, the technological sublime "does not endorse human limitations" (ATS 60).

⁸⁴⁸⁴ See Woodson.

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List of bibliographical abbreviations

ASC	<i>America as Second Creation</i>
ATS	<i>American Technological Sublime</i>
AP	<i>Assault on Progress</i>
CM	<i>Civilizing the Machine</i>
IOW	<i>In Other Worlds</i>
MIA	<i>The Machine in America</i>
TUAC	<i>Technological Utopianism in American Culture</i>